

Blue Mosque



The Blue Mosque in Istanbul, also known by its official name, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Turkish: Sultan Ahmet Camii), is an Ottoman-era historical imperial mosque located in Istanbul, Turkey. It was constructed between 1609 and 1617 during the rule of Ahmed I and remains a functioning mosque today. It also attracts a large number of tourists and is one of the most iconic and popular monuments of Ottoman architecture.[2][3]

The mosque has a classical Ottoman layout with a central dome surrounded by four semi-domes over the prayer hall. It is fronted by a large courtyard and flanked by six minarets. On the inside, it is decorated with thousands of Iznik tiles and

painted floral motifs in predominantly blue colours, which give the mosque its popular name. The mosque's külliye (religious complex) includes Ahmed's tomb, a madrasa, and several other buildings in various states of preservation.

HISTORY CONSTRUCTION

History

After the Peace of Zsitvatorok, seen as a blow to Ottoman prestige, Sultan Ahmed I decided to build a large mosque in Istanbul in the hope of soliciting God's favour.[4] He was the first sultan to build an imperial mosque since Selim II (d. 1574), as both Murad III and Mehmed III before him had neglected to construct their own.[5][6]

The mosque was built on the southeast side of the old Byzantine Hippodrome, near the Hagia Sophia (the most important mosque of the Ottoman Empire[7][8]), a site of significant symbolic significance that allows it to dominate the city's skyline. The mosque's location was originally occupied by the Hippodrome's bleachers and its imperial box (where the emperor sat when attending events here). During excavations in the early 20th century, some of the ancient seats were discovered in the mosque's courtyard.[9] Given the mosque's location, size, and number of minarets, it is probable that Sultan Ahmed intended to create a monument that rivalled or surpassed the Hagia Sophia.[10]

Prior to construction, this site was occupied by the palaces of several Ottoman viziers, including Sokollu Mehmet Pasha and Güzel Ahmet Pasha, which required a costly expropriation

process.[11][5] This, along with the fact that the empire was under economic stress, aroused the protests of the ulema (Islamic legal scholars), who argued that sultans should only fund the construction of an imperial mosque with spoils of conquest. Ahmed I had won no major victories and thus had to divert funds from the treasury for this expensive project.[11][3] The ulema went so far as to forbid Muslims from praying at the mosque.[11]

Interior

The mosque's interior is dominated by its dome and cascading semi-domes. The main dome reaches a height of 43 metres (141 ft).[26] The weight of the dome is supported by four massive cylindrical pillars. The transition between the central dome and the pillars is achieved by four long, smooth pendentives. Smaller pendentives are used for transitions between the semi-domes and their exedrae and between the hall's corner domes and the surrounding structure. The transitions between the smaller exedrae and the supporting walls or arches are covered by muqarnas (stalactite-like sculpting) made of stucco.[27] By employing these elements, Mehmed Agha created a softer progression from the rectangular outer walls to the round central dome.[27] A two-floor gallery, supported on columns, runs along three sides of the prayer hall, except for the southeastern (or qibla) side, where the mihrab is located.[28] Two fountains are incorporated into the two northern pillars of the mosque, similar to the Süleymaniye Mosque's prayer hall.[29] The floors are covered with carpets, which are donated by the faithful and are regularly replaced as they wear out.

At ground level, the focus of the prayer hall is the mihrab, which is made of finely carved marble, with a muqarnas niche and a two inscription panels above it.[29] It is surrounded by many windows. To the right of the mihrab is the richly decorated minbar, or pulpit, where the imam stands when he is delivering his sermon at the time of noon prayer on Fridays or on holy days. The minbar is crafted from elaborately carved marble, with a summit covered by a gold-covered conical cap.[29] The mosque has been designed so that even when it is at its most crowded, everyone in the mosque can see and hear the imam,[30] with the exception of the areas behind the mosque's large pillars.[26] According to Evliya Çelebi, who saw the mosque in the 17th century, a hundred Qur'ans on lecterns inlaid with mother-of-pearl, all gifted by sultans and viziers, were placed near the mihrab.[31]

Architecture

Architecture

The design of the mosque is based on that of the earlier Şehzade Mosque designed by Mimar Sinan in the early 16th century. The prayer hall occupies an area of 64 by 72 metres (210 by 236 ft) and has a central dome measuring 23.5 metres (77 ft) in diameter.[19] The dome is surrounded by four semi-domes, each of which is flanked by three smaller semi-domes or exedrae. Four smaller domes cover the corners of the prayer hall. On the outside, the mosque has six minarets, ablutions facilities, and a large courtyard preceding the prayer hall.[19][20]

The mosque's architect, Sedefkar Mehmed Agha, synthesized the ideas of his master Sinan, aiming for overwhelming size, majesty and splendor.[2] According to the architect's official biographer, the mosque was the culmination of his career.[6] Reflecting the classical Ottoman style of the period, the structure incorporates aspects of Byzantine architecture from the neighboring Hagia Sophia with Islamic architecture.[21] It was the last great mosque of this classical period.[22]

Architectural historian Doğan Kuban characterizes Mehmed Agha's style as having a more "sculptural" approach, with more attention brought on the details of the building and a willingness to break up its elements into smaller parts, whereas Sinan had placed more emphasis on rigorous spatial designs with relatively restrained decoration.[23] Scholar Gülru Necipoğlu states that the mosque demonstrates an emerging trend towards extravagance in the structure and decoration of Ottoman buildings during this time,

Restoration

In 1883, much of the mosque interior's painted decoration was replaced by new stenciled paintwork, some of which changed the original colour scheme.[15] A major fire in 1912 damaged or destroyed several of the outlying structures of the mosque complex, which were subsequently restored.[15]

A major restoration of the mosque took place in the 21st century. During preparatory work in 2013, it was discovered that the mosque's northwest minaret had shifted 5 centimetres (2.0 in) over time, constituting a potential threat to its structural stability. Work to reconstruct and repair the minaret was underway in 2015.[16] Comprehensive restoration work on the rest of the mosque began in 2018 and was finished in April 2023.[17][18]