

# Hagia Sophia



Hagia Sophia (lit. 'Holy Wisdom'; Turkish: Ayasofya; Greek: Ἀγία Σοφία, romanized: Hagía Sofía; Latin: Sancta Sapientia), officially the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque (Turkish: Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi),[3] is a mosque, a former church, and a major cultural and historical site in Istanbul, Turkey. **The** last of three church buildings to be successively erected on the site by the Eastern Roman Empire, it was completed in 537 AD. The site was an Eastern Orthodox church from 360 AD to 1204, when it was converted to a Catholic church following the Fourth Crusade.[4] It was reclaimed in 1261 and remained Eastern Orthodox until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. It served as a mosque until 1935, when it became a museum. In 2020, the site once again became a mosque.

## CHURCH OF CONSTANTIUS II

### History

The first church on the site was known as the Magna Ecclesia (Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία, Megálē Ekklesiā, 'Great Church')[21][22] because of its size compared to the sizes of the contemporary churches in the city.[13] According to the Chronicon Paschale, the church was consecrated on 15 February 360, during the reign of the emperor Constantius II (r. 337–361) by the Arian

bishop Eudoxius of Antioch.[23][24] It was built next to the area where the Great Palace was being developed. According to the 5th-century ecclesiastical historian Socrates of Constantinople, the emperor Constantius had c. 346 "constructed the Great Church alongside that called Irene which because it was too small, the emperor's father [Constantine] had enlarged and beautified".[25][23] A tradition which is not older than the 7th or 8th century reports that the edifice was built by Constantius' father, Constantine the Great (r. 306–337).[23] Hesychius of Miletus wrote that Constantine built Hagia Sophia with a wooden roof and removed 427 (mostly pagan) statues from the site.[26] The 12th-century chronicler Joannes Zonaras reconciles the two opinions, writing that Constantius had repaired the edifice consecrated by Eusebius of Nicomedia, after it had collapsed.[23] Since Eusebius was the bishop of Constantinople from 339 to 341, and Constantine died in 337, it seems that the first church was erected by Constantius.[23]

## Mosque (1453-1935)

Constantinople fell to the attacking Ottoman forces on 29 May 1453. Sultan Mehmed II entered the city and performed the Friday prayer and khutbah (sermon) in Hagia Sophia, and this action marked the official conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.[112] The church's priests and religious personnel continued to perform Christian rites, prayers, and ceremonies until they were compelled to stop by the invaders.[105] When Mehmed and his entourage entered the church, he ordered that it be converted into a mosque immediately. One of the 'ulamā' (Islamic scholars) present climbed onto the church's ambo and recited the shahada ("There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger"), thus marking the beginning of the conversion of the church into a mosque.[19][113] Mehmed is reported to have taken a sword to a soldier who tried to pry up one of the paving slabs of the Proconnesian marble floor.[114] As described by Western visitors before 1453, such as the Córdoba nobleman Pero Tafur[115] and the Florentine geographer Cristoforo Buondelmonti,[116] the church was in a dilapidated state, with several of its doors fallen from their hinges. Mehmed II ordered a renovation of the building. Mehmed attended the first Friday prayer in the mosque on 1 June 1453.[117] Aya Sofya became the first imperial mosque of Istanbul.[118] Most of the existing houses in the city and the area of the future Topkapı Palace were endowed to the corresponding waqf.[19] From 1478, 2,360 shops, 1,300 houses, 4 caravanserais, 30 boza shops, and 23 shops of sheep heads and trotters gave their income to the foundation.[119] Through the imperial charters of 1520 (AH 926) and 1547 (AH 954), shops and parts of the Grand Bazaar and other markets were added to the foundation.[19]

### RENOVATION OF 1847–1849

# RENOVATION

The 19th-century restoration of the Hagia Sophia was ordered by Sultan Abdulmejid I (r. 1823–1861) and completed between 1847 and 1849 by eight hundred workers under the supervision of the Swiss-Italian architect brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati. The brothers consolidated the dome with a restraining iron chain and strengthened the vaults, straightened the columns, and revised the decoration of the exterior and the interior of the building.[124] The mosaics in the upper gallery were exposed and cleaned, although many were recovered "for protection against further damage".[125]

Eight new gigantic circular-framed discs or medallions were hung from the cornice, on each of the four piers and at either side of the apse and the west doors. These were designed by the calligrapher Kazasker Mustafa Izzet Efendi (1801–1877) and painted with the names of Allah, Muhammad, the Rashidun (the first four caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali), and the two grandsons of Muhammad: Hasan and Husayn, the sons of Ali. The old chandeliers were replaced by new pendant ones.

## MUSEUM (1935–2020)

In 1935, the first Turkish President and founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, transformed the building into a museum. During the Second World War, the minarets of the museum housed MG 08 machine guns.[129] The carpet and the layer of mortar underneath were removed and marble floor decorations such as the omphalion appeared for the first time since the Fossatis' restoration,[130] when the white plaster covering many of the mosaics had been removed. Due to neglect, the condition of the structure continued to deteriorate, prompting the World Monuments Fund (WMF) to include the Hagia Sophia in their 1996 and 1998 Watch Lists. During this time period, the building's copper roof had cracked, causing water to leak down over the fragile frescoes and mosaics. Moisture entered from below as well. Rising ground water increased the level of humidity within the monument, creating an unstable environment for stone and paint.