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**Understanding Art**

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**Hagia Sophia: Symbolisms and Strata of Structures and Time**

# Hagia Sophia: Symbolisms and Strata of Structures and Time

“Holy Wisdom”



Hagia Sophia, or  
“Church of  
Holy/Divine  
Wisdom,” 532-  
37 CE

Architects:  
Physicist Isidore  
of Miletus and  
mathematician  
Anthemius of  
Tralles





Constantinople or Byzantium, Greek city on the Bosphorus, capital of the Byzantine Empire, modern Istanbul

Constantinople was the capital city of the Roman/Byzantine Empire (330–1204 and 1261–1453)

From the mid-5th century to the early 13th century, Constantinople was the largest and wealthiest city in Europe.

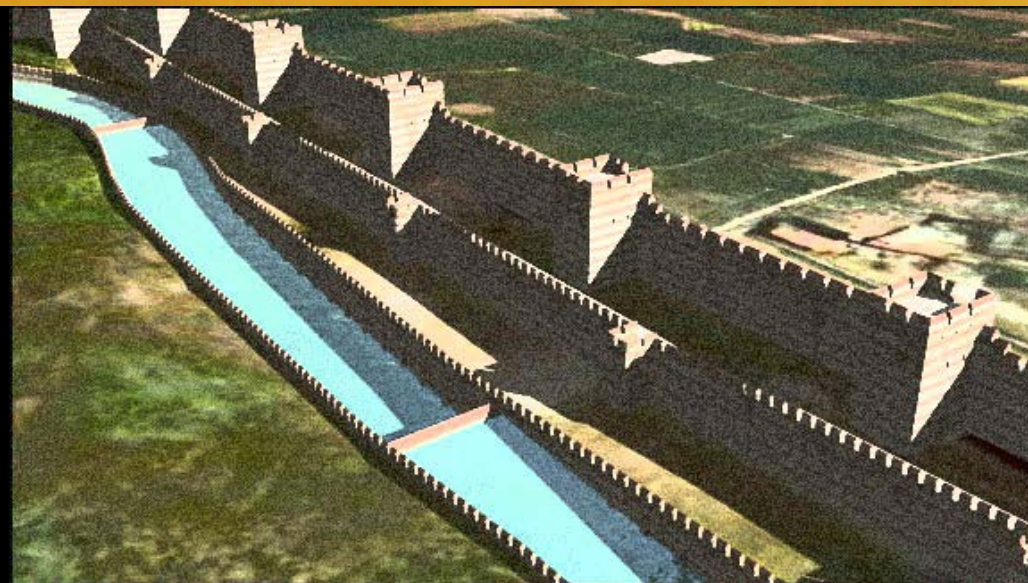
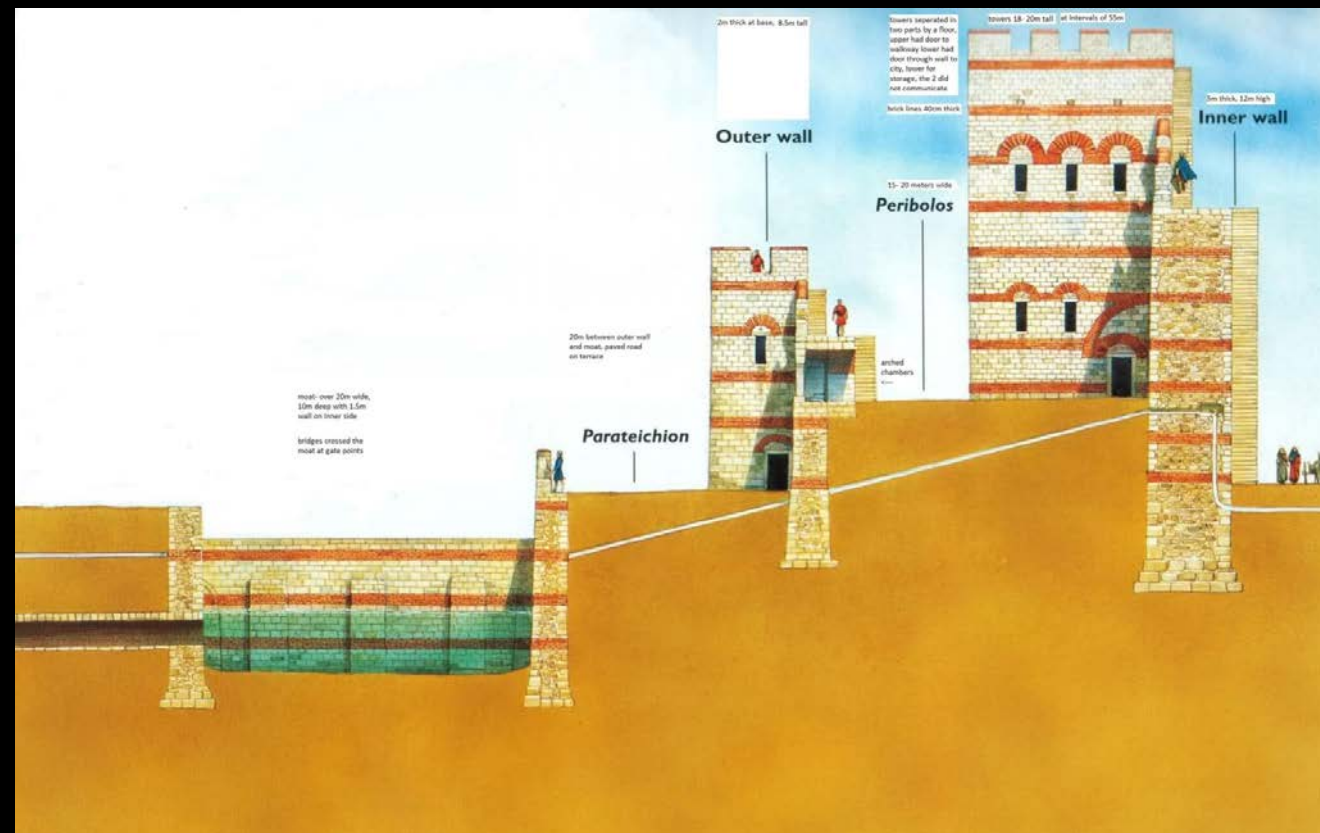
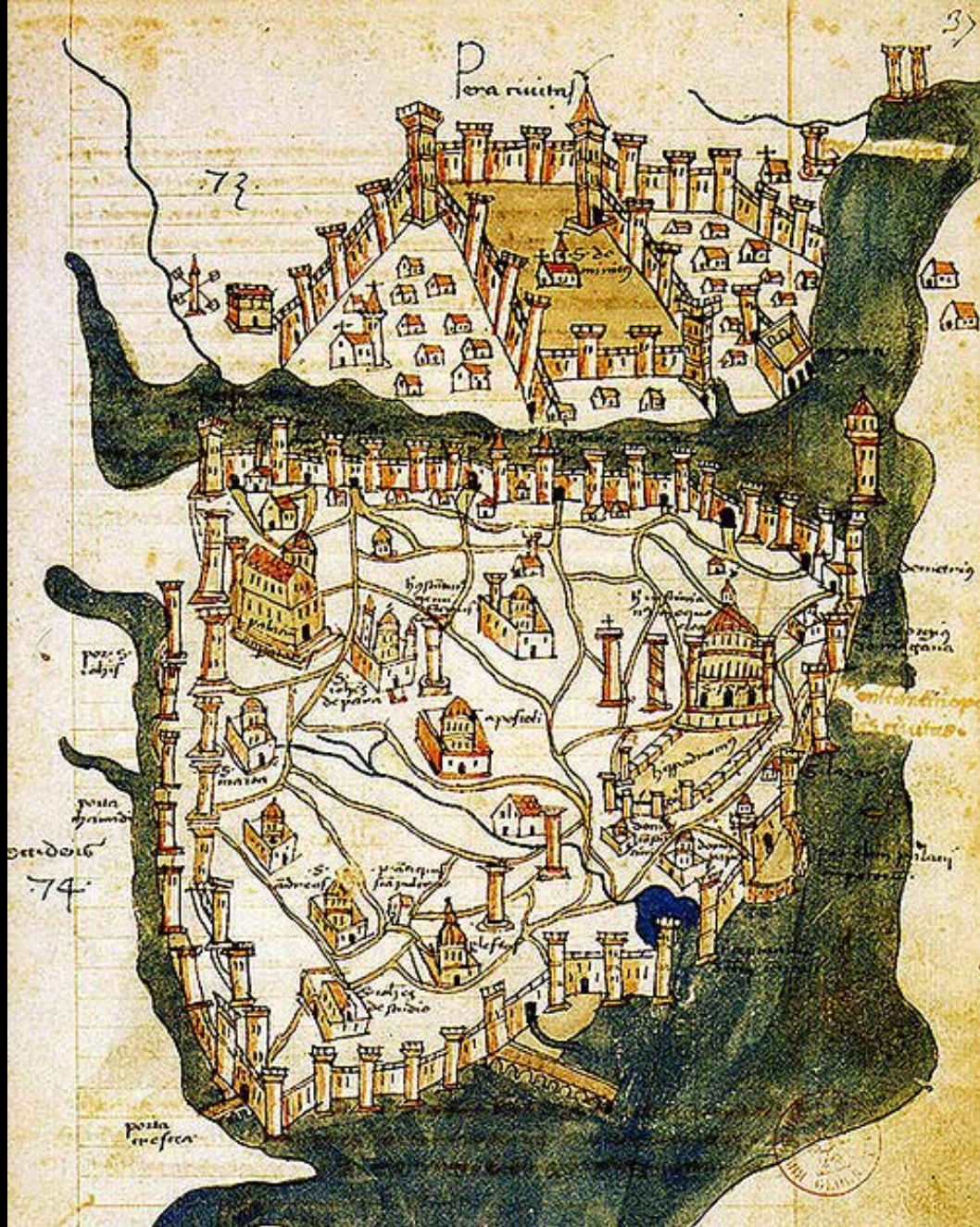










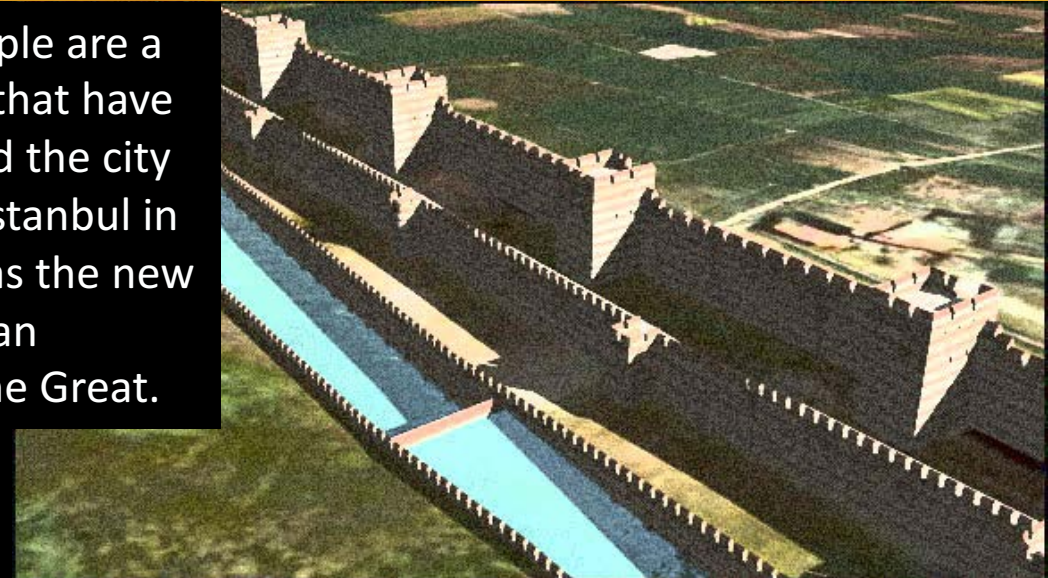
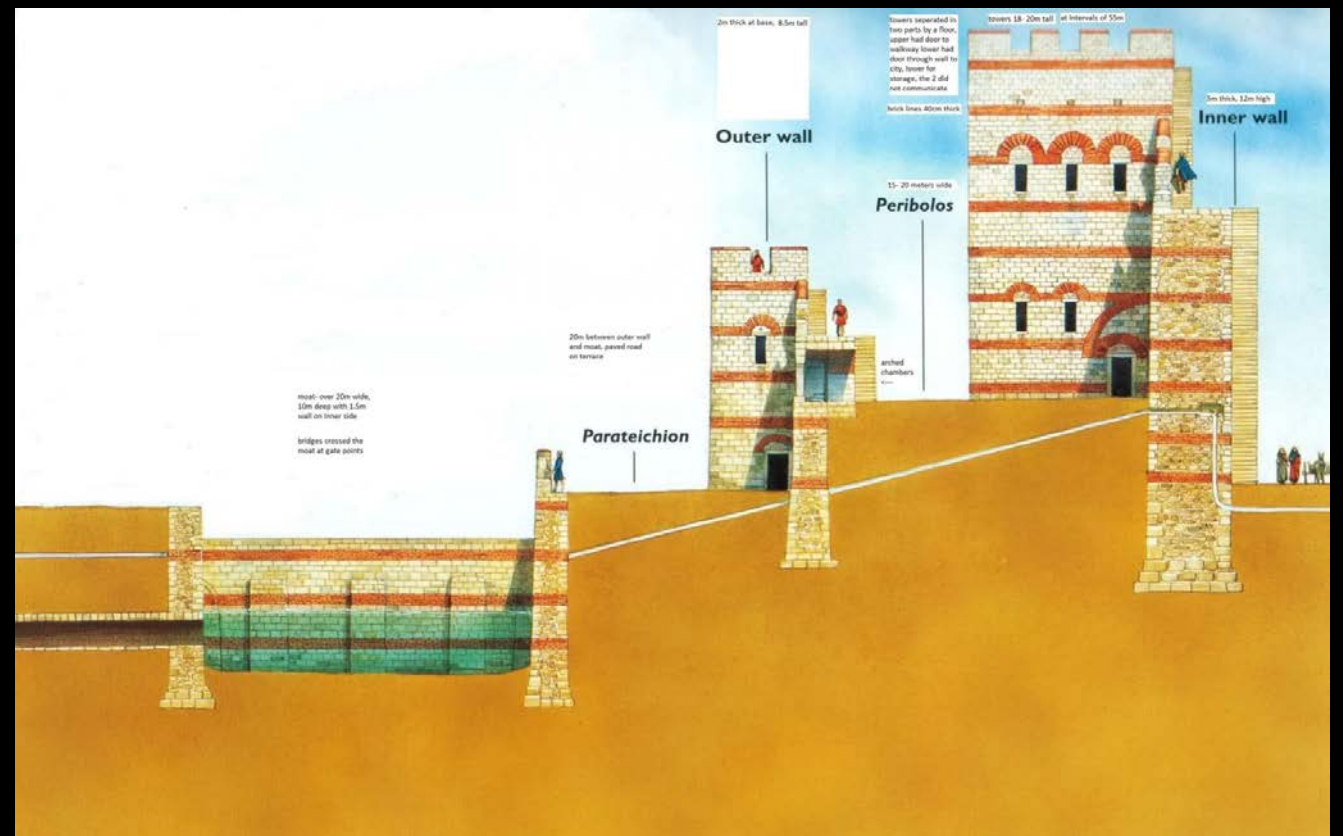


The oldest surviving map of Constantinople, by Cristoforo Buondelmonti (1422).



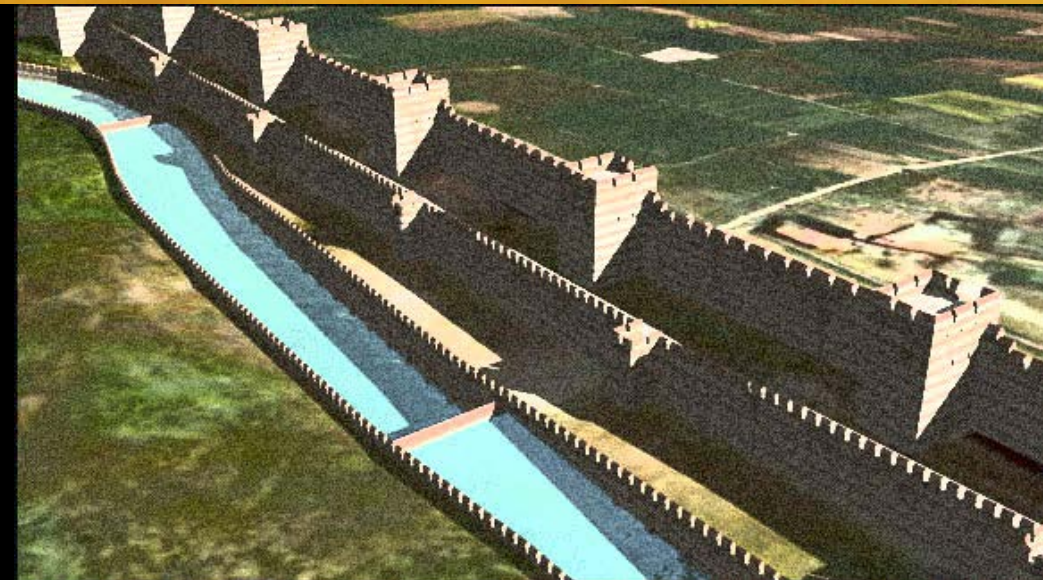
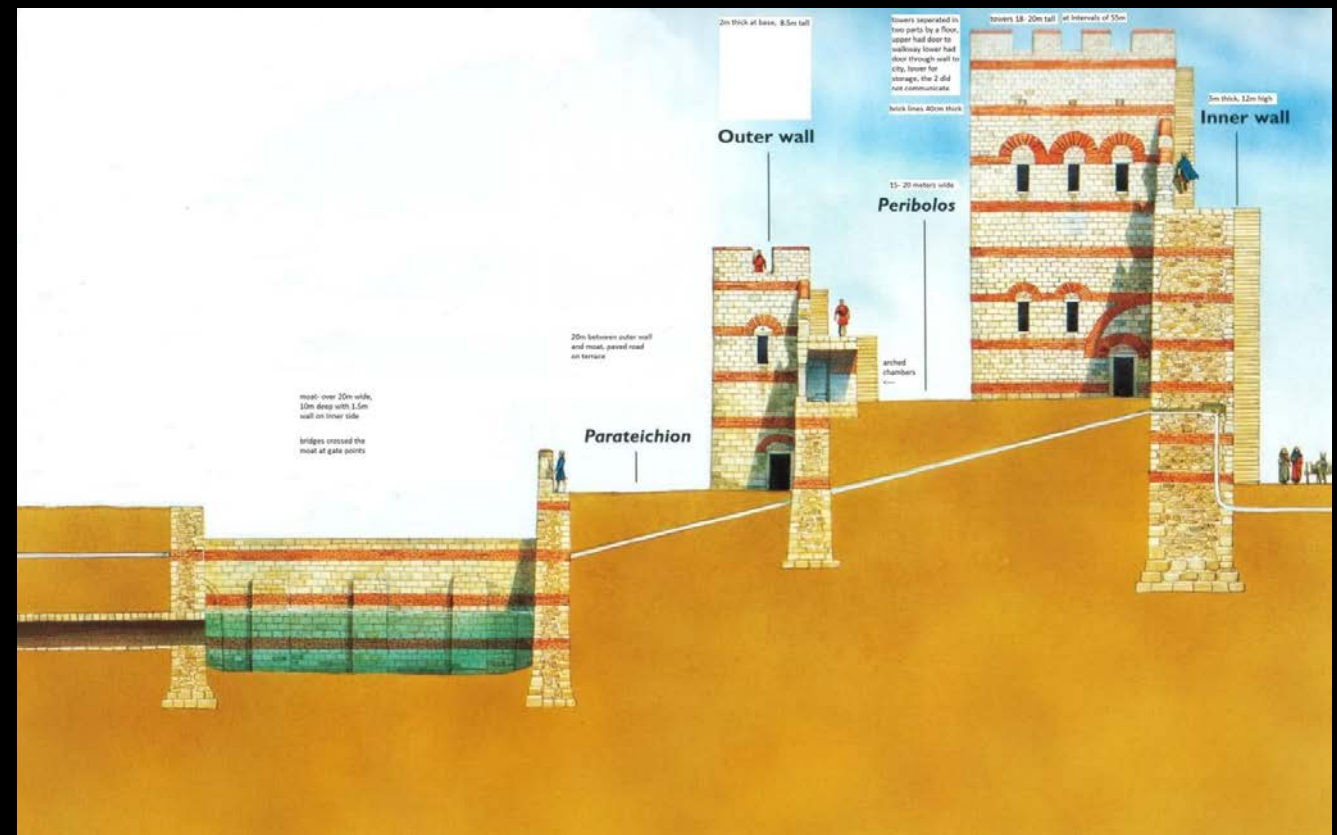


The Walls of Constantinople are a series of defensive stone that have surrounded and protected the city of Constantinople (today Istanbul in Turkey) since its founding as the new capital of the Roman Empire by Constantine the Great.



The oldest surviving map of Constantinople, by Cristoforo Buondelmonti (1422).



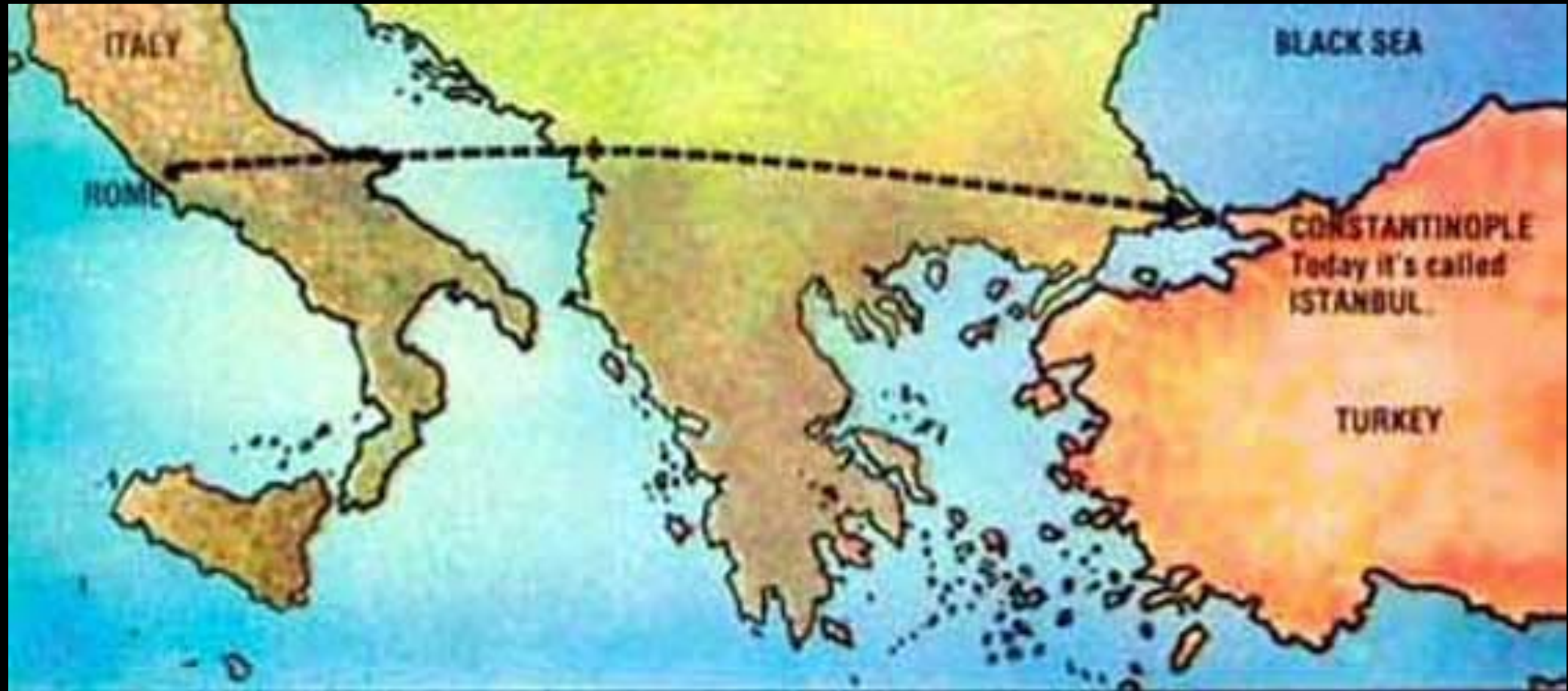


The oldest surviving map of Constantinople, by Cristoforo Buondelmonti (1422).

Note in both the map and schematics the massive and complex defenses. Although besieged on numerous occasions by various peoples, the defenses of Constantinople proved invulnerable for nearly nine hundred years before the city was taken by foreign forces in 1204 by the Crusader armies .

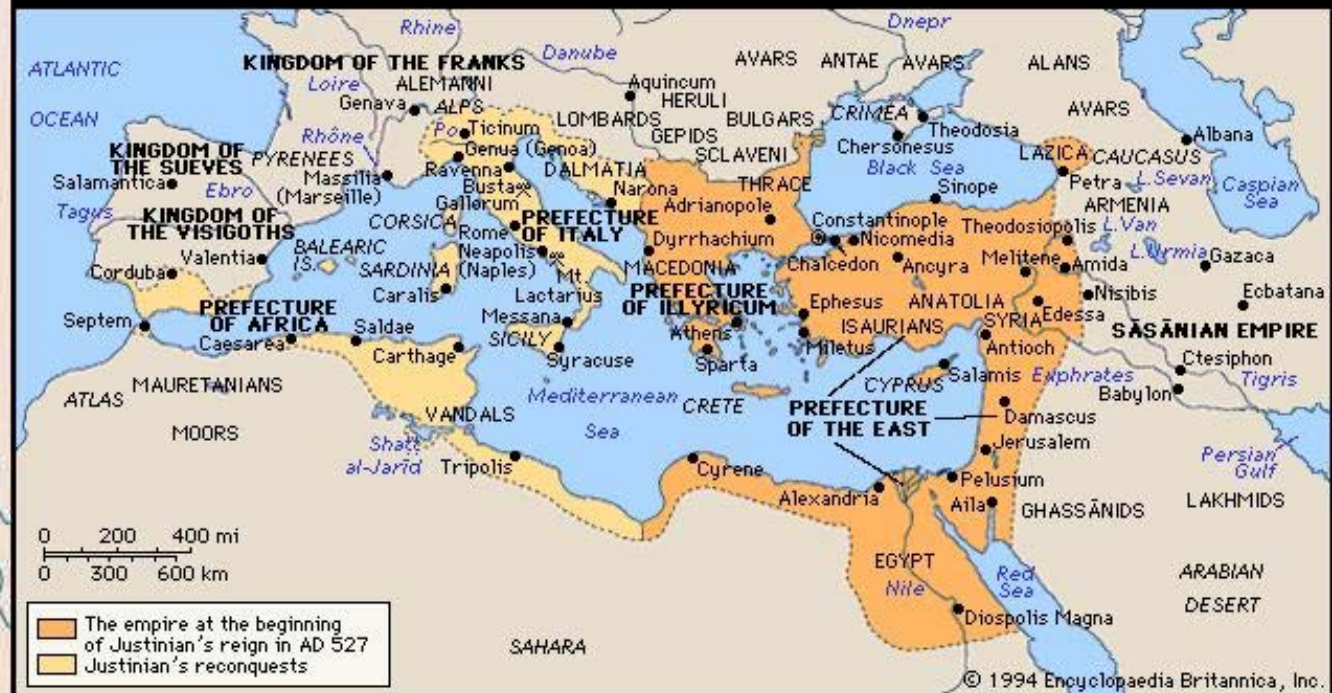
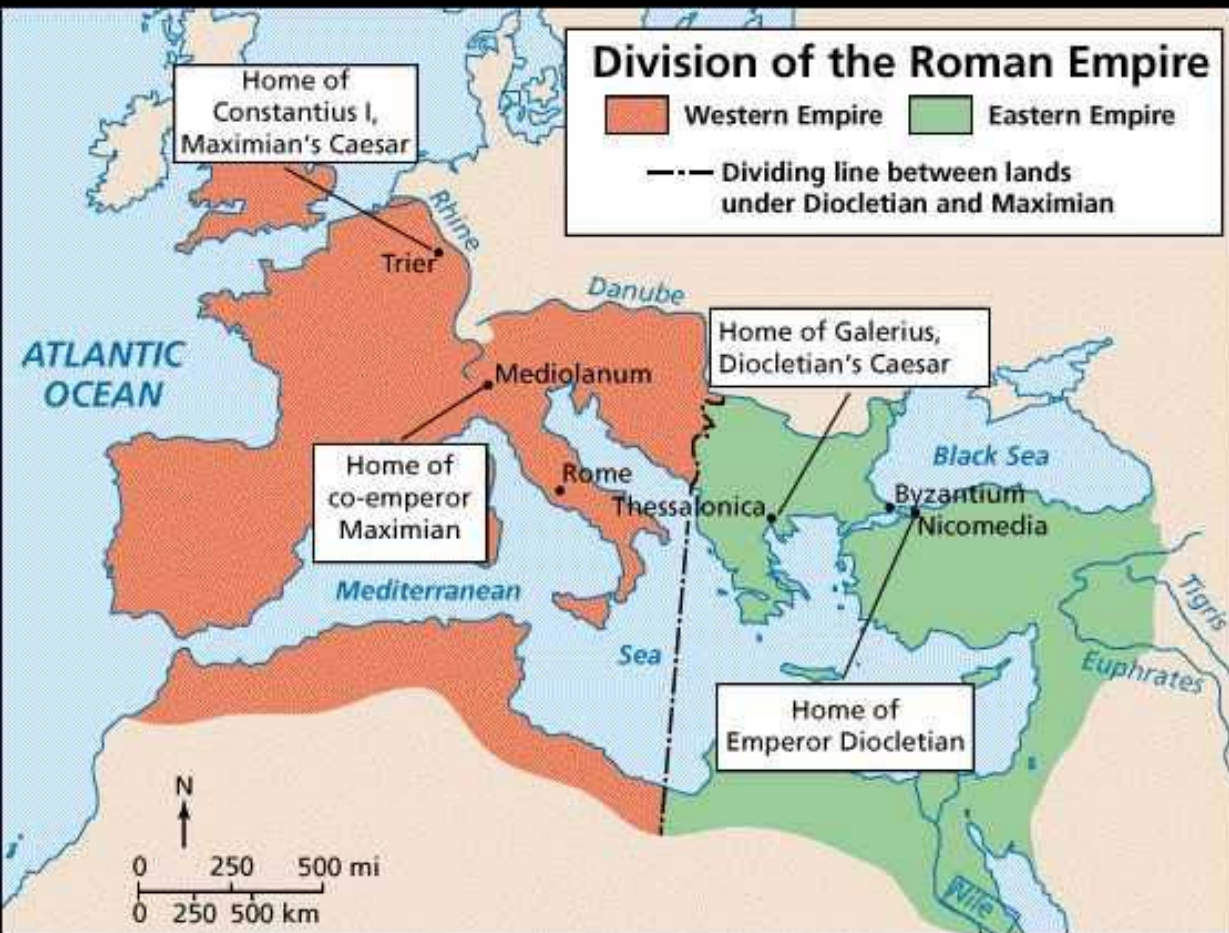
This formidable complex of defenses was one of the most sophisticated of Antiquity.





395 CE: The Roman Empire was divided between east and west











One of Constantine's Coin's  
The inscription on the right side reads  
"Soli Invicto Comiti" or  
"Committed To The Invincible Sun"



Above/Below: Coins with Constantine on one side, and a Chi Rho, an early Christian symbol -- "**Chi-Rho**" symbol ☩, a christogram formed from the **first** two Greek letters of the word "Christ" (Greek: ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, or Χριστός) — **Chi** (χ) and **Rho** (ρ).

Roman Empire under Constantine the Great

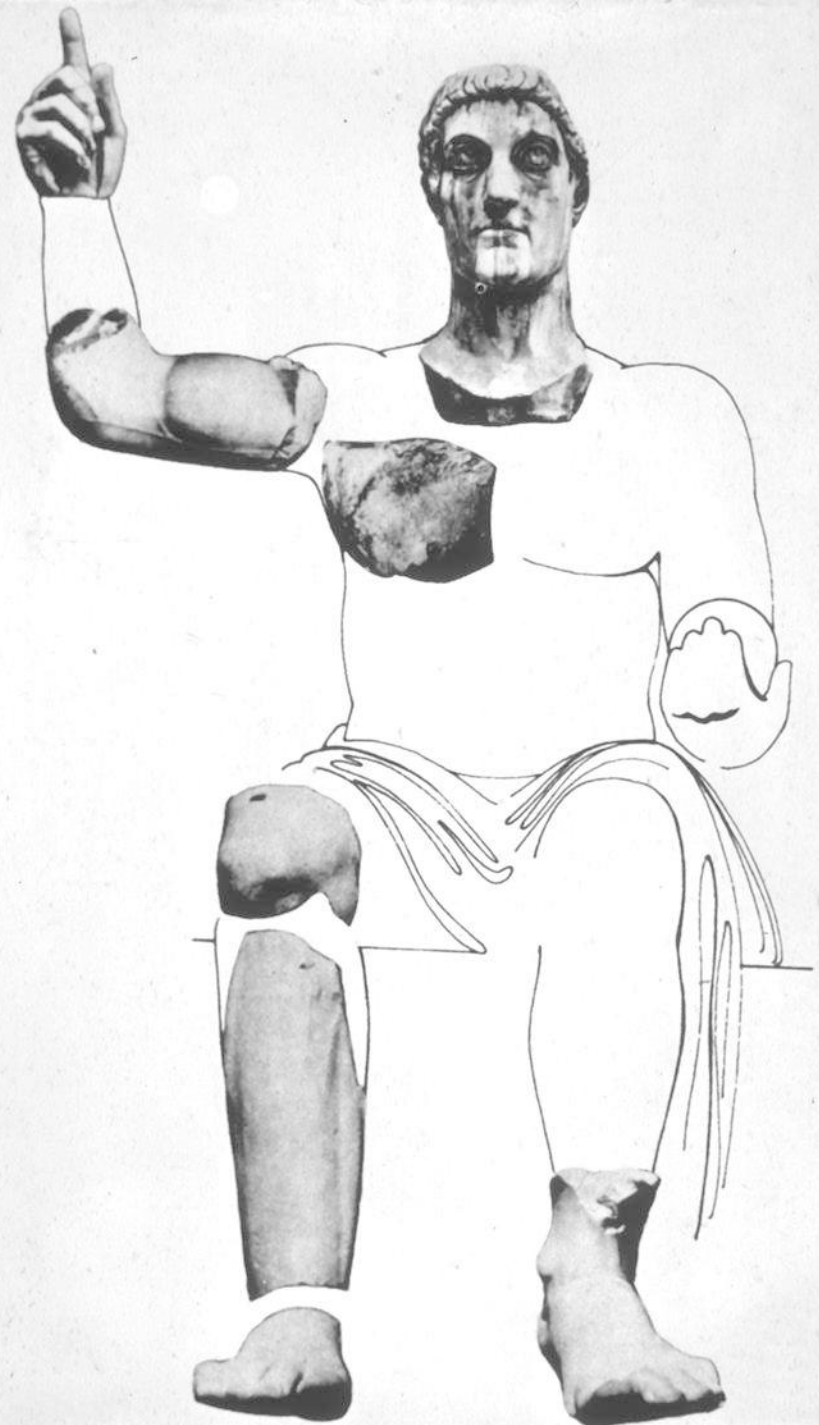
Assimilation







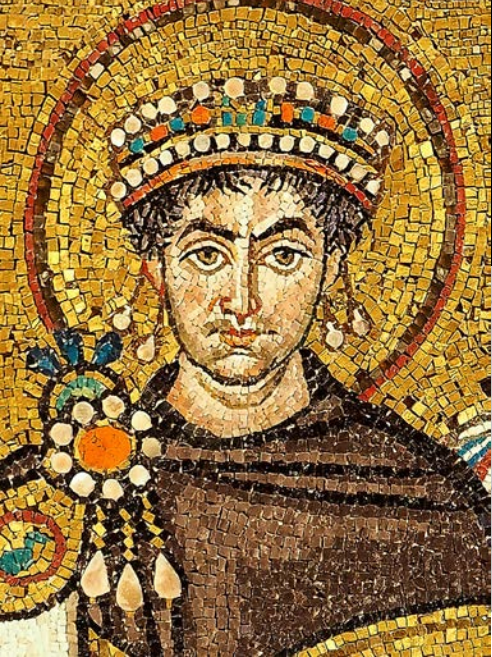
Colossus of Constantine, 312-315, Rome, wood and marble  
The great head, arms and legs of the Colossus were carved from white marble, while the rest of the body consisted of a brick core and wooden framework, possibly covered with gilded bronze. Judging by the size of the remaining pieces, the seated, enthroned figure would have been about 12 meters (40 feet) high.









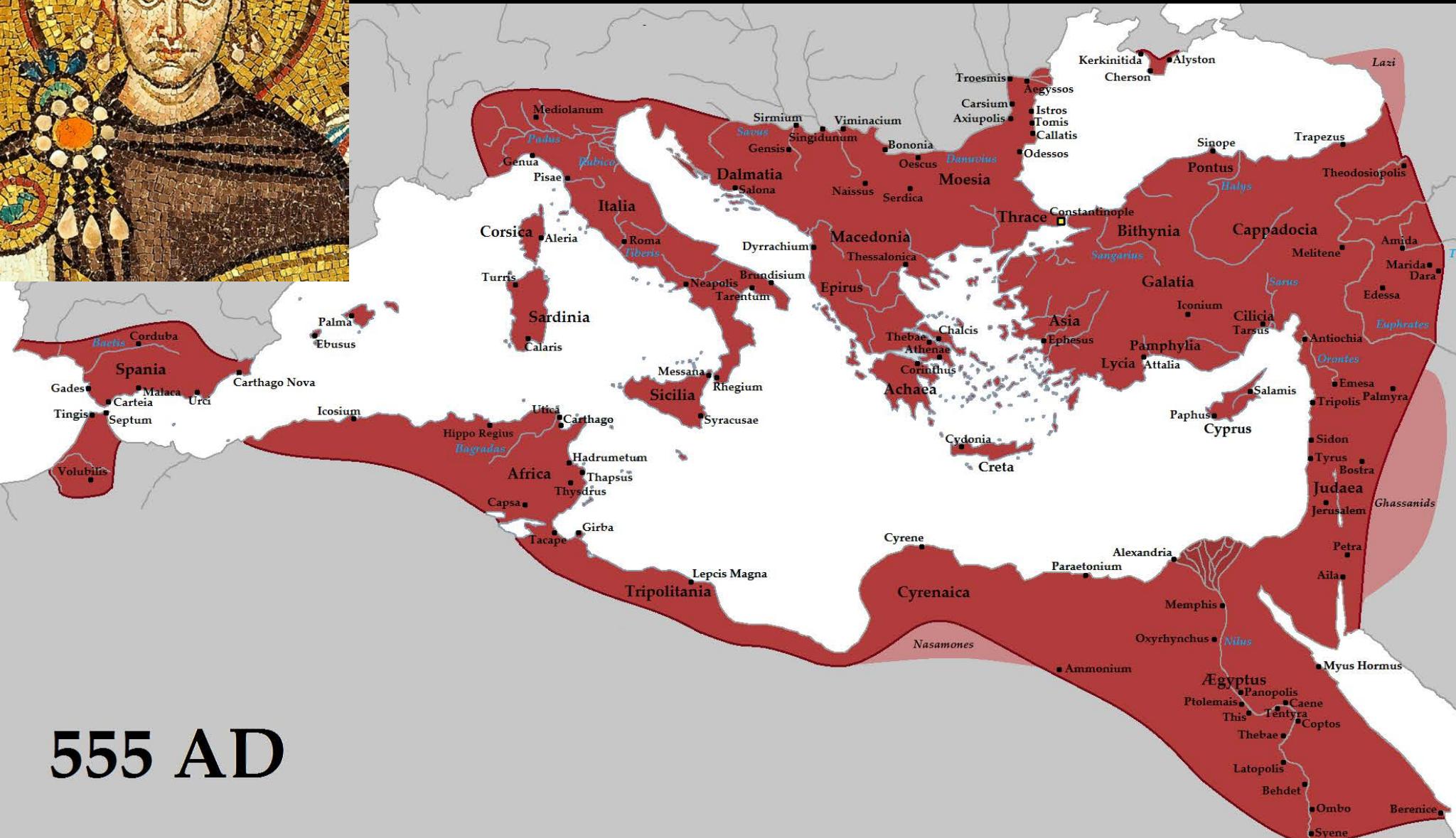


Justinian, Byzantine  
Emperor  
r. 527-565

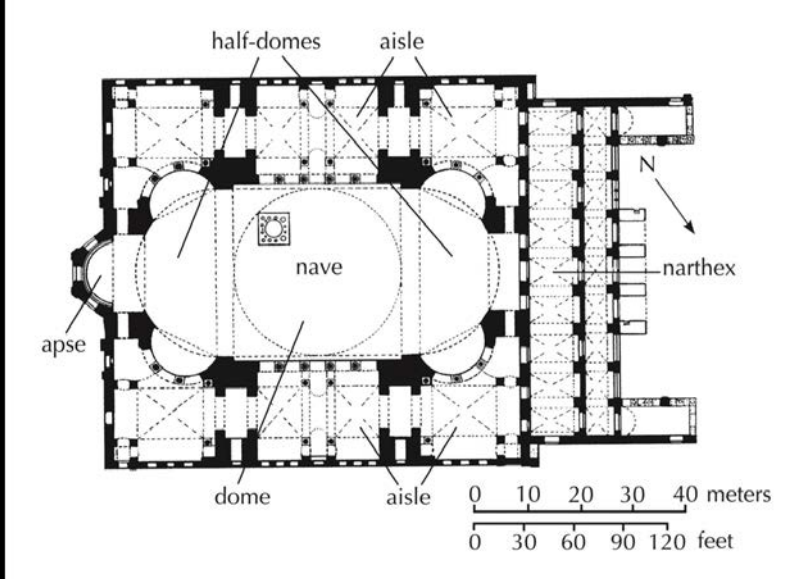
Codex Justinianus,  
or Body of Civil Law,  
534

Regulated religious  
practice; promoted  
Christianity; banned  
paganism; influenced  
civil law throughout  
the Middle Ages and  
into modern nation  
states.

555 AD







A mosaic in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Constantinople), Turkey, shows 6<sup>th</sup>-century Justinian, at left, holding a model of Hagia Sophia, 4<sup>th</sup>-century Constantine, at right, holding a model of the city of Constantinople, and the Virgin Mary and Christ child, center.

Is there separation of Church and State here?

Interior Narthex - Hagia Sophia





Far Left: Mosaic of Emperor Constantine [272-337] holding model of the city of Constantine c. 1000



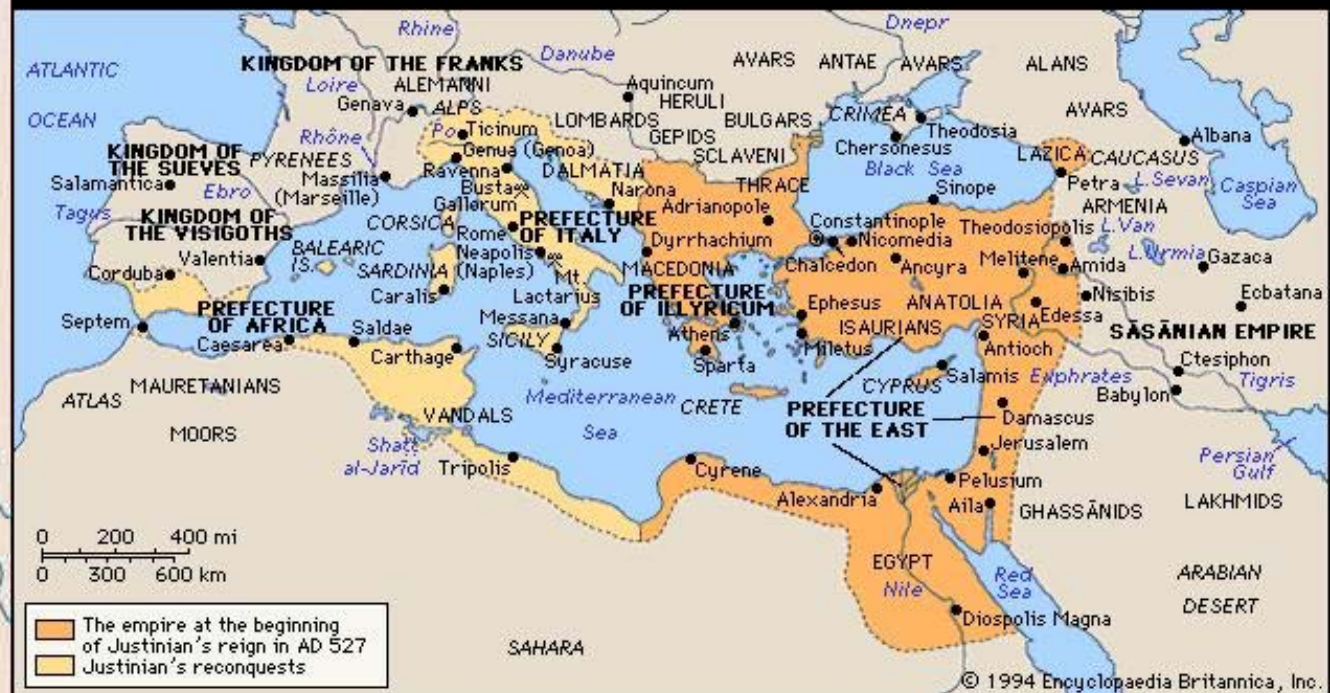
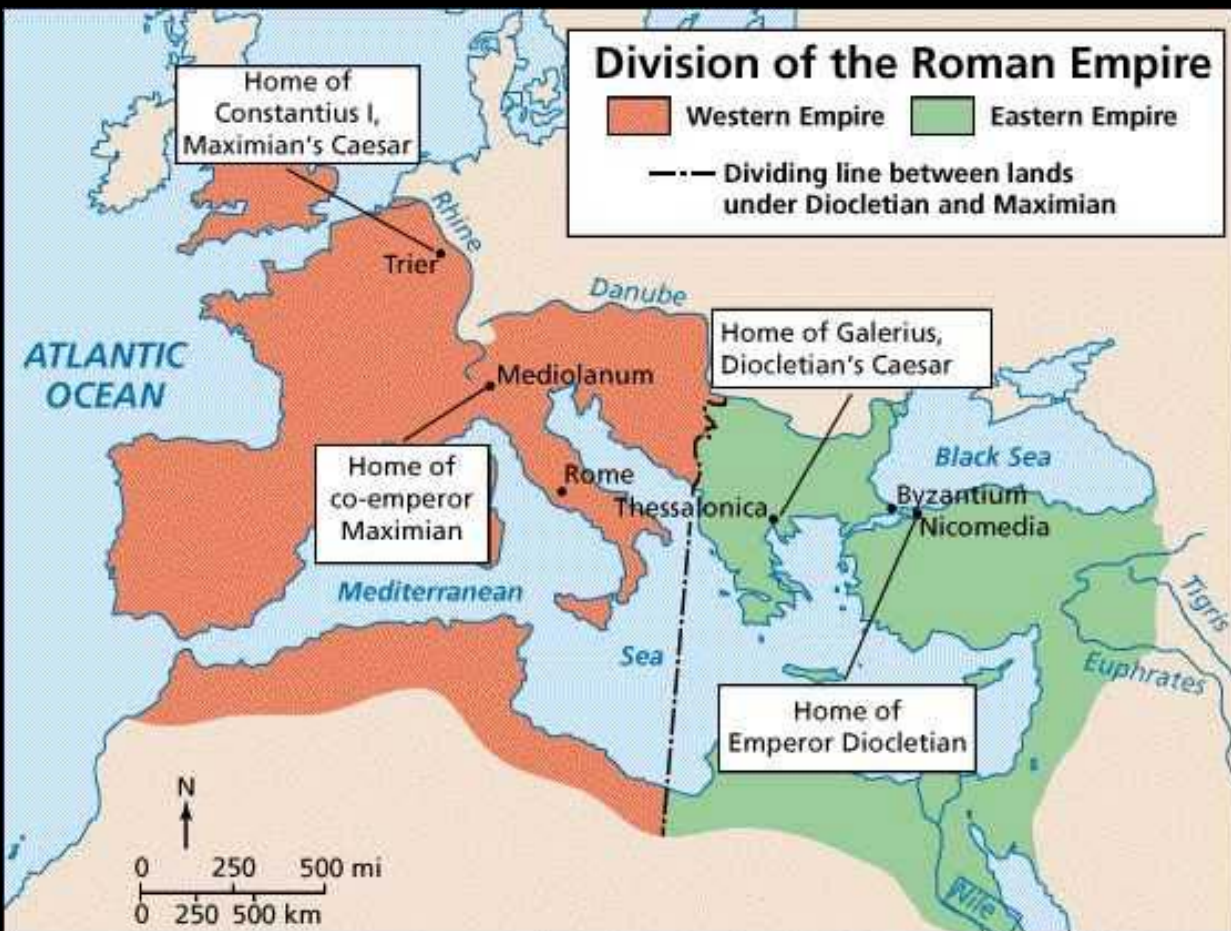
Near Left: Same mosaic of Emperor Justinian [527-565] holding model of Hagia Sophia, c.1000



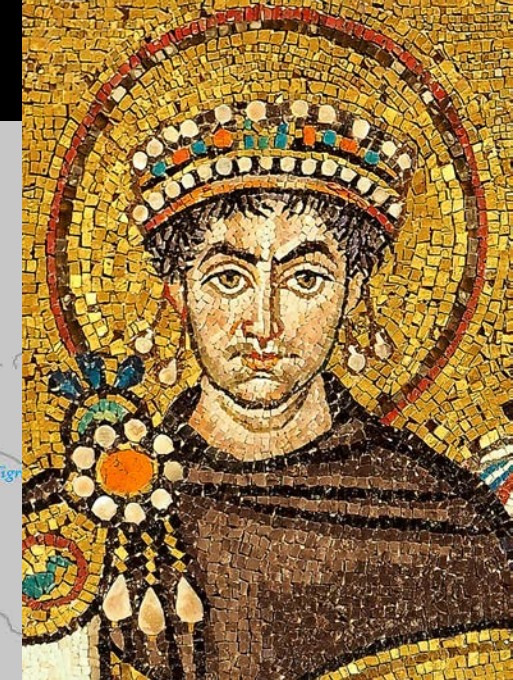
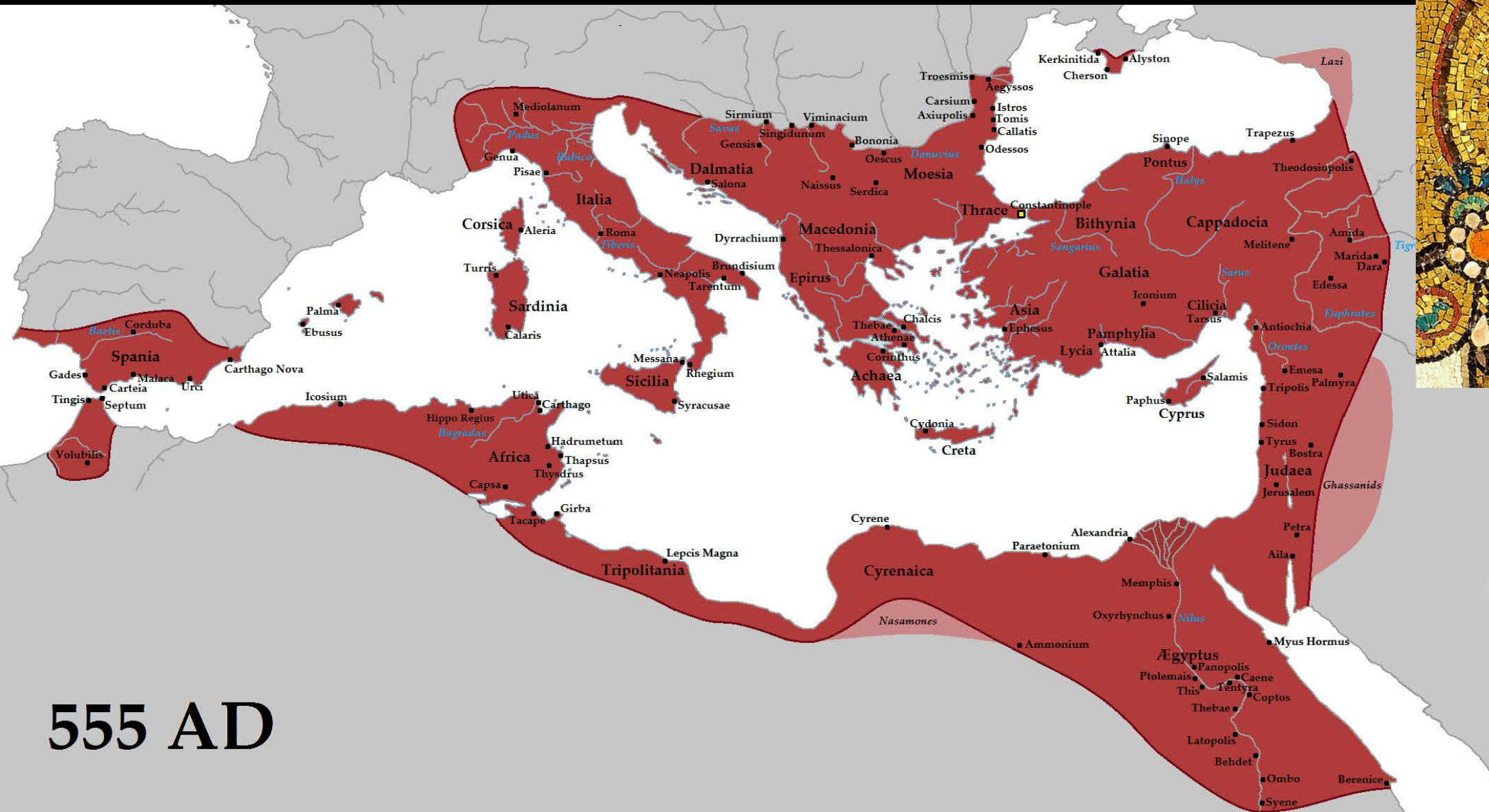


Byzantine Emperor Justinian  
ruled from 527 to 565 CE









Justinian  
r. 527-565

555 AD

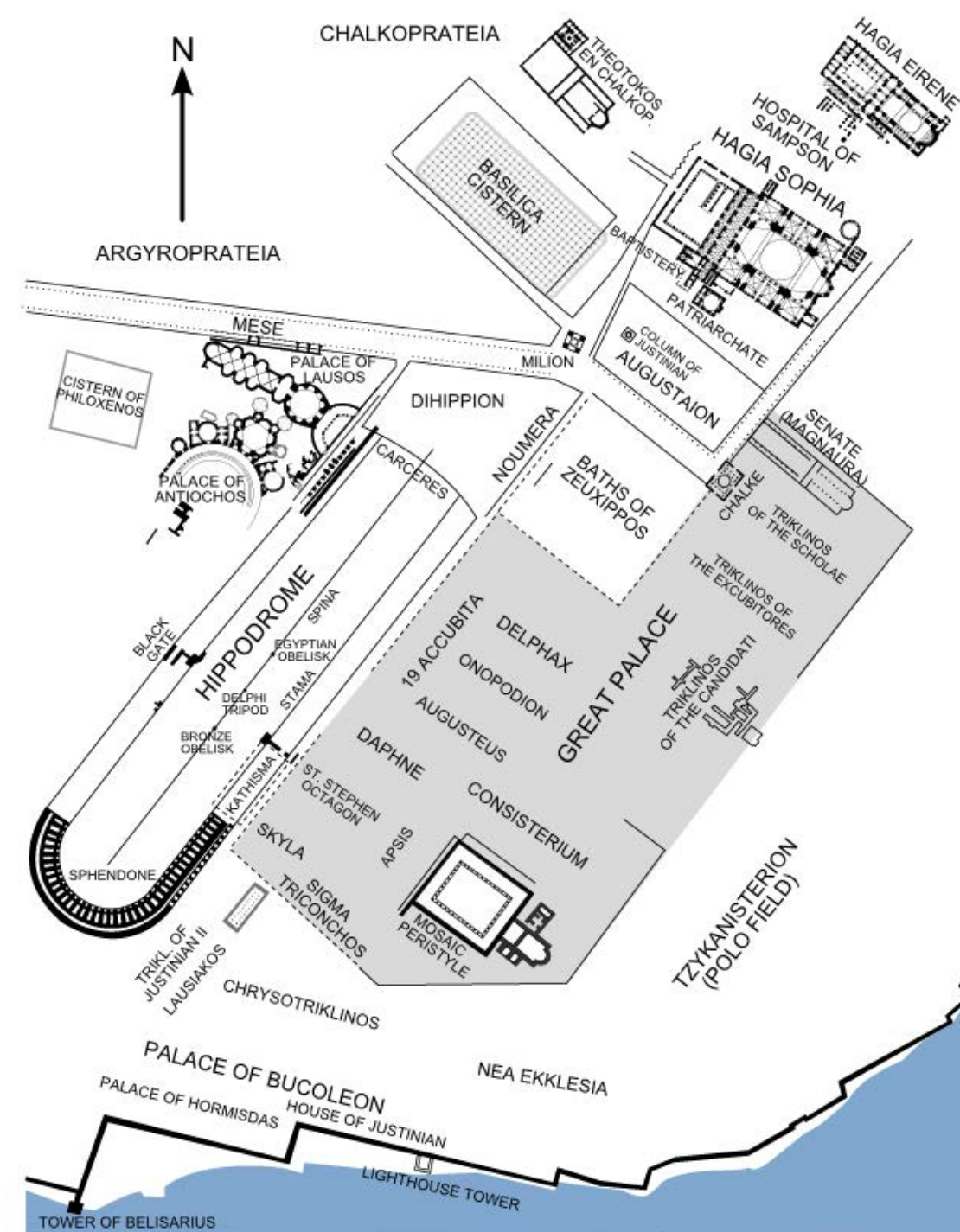
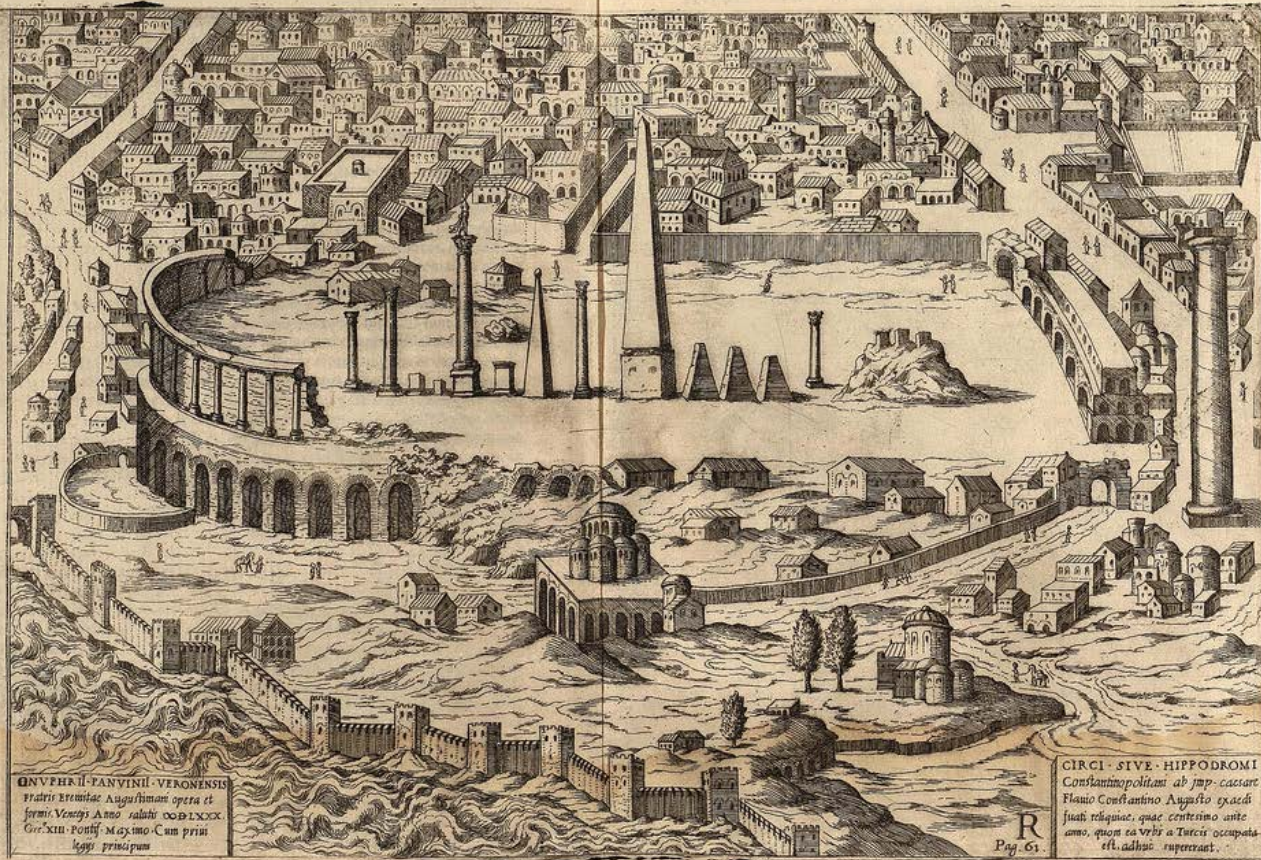




Byzantine Emperor Justinian  
ruled from 527 to 565 CE

The story of the construction of the Hagia Sophia began in A.D. 532 when the Nika Riots, a great revolt, hit Constantinople. At the time Emperor Justinian I had been ruler of the empire for five years and had become unpopular. It started in the hippodrome among two chariot racing factions called the blue and green with the riot spreading throughout the city the rioters chanting “Nika,” which means “victory,” and attempting to throw out Justinian by besieging him in his palace. “People were resentful of the high taxes that Justinian had imposed and they wanted him out of office,” explains University of London historian Caroline Goodson.





Above: The ruins of Constantinople's Hippodrome in 1600, from an engraving by Onofrio Panvinio in *De Ludis Circensibus*. The spina that stood at the center of the chariot racing circuit was still visible then; in modern Istanbul, only three of the ancient monuments remain.

Left: Mosaic referencing the Nika Riots, which broke out in the Hippodrome in Constantinople five years into Justinian's rule in 532 CE







Churches of Hagia Sophia (from right to left): church of Theodosius II [401-450 CE], church of Justinian I as in 537 and after the new dome in 562



The failure of *bread and circuses*.





## *“Panem et circenses, or Bread and circuses”*

“The people that once bestowed commands,  
consulships, legions, and all else, now meddles  
no more and longs eagerly for just two things —  
bread and circuses!”

Juvenal, *Satire X*, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE



Ancient Roman  
mosaics showing  
above a charioteer  
and at the right  
gladiators, both as  
public spectacle.

## What does the phrase “bread and circuses” mean?





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Juvenal, *Satire X*, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE

The term “bread and circuses” refers to something, as extravagant entertainment, offered as an expedient means of pacifying discontent or diverting attention from a source of grievance. With respect to politics, the words are used to describe the generation of public approval, not through exemplary or excellent public service or policy, but through diversion, or the mere satisfaction of the immediate, shallow requirements of a populace.



Ancient Roman mosaics showing above a charioteer and at the right gladiators, both as public spectacle.









**Left: Site of the  
Constantinople  
Hippodrome, Istanbul**



**Right: Model of the  
Hippodrome**









Churches of Hagia Sophia (from right to left): church of Theodosius II [401-450 CE], church of Justinian I as in 537 and after the new dome in 562





Remains of the basilica that was constructed during the reign of emperor Theodosius II and stood from 415 AD. - 532 AD. Remains are exhibited next to the current Hagia Sophia.





## **Basilica of the Hagia Sophia**

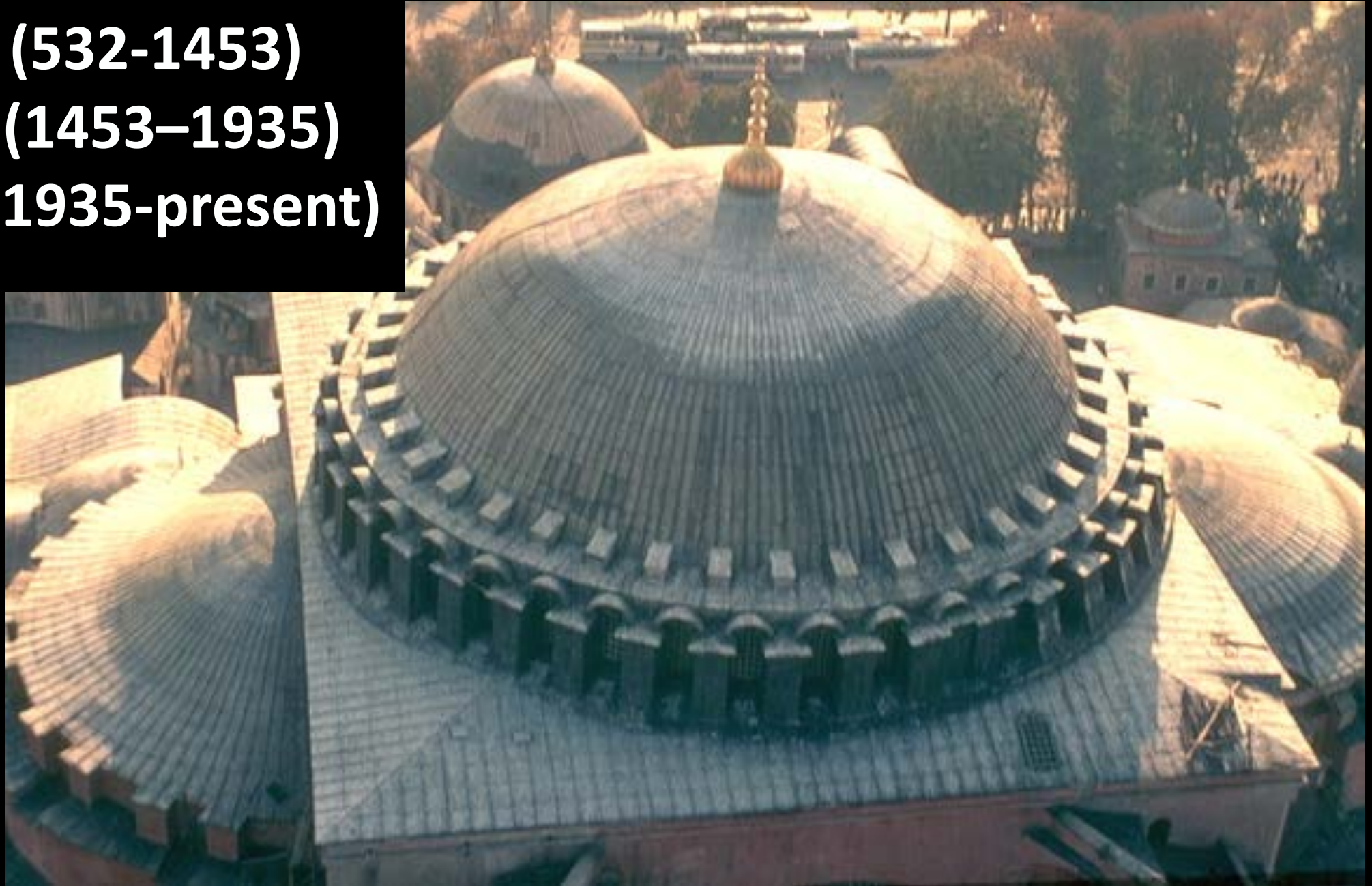
The current structure was constructed by Isidoros (Milet) and Anthemios (Tralles), who were renowned architects of their time, by Emperor Justinian's (527-565) orders

**Church (532-1453)**  
**Mosque (1453–1935)**  
**Museum (1935-present)**

Gaspare Fossati, "Aya Sofia, Constantinople," lithography made by Louis Haghe, 1852



**Church (532-1453)**  
**Mosque (1453–1935)**  
**Museum (1935-present)**







Considered the finest example of Byzantine architecture in the world, the church of Hagia Sophia was constructed on a scale unprecedented in human history. Under the rule of Justinian the Emperor, and with a force of 10,000 workers, the dome atop the church of Hagia Sophia was built in record time: it took just five years, ten months, and four days to complete.

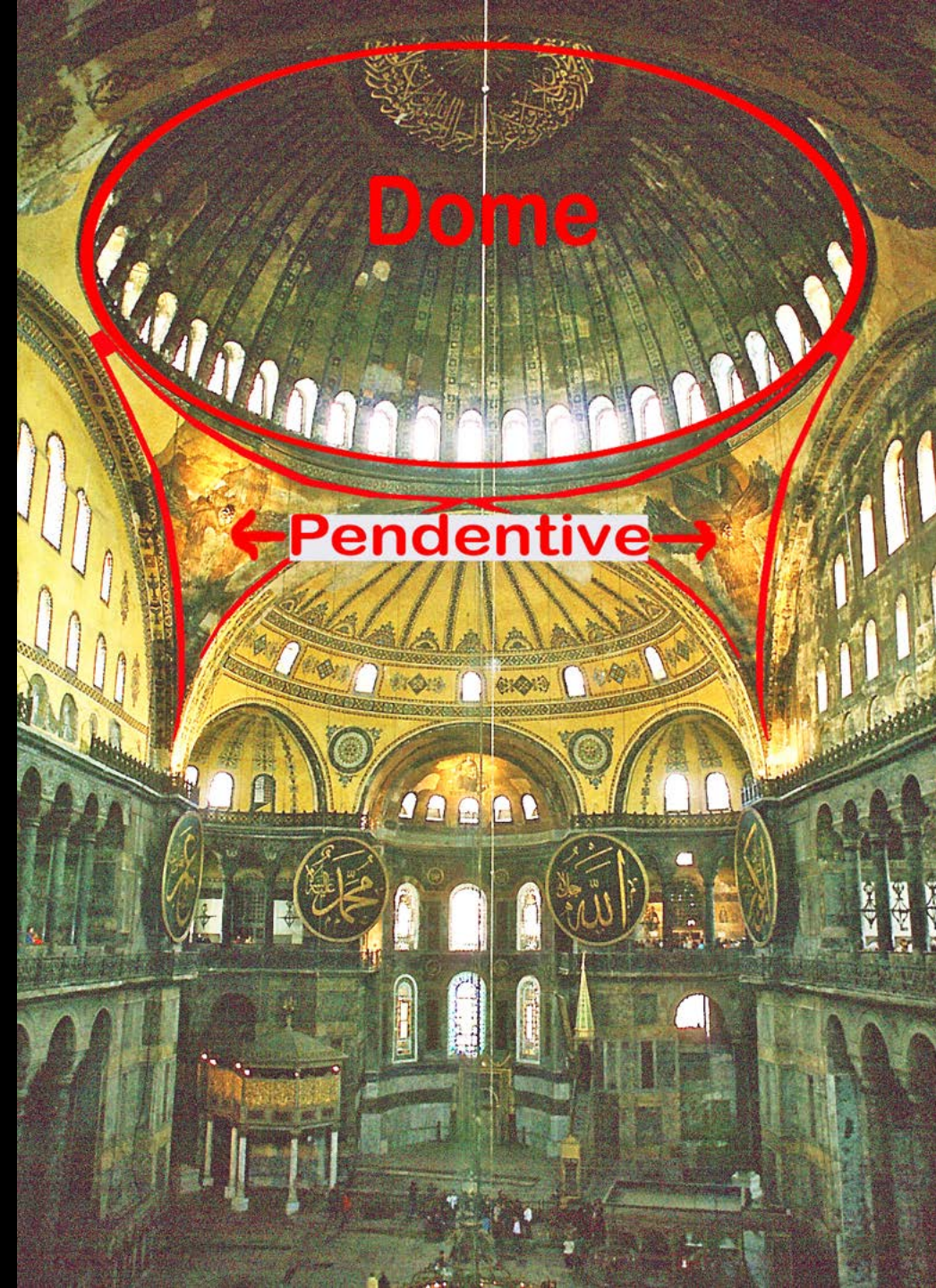
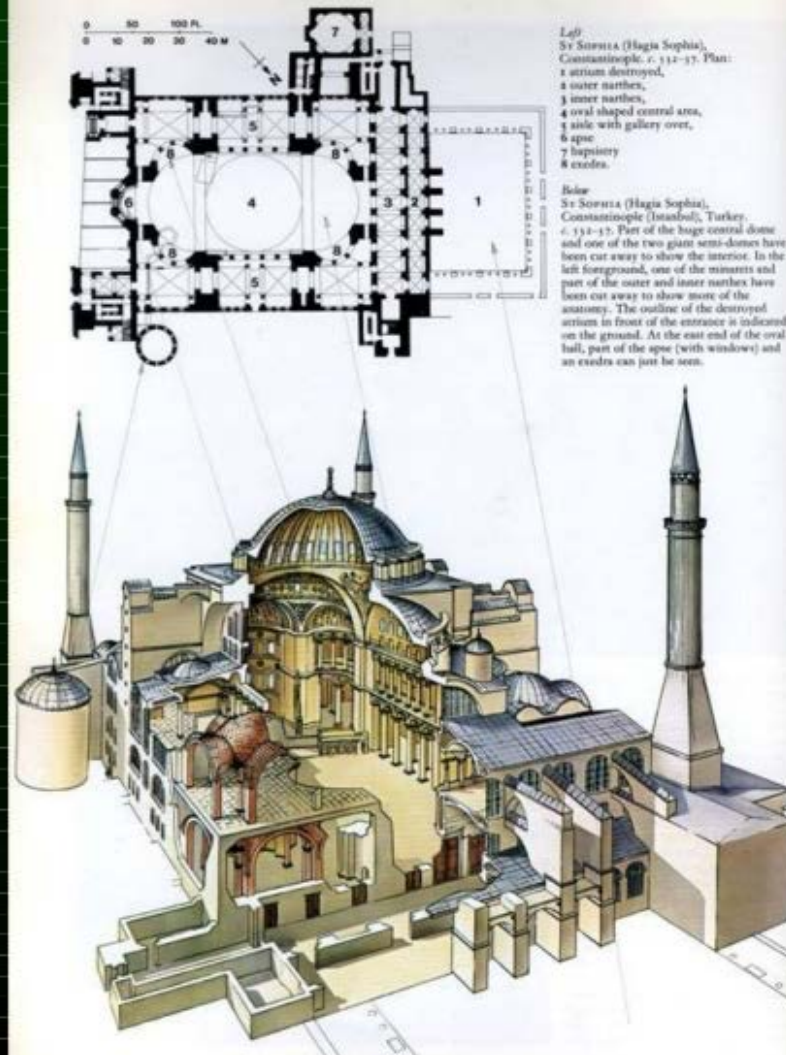
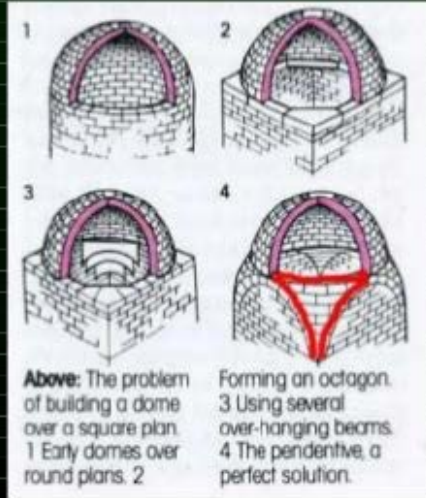


When construction began, Anthemius found himself in a geometric fix. How would he build a circular dome atop a square base?



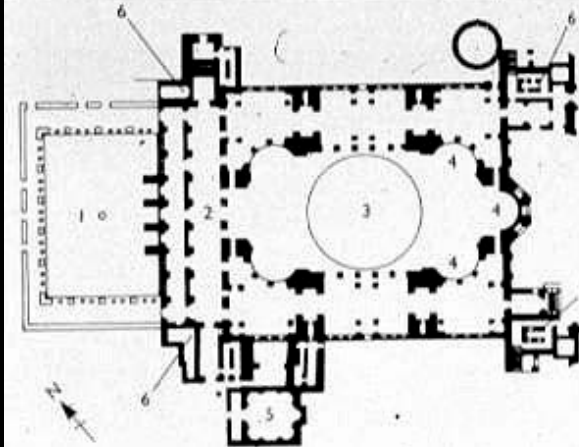
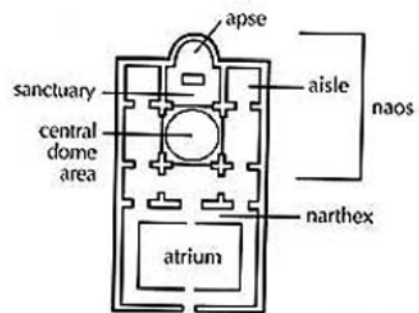
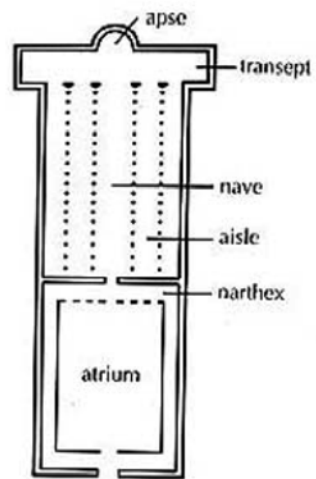
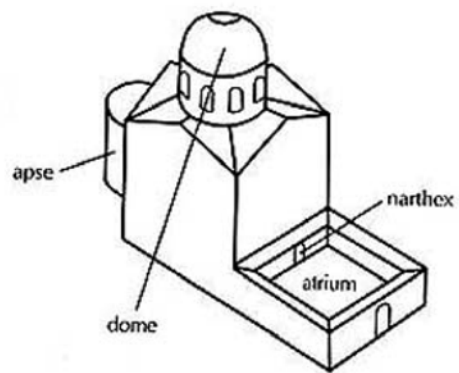
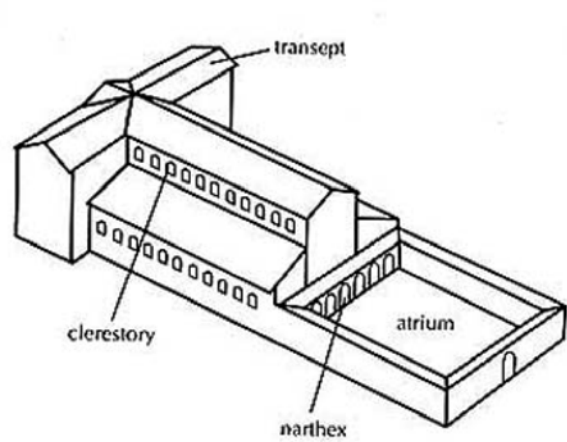
## The Architectural Achievement and Plan

An old architectural problem is to fit a circular dome over a square plan. A perfect solution to the problem is the use of a **pendentive**, a curved triangular vault. These were incorporated into the construction of Hagia Sophia.

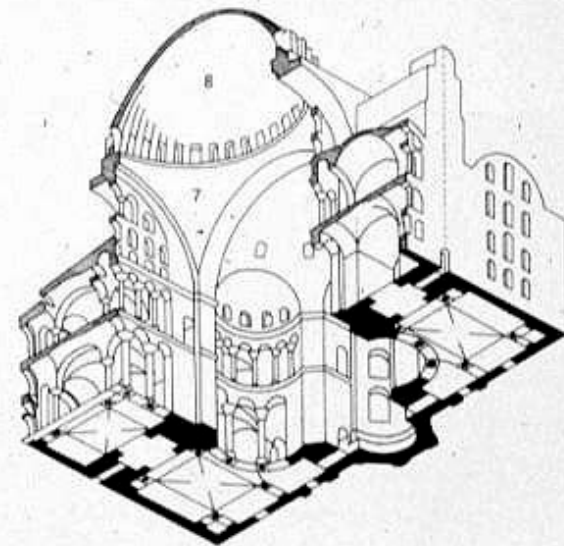
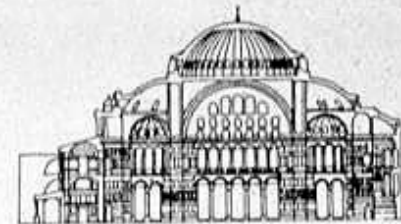
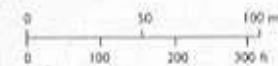


The dome springs from pendentives at 183 feet (54 meters) above the floor and The plan of Hagia Sofia is almost square, approximately 250 by 220 feet

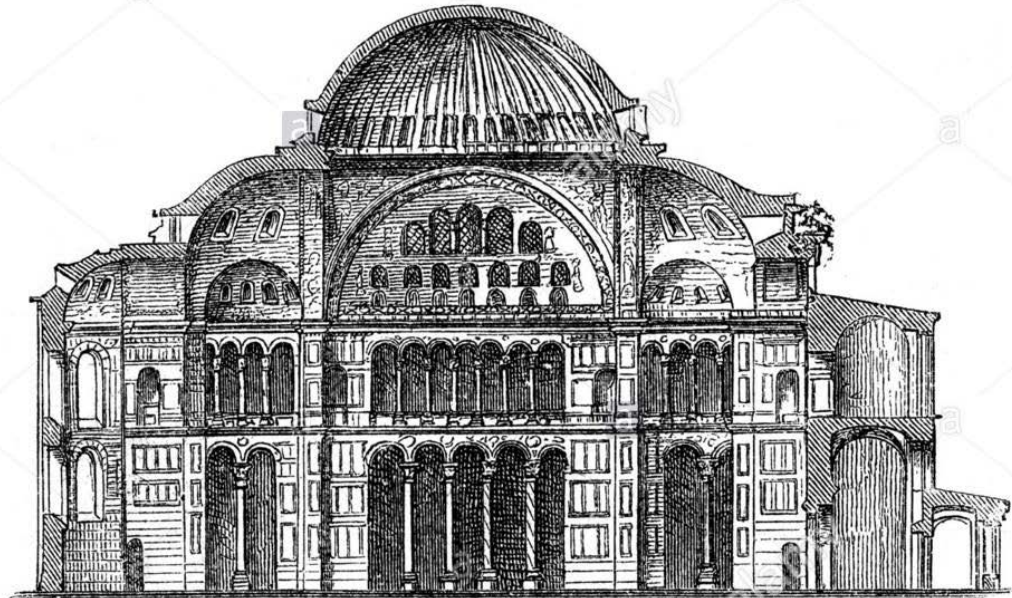




- 1 Atrium
- 2 Narthex
- 3 Nave
- 4 Apse
- 5 Baptistry
- 6 Minaret
- 7 Pendentive
- 8 Dome

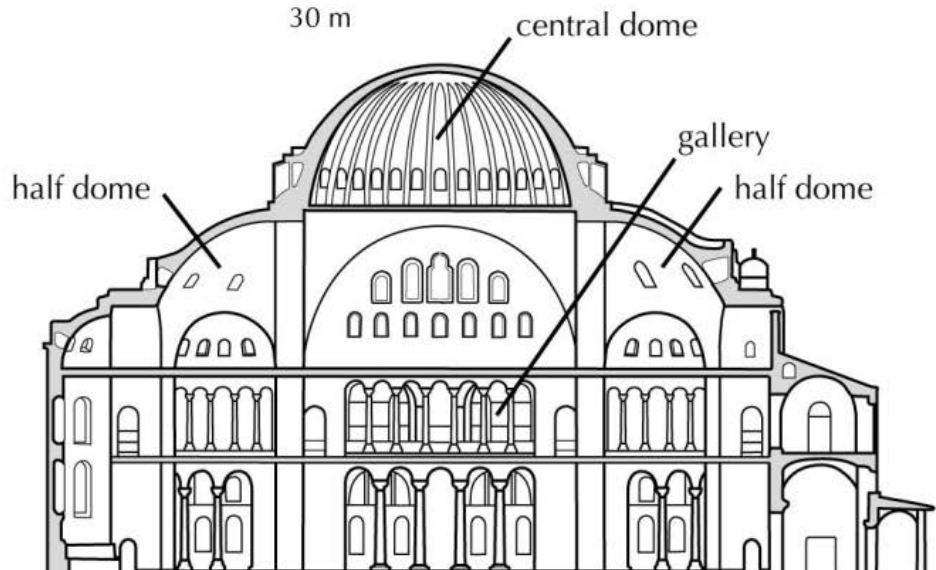
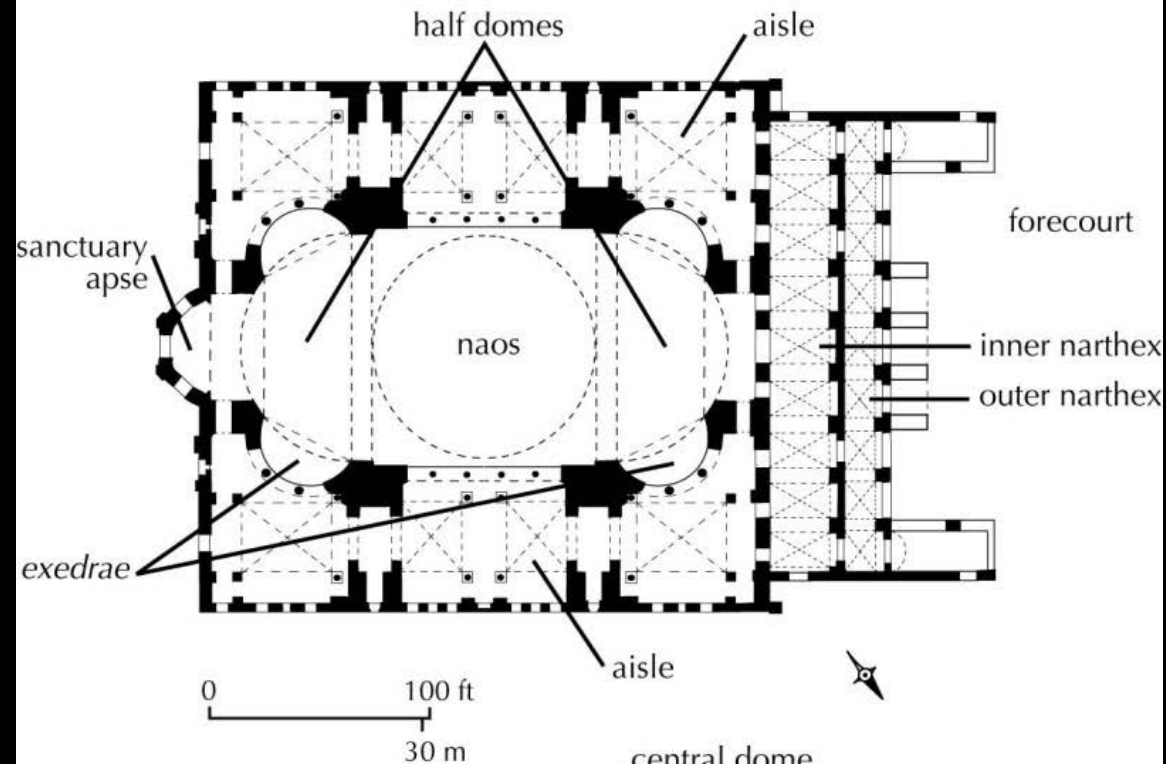
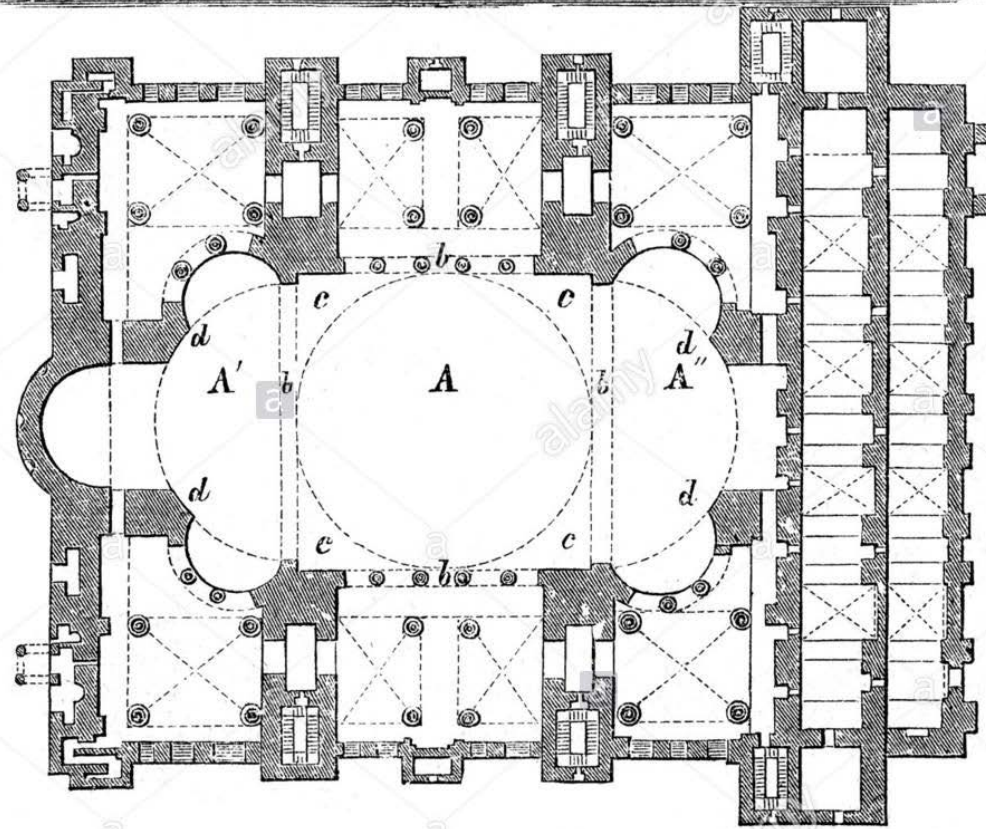




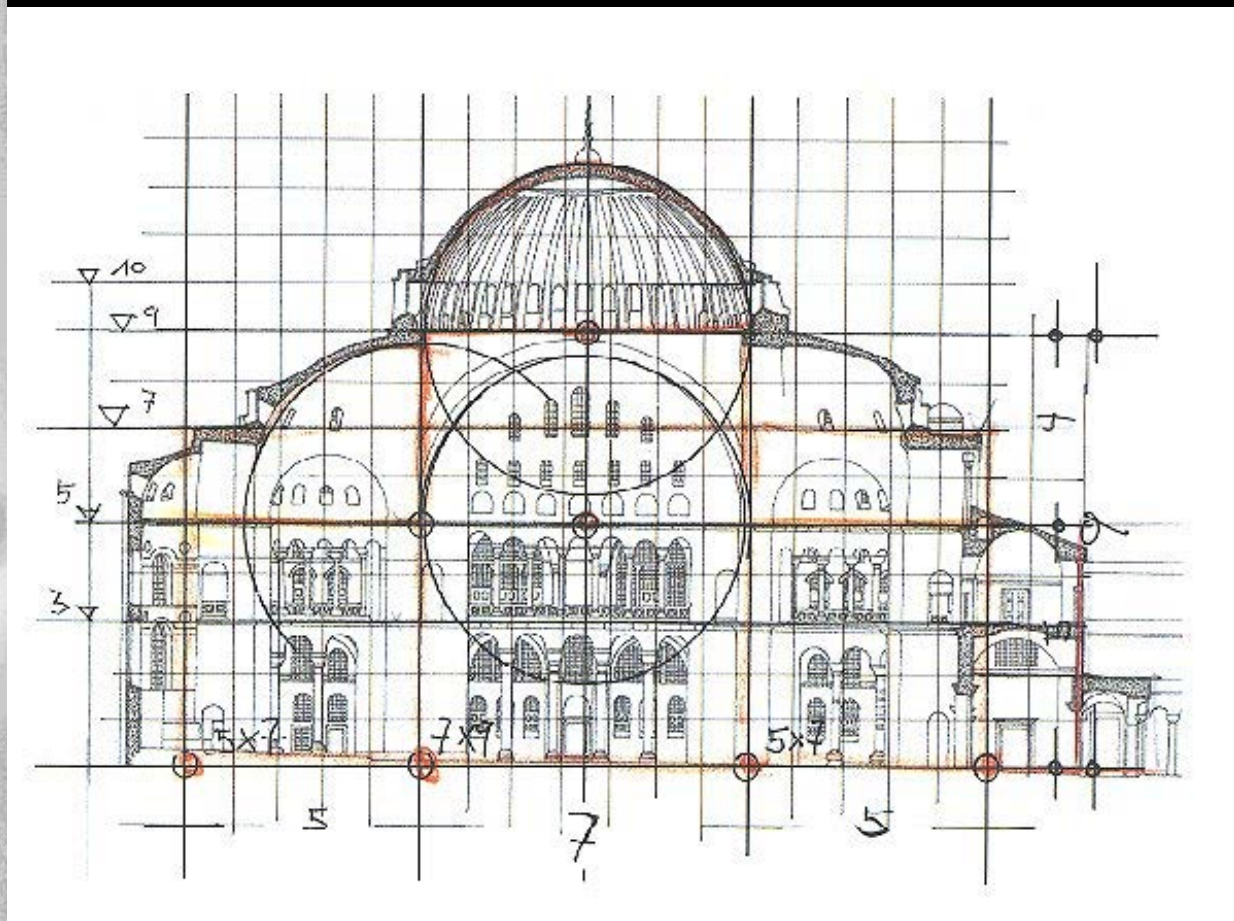
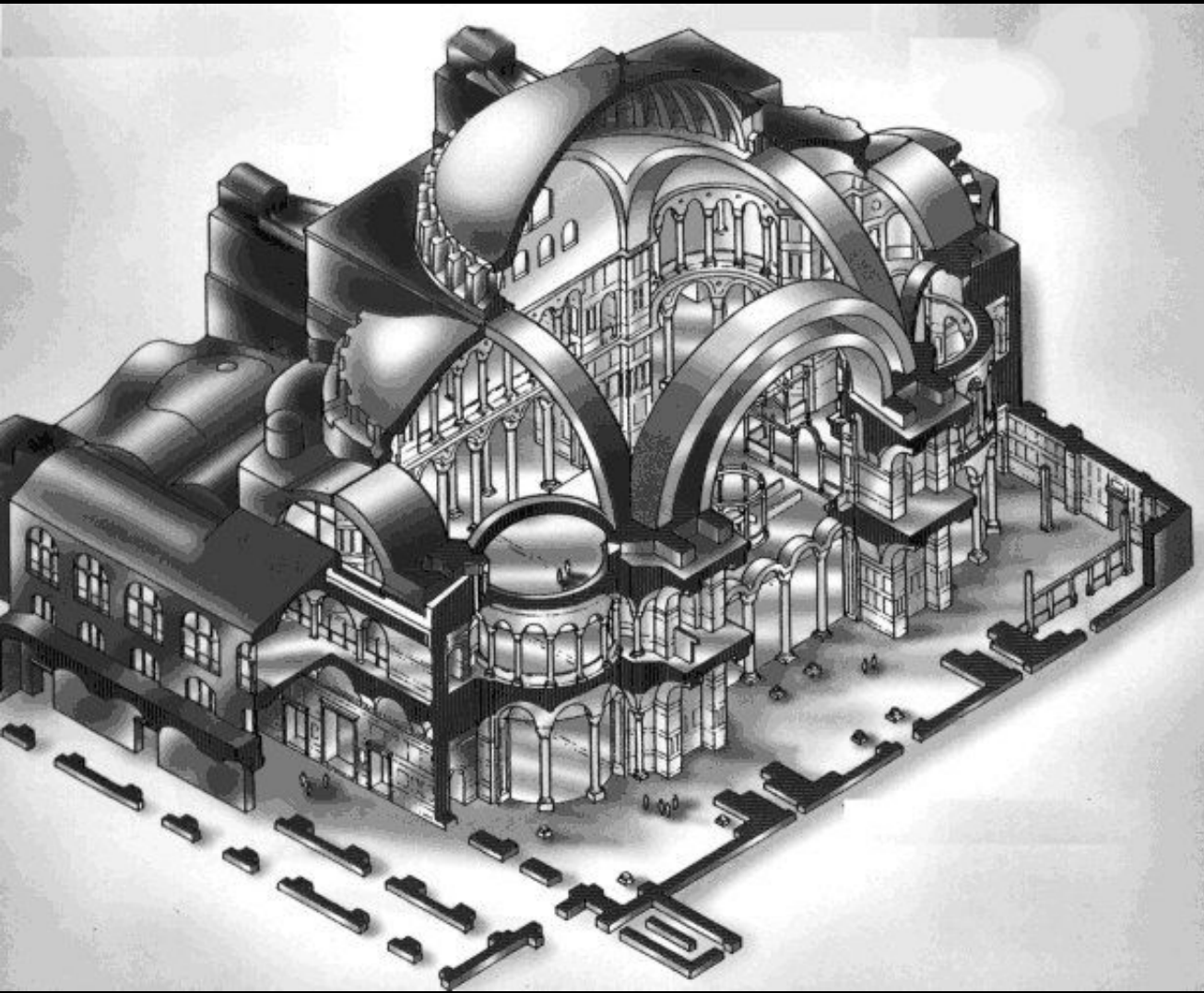


Meter 40  
30  
20  
10  
0  
15

N. →









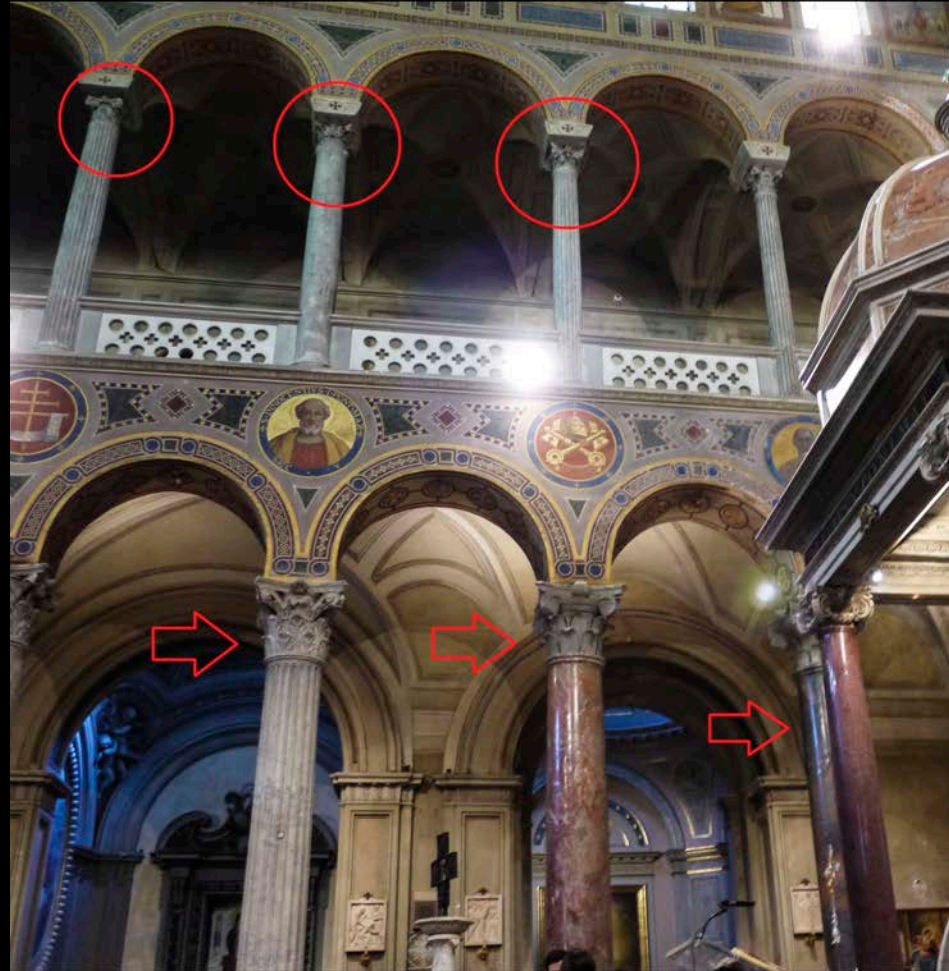
# Architectural Palimpsest

Emperor Justinian ordered all provinces under his reign to send the best architectural pieces to be used in the construction so that the Hagia Sophia could be bigger and grander. The columns and marbles used in the structure have been taken from ancient cities in and around Anatolia and Syria, such as, Aspendus Ephessus, Baalbeek and Tarsa.

spolia – from ‘spoils,’ as in the ‘spoils of war’

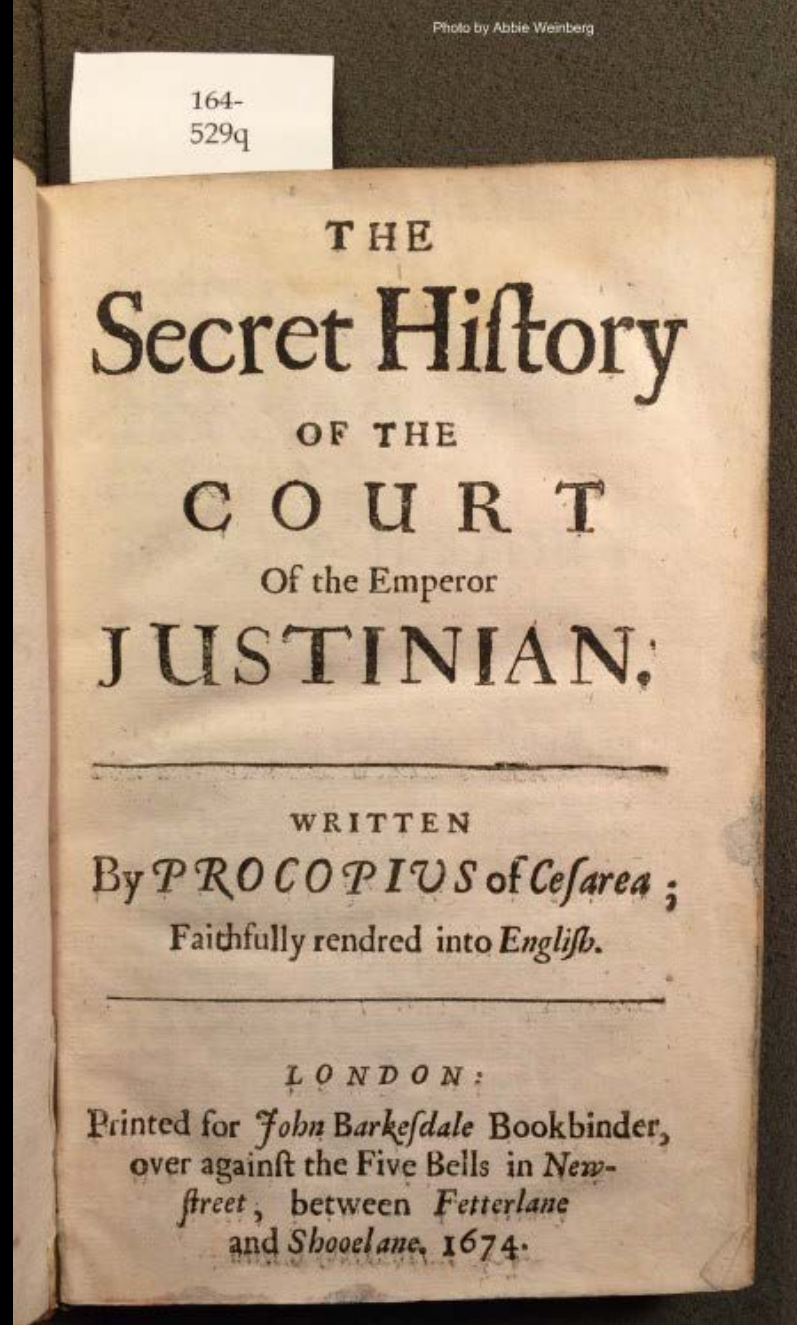


"Spolia" refers to the re-use of materials from old buildings to construct new ones. When Rome converted to Christianity, new churches were built from the materials of closed Pagan temples.



In this photo we can see that the church columns are made from different materials, as are the "capitals" (tops). They were probably taken from decommissioned temples.





Procopius, *The Secret History of the Court of the Emperor Justinian*, written 550 or 558, or maybe even as late as 562; discovered in the Vatican library and published in 1623

Procopius on Justinian mosaic, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, 527-457 CE





Description of The Hagia Sophia in  
Constantinople by Prokopios, written 544:

So the church has been made a spectacle of great beauty, stupendous to those who see it and altogether incredible to those who hear of it....Its breadth and length have been so fittingly proportioned that it may without impropriety be described as being both very long and extremely broad. And it boasts of an ineffable beauty, for it subtly combines its mass with the harmony of its proportions, having neither any excess nor any deficiency, inasmuch as it is more pompous than ordinary [buildings] and considerably more decorous than those which are huge beyond measure; and it abounds exceedingly in gleaming sunlight. You might say that the [interior] space is not illuminated by the sun from the outside, but that the radiance is generated within, so great an abundance of light bathes this shrine all round.



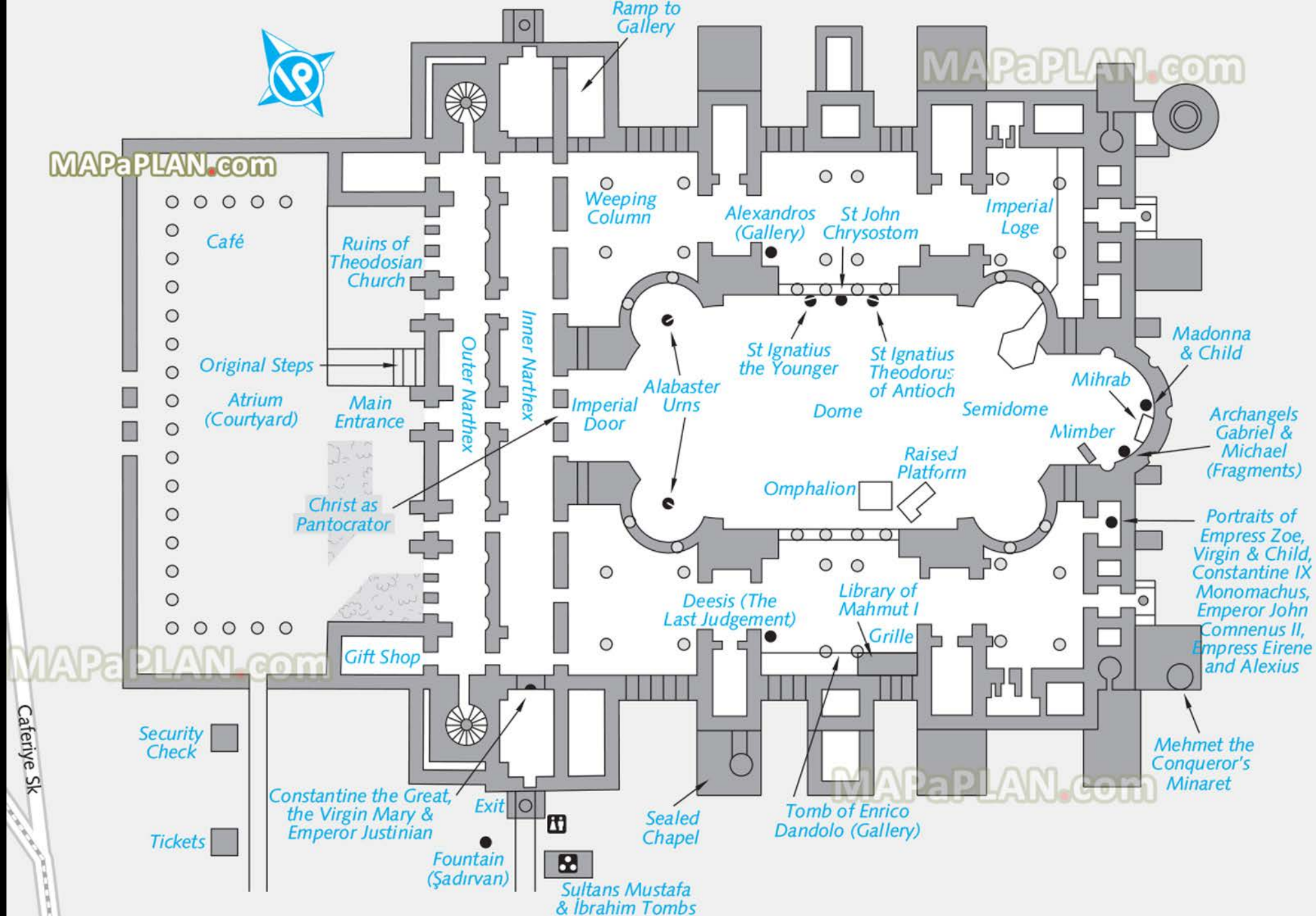


ICONOCLASM

ICONOCLASTIC

ABSTRACTION









Leon Mosaic, 10<sup>th</sup> century, Emperor Leon in prayer position at the right of Pantocrater figure  
 HIERATIC STYLE – Sacred style, often flat and abstract

Imperial Gate Mosaic:  
 The Imperial Gate mosaic is located in the tympanum above that gate, which was used only by the emperors when entering the church. Christ Pantocrater at center with emperor at his feet. The text on the book reads as follows: "Peace be with you. I am the light of the world". (John 20:19; 20:26; 8:12) On each side of Christ's shoulders is a circular medallion: on His left the Archangel Gabriel, holding a staff, on His right His Mother Mary.





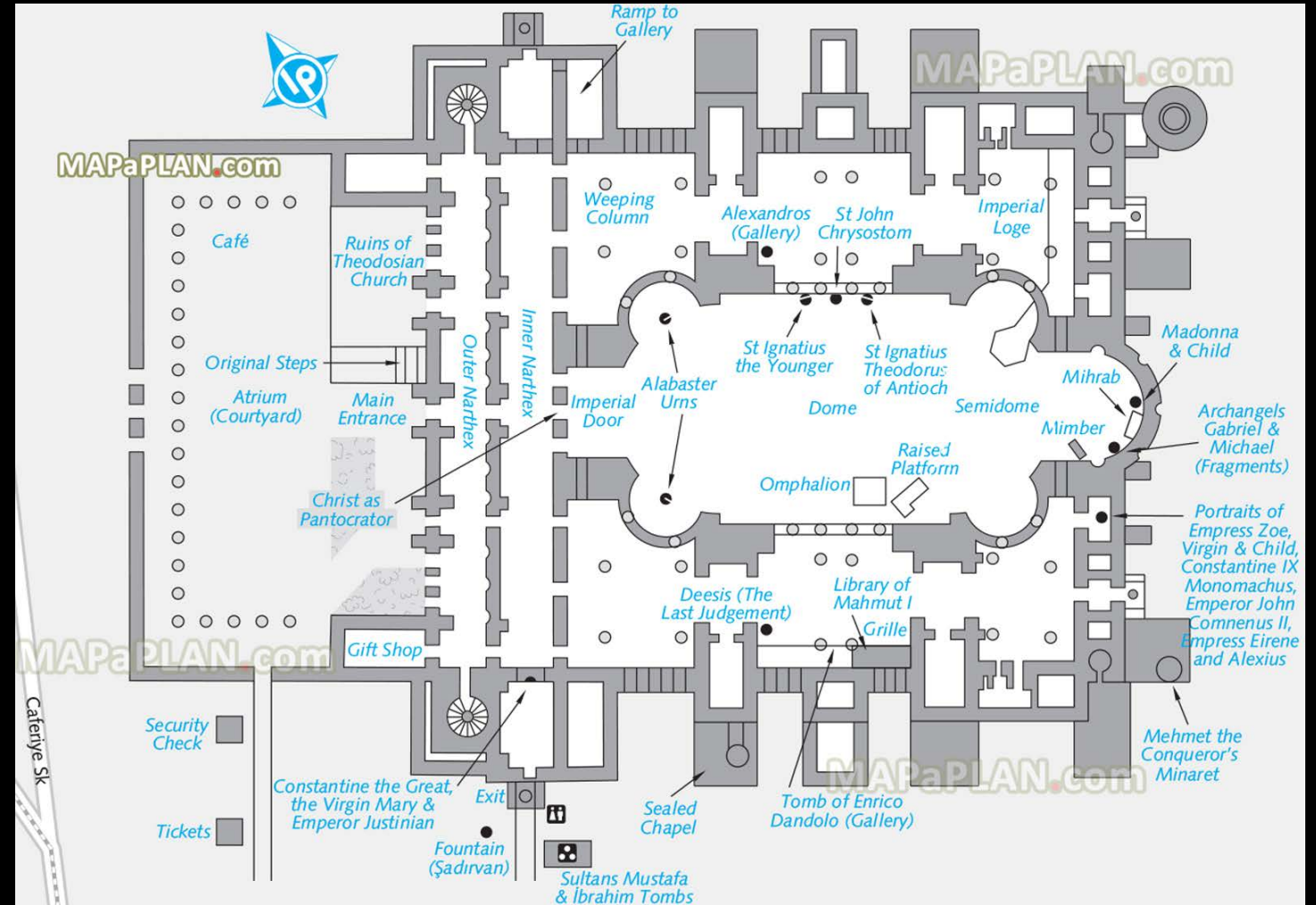
Southwestern entrance mosaic— Sunu Mosaic, 10<sup>th</sup> century – On her left is Emperor Constantine and on her right is Emperor Justinian. The maquettes presented to Virgin Mary by Emperor Constantine and Emperor Justinian portrays the role of ‘protector’ Virgin Mary holds towards the church and the city.





In the center of the quarter dome is the figure of Virgin Mary seated on a throne with jeweled cushions, holding baby Jesus. The mosaic dates back to the 9th century.





Apse mosaic of the Virgin and Child This mosaic is significant as it is the first figured mosaic created following the iconoclasm period of Hagia Sophia.





Deesis Mosaic, 13<sup>th</sup> century. A Deesis is a traditional representation of Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist, imploring Christ the salvation of man  
Note modeling of the faces of the figures





tesserae







In 1453, Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Empire under Mehmed the Conqueror, who ordered this main church of Orthodox Christianity converted into a mosque. By that point, the church had fallen into a state of disrepair. Nevertheless, the Christian cathedral made a strong impression on the new Ottoman rulers and they decided to convert it into a mosque. The bells, altar, iconostasis, and sacrificial vessels and other relics were destroyed and the mosaics depicting Jesus, his Mother Mary, Christian saints and angels were also destroyed or plastered over. Islamic features – such as the mihrab, minbar, and four minarets—were added. It remained a mosque until 1931, when it was closed to the public for four years. It was re-opened in 1935 as a museum by the Republic of Turkey.





PALIMPSEST

URBAN PALIMPSEST

CULTURAL AND  
RELIGIOUS  
PALIMPSEST





ICONOCLASM

ICONOCLASTIC

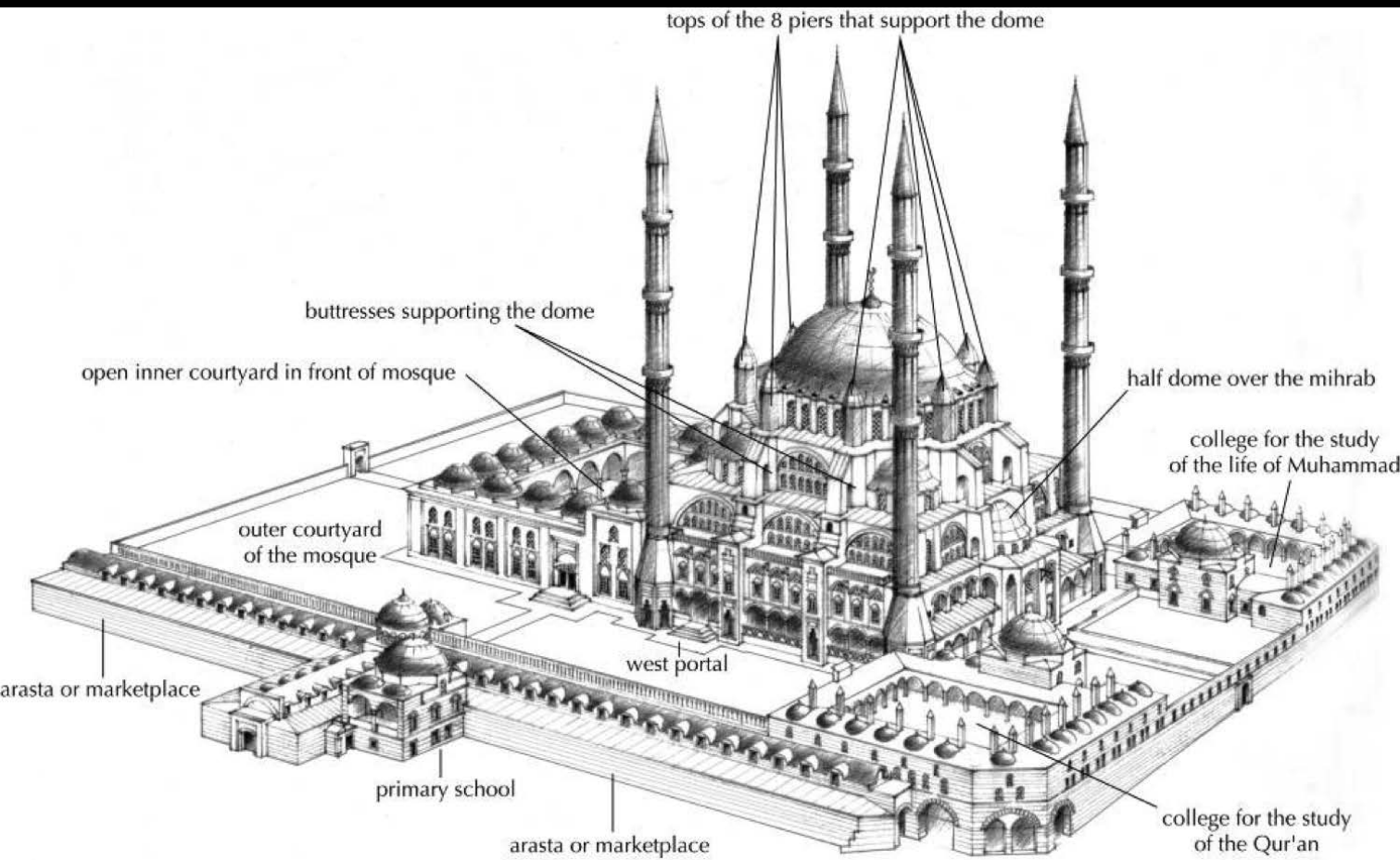




Arabic calligraphy roundels with names of the Prophet Muhammed, God, and family members of the Prophet

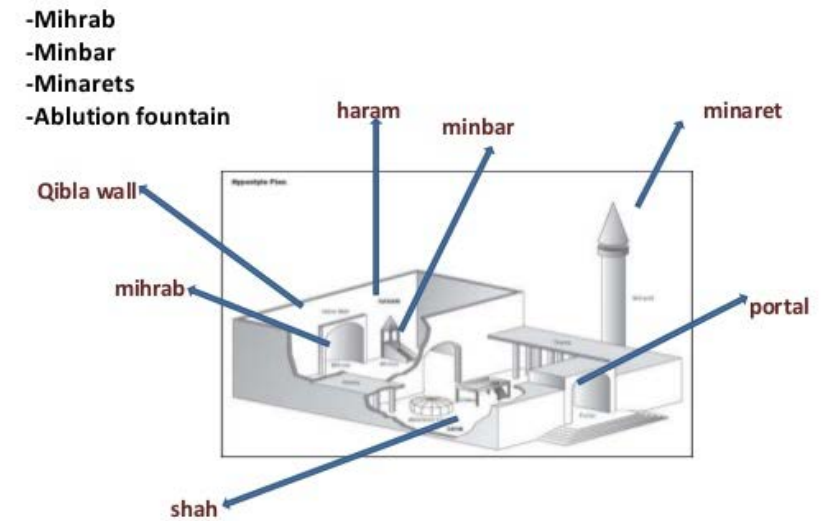






## MOSQUE

- Mosque is sacred buildings used by muslims for prayer.
- Word mosque is arabic for "place of prostration" or "bowing down to allah".
- Mosques always include:-

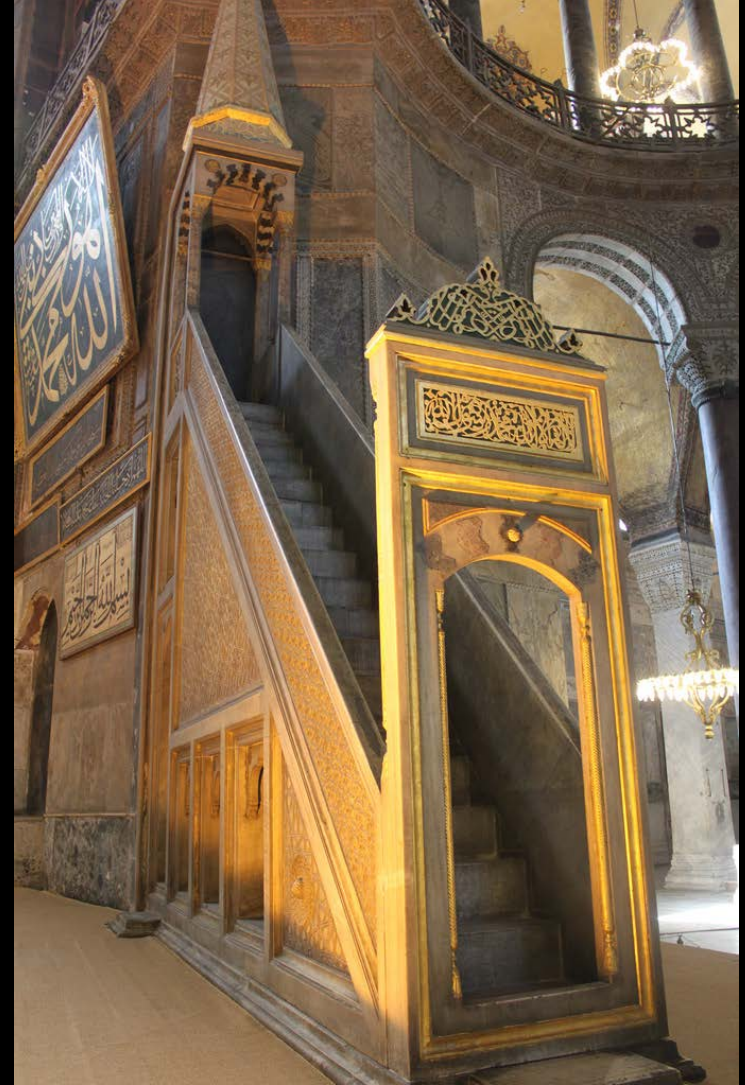






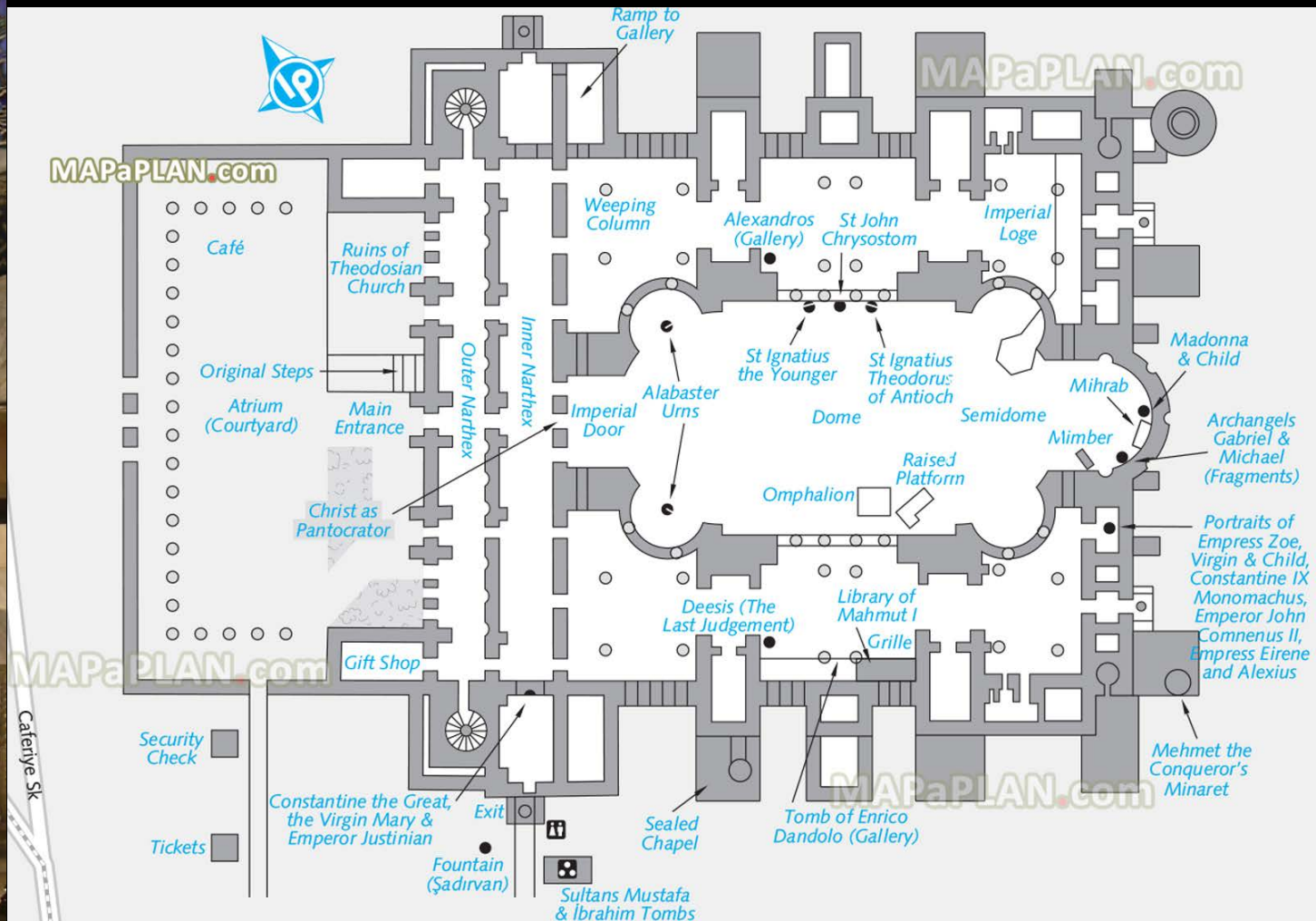
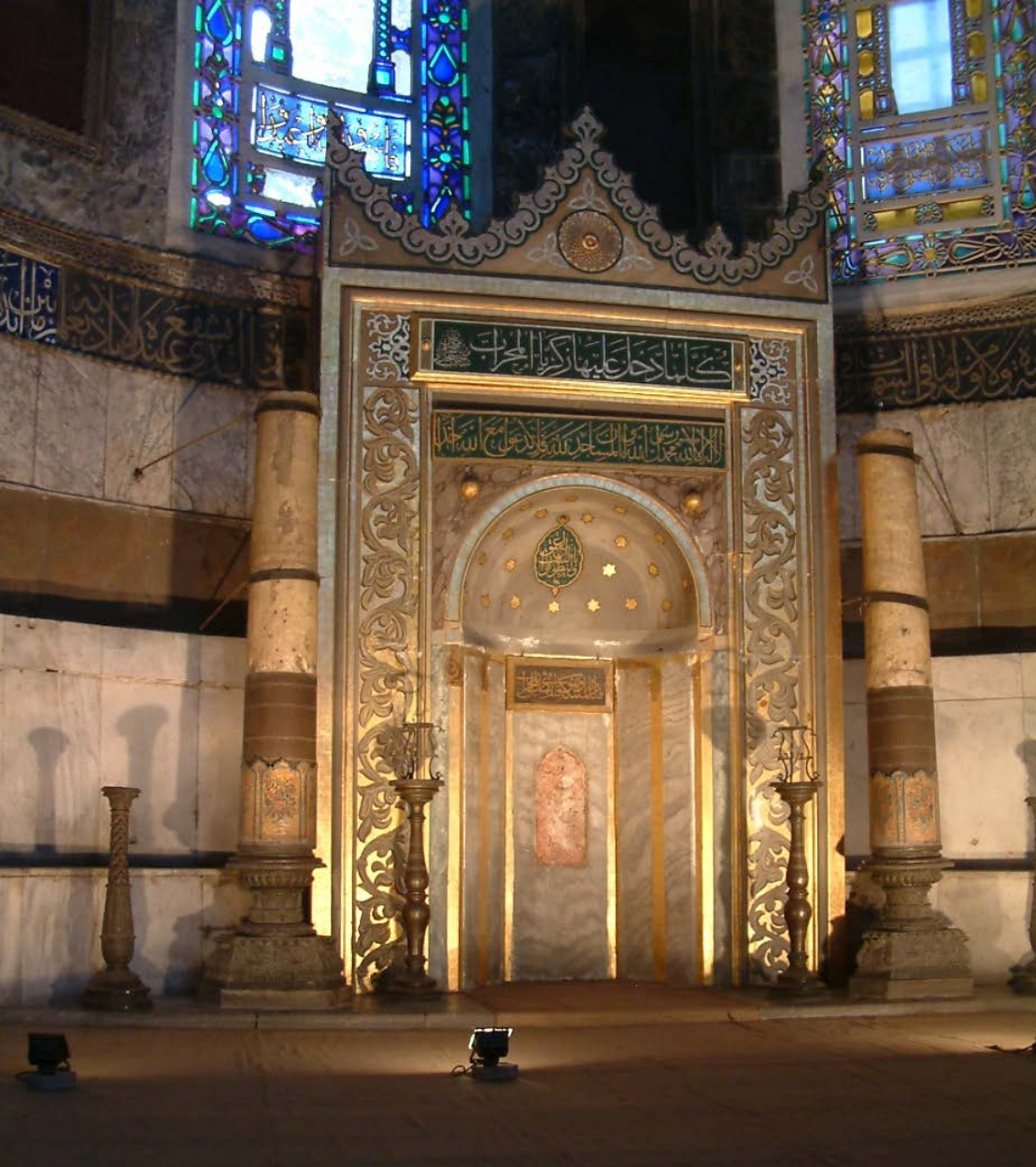
The minarets were an Ottoman addition, and not part of the original church's Byzantine design. They were added in the 16th century





Minbar





The *mihrab* located in the apse where the altar used to stand, pointing towards Mecca





Far Left: Interior view of the Hagia Sophia, showing Islamic elements on the top of the main dome.  
Middle: Ceiling decoration showing original Christian cross still visible through the later aniconic decoration  
Right: The face of the *Hexapterygon* (six-winged angel) on the north east pendentive (upper left)





**Basilica of the Hagia  
Sophia**

**Church (532-1453)  
Mosque (1453–1935)  
Museum (1935-  
present)**

Gaspare Fossati, "Aya Sofia, Constantinople," lithography made by Louis Haghe, 1852





Copy del. Fossati, direct. L. Hagia Sophia.

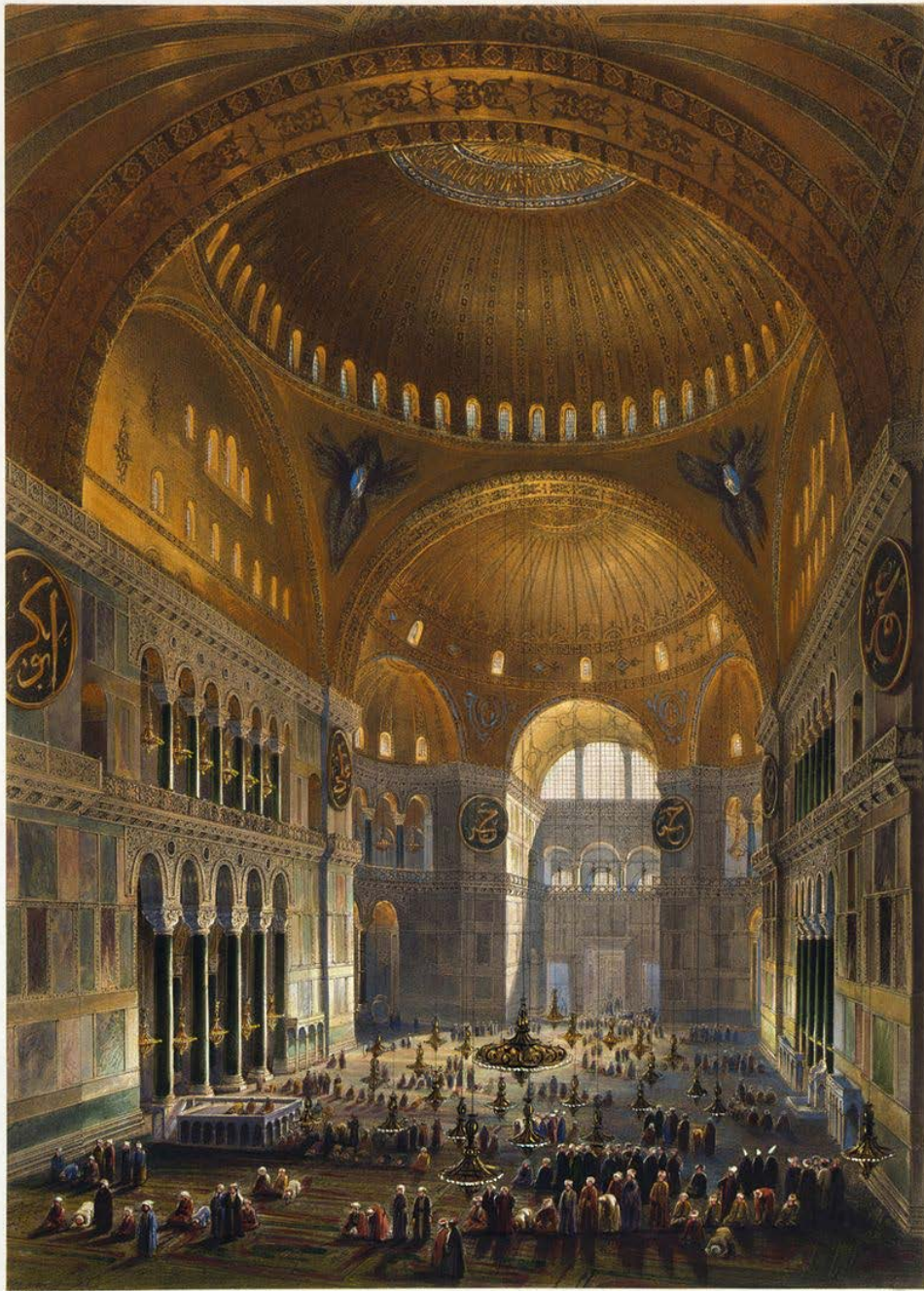
London, Published June 16, 1858 by P & D Colnaghi, 8, 10, 12 & 14 Pall Mall, East.

Printed in London by the Queen.

Brothers Gaspare (1809-1883) and Guiseppe (1822-1891) Fossati, were born in Switzerland and trained as architects in Italy. In 1833 Gaspare moved to St. Petersburg, and in 1836 he became the official court architect. In 1837 he moved to Istanbul to plan the new Russian embassy; he stayed to work on other projects including restoration work and original architecture, often collaborating with Giuseppe.

In 1847 Sultan Abdülmecid (1823-1861) commissioned the Fossati brothers to restore Hagia Sophia, a project which included removing the plaster covering the Byzantine mosaics. Approximately 800 workers were employed for about 2 years; they repaired cracks, strengthened foundations, renovated mosaics, and renovated the mihrab and the minbar.

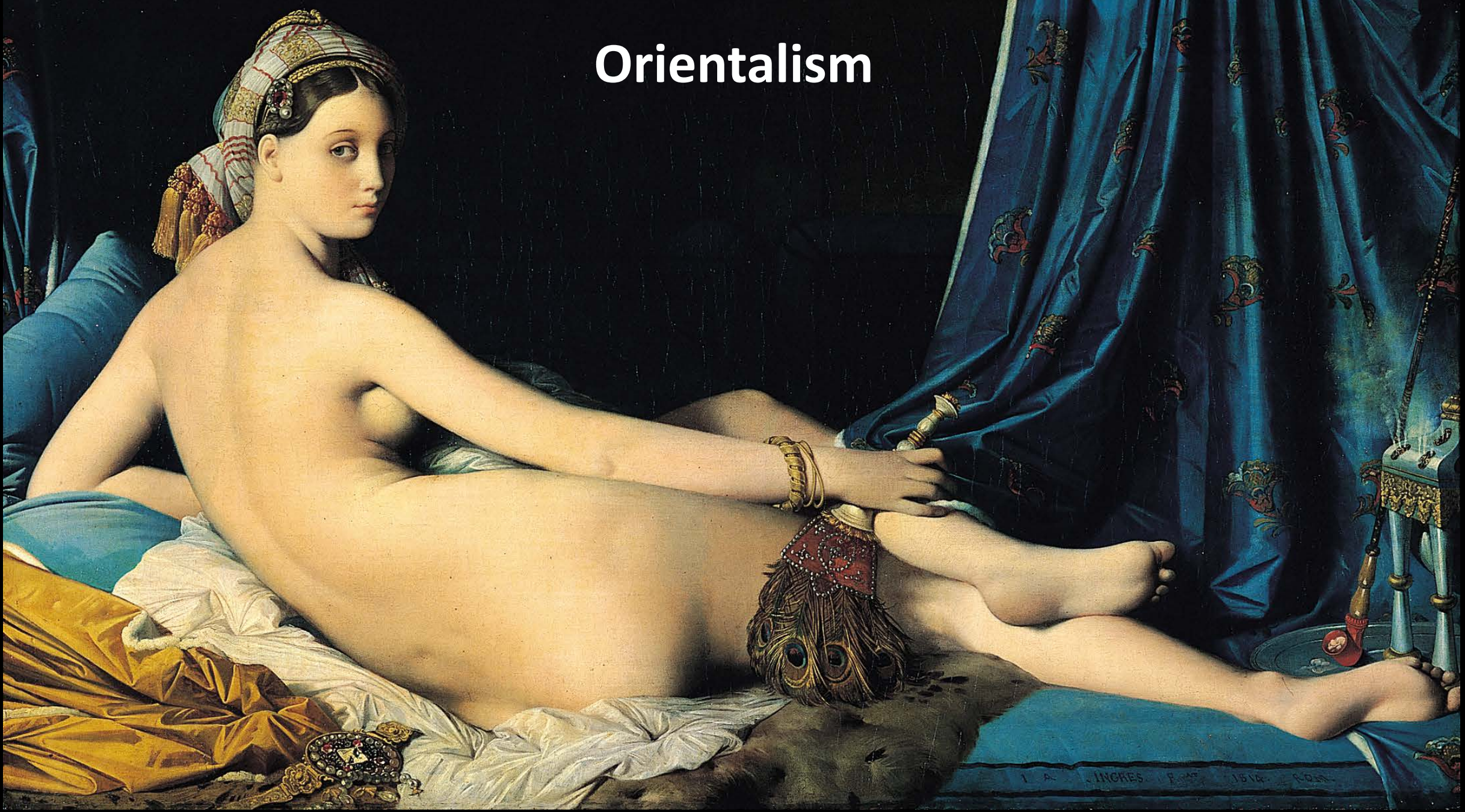




General View of the Nave, Hagia Sophia, from a drawing by Gaspere Fossati, Lithography by Louis Haghe, 1852



# Orientalism



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Grande Odalisque, 1814

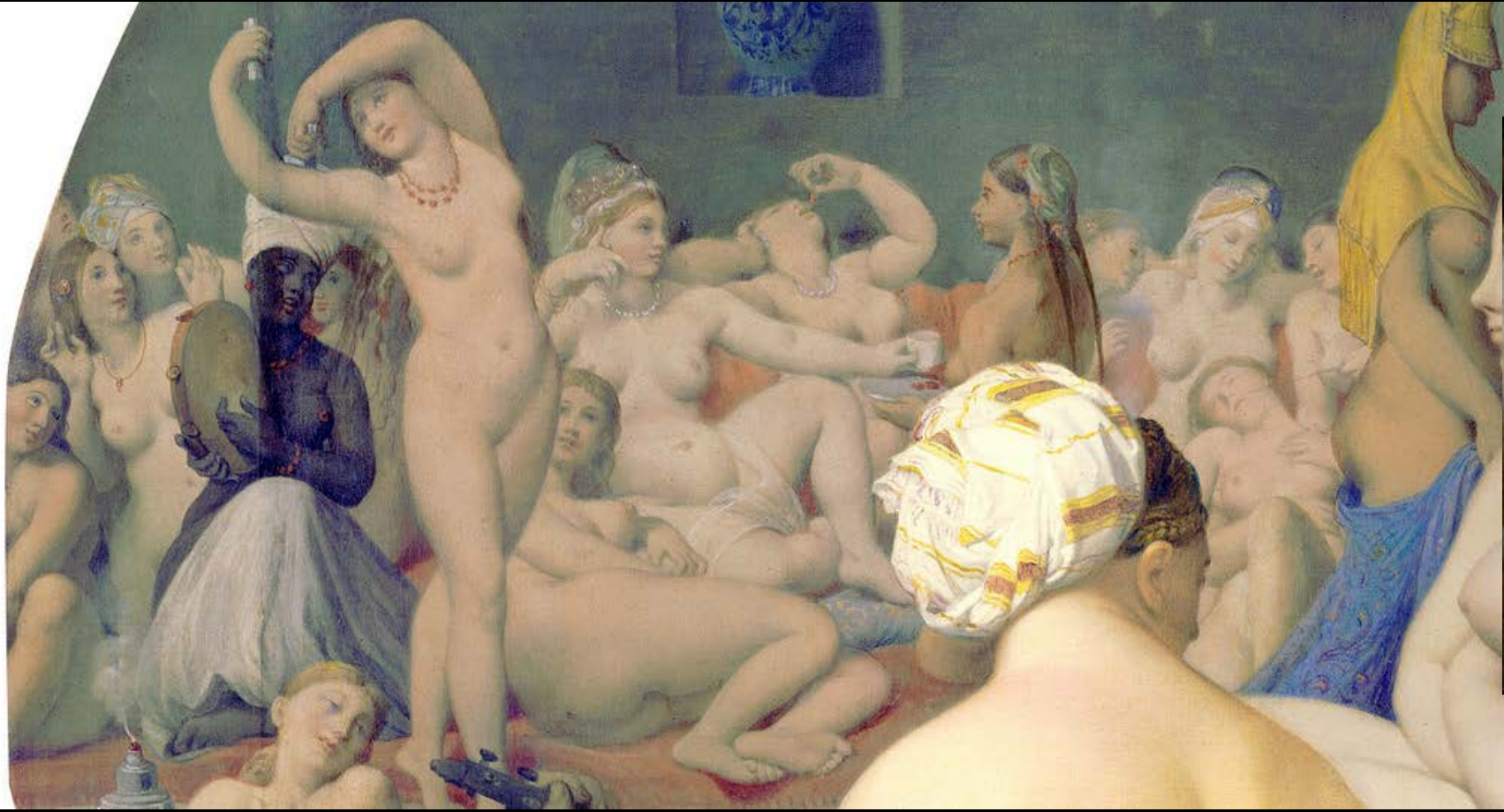




Orientalist painting, representing "the Middle East ", was a genre of Academic art in the 19th century.

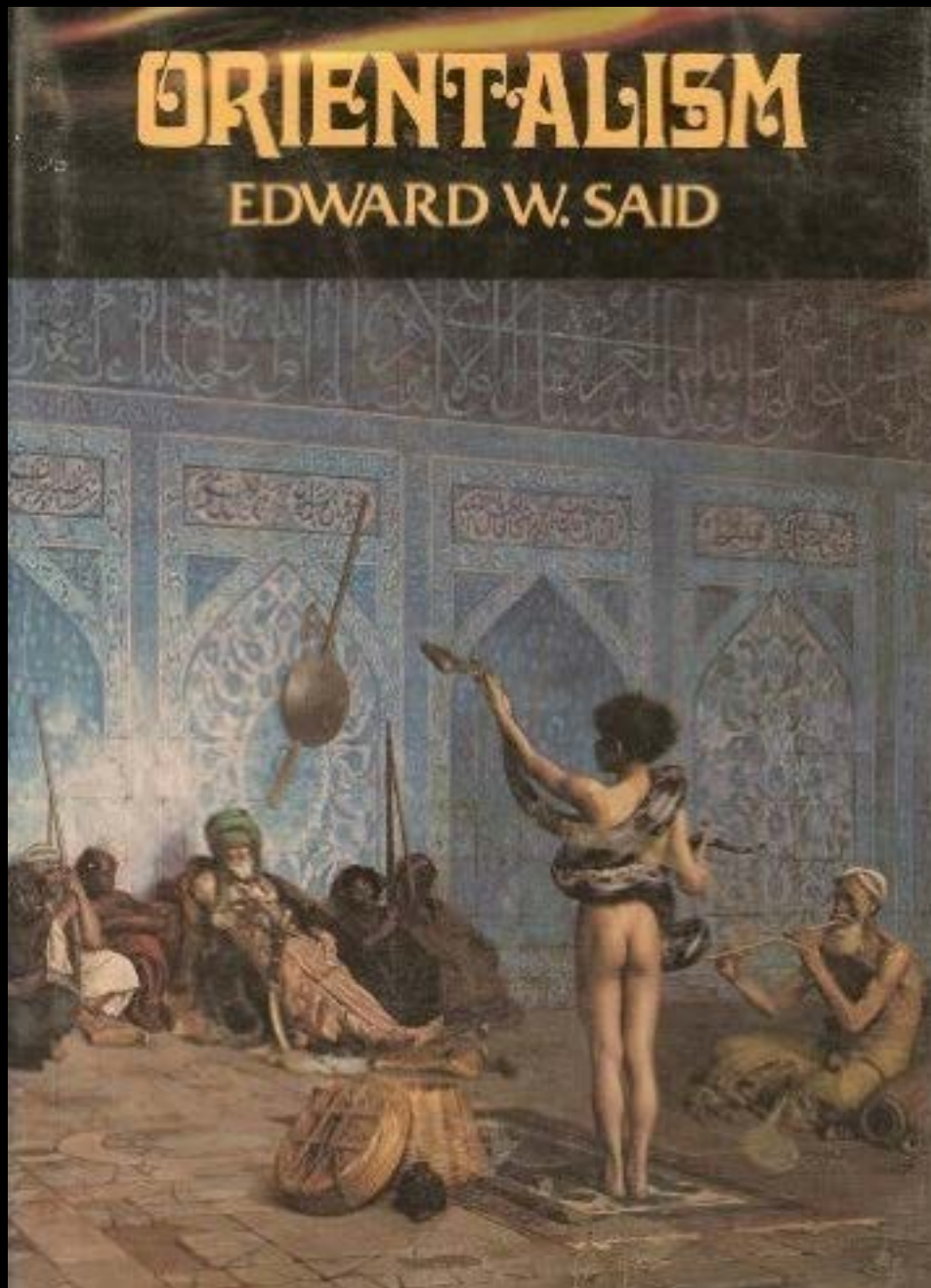
Jean-Auguste-Dominique **Ingres**, The Turkish Bath (Le Bain Turc), 1863





**Orientalism  
Stereotypes**





# Orientalism

- In particular, Orientalist painting, representing "the Middle East", was a genre of Academic art in the 19th century.
- ***Orientalism*** is a 1978 book by Edward W. Said which studies the cultural representations that are the bases of Orientalism, which Said defined as the West's patronizing representations of "The East" — the societies and peoples who inhabit the places of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. According to Said, orientalism (the Western scholarship about the Eastern World) is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies who produced it, which makes much Orientalist work inherently political and servile to power