

HAGIA SOPHIA FROM THE AGE OF JUSTINIAN TO THE PRESENT

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THE LIFE OF AN IMPERIAL MONUMENT: HAGIA SOPHIA AFTER BYZANTIUM

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Only a few great sanctuaries with a transcendent aesthetic quality have had a special propensity for adaptive reuse in different cultural and religious contexts. The afterlives of the Parthenon, first as a church, then as a mosque, of the Great Mosque in Cordoba, and of the Roman Pantheon as a church are examples that come to mind as parallels to the case of Hagia Sophia, transformed in 1453 into the foremost imperial mosque of Ottoman Istanbul after having served as the patriarchal seat of Eastern Christendom for nearly a millennium. The unusual resilience of the original sixth-century structure despite numerous later additions and changes is a tribute to Justinian and his architects, whose daring experiment in dome construction remained an unsurpassed feat for many centuries. Hagia Sophia's successive adjustment to modified circumstances and its capacity to absorb change while remaining essentially unchanged was due largely to an uninterrupted recognition of its unique formal qualities and its rich aura of symbolic associations through the centuries.

The 481-year-long life of Justinian's church as the mosque of Ayasofya deserves to be studied in greater detail than has thus far been attempted.¹ The various stages in the formal transformation and Ottomanization/Islamization of the post-Byzantine Hagia Sophia constitute an integral part of the monument's history. The layers of meaning the building acquired over the centuries transcended the specificity of the original context in which it was created and the chronological slot it occupies in the diachronic sequence of architectural history. To penetrate its historically mediated meanings one has to consider the influence and reception of Hagia Sophia after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and its sheer capacity to stand through time. The life of the

¹ For preliminary studies of Hagia Sophia in the Ottoman period, see William Emerson and Robert L. Van Nice, "Hagia Sophia and the First Minaret Erected After the Conquest of Constantinople," *American Journal of Archaeology* 54 (1950), 28-40; Reşad Ekrem Koçu, "Osmanlı Devrinde Ayasofya," *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1960), 3: 1445-86; Tahsin Öz, *İstanbul Camileri* (Ankara, 1962), 1: 29-30; Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul's: Byzantion, Konstantinopolis, Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1977), 91-4.

monument involved a dynamic interaction with changing audiences and a lively dialogue between the past and present.

A Byzantine source suggests that nearly half a century before Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople his great grandfather Bayezid I had already nursed the hope of converting Hagia Sophia into his royal mosque while contemplating its monumental glory from afar during an earlier siege of the city in the last decade of the fourteenth century:

Au contraire, il [Bayezid I] menaça avec serment de s'emparer immédiatement de notre ville, s'il triomphait de ses ennemis, de transformer en mosquées pour les Agarènes tous les lieux saints de notre cité et, avant tout, la très grande église de la Sagesse de Dieu. . . . Posté sur une hauteur et contemplant les églises de la ville, il s'informait sur chacune d'elles et en demandait le nom. Il les distribuait à ses fils et à ses satrapes, se réservant pour lui uniquement la grande église de la Sagesse de Dieu. Voilà quel était l'objet de ses rêves et de son imagination, mais Dieu décidait de son sort et le destin, peut-on dire, se gaussait des espoirs de l'insensé.²

The singling out of Hagia Sophia as the church most suited to the sultan's dignity indicates an awareness of its special prestige. Bayezid I's premature dream was realized in 1453 when Mehmed II finally conquered Constantinople after yet another unsuccessful siege of the city by his father Murad II in 1422. When the victorious sultan made his formal entry into the vanquished city, he directly visited Hagia Sophia, the ruined state of which made him reflect on the transitoriness of worldly power and inspired melancholy meditations. With reference to the domed church and the nearby ruins of the Byzantine Great Palace he allegedly recited in Persian, "The spider serves as gatekeeper in the Arch of Chosroes, / The owl plays martial music in the castle of Afrasiyab," a distich that emphasizes the imperial associations of those monuments.³ Like his grandfather, Mehmed II was quick to recognize Hagia Sophia's imperial prestige and monumental magnificence. Its imposing physical presence inevitably stimulated a dialogue with the Byzantine past that would bind the Ottoman rulers of Constantinople, which Mehmed II declared to be the new capital of his empire without changing its name (the official name *Ḳoştantiniyye* continued to be used in Ottoman imperial documents and coins), to the classical imperial tradition. That tradition was subtly merged with the Turco-Islamic heritage of universal sovereignty and revived

2 P. Gautier, "Un récit inédit du siège de Constantinople par les Turcs (1394–1402)," *Revue des études byzantines* 23 (1965), 108–9. A similar story is related in a less reliable source, which claims that Bayezid I, gazing from a distance at Hagia Sophia, proclaimed it to be worthy of becoming his palace after his expected victory, cited in the Bulgarian Chronicle of 1296 to 1414, edited by J. Bogdan in "Ein Beitrag zur bulgarischen und serbischen Geschichtsschreibung," *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 13, no. 4 (1891), 540–2.

3 Cited in Tursun Beg, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror* by Tursun Beg, facsimile and introduction by H. İnalcık and R. Murphy (Minneapolis, 1978), fol. 51a; and İdris-i Bidlisi, *Tercüme-i Heşt Behişt*, Ms. T.K.S.B. 196, fol. 80b. I thank John Pinto for bringing to my attention a similar passage from the *Commentaries* of Pius II, describing his visit to the ruins of Hadrian's Villa in 1461, which parallels Mehmed II's reaction to the ruins of Byzantine imperial monuments in 1453: "Time has marred everything. The walls once covered with embroidered tapestries and hangings threaded with gold are now clothed with ivy. Briars and brambles have sprung up where purple-robed tribunes sat and queens' chambers are the lairs of serpents. So fleeting are mortal things!" Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. F. A. Gragg (New York, 1959), 193.

precisely at the moment when the classical past was being rediscovered in another part of the Mediterranean world, Renaissance Italy.

The contemporary court historian Tursun Beg describes how the awe-struck sultan wandered through the “paradise-like” Hagia Sophia with a group of learned men and dignitaries, contemplating the vastness of its “celestial dome,” its patterned marble floors resembling the wavy sea, and its artistic gold mosaics. Tursun extolls the expert portraitist (*muşavvir-i mâhir*) who with pieces of colored glass had depicted on the summit of the dome the “portrait of an imposing man, so that it appeared to turn its face toward whatever direction one looked from,” a reference to the illusionistic image of Christ Pantokrator, which the Muslim historian could not accept to be a representation of Christ as God. Tursun continues to describe how the “world emperor (*pādişāh-i cihān*)” climbed to the dome “as the spirit of God had mounted to the fourth story of the heavens,” after he had observed from below the wonderful and strange figural mosaics. Having fully comprehended the significance of the building, the “emperor of the universe” ordered it to be repaired and transformed into his royal mosque.⁴

Mehmed II’s aesthetic appreciation of Hagia Sophia is also confirmed in his *waqfiyya* (endowment deed), where it is referred to as the “exquisitely ornamented church (*kenise-i nefise-i münakkāşe*).”⁵ The sultan’s receptiveness to the formal values embodied in the building was natural given that Islamic-Ottoman architecture had for more than a century been experimenting with smaller domed mosques that culminated in the large domed space of the Üç Şerefeli Mosque in Edirne, built by Mehmed II’s father between 1437 and 1447. The latter’s monumentality might well have been a distant response to Hagia Sophia, which was not unknown to the Ottomans at that time. It may also have been inspired by the grand scale of contemporary Timurid domed buildings characterized by their multiple minarets, given the Ottoman preoccupation with the prestige of Timurid culture after the humiliating defeat of Bayezid I by Timur in 1402. Whatever its source of inspiration, the Üç Şerefeli Mosque architecturally expressed growing imperial claims justified by the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire. Its monumental hemispherical dome and its atrium-like columned courtyard with a fountain at the center (used in a royal mosque for the first time) were part of a classical Mediterranean language of forms creatively synthesized with the Islamic-Ottoman architectural heritage.

Shared architectural idioms and a familiarity with Hagia Sophia’s imperial iconography were important factors that contributed to its preservation by Mehmed II, who began to see himself as legitimate heir to the Byzantine emperors after conquering Constantinople. This is acknowledged by the humanist George of Trebizond, who wrote in his Latin treatise (*On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat and His World Dominion*), which he dedicated to the sultan in 1466 with the hope of converting him to Christianity before he conquered Rome, “All the Westerners agree that in Constantine’s time the universal kingdom passed to that city which as a grace from God you now rule (hence no one can doubt that in accordance with the laws handed down to us by our

⁴ Tursun, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, fols. 51a–53a. The same tour is described in Bidlisi, *Tercüme-i Heşt Behişt*, fols. 79v–91r.

⁵ *Fatih Mehmed II Vakfiyeleri* (Ankara, 1938); Tahsin Öz, ed., *Zwei Stiftungsurkunden der Mehmed II* (Istanbul, 1935).

forefathers you are the king of the world).” Inspired by the lives of Hannibal, Caesar, and Alexander the Great, which two readers in Greek and Latin daily read to him, Mehmed II was fired by an ambition to reunite Constantinople and Rome under a world empire unified by a single monarch and a single religion. European efforts to convert him to Christianity proved futile; the sultan was strongly committed to the glory of Islam. His restoration of Hagia Sophia as his royal mosque was part of an ambitious program to restore the new Ottoman capital to its former magnificence and prosperity in the golden age of the Byzantine Empire, so that it would become a proper center for the world empire he sought to create. In this unique building, past and present were juxtaposed to invite a recognition of the Ottoman sultans as the successors of the Byzantine emperors and of the triumph of Islam over Christianity. This theme was also emphasized by the sultan’s decision to model his own funerary mosque complex built between 1463 and 1470 to replace the Church of the Holy Apostles, where the Byzantine emperors used to be buried, after the Hagia Sophia. That this was a conscious decision is revealed by Tursun Beg’s description of the building as a “great mosque based on the design of Ayasofya (*Ayaşofya kārñāmesi resminde*) which not only encompassed all the arts of Ayasofya, but moreover incorporated modern features constituting a fresh new idiom (*nev^c-i şīve-i tāze*).” Thus, Mehmed II initiated an ongoing dialogue between the Islamic–Ottoman architectural heritage and Hagia Sophia that would give birth to a new series of sultanic mosques visually expressing the dialectic link between the past and present through a unique stylistic synthesis.⁶

Constructing the Myth of Hagia Sophia

To facilitate the reconsecration of Hagia Sophia and Constantinople in the new Islamic context – a project reminiscent of the task Constantine the Great faced when he appropriated the pagan city – Mehmed II ordered a group of Greek and European learned men, patriarchs, and priests to write a history of the emperors who built the city’s astonishing monuments, which no longer appeared to be man-made. The earliest surviving Turkish and Persian versions of this text composed in 1479 and 1480 are based largely on the Byzantine ninth-century *Diegesis peri tes Hagias Sofias* (Narrative concerning Hagia Sophia), of which a Greek copy written for Mehmed II in 1474 survives among the royal manuscripts of the Topkapı Palace. Other versions of the text, supplemented with newly invented traditions of popular piety, were composed soon after the death of Mehmed II and incorporated into a large number of

6 John Monfasani, ed., *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1984), 494. For Mehmed’s two readers and his imperial ambitions, see the report of Giacomo Languschi from 1453, published in Agostino Pertusi, *Testi inediti e poco noti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli*, ed. posthumously A. Carile (Bologna, 1983), 172–5. The sultan’s project for restoring Constantinople is described in *History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Kritovoulos (1451–1467)*, trans. C. Riggs (Princeton, N.J., 1954), 104–5, 140–1. For Mehmed II’s mosque complex in Istanbul, see Tursun, *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, fols. 58a–58b. For a recent discussion of the impact of Hagia Sophia on Ottoman mosque architecture, see Rowland J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian’s Great Church* (London 1988), 237–59.

late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Ottoman chronicles.⁷ It was to a large degree these widely circulated texts that helped instill in the popular imagination the image of Hagia Sophia as a mosque.

In these texts history and myth are combined in an attempt to interweave Constantinople and Hagia Sophia into both a pre-Christian mythical past and an Islamic present to complement their dominant Christian-Byzantine memory. Constantinople is described as a great historical city founded by the mythical ruler Yanko bin Madyan, a descendant of the Persian emperor Shaddad, who was divinely guided by a dream to build a wonderful city where two seas meet. By tracing the periodic destructions of Constantinople and its subsequent rebuilding by great sovereigns like Solomon, Constantine, and Justinian, the texts place the city's history in a cyclical scheme of universal cosmography. Following several unsuccessful Arab attempts to conquer Constantinople, Mehmed II's victory fulfills the Prophet Muhammad's prophecy that the city would one day be conquered by Muslims: "They will conquer Constantinople. Hail to the Prince and the army to whom this is granted." The sultan's subsequent rebuilding of Constantinople thus marks the beginning of a new Islamic epoch that had been foreshadowed in the days of the Prophet.

These mythical Ottoman histories attempt to justify Hagia Sophia's conversion into a royal mosque by complementing its Christian associations with Islamic ones and by emphasizing its prestigious imperial past, which made it a potent symbol of universal sovereignty. Some versions invent the tradition that it was constructed with spolia from structures built by Solomon (revered as a prophet in the Islamic tradition) on a site originally sanctified by him, a reference meant to strengthen the royal connotations of the palatine church juxtaposed to the ruins of Constantine's Great Palace, next to which Mehmed II built his own palace, the Topkapı, between 1459 and 1479. According to Şemsüddin's version of 1480, Justinian in a dream is urged by God's immortal messenger Hızır (Elias) to build the church according to a divinely inspired plan on the site of an ancient temple that would demonstrate the triumph of Christianity over paganism following his suppression of a pagan revolt. After demolishing the temple of the defeated idol worshipers on that site, the victorious emperor writes to the "kings of the seven climes," ordering them to

7 The original Greek text is published in Théodor Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1901-7); it is translated into French and analyzed by Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris, 1984), 191-314. For the early Ottoman texts on Hagia Sophia by Yusuf bin Musa (1479) and Şemsüddin (1480), see Felix Tauer, "Notice sur les versions persanes de la légende de l'édification d'Ayasofya," in *Fuat Köprülü Armağanı* (Istanbul, 1953), 487-94; idem, "Les versions persanes de la légende sur la construction d'Aya Sofya," *Byzantinoslavica* 15 (1954), 1-20; Paul Wittek, "Miscellanea; 2. Zu den persischen Tarih-i Ayasofya," *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 14 (1964), 266-70. For a later account of Constantinople and Hagia Sophia incorporated into an anonymous Ottoman chronicle in 1491, translated into French with a detailed analysis of its sources and textual variants, see Stéphane Yerasimos, *Légendes d'empire: La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie* (Paris 1990). Yerasimos's translation is based on the edition of Friedrich Giese, *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken: part 1: Text und Variantenverzeichnis* (Breslau, 1922), 71-111; in this essay I will cite Yerasimos's convenient French translation (thereafter *Légendes*).

I started a comparative study of Persian and Turkish manuscripts on Hagia Sophia in 1985-6, as part of a postdoctoral research project that was awarded a Mellon Fellowship at the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University. Together with the Greek *Diegesis* written in 1474 for Mehmed II (Topkapı N6) these texts still await a critical edition, a difficult task given the large number of variants listed in *Légendes*, pp. 250-6.

contribute to the construction of Hagia Sophia by sending rare stones removed from the ancient pagan temples of India, Arabia, Yemen, Maghrib, Persia, China, Turkistan, Byzantium, and Europe. In this way Justinian's monumental church is reconstituted in the Ottoman text as a symbol of universal rule that reflected a perfect concordance between divine will and imperial power.⁸

The original construction of Hagia Sophia signified the triumph of Christianity over paganism under Justinian; its second consecration as Mehmed II's royal mosque represented the final victory of Islam that had been predicted by various signs. The Ottoman texts claim that the half-dome above the apse of Hagia Sophia had collapsed on the night of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, together with many other churches and Sassanian monuments including the Arch of Chosroes. Attempts to rebuild it were unsuccessful until a Byzantine embassy was sent to the Muslim Prophet, who sanctioned its reconstruction, knowing that it would someday serve Muslim congregations.⁹ Thus, the new dome was held in place by the Prophet's miracle and, according to one version of the legend, by a special mortar compounded of sand from Mecca, water from the holy well of Zemzem at the Ka'ba, and the Prophet's saliva.¹⁰

This myth is developed further in the story of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, one of the Prophet's companions, who had made an agreement with the Byzantine emperor to stop his siege of Constantinople in return for permission to pray in Hagia Sophia, an unusual request prompted by the Prophet's prophecy that the church was predestined to become a mosque and that whoever prayed in it would go to paradise. Ayyub was the first Muslim to pray there before he was martyred by the Byzantines, who buried him outside the city walls. His tomb was miraculously discovered and rebuilt by Mehmed II soon after the conquest of Constantinople, when it became the center of an imperially sponsored cult that played an important role in sanctioning Ottoman rule in the Islamized city. In it the sultans were girded with the sword of sovereignty after their accession to the imperial throne.¹¹

The earlier consecration of Hagia Sophia by the Prophet and by a Muslim martyr helped legitimize its conversion into a mosque with no radical changes in its structure or decorative program. Şemsüddin writes that both its plan and the name Ayasofya (understood at that time to mean the "House of Worship [*'ibādetgāh*]" of God) had been divinely communicated to Justinian through Hızır in a dream. He adds that this is why the mosque continued to be called by the same name, a continuity implying that Hagia Sophia had always been

8 For references to Solomon in the anonymous chronicle of 1491 and a summary of Şemsüddin's version, see *Légendes*, 6–7, 27–8, 113–23.

9 *Ibid.*, 36.

10 The use of mortar made up of Meccan earth, Zemzem water, and the saliva of the Prophet is mentioned in the seventeenth-century travelog of Evliyā Çelebi, *Seyāhatnâme* (Istanbul, 1896), 1: 124–5; also see F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford, 1929), 1: 11. According to one source, seventy camel-loads of water from the holy well of Zemzem and seventy camel-loads of earth from Mecca were dispatched for the mortar; Hasan Özdemir, *Die altosmanischen Chroniken als Quelle zur türkischen Völkunde*, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 32 (1975), 169. For the urban folklore of Istanbul, see H. Russack, *Byzans und Stamboul, Sagen und Legenden vom Goldenen Horn* (Berlin, 1941).

11 For the story of Ayyub and the Arab sieges of Constantinople, see *Légendes*, 38–48, 160–82; M. Canard, "Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople dans l'histoire et dans légende," *Journal asiatique* 208 (1926), 61–121.

the sanctuary of the same God worshiped by Christians and Muslims alike.¹² Many of the Christian legends attached to the building were similarly appropriated by Muslim popular piety, such as the story of the doors said to be constructed from the wood of Noah's ark, in front of which the opening sura of the Koran (Al-Fatiha) was recited before a voyage, or of water from the sacred well seen as a cure for palpitations, or of the sweating column of St. Gregory (now associated with Hızır), which also had curative powers. These were complemented by an ever-growing series of new legends. The praying places (*maḳām*) of Muslim martyrs like Ayyub, Sayyid Battal Ghazi, and others who fought in the Arab sieges of Constantinople were regularly pointed out to Muslims and foreign travelers by mosque attendants, well versed in popular legends concerning Hagia Sophia that constituted a continually elaborated collection of urban lore. When Reinhold Lubenau came to Istanbul with an embassy from the Hapsburg emperor Rudolf II in 1587–9, he was taken around Hagia Sophia and shown, among other wonders, the stone cradle of Christ; he was also told about the simultaneous collapse of Hagia Sophia's dome and the Arch of Chosroes on the day of Muhammad's birth and other "wonderful fables."¹³

These fables played a central role in making Hagia Sophia an integral part of the Ottoman collective memory. By the early sixteenth century, the court historian İdris-i Bidlisi could compare the special sanctity of the mosque to that of the Ka'ba and the Aqsa Mosque, the holiest Muslim sanctuaries. Other sixteenth-century authors repeat the comparison with the Aqsa Mosque and refer to Hagia Sophia as the second Ka'ba for the poor who could not afford the pilgrimage to Mecca.¹⁴

Numerous encomiums were composed by Ottoman poets about Hagia Sophia in the *Şehr-engiz* literature of Istanbul, a poetic genre that praises the beauties of the city, including both its outstanding monuments and inhabitants. In his poem of 1493–4, entitled "Attributes of Ayasofya," Cafer Çelebi praises the cosmic features of the mosque's monumental construction, the patterns of its precious marble revetments resembling the waves of the sea, its vast interior space covered by a colossal celestial dome, its artistic gold mosaics, its columns and arches, which seemed to bow and rise up in the worship of God, as well as its beautiful minbar, mihrab, and loggia (*mahfil*) from which the Koran was recited. Noting that the name Ayasofya means "place of worship (*cāy-i 'ibādet*)" of God for the pious, the court poet concludes that though there may be many other holy mosques covered with high domes, this one is the "victorious Shah of them all" (a claim repeated by the nineteenth-century author Müstakimzade, who refers to Hagia Sophia as the

12 From an anonymous Turkish translation of Şemsüddin's Persian text based on the Greek *Diegesis* written for Mehmed II, *Tercüme-i târih-i câmi'-i Ayasofya li Derviş Şemsü'd-din Karamânî*, Istanbul University Library, Ms. T. 259, fol. 19; cited with a slightly different translation in *Légendes*, 119–20.

13 For the continuity of Christian traditions and the invention of new ones by popular piety, see Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1: 10–13; Evliya, *Seyâhatnâme*, 1: 133–6. Popular traditions reported by pilgrims before the Ottoman conquest are conveniently compiled in George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, D.C., 1984). The role of mosque attendants in perpetuating the popular stories can be deduced from Reinhold Lubenau, *Beschreibung der Reisen des Reinhold Lubenau (1573–1589)*, 2 vols., ed. W. Sahn (Königsberg, 1912–20), 1: 143–6.

14 Bidlisi, *Tercüme*, fol. 80a. For the same comparison made by Celâlîzâde, Lâtîfi, and Taşlıcalı Yahya Bey, see Asaf Halet Çelebi, *Divan Şi'rinde İstanbul* (Istanbul, 1953), 37, 39, 40–1.

“commander of all mosques”). The late-seventeenth-century court poet Nabi also stresses the special sanctity of Hagia Sophia that makes prayer in it “a hundred times more valuable” than in any other mosque.¹⁵

These poems and the continuous life of Hagia Sophia as a mosque for nearly half a millennium testify to the success of its mythical history, which was originally part of Mehmed II’s efforts to legitimize the preservation of the Byzantine church as the main imperial mosque of the new Ottoman capital. The text commissioned by the sultan was much closer to its ninth-century Byzantine model than its other versions to which new oral traditions invented by folk piety were freely incorporated. The original text written for Mehmed II and translated into Persian in 1480 by Şemsüddin had primarily stressed the triumphal aspects of Justinian’s divinely inspired imperial church (built with spolia that the tributary kings of the seven climes had sent to commemorate the emperor’s victory over pagan rebels) to highlight the sultan’s own political ambitions. It confirmed how closely the conversion of Hagia Sophia to the sultan’s mosque was associated with his imperial policy, which marked the graduation of the Ottoman state from a modest principality to a world empire. Different versions of the text, which proliferated soon after Mehmed II’s death in the late 1480s and 1490s, change the emphasis from the *regal* to the *sacred* associations of the building through new traditions of Muslim popular piety. Radically departing from the original Greek text, they go as far as attributing the construction of Hagia Sophia to the will of Constantine’s pious wife Asafiya, after whom the monument was allegedly named, an attempt to underplay its connection with the powerful emperor Justinian. These texts, which lived side by side with versions elaborating the one composed for Mehmed II, are characterized by an antiimperial sentiment reflecting the popular resentment of those opposed to the conqueror’s new imperial image so different from that of his more egalitarian forebears. The mosque that had been Ottomanized by Mehmed II thus took a much longer time to Islamize.¹⁶

Changes in the Architecture and Decoration of Hagia Sophia

The symbolic appropriation of Hagia Sophia by the new dynasty and faith through the “invention of tradition” was complemented by subtle changes in its architecture and decoration over the centuries. According to popular legend, this process of physical transformation began even before the church had been converted to a mosque. The seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi claims that an architect named Ali Neccar, whom Mehmed II had sent to the Byzantine emperor to repair Hagia Sophia (damaged by an earthquake three years before the city’s conquest), informed the sultan on his return to Edirne: “I have secured the cupola of Ayasofya, O Emperor, by four mighty buttresses; to repair it depended on me, to conquer it depends on

15 Cafer Çelebi’s poem is published in Agah Sırrı Levend, *Türk Edebiyatında Şehr-Engizler ve Şehr-Engizlerde İstanbul* (Istanbul, 1957), 76–8. See Süleyman Sa‘aded-din Efendi [called Müstakimzâde], *Tuhfet’ül-haṭṭaṭin* (Istanbul, 1928), 78; and Nabi’s poem published in Asaf Halet Çelebi, *Divan*, 65. For other encomia on Hagia Sophia, see *Ibid.*, 39, 41–2, 48–9, 65; Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 3: 1469–71.

16 The reference to Asafiya is found in the anonymous version of 1491, *L. égendes*, 24. For Yerasimos’s interpretation of the antiimperial ideology inherent in some texts, see *ibid.*, 2–3, 123, 133–59, 247–9.

nineteenth-century traveler Edmondo de Amicis notes, the mats and strips of carpets had to be “placed obliquely with the lines of the building, and produce upon the eye some gross defect in perspective.” The figural mosaics on the lower levels were immediately plastered over, but the ones situated above or beyond the view of the praying congregations survived almost intact well into the sixteenth century. They were complemented by a few unobtrusive Muslim inscriptions that helped announce the new identity of the building.¹⁸

Inside the mosque Mehmed the Conqueror also placed Muslim relics and mementos of victory, including one of the four prayer carpets of the Prophet hanging to the right of the mihrab and his own banners of victory commemorating the conquest of Constantinople. The latter were attached to both sides of the minbar where the *khatib* read the *khutba* each Friday with a drawn sword in his hand signifying that Hagia Sophia was a mosque acquired through holy warfare. The mosque was also associated with the conquest of Constantinople through its enormous *waqf*; Mehmed II dedicated all the income from shops and other property that fell to his share in the vanquished city for its upkeep.¹⁹

Emblems of conquest continued to accumulate inside the mosque: In 1526 Süleyman the Magnificent offered as *waqf* to it two enormous bronze candlesticks removed from the cathedral of Buda as a trophy of his conquest of the Hungarian kingdom. They still flank the mihrab, inscribed with verses referring to the victory of the “world emperor” Süleyman, the death of the Hungarian king, and the destruction of Hungary’s churches. They end with the chronograms “Let the candle of religion shine forever” and “Let the candle of the light of Islam be eternal,” both yielding the date 933 (1526–7).²⁰

The church that Justinian had built to commemorate the triumph of Christianity by incorporating into its structure marbles and spolia from pagan monuments thus came to represent the glory of Islam through new spoils of victory. Throughout the sixteenth century, when Ottoman dynastic legitimacy was still based largely on successful military expansion through holy warfare (*ğazā*), Hagia Sophia continued to be a meaningful commemorative monument celebrating the triumph of Islam under the aegis of the victorious Ottoman dynasty. Its architecture and mosaic decoration were preserved as the brilliant mementos of the subjugated Christian–Byzantine past, the memory of which was still very much alive and encouraged the hope of future victories to come.

18 Edmondo de Amicis, *Constantinople*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1896). For the preservation of the mosaics, see Cyril Mango, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington, D.C., 1962). That some of the mosaics had been covered up by Mehmed II is demonstrated by Marino Sanuto’s report referring to an earthquake in 1509 when images reappeared under the falling plaster; cited in *ibid.*, 99, 118. Bidlisi notes that some of the mosaics in the mosque were replaced by Muslim inscriptions; *Tercüme-i Heşt Behişt*, fols. 79v–91r. These early inscriptions are attributed to Mehmed bin Hamdi bin Mehmed bin Hamza (d. 909/1503–4), a descendant of Akşemseddin, Mehmed II’s revered teacher, who was assigned the professorship of the madrasa of Hagia Sophia; see Müstakimzâde, *Tuhfet*, 442.

19 The Prophet’s carpet and Mehmed II’s banners are mentioned in H. G. Samuclyan, *The Mosque of St. Sophia* (New York, 1890), 6; and in De Amicis, *Constantinople*, 1: 259. Lubenau says the banners were green and black; *Beschreibung*, 1: 144. For the enormous *waqf* of Hagia Sophia, see Mehmed II’s *waqfiyyas* cited in note 5; the *waqfiyya* of Hagia Sophia is preserved in Atatürk Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Ms. Muallim Cevdet 0.41; and another *waqf* register of Hagia Sophia compiled in 1490 is in Başbakanlık Arşivi, Maliyeden Müdevver 16.

20 For the candlesticks and their inscriptions, see Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* 3: 1471; İbrâhîm Peçevî, *Târîh*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1864–7), 1: 100.

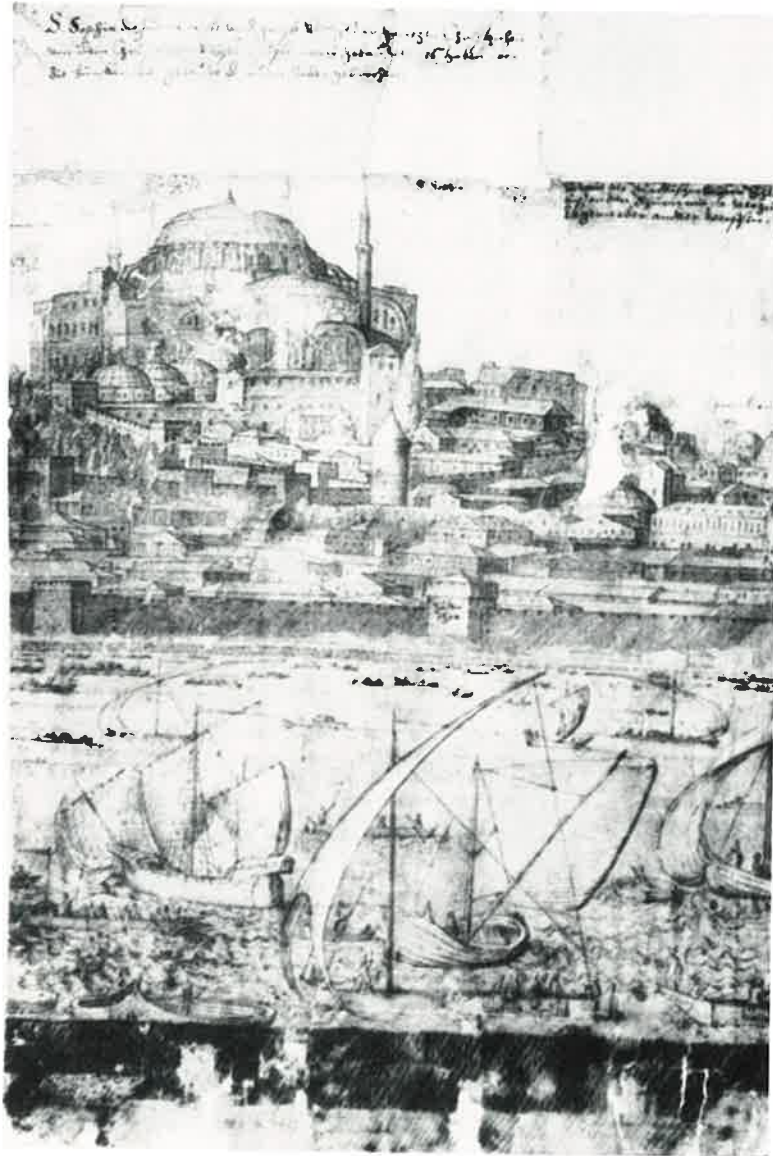


Fig. 111. Melchior Lorch, Hagia Sophia, ca. 1559. (From E. Oberhummer, *Konstantinopel unter Sultan Suleiman dem Grossen*, Munich, 1902)

More than a century had passed since the reconsecration of Hagia Sophia as a mosque when Selim II undertook the first large-scale renovation of the building in 1572–4 (Figures 111 and 112). Mimar Ahmed, the architect in charge of Hagia Sophia's maintenance, prompted the project when he informed the sultan that the building needed extensive renovation. Four firmans of Selim II, only two of which have been published, document the sultan's efforts to reinforce the threatened monument. The first two inform the qadi of Istanbul in April 1572 (Zilhicce 979) that Mimar Ahmed (Ayaşof-ya Mi'marı Ahmed) had complained that houses, rooms, latrines, and kitchens had been built adjacent to or were encroaching onto the walls of the mosque, a situation confirmed by an inspecting committee that included the *naib* and the mosque's imam. The qadi is ordered to have these structures demolished. The third firman from April 1573 (Zilhicce 980) is addressed to

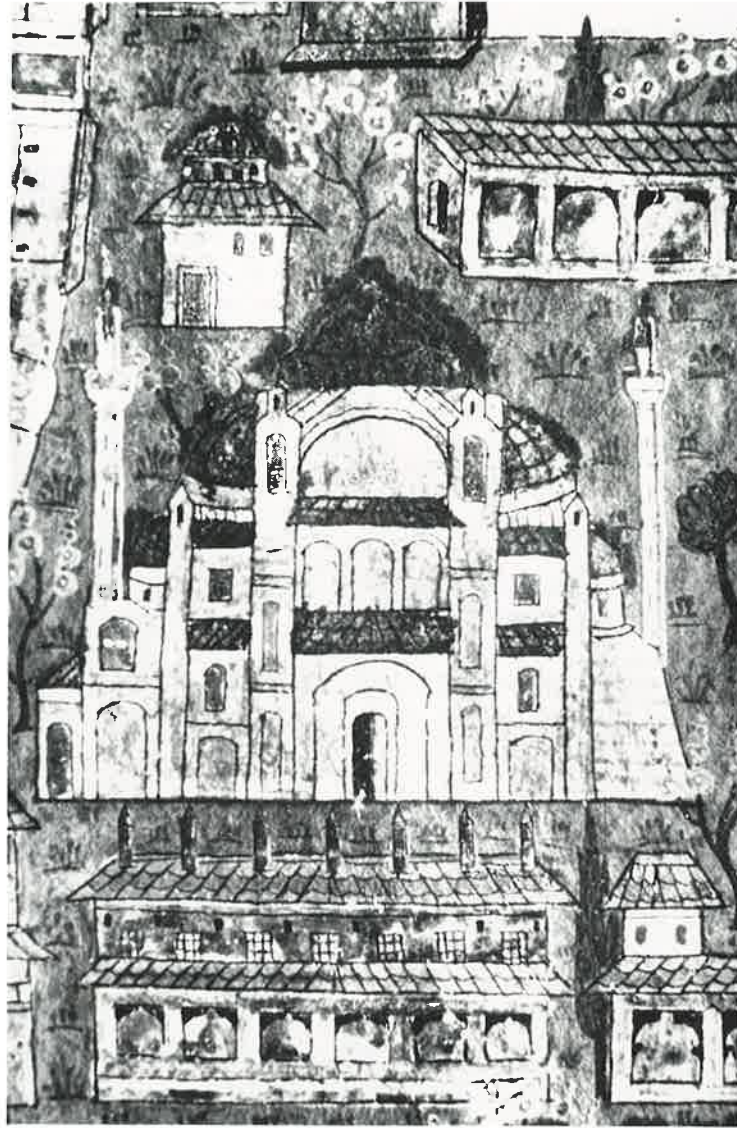


Fig. 112. Matrakçı Nasuh; detail of Hagia Sophia from map of Istanbul, ca. 1536. (From H. G. Yurdaydın, *Be-yan-i Menazil-i Sefer-i Irak-eyn*, Ankara, 1976)

the *waqf* administrator (*mütevelli*) of Hagia Sophia and to the royal architect Mehmed (Ḥāṣṣa mi‘marı üstād Meḥmed). It reports that the administrator had sent the sultan a letter about the need to repair the mosque’s crumbling buttresses and to rebuild in brick the dilapidated wooden minaret that had been hastily added to the church after the city’s conquest. It therefore orders the architect Mehmed to construct an appropriate base for the new minaret and to repair the buttresses with utmost care.²¹

The fourth firman was issued three months later in June 1573 (Safer 981). It informs the qadi of Istanbul and the *waqf* administrator that the sultan had inspected the building with a committee of experts, including the chief archi-

²¹ The first two unpublished firmans are in Başbakanlık Arşivi, İstanbul, Mühimme Defteri 10, no. 291, and Mühimme Defteri 16, no. 375. The third one (Mühimme Defteri 21, no. 615) is published in Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda İstanbul Hayatı*, no. 14 (İstanbul, 1935), 21, and partially translated into English in Emerson and Van Nice, “Hagia Sophia and the First Minaret,” 33.

tect Sinan, and had come to the conclusion that a space of 35 cubits should be cleared to the right and left of the mosque, that a 3-cubit passage should be left around the madrasa, that the neighboring royal warehouse must be demolished, that the minaret on top of the half-dome should be eliminated and replaced by another minaret built on top of the buttress in front of it, that buttresses and water conduits should be built in the 35-cubit-wide open space around the mosque, that places in need of repair inside and outside the mosque should be restored and cleaned, that the stone and brick obtained from the demolished structures abutting the mosque should be used in the repairs, and that the lead covering the dome should be renewed. The firman also stipulates that the continuous row of buildings with shameful latrines that had appropriated spaces between the buttresses, or had been carved into them in ways that threatened the mosque's stability, should forthwith be removed. According to a *fatwa* (legal opinion) obtained from the Şeyhülislam, even those squatters who had sold stones and bricks removed from the buttressing to build their own wooden or mudbrick houses were going to be recompensed with indemnities. However, the royal firman concludes, those who opposed the sultan's orders as tyranny, arguing that Hagia Sophia need not be preserved since it had been built by non-Muslims, deserved to be executed as infidels.²² This last point shows that, despite largely successful official efforts to Islamize the building, its Christian memory had not completely been erased.

As these firmans suggest, Selim II's efforts to consolidate the structural stability of Hagia Sophia by strengthening its buttresses and building a minaret on one of them were on a massive scale. The contemporary historian Selaniki notes that the more than a millennium old building had not been repaired since the days of Mehmed II; it was surrounded by houses on all sides and faced imminent collapse, already leaning about 1.5 cubits to one side. When the surrounding structures were demolished, an army of martens, rats, and bats fled through the neighborhood. After inspecting the building with his grandees, the sultan ordered Sinan to build powerful buttresses around it. Giving the architect a robe of honor, he said, "It is my wish to renovate the noble mosque in order to make it my own royal monument," a clear indication that the sultan wanted to place his personal stamp on the prestigious building.²³

Peçevi and Mustafa Âli, two other contemporary historians, bring out the hitherto unnoted fact that Selim II had also commissioned Sinan to build two new minarets in addition to the pair that he had repaired, two Selimiye madrasas, and a mausoleum in the walled-in space that had been cleared up around the mosque.²⁴ The project conceived by Selim II was left partially incomplete

22 Başbakanlık Arşivi, İstanbul, Mühimme Defteri 22, no. 171; published in Refik, *On Altıncı*, no. 18 (1935), 22–4, and partially translated in Emerson and Van Nice, "Hagia Sophia and the First Minaret," 33–4.

23 "Murâdım câmî'î şerîfi ihyâ' idüb eşer-i hâşş idinmekdür," Muştâfâ Selânîkî, *Târîh* (İstanbul, 1864–5), 120–1.

24 Peçevi describes Selim II's renovation under the chapter title "The Construction of Buttresses and Two New Monumental Minarets at the Noble Mosque of Ayasofya." He writes that in "the year 981 (1573–74): A decree was issued by Sultan Selim Khan . . . ordering the construction of great buttresses as a safety measure for the colossal dome of the noble Ayasofya mosque, two unequalled minarets, two lofty madrasas, and a noble mausoleum for his burial. These were completed in a short time except for the mausoleum, which was finished posthumously"; Peçevî, *Târîh*, 1: 501. Mustafa Âli says that after properties adjacent to the mosque were bought, a space 40 cubits wide

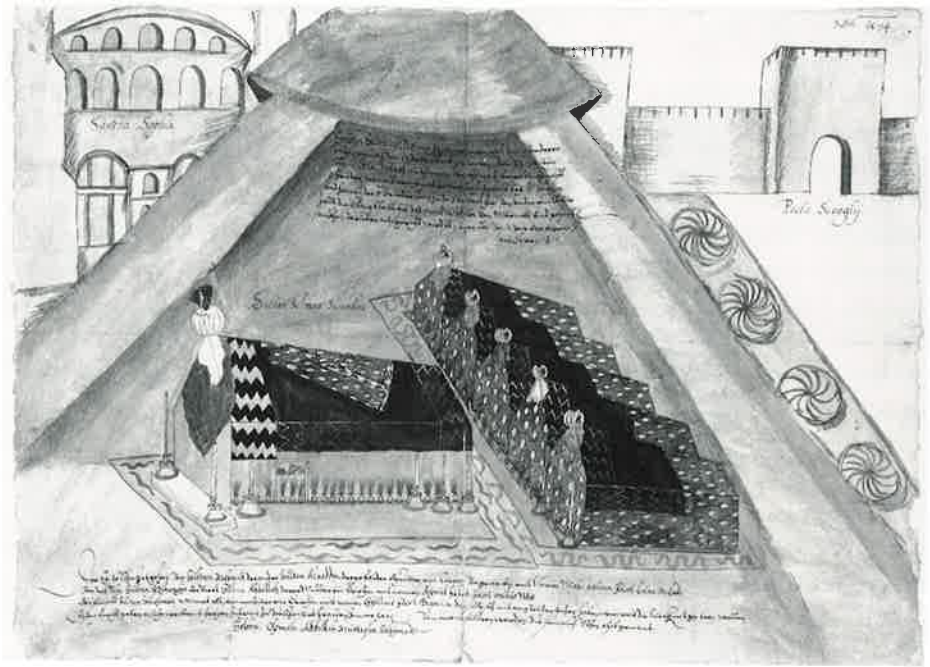


Fig. 113. Burial tent of Selim II and the royal princes, ca. 1574. (From the Freshfield Album, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, p. 45, ms. 0.17.2)

when he died a year later in 1574. That the mausoleum, whose site had already been selected, was built posthumously is confirmed by a folded drawing in the so-called Freshfield Album, made by an anonymous German artist in December 1574. Behind the south facade of Hagia Sophia, on the spot where Sinan later built Selim II's mausoleum (completed in 985/1577), the drawing shows a temporary red tent over the coffins of Selim II and his five sons (Figure 113).²⁵ This is in keeping with the common Ottoman practice of constructing royal tombs only after the death of each sultan; a miniature in the Chester Beatty *Süleymānnāme* shows that a similar imperial tent had been temporarily raised behind the Süleymaniye Mosque over the site where Sinan later built Süleyman's domed mausoleum.²⁶

While the two madrasas named after Selim II were never completed, the two new minarets he commissioned were built, together with his projected mausoleum, by his son Murad III. This is demonstrated by another folded drawing in the Freshfield Album, which depicts Hagia Sophia with only two

was opened up around the building and enclosed by an elegant wall (*sūr-i lafif*). "Then the construction of buttresses abutting the dome of Ayasofya and the building of two new minarets in addition to the two existing monumental minarets was ordered. A pleasant site for his burial place was designated and in addition to the old madrasa the construction of two exalted Selimiye madrasas (*iki medrese-i celile-i Selimîyye*) was commanded as well. But since his blessed lifetime did not suffice, God enabled him to realize merely the beginning of the construction of those two madrasas while the rest of the conceived parts had been fully planned"; Mustafa 'Āli Gelibolulu, *Künhü'l-ahbār*, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Ms. T.Y. 5959, fol. 459v.

²⁵ The princes were strangled by their brother Murad III soon after his accession to the throne according to a dynastic tradition instituted to stop struggles for succession among the princes. For the Freshfield Album (Trinity College, Cambridge, Ms. 0.17.2), see E. H. Freshfield, "Some Sketches Made in Constantinople in 1574," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1930), 519–22; Cyril Mango, "Constantinopolitana," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 80 (1965), 305–36.

²⁶ For Süleyman's burial tent, see Lokmān, *Süleymānnāme*, dated 1579–80, Chester Beatty Library, Ms. 413, fol. 115b.

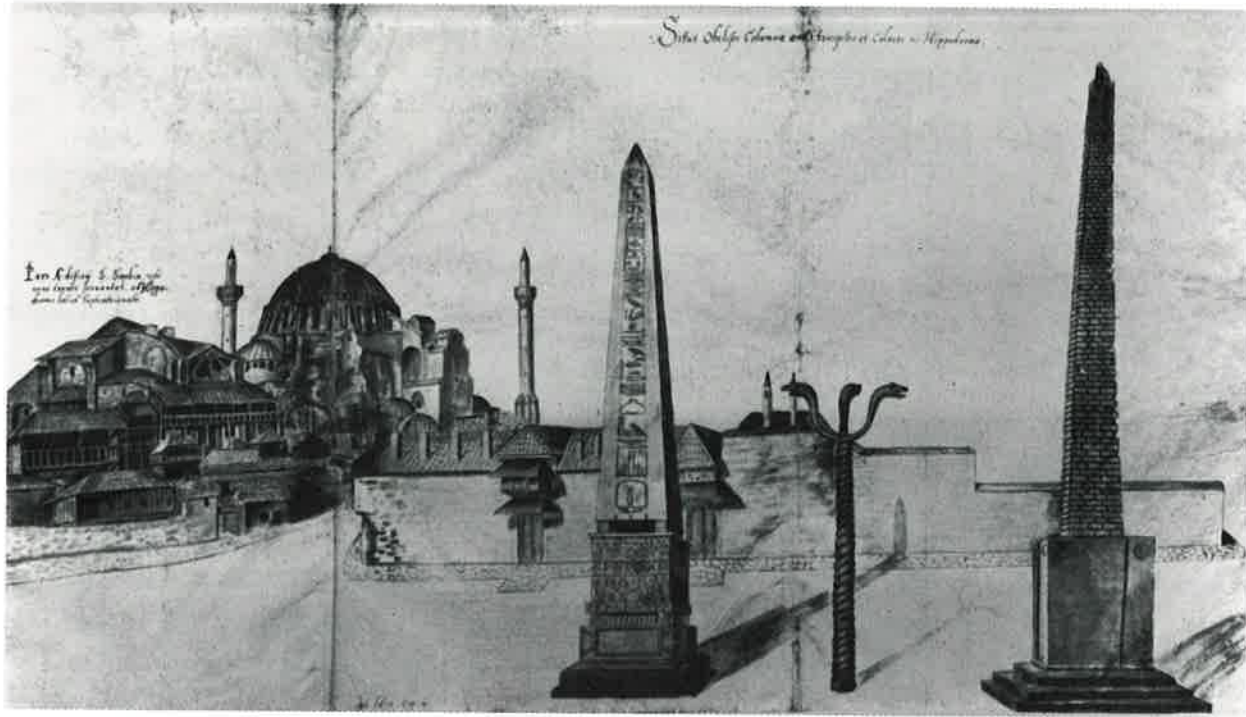


Fig. 114. The Hippodrome and Hagia Sophia, ca. 1574. (From the Freshfield Album, Trinity College Library, p. 45, ms. 0.17.2)

minarets in 1574 (Figure 114). The late-sixteenth-century Ottoman geographer Mehmed Âşık confirms that the two minarets on each corner of Hagia Sophia's qibla wall had been built by Mehmed II and Selim II (the one that replaced Mehmed II's wooden structure) and that the remaining two identical minarets had been added by Murad III.²⁷

Selim II, who wanted Hagia Sophia to be associated with his own person, transformed its image forever by deciding to increase the number of its min-

²⁷ This source is the only contemporary information we have on the chronology of the minarets: 'Âşık, Mehmed bin 'Osman bin Bayezid, *Menâzırı' l-'avâlim*, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Mxt. 314, fols. 262r–262v, Vienna. The same information is repeated in De Amicis, *Constantinople*, 1: 255: "One minaret was erected by Muhammad the Conqueror, another by Selim II, the two others by the Third Murad"; and in W. R. Lethaby and H. Swainson, *Sancta Sophia, Constantinople: A Study of Byzantine Building* (London, 1894), 127, where the brick minaret at the southeast corner is attributed to Mehmed II, the one on the northeast corner to Selim II, and the two on the western corners to Murad III. Müstaķîmzâde also attributes the two identical western minarets to Murad III, stating that the one facing the Bab-i Hümayun was built by Selim II; *Tuhfet'ül-haġġatîn*, 516. Without producing evidence, Ayvansarâyî confuses the issue by claiming that the brick minaret was built by Mehmed II, the one in front of Bab-i Hümayun by Bayezid II, and the other two by Selim II; Hâfız Hüseyin Ayvansarâyî, *Hadîkatü' l-cevâmi'*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1865), 1: 3–4. Emerson and Van Nice remain inconclusive; they state that the southeast minaret was constructed by Mehmed II, the northeast one either by Bayezid II or by Selim II, and "though erection of one of the western pair was begun on orders issued by Selim in 1573, both, on account of his sudden death in 1574, were completed during the reign of his son Murad III"; "Hagia Sophia and the First Minaret," 31. Murad III is also credited with donating to Hagia Sophia in 982 (1574–75), probably upon the completion of the project, two calligraphic panels written in his own hand to be hung on both sides of the mihrab, two antique ablution urns said to have come from Bergama, and four marble pulpits built adjacent to the pillars supporting the dome; see Müstaķîmzâde, *Tuhfet'ül-haġġatîn*, 516; Ayvansarâyî, *Hadîka*, 1: 4; De Amicis, *Constantinople*, 1: 259; Lethaby and Swainson, *Sancta Sophia*, 84–5. Lubenau saw the urns filled with water from an underground source in 1587–9; *Beschreibung*, 1: 144.

arets from two to four. The four minarets around Hagia Sophia's dome appear to have been planned to reinforce the open competition with the Selimiye Mosque, built for the same sultan in the old capital Edirne between 1568 and 1574 as the culmination of the dialogue between Ottoman-Islamic architecture and Hagia Sophia that had been initiated earlier by Mehmed II. Surrounded by four minarets, the monumental dome of Selimiye, which Sinan built in 1572–3 (just when the firmans ordering the restoration of Hagia Sophia were issued), represented an attempt to surpass the unprecedented monumentality of Justinian's dome.²⁸ The two madrasas of Hagia Sophia, had they been completed, would have carried the long-distance dialogue with the Selimiye Mosque, also provided with two madrasas, still further.

Instead of his mosque in Edirne, it was Hagia Sophia in the capital that Selim II chose as the site of his mausoleum, a choice that explains why he wanted to leave his personal stamp on the latter monument. After the conquest of Constantinople, all Ottoman sultans had been buried in that city next to mosque complexes built in their own names. That Selim II did not want to interrupt the message of dynastic continuity communicated by these funerary mosque complexes symbolically marking the multiple hills of Istanbul is demonstrated by his decision to be buried in the walled garden enclosure of Hagia Sophia on the first hill. This unprecedented choice changed the character of Hagia Sophia from a commemorative victory monument to the sultan's own funerary mosque (Figures 115 through 117). The Ayasofya Mosque had dictated the new image of the Ottoman imperial mosques built after the conquest of Constantinople, but it was in turn reshaped to conform to that image through the addition of four minarets (a privilege reserved for sultanic mosques) and a royal mausoleum set in a walled garden. Selim II's imperial decree, which ordered the clearing of a wide space around the monument, shows an attempt to adapt Hagia Sophia to the by then standard layout of Ottoman imperial complexes, all of them occupying vast open precincts that can be seen as Mediterranean-Islamic counterparts to contemporary Italian Renaissance piazzas.

Hagia Sophia did not remain associated solely with Selim II for long; it eventually took on a more general dynastic character as other sultans came to be buried there, each in his own domed mausoleum. Sinan's student Davud built one for Murad III (d. 1595), using this as an opportunity to make minor repairs on the Hagia Sophia. An account book dated 1003–5 (1594–7) records the renewing of the lead on the domes, repairing the madrasa rooms, dependencies, large doors, latrines, and water conduits.²⁹ The domed tomb of Mehmed III (d. 1603) was built on the order of his son Ahmed I by the architect Dalgıç Ahmed Aga in 1017 (1608).³⁰ Its construction was again accompanied by re-

28 For the attempt to surpass the size of Hagia Sophia's dome in Selimiye and the competitive dialogue between the two monuments, see Muṣṭafā Sā'ī, *Tezkiiretül' l-Bünyân* (Istanbul, 1897), 71–2; translated by M. Sözen and S. Saatçi, *Mimar Sinan and Tezkiiret-ül Bünyân* (Istanbul, 1989), 114–16. The only other Ottoman imperial mosques with four minarets are the Üç Şerefeli in Edirne (1437–47) and the Süleymaniye in Istanbul (1550–7), in which they mark the four corners of the marble courtyard, unlike Selimiye and Hagia Sophia, where the four minarets surround the domed sanctuary.

29 For Murad III's tomb and that of his children built adjacent to it, see Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 91, 93; Öz, *İstanbul Camileri*, 1: 30. The repair of Hagia Sophia is documented in Başbakanlık Arşivi, Maliyeden Müdevver 4517 and 5315.

30 For Mehmed III's tomb and a Byzantine baptistery converted to the tombs of Mustafa I and Sultan Ibrahim, see Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 91, 93; Öz, *İstanbul Camileri*, 1: 30.



Fig. 115. Hagia Sophia, ca. 1586. (From the Lewenklaui Album, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vindob. 8615, fol. 129r, Vienna)

pairs in the Hagia Sophia, but this time more extensive ones that significantly transformed the mosque's celebrated decorative skin, which earlier Ottoman poems had so consistently eulogized. This was an important step in the ongoing Islamization of the building, a project that took several generations to complete.

An unpublished repair document from 1016–17 (1607–9) shows that Ahmed I's renovation included the replacement of lead sheets covering the dome, the renewal of glass panes and inscriptions, the addition of ceramic tile (*kāṣī*) revetments, as well as the painting by decorators (*naḳḳāṣān*) of the sultan's royal tribune, the minbar, the mihrab, the railings around the three galleries, as well as the dome and half-domes. The remaining interior and



Fig. 116. Hagia Sophia, ca. 1590. (From an anonymous album, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vindob. 8626, fol. 162r, Vienna)

exterior walls were whitewashed, a task that required covering the whole structure with a wooden scaffolding.³¹

It was then that many of Hagia Sophia's figural mosaics, including the Pantokrator on the dome, which Cyril Mango brilliantly demonstrated to have remained in view throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, disappeared under paint. In a recent study of the Kariye Camii, Robert Ouster-

31 The beginning of the document summarizes the project as the "renovation and restoration of the noble Ayasofya Mosque, and covering with lead the domed roof, and various repairs at the exterior and interior, and the painted decoration of the dome with the half-domes and railings of the first and middle galleries, and the exterior and interior walls, and the repair of the glass panes, and the renewal of the crystal panes above the mihrab, and the scraping of the mihrab, minbar and mahfil." This entry is followed by a list of expenditures, including a large amount of wood used for the scaffolding, glass panes, oil, sandaracha resin, paints, brushes, bottles, gold leaf, nails, iron rods for windows around the dome, and iron seals of Solomon (*mühr-i Süleymân*) for suspending the oil lamps. The repairs also involved renewing the inscriptions: "repairing the holy words (*kelâm-i şerif*) of Ayasofya the Great"; Başbakanlık Arşivi, Maliyeden Müdevver 6484. The ceramic tiles (*kâşi*) that can still be seen near the mihrab carry the date 1016 (1607–8).

hout showed that there, too, the figural frescoes and mosaics survived well into the sixteenth century – Stephan Gerlach saw them in 1578.³² Although Mango points out that many of the Hagia Sophia mosaics had been covered with paint by 1672, when Guillaume-Joseph Grélot made his drawing of the mosque's interior, he does not say exactly when this change took place (Figure 118).³³ He cites a curious report by the Spanish priest Otavio Sapienca from around 1610 according to which Ahmed I had done away with the image of God on the dome to the affliction of all Christians when its lead covering was renewed. This was allegedly prompted by some Jews who had offered the sultan a large sum of money for the original lead sheets, believed to contain a considerable proportion of silver, and had promised to replace the removed sheets with ordinary lead.³⁴ This observation seems to have been confirmed by Hans Jacob Amman, who saw only inscriptions at the center of the dome in 1612,³⁵ and by Louis Deshayes de Courmenin (1621), who noted that parts of the mosaic-covered dome were whitewashed and inscribed with large Arabic letters.³⁶ However, other travelers cited by Mango confuse the issue by continuing to mention the Pantokrator during the first half of the seventeenth century,³⁷ a discrepancy that can probably be explained by the tendency of travel literature to plagiarize earlier texts in order to boast of having seen all the marvels previously described.

In addition to the document recording Ahmed I's repairs in 1607–9, which confirms the renewal of lead on the dome and the painting of the whole monument, there is other evidence to suggest that the Pantokrator and other mosaics disappeared under paint at the time. The Polish traveler Simeon, who passed through Istanbul during the reign of Ahmed I on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, describes in detail the images from the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the apostles, prophets, and patriarchs, the vestiges of which were still visible in Hagia Sophia. But even though he climbed to the dome he failed to mention the Pantokrator, an omission implying that it had disappeared by then. This is confirmed by an amusing story Simeon recounts as having occurred in 1609, when workers were repairing the dome of Hagia Sophia on the sultan's order:

One of the workers who felt a natural urge to relieve himself, too lazy to come down, urinated into a bucket of lime and mixing this with plaster began to use it. But Hagia Sophia, unable to tolerate this disrespect, threw the man with the bucket in his hand down to the floor in front of everyone's eyes. The man's body was smashed into pieces like the corpse of Simon the sorcerer. Those who saw this event with their own eyes were terrified. When the sultan heard this event he was astonished and begged Allah, or-

32 Mango, *Materials*; see sources cited in app. 2: 117–40. Robert G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul* (Washington, D.C., 1987), 6.

33 Mango writes that the face of the Pantokrator on the dome was obscured sometime before 1630 (perhaps before 1580–92), but that the figure, which disappeared by 1672, may still have been visible in 1652; *Materials*, 99.

34 Cited in *ibid.*, 89, 122. The reference to Jews seems to be a topos. The Umayyad caliph Yazid II, who in 723 ordered the removal of icons from all Christian churches within his realm, is also supposed to have been influenced by a Jew. For the view that Jews were responsible for the development of iconoclasm in Islam, see A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9–10 (1956), 25–47.

35 Cited in Mango, *Materials*, 89, 122.

36 Cited in *ibid.* For Grélot's drawings of Hagia Sophia, see Guillaume-Joseph Grélot, *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople* (Paris, 1680).

37 Mango, *Materials*, 123–5.

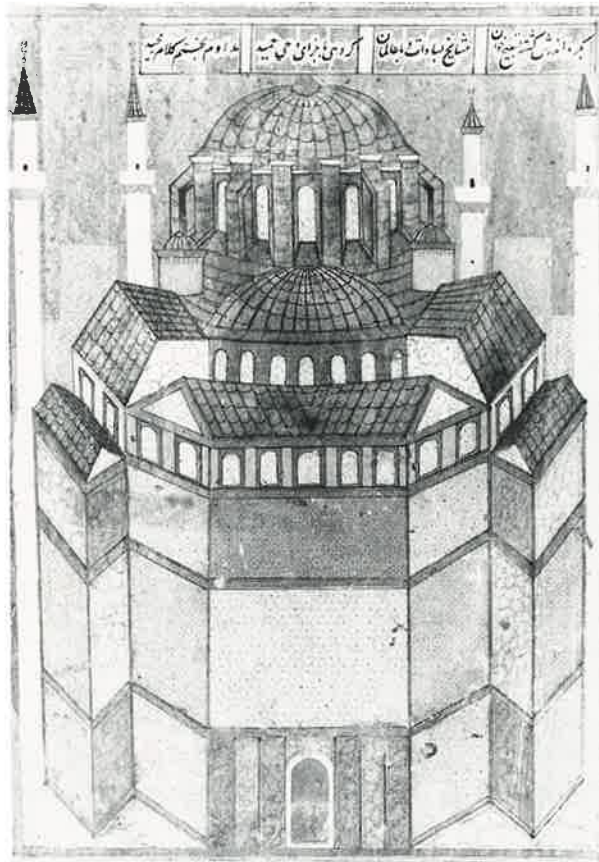


Fig. 117. Miniature commemorating Selim II's renovation of Hagia Sophia and his burial, 1581. (Seyyid Lokman, *Şehname-i Selim Han*, MS. T. K.S.A. 3595, fol. 156r)

Fig. 118. Interior of Hagia Sophia looking east toward the mihrab in 1672. (From Guillaume-Joseph Grélot, *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople*, Paris, 1680)

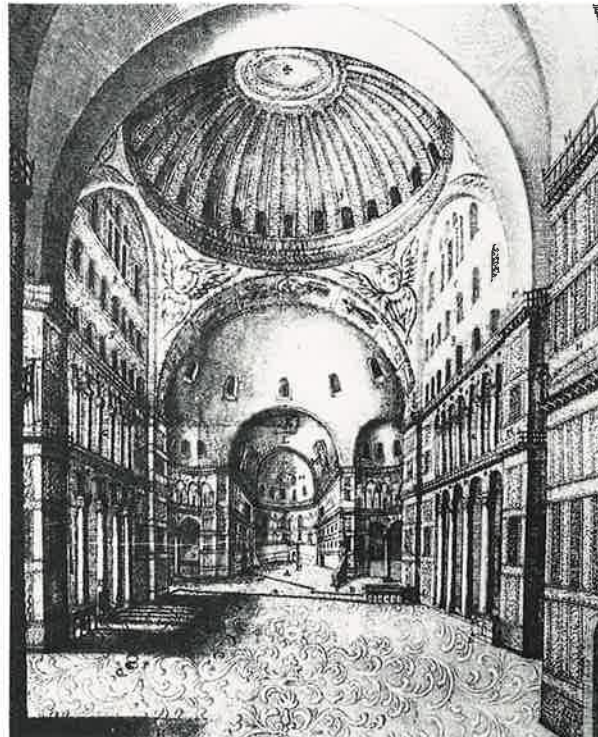




Fig. 119. (a–d) Drawings of the interior of Hagia Sophia in 1710–11 by Cornelius Loos, Stockholm National Museum. (From Alfred Westholm, *Cornelius Loos*, Stockholm, 1985)

Fig. 119a.

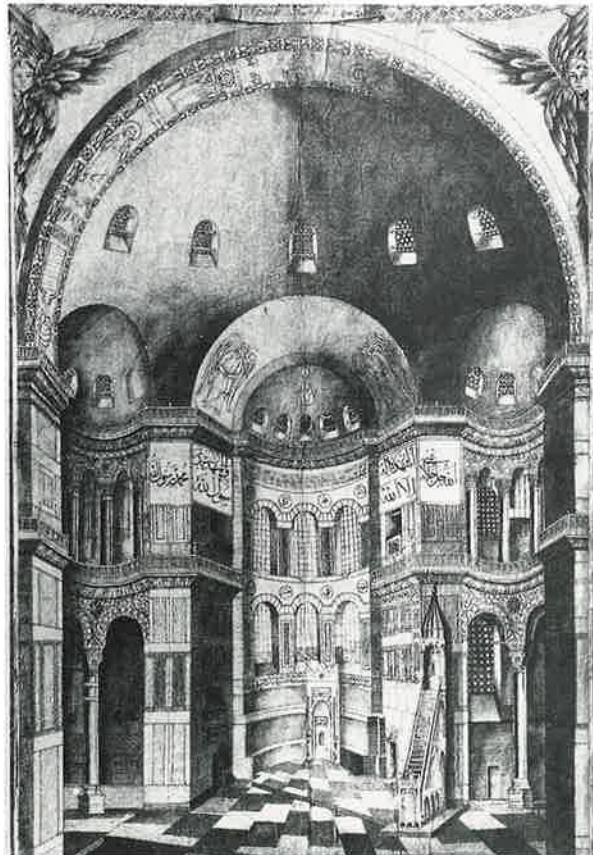


Fig. 119b.

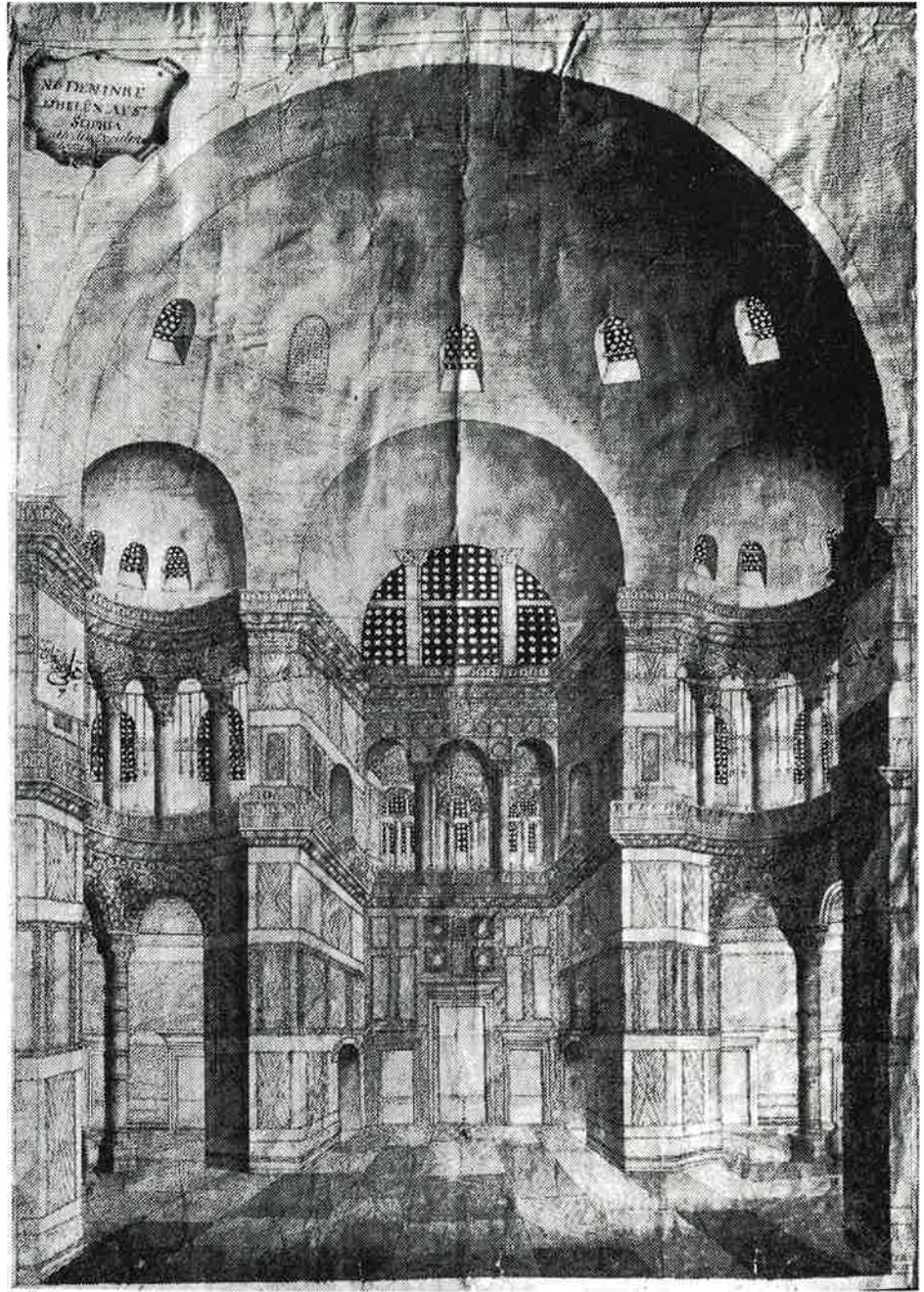


Fig. 119c.

dering that from now on nobody should show such impertinence and impudence; if anyone felt a natural urge he should come down and thus serve the sanctuary with respect and deference. Although we have not personally witnessed this event which left everyone bewildered, we heard it from the mouth of reliable Armenians, Greeks, and Turks who worked there and likewise from priests. This event occurred as a miracle to those disrespectful toward God's saints who are the honor of the Trinity and the pride of Christians.³⁸

38 Simeon stopped in Istanbul three times (1608–9, 1614–15, 1618–19); his travelog is translated into Turkish by Hrand D. Andreasyan, *Polonyalı Simeon'un Seyahatnamesi (1608–1619)* (Istanbul, 1964), 5–6.

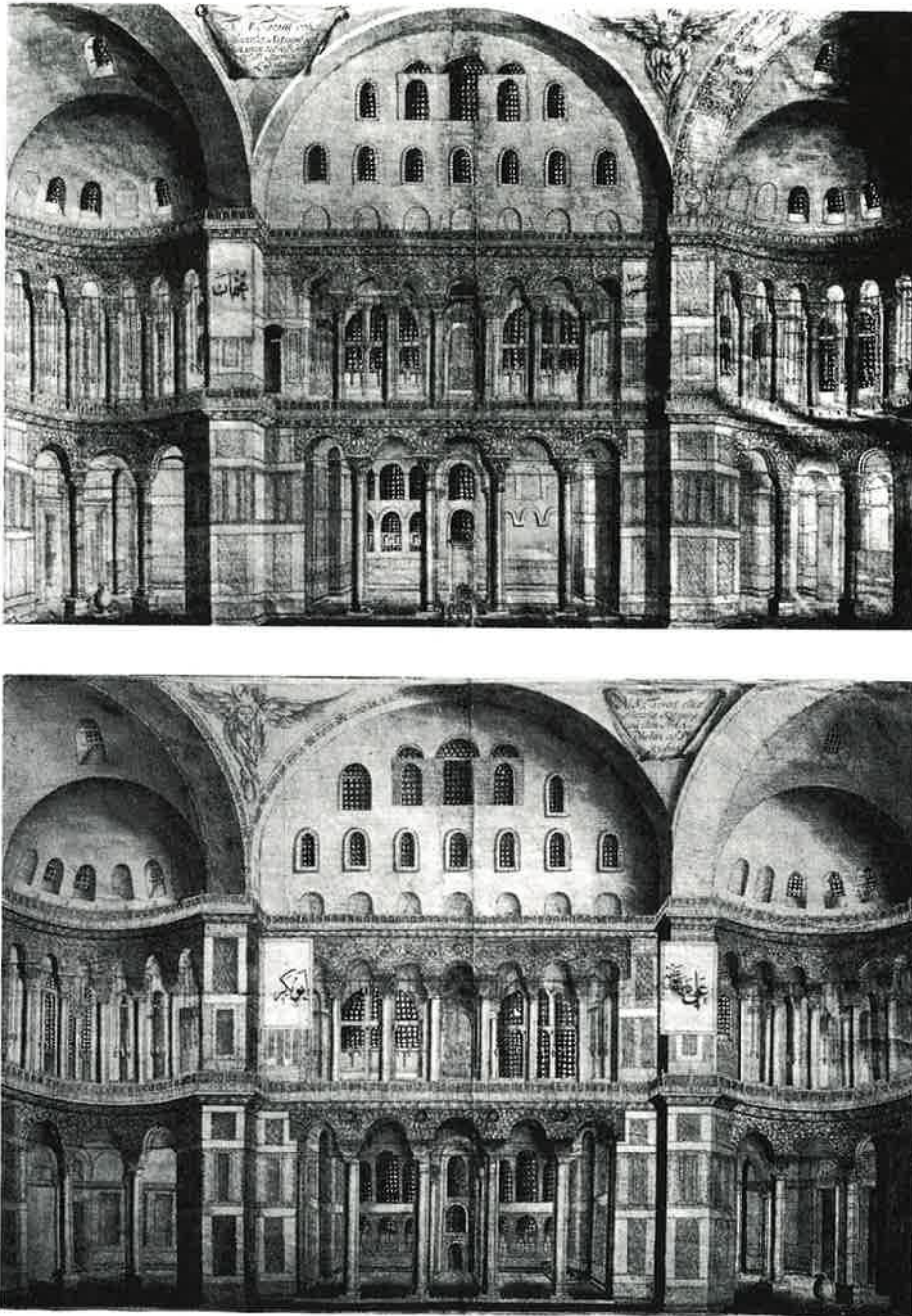


Fig. 119d.

The covering over of the Pantokrator and other mosaics in 1609 signals a growing intolerance of figural imagery in the context of a mosque.³⁹ Mustafa Safi, the royal imam of Ahmed I, describes in his history how the sultan broke to pieces a mechanical clock in the form of an organ with moving figurines of birds and persons holding trumpets that Queen Elizabeth of England had sent as a gift to his father Mehmed III in 1599. The sultan destroyed this object, which had been installed by the Englishman Thomas Dallam in

³⁹ For Ottoman attitudes toward figural imagery, see Klaus Kreiser, “‘. . . Dan die Türckhen leiden khain Menschen Pildnuss’: Über die Praxis des ‘Bilderverbots’ bei den Osmanen,” in *Fifth International Congress of Turkish Art*, ed. G. Fehér (Budapest, 1978), 549–56.

the Pearl Kiosk, a garden pavilion of the Topkapı Palace, because its “strange shapes and queer representations suited to heathen’s temples were not tolerable in such a place of prayer and a mansion of the caliphate,” a reference to the small masjid inside the kiosk.⁴⁰

Ahmed I, described in contemporary sources as extremely devout, had turned out to be more scrupulous in conforming to the aniconic Islamic tradition than his forebears had been. However, with all his zeal, even this sultan could not bring himself to leave the walls of the Hagia Sophia totally denuded. Outside the main prayer space and beyond the congregation’s field of vision, the figural mosaics were left untouched. The entire mosaic program of the inner narthex, including the lunette over the imperial door, and the vaults of the north and south galleries were still uncovered when the Swedish engineer Cornelius Loos recorded them in his drawings in 1710–11.⁴¹

It seems that Ahmed I had the figural mosaics of Hagia Sophia painted over selectively according to the acceptability of their iconography from an Islamic point of view. The drawings of the mosque’s interior by Grélot and Loos (Figures 118 and 119 a–d) show that the only mosaics spared in the main prayer space were the four seraphim on the pendentives and the Virgin and Child in the conch of the apse above the mihrab flanked by the archangels Gabriel and Michael and framed by the figures on the great eastern arch. One wonders if the selective preservation of these mosaics was not inspired by the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who had removed all the pagan idols and painted images inside the Ka’ba except for a representation of the revered Virgin with the Christ Child sitting on her lap. Ahmed I, who had had the Ka’ba restored, might have been familiar with this tradition.⁴² The consistent comparison of Hagia Sophia with the Ka’ba in Ottoman texts (perhaps because both were among the few prestigious pre-Islamic monuments reconsecrated as major Muslim shrines through the removal of idols and figural imagery) makes this hypothesis likely.

Domenico Hierosolimitano, a Jewish physician employed in the Topkapı Palace between 1580 and 1592, wrote in 1611 that a veil had been placed over the mosaic of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia so that it was not clearly visible from the prayer space below but could be observed from the gallery above; it remained uncovered because of the great veneration with which it was held.⁴³ The special sanctity of Mary as the mother of Christ is recognized in

40 “. . . eşkāl-i ‘acîbe ve temâşîl-i ğarîbeyi göricek maḥall-i buḥāneler olan temâşîl ve suver bunun gibi maḥall-i ‘ibâdet ve menzîl-i ḥilâfetde turmak cā’iz olmaz . . .”; Muṣṭafâ bin İbrâhîm Şâfi, *Zübdetü’ t-tevârîḥ*, Ms. T. K. S. Revan 1304, fols. 39r–39v. For photographs of the relevant manuscript pages describing Ahmed I’s destruction of the object, see Tûlay Reyhanlı, *İngiliz Gezginlerine Göre 16. Yüzyılda İstanbul’da Hayat (1582–1599)* (Ankara, 1983), 52, 143–6. For the installation of the organ, see Thomas Dallam, “The Diary of Master Thomas, 1559–1600,” in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, ed. J. T. Bent (London, 1893), 71–2, 76–80; and Stanley Mayes, *An Organ for the Sultan* (London, 1956). That clocks with mechanical figurines were tolerated by earlier sultans becomes evident in Otto Kurz, *European Clocks and Watches in the Near East* (Leiden, 1975).

41 Mango, *Materials*, 24, 99. The complete collection of Loos’s drawings preserved in the Stockholm National Museum is published in Alfred Westholm, *Cornelius Loos: Teckningar fran en expedition till Främre Orienten, 1710–1711* (Stockholm, 1985).

42 A. J. Wensinck [J. Jomier], “Ka’ba,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden, 1990) 4: 320. Azraqi’s account of this tradition is cited in K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (New York, 1979), 1 (pt. 1): 2–3. Also see Azraqi (d. 858), *K. Akhbar Makkah*, in *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1858), 111–13.

43 Cited in Mango, *Materials*, 88–9, 121. The image of the Virgin, which Hierosolimitano says was at the center of the dome, must be the one on the half-dome over the mihrab apse.

several verses of the Koran. On the Hagia Sophia mihrab itself, dating back to Mehmed II's reign, is inscribed the part of verse (3:37) containing the term "mihrab," possibly chosen for its reference to Mary as the mother of Christ, the very subject represented in the mosaics above.⁴⁴

The representations of the four seraphim, archangels, and other holy personages may also have been preserved by Ahmed I for being consistent with the message of the Koran. The mid-seventeenth-century traveler Evliya Çelebi describes them as strange representations of "cherubs (*kerubiyān*) and other persons" and identifies the seraphim on the pendentives as winged angels. However, the iconography of the Pantokrator image, representing Christ as God, was more difficult to justify from an Islamic point of view. While Tur-sun Beg could avoid that problem by referring to it as the image of an imposing man, it was no longer tolerated by the early seventeenth century. It is unclear when the Koranic inscription roundel at the center of the dome that replaced the Pantokrator first appeared. It does not appear in the drawings of Grélot and Loos, where the central medallion is left blank with a small Greek cross in the middle, which eludes explanation (Figures 118 and 119a). Grélot describes the roundel in 1672 as "une roze, qui estoit apparemment garnie de quelque figure en Mosaïque . . . mais les Turcs l'ont maintenant effacée, puisqu'il n'y paroist que du blanc." This contradicts the statements of Amman (1612) and Deshayes de Courmenin (1621), who do mention Koranic inscriptions on the dome. Since the drawings of Loos record all the other inscriptions, the one on the main dome may have been added later in the eighteenth century, as Mango concludes.⁴⁵

The dome inscription seen today was renewed in the mid-nineteenth century by the calligrapher Kazasker Izzet Efendi. It quotes the Light Verse (24:35), which refers to Allah as the light of the heavens and the earth, an appropriate substitution for the Pantokrator image with a calligraphic representation of the nonanthropomorphic Muslim God. The Koranic passage is reinforced by the rays of gold mosaic emanating from the central disk and by the halo of light pouring in from the clerestory windows that make the colossal dome appear as if weightlessly suspended from heaven. Moreover, the Light Verse echoes the Greek inscription "Peace be with you; I am the light of the world," which remained visible up to the mid-eighteenth century on the mosaic lunette panel above the imperial door representing Christ enthroned, the very door from which the dome was meant to be viewed upon entrance to the sanctuary. This suggests that the choice of inscriptions was guided by an understanding of the iconography of the mosaics that they replaced or complemented.⁴⁶

44 "And her Lord accepted her with full acceptance and vouchsafed to her a goodly growth: and made Zachariah her guardian. Whenever Zachariah went into the sanctuary (mihrab) where she was, he found that she had food. He said: O Mary! Whence cometh unto thee this [food]? She answered: It is from Allah. Allah giveth without stint to whom He will"; from the translation of M. M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'an* (New York, 1977), 52. The use of this verse on mihrabs was not common in Ottoman mosques before the conquest of Istanbul, but it became the standard mihrab inscription thereafter.

45 Evliya, *Seyāhatnâme*, 1: 127. Sources about the dome are cited by Mango, who concludes that the inscription roundel was probably added later in the eighteenth century; *Materials*, 89–90. It is unclear whether the Pantokrator under the calligraphic roundel was destroyed; a definite answer can be provided only by soundings in the dome; see *ibid.*, 90–1.

46 "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass as it were a shining star. [This lamp is] kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth [of

Loos's drawings show that the epigraphic program of the seventeenth-century mosque was concentrated on the piers supporting the dome and around the mihrab area (Figures 119a–d). The two piers flanking the mihrab apse had rectangular panels inscribed with the Sunni profession of faith (Shahāda), also repeated on the mihrab itself. Eight small roundels with the names of Allah, Muhammad, Abu Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthman, ʿAli, Hasan, and Husayn (the same names repeated on the piers of the dome) marked the spandrels of the arched windows above the mihrab as the aniconic Muslim counterparts to the mosaic images of apostles and church fathers that had once decorated the church. Probably dating back to Mehmed II's reign, the long inscription band flanking the mihrab quoted the Throne Verse (2:255) celebrating the absolute sovereignty of God, whose throne included both the heavens and the earth.⁴⁷ This relatively simple inscription program, deliberately kept to a minimum, was enough to communicate the orthodox Islamic identity of the mosque in which selectively preserved figural mosaics were still visible to remind the Muslim congregations of the long life of Hagia Sophia, which had witnessed the progress of religion from paganism to monotheism, a process finally sealed by the message of the Prophet Muhammad that completed the revelation of Christianity.

Ahmed I's renovation of Hagia Sophia in the early seventeenth century reflects a new ethos and ideological orientation characterized by growing emphasis on a more dogmatic interpretation of Sunni Islam. State support of religious orthodoxy had begun to play an increasingly central role in legitimizing the rule of the sultans from the late sixteenth century onward once the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire had slowed down. The early years of Ahmed I's reign saw the loss of territories to the Safavids in the eastern front and the loss of face in the west through the signing of the Zsitvatorok Treaty (1606) with the Austrian emperor, in which the sultan officially abandoned claims to superiority and demands of tribute. In this context, when the Ottoman state also came under constant criticism for its failure to maintain domestic law and order in the face of the disastrous Celali rebellions, the syncretism of the conquering *ghazis* was replaced with a stricter interpretation of Islam.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the sultans began to present themselves officially as caliphs with claims to religious authority over the Muslim populations that had passed under Christian domination, Hagia So-

itself] though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is knower of all things"; translated by Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'an*, 364. It is tempting to interpret the reference to God as the "Knower of all things" as an allusion to the dedication of the building to Holy Wisdom (Christ as Hagia Sophia). The interesting observation that roundels with illusionistic representations of Christ at the centers of Byzantine church domes were designed according to the position of an ideal viewer at the threshold of the gate leading from the narthex into the domed sanctuary was made by John Shearman in one of his Mellon Lectures at CASVA, Washington D.C. in the fall of 1988. The beginning of the inscription that replaced the Pantokrator on the dome of Hagia Sophia is also aligned according to the position of a viewer in the same position.

47 "Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous"; translated by Pickthall, *The Glorious Qur'an*, 40. Like the dome inscription, this verse refers to the supreme knowledge of God.

phia was redefined as the symbolic seat of the Ottoman caliphate. Among the new myths created at that time (showing that the mythical history of Hagia Sophia continued to evolve) was the alleged ceremony during which the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil, captured after the defeat of Mamluk Egypt in 1517, passed on the Prophet's Holy Mantle to Selim I inside the mosque. The myth of the symbolic transfer of the supreme Islamic caliphate to the Ottoman sultanate in Hagia Sophia, for which there was no historical justification, began to circulate toward the end of the eighteenth century to legitimize the rule of the sultans through the legacy of the pan-Islamic caliphate.⁴⁸

It was in this new context that the figural mosaics still visible in Loos's drawings from 1710 to 1711 were completely covered up. The French manufacturer Jean-Claude Flachet, who was in Istanbul between 1740 and 1755, wrote that everything except for the seraphim on the pendentives had been recently whitewashed. This probably happened in the reign of Mahmud I (1730–54), who extensively renovated Hagia Sophia and added several new dependencies to it, such as a library, fountain, imaret, and a school for children.⁴⁹ The mosaics remained under the whitewash until they were uncovered by the brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati, who were commissioned by Abdülmecid I to undertake a major restoration of Hagia Sophia between 1847 and 1849. This was the second major structural repair of the building 274 years after that of Sinan. The Swiss architects consolidated the dome and vaults, heightened the southeast brick minaret to conform to the other three, repaired the leaning columns, cleaned and again covered the mosaics, painting both the interior and the striped exterior.⁵⁰

Abdülmecid, whose reign had started with the proclamation of the Tanzimat, the most important milestone in the Westernization of the Ottoman state and culture, encouraged uncovering the mosaics for repair and criticized his predecessors for having obscured these beautiful ornaments. He took advantage of the hajj (pilgrimage) to send the most fanatical of the imams of the mosque to Mecca, before he undertook the restoration.⁵¹ He is reported to have asked that the repaired mosaics be covered in a way that would allow them to be revealed again when an opportune moment presented itself at a religiously more tolerant time. After he had seen the uncovered mosaics, he is reported to have said, “Elles sont belles, cachez-les pourtant puisque notre religion les défend; cachez-les bien, mais ne les détruisez pas: car qui sait ce qui peut arriver?”⁵² Although Abdülmecid wanted the figural mosaics of the southwest vestibule and the imperial door to remain visible since they were outside the prayer hall, in the end they, too, had to be covered under pressure from those with more conservative views.⁵³ Only the seraphim on the pendentives were spared, but their faces were now replaced with star medallions.

The earlier toleration of figural imagery – so long as it remained above or beyond the congregation's sight while facing the mihrab – was now completely rejected by a dogmatic attitude whose roots went back to the early

48 D. Sourdel, “Khalīfa,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., 4: 944–47. For the ceremony of the transfer of the caliphate in Hagia Sophia, see Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 3: 1471. This ceremony is not mentioned in contemporary texts; Ahmed Uğur, *The Reign of Sultan Selīm I in the Light of Selīm-nāme Literature* (Berlin, 1985).

49 Flachet is cited in Mango, *Materials*, 100. For the repairs of Ahmed III in 171, of Mahmud I, and of later sultans, see Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 93–4.

50 Mango, *Materials*, 11–16.

51 Ibid., 12–14, 135.

52 Ibid., 140.

53 Ibid., 14.



Fig. 120. Interior of Hagia Sophia looking toward the mihrab in 1849 after the Fossati restoration. (From G. Fossati, *Aya Sofia*, London, 1852, plate 3)

Fig. 121. Medal of Hagia Sophia commemorating the renovation of Sultan Abdülmecid.



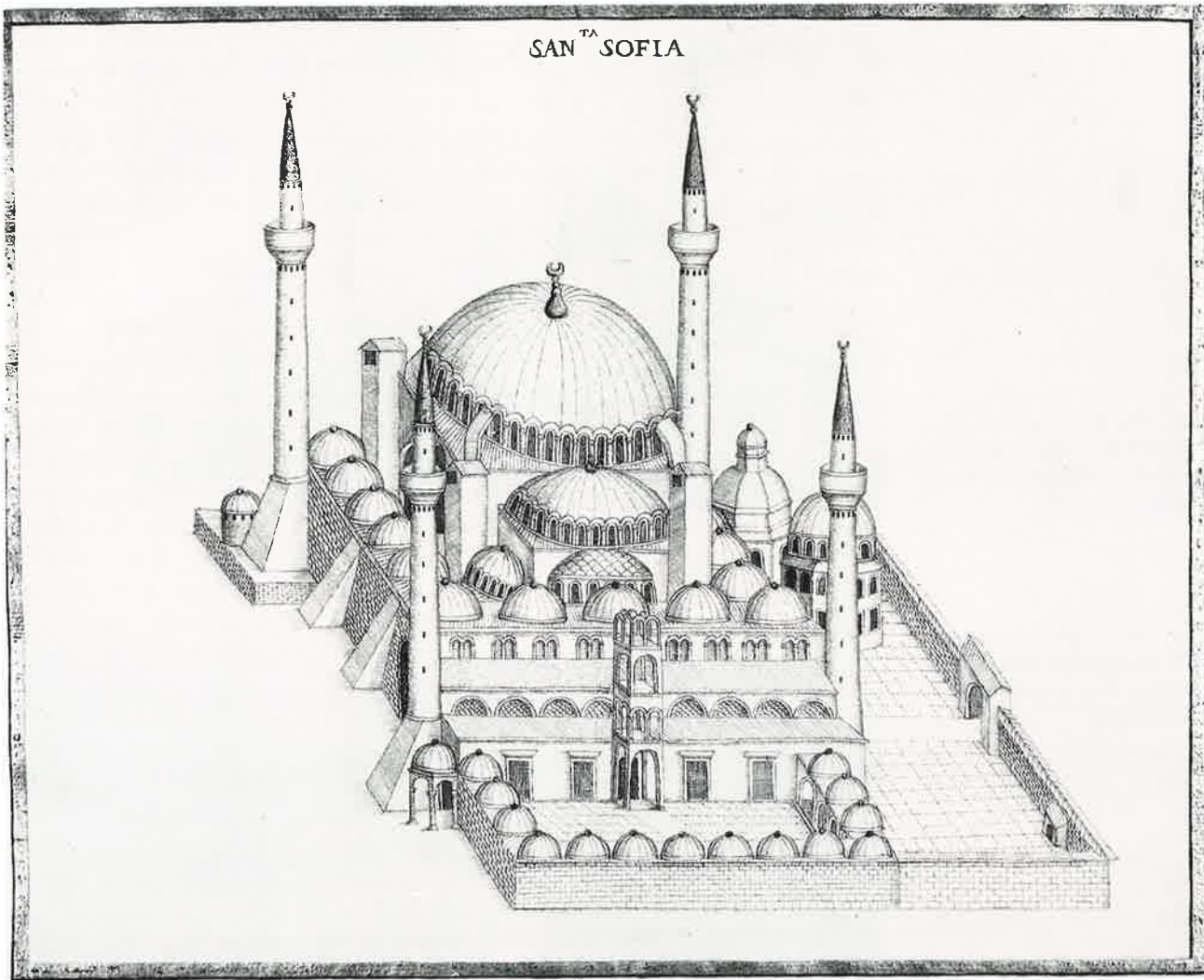


Fig. 122. Drawing of Hagia Sophia in 1686 by Francesco Scarella, *Disegni della città di Constantinopoli*. (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 8627, fol. 6r., Vienna)

seventeenth century. It was during the Fossati repairs that the eight colossal calligraphic roundels with radii of nearly 8 m, which even today so insensitively dominate the mosque's interior, were created as if to proclaim Islam's power more forcefully. Composed by the calligrapher Kazasker Mustafa İzzet Efendi, these large circular placards, inscribed with the names of Allah, Muhammad, the first four Sunni Caliphs, Hasan, and Husayn, replaced the smaller seventeenth-century rectangular inscription panels bearing the same names, which had harmonized successfully with the mosque's proportions (Figures 119a–d and 120).⁵⁴ İzzet Efendi also renewed the dome inscription

⁵⁴ For the large roundels, see Mango, *Materials*, 90–1. They were first composed on a small scale by İzzet Efendi and subsequently enlarged with the help of his students by the use of a square grid; Sedat Kumbaracılar, "Ayasofyanın Levhaları," *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası* 1 (1970), 74–7. The removed rectangular inscription panels are attributed to the mid-seventeenth-century calligrapher Teknecizade İbrahim Efendi; see Müstakîmzâde, *Tuhfet-ül-haṭṭaṭîn*, 48; Ayvansarayî, *Hadiqa*, 4. Koçu, *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 3: 1451. For the tradition that they were made for Murad IV by the calligraphers Bıçakcızaade Mustafa Çelebi and Teknecizade İbrahim, see Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 93.



Fig. 123. Exterior view of Hagia Sophia from the southwest. (From Grélot, *Relation nouvelle*)

Fig. 124. Aerial photograph of Hagia Sophia with the Topkapı Palace seen in the background.



and possibly others without significantly transforming their earlier program. After the Fossati renovation, the ancient basilica became the support for aniconic Islamic signifiers that constituted a new decorative skin. The late-nineteenth-century traveler Edmondo de Amicis observed that the mosque was spread over the surface of Justinian's basilica and "hung upon its walls."⁵⁵

For the inauguration ceremony on 13 July 1849, Abdülmecid had a commemorative medal cast in Paris, one side carrying his *tughra* (monogram) and the other an image of the mosque with the inscription "Date of the repair of Hagia Sophia 1849 (*Tārīḥ-i tā'mūr-i Ayaşofya, 1265*)" (Figure 121). Together with the twenty-five colored lithographs published as an album by the Fossati

⁵⁵ De Amicis, *Constantinople*, 1: 258.

brothers, the European medal brought Hagia Sophia to the center of international and scholarly attention, which eventually culminated in the uncovering of its mosaics by Thomas Whittemore in 1931 and Atatürk's secularization of the mosque by turning it into a museum in 1934.⁵⁶

The appropriation of Hagia Sophia as an imperial and religious symbol by the Ottoman sultans had involved an awareness of its former significance, as well as a shared language of architectural forms transcending the mere *prise de possession* of a Christian sacred space by Muslim conquerors (Figures 122 through 124). Its adaptive reuse is a striking example of cultural confrontation in a frontier zone where the conquerors chose to define their self-identity in terms of the conquered, while simultaneously remaining meaningful to their own past. The Ottomans had inherited both a unique building and a literary text explaining its past; they subtly transformed the two together into an integral part of their own collective memory. Hagia Sophia was therefore a true *lieu de mémoire* in which a wide variety of memories (Christian-Byzantine and Islamic-Ottoman) crystallized, passing down from one generation to the other and continually being reinterpreted according to changing contexts.⁵⁷ While it had a remarkable capacity to condense memory, Hagia Sophia was not an open signifier to which any signified could arbitrarily be attached by changing audiences. Its meanings revolving around the twin themes of universal empire and religion remained surprisingly constant before and after the conquest of Constantinople. Given the complementary role of state and religion in both the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, which shared universalistic ambitions, the colossal domed space of Hagia Sophia, designed as a micro-cosmic image of the universe, was always meaningful as a monumental expression of sacred and royal power. The imperial and religious associations that the Ayasofya Mosque came to acquire over 481 years of Ottoman rule had to be neutralized under the secular Turkish Republic soon after the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate. The mosque had become too closely linked with the legitimacy of the Ottoman past from which the new government chose to sever its ties. As a national museum Hagia Sophia again proved its remarkable flexibility in adapting to a new context, a flexibility that ensured its continued life through the ages.

⁵⁶ For the medal, see Mango, *Materials*, 16. The album is G. Fossati, *Aya Sofia, Constantinople, as Recently Restored by Order of H. M. the Sultan Abdul-Medjid* (London, 1852).

⁵⁷ The concept of *lieux de mémoire* is developed by Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* (special issue on memory and counter-memory) 26 (1989), 7–25. Also see Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York, 1980).