

**CONSTANTINOPLE/
ISTANBUL: HAGIA
SOPHIA: CHURCH OF
THE HOLY WISDOM**



CONSTANTINOPLE/ISTANBUL: HAGIA SOPHIA: CHURCH OF THE HOLY WISDOM

Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the importance of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, how and why it was constructed, why it was converted from a church to a mosque by the Ottomans in 1453, how its design inspired later western architects and why the great building is seen today as a cultural masterpiece.

Subjects

World History, European History, Art, Architecture

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Istanbul Archaeological Museum
- Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
- Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

Essential Questions

- What is Hagia Sophia? What is its history? Who ordered its construction?
- Why was Hagia Sophia converted from a church to a mosque in 1453?
- What is the current status of Hagia Sophia?

Academic Summary

Paul the Silentiary: The Magnificence of Hagia Sophia, 6th Century CE

Above all rises into the immeasurable air the great helmet [of the dome], which, bending over, like the radiant heavens, embraces the church. And at the highest part, at the crown, was depicted the cross, the protector of the city. And wondrous it is to see how the dome gradually rises wide below, and growing less as it reaches higher. It does not however spring upwards to a sharp point, but is like the firmament which rests on air, though the dome is fixed on the strong backs of the arches....Everywhere the walls glitter with wondrous designs, the stone for which came from the quarries of seagirt Proconnesus. The marbles are cut and joined like painted patterns, and in stones formed into squares or eight-sided figures the veins meet to form devices; and the stones show also the forms of living creatures....

A thousand others [lamps] within the temple show their gleaming light, hanging aloft by chains of many windings. Some are placed in the aisles, others in the center or to east and west, or on the crowning walls, shedding the brightness of flame. Thus the night seems to flout the light of day, and be itself as rosy as the dawn....

Thus through the spaces of the great church come rays of light, expelling clouds of care, and filling the mind with joy. The sacred light cheers all: even the sailor guiding his bark on the waves, leaving behind him the unfriendly billows of the raging Pontus, and winding a sinuous course amidst creeks and rocks, with heart fearful at the dangers of his nightly wanderings-perchance he has left the Aegean and guides his ship against adverse currents in the Hellespont, awaiting with taut forestay the onslaught of a storm from Africa- does not guide his laden vessel by the light of Cynosure, or the circling Bear, but by the divine light of the church Itself. Yet not only does it guide the merchant at night, like the rays from the Pharos on the coast of Africa, but it also shows the way to the living God.

A Description of Hagia Sophia (excerpts)

Gonzalez DB Clavijo to the Court of Timour, 1406

On the same day the ambassadors went to see the church which is called St. Sophia, which is the largest, most honored, and most privileged of all the churches in the city; and it has canons who do duty as if it was a cathedral, and a patriarch, whom the Greeks call Marpollit.

In a court, in front of the church, there are nine very large white marble pillars, the largest I ever beheld, and it is said that a great palace used to stand on the top of them, where the patriarch and his clergy held their meetings. In this same court, in front of the church, a wonderfully high stone column stands, on the top of which there is a horse made of copper, of the size of four large horses put together; and on its back there is the figure of an armed knight, also of copper, with a great plume on his head, resembling the tail of a peacock. The horse has chains of iron round its body, secured to the column, to prevent it from falling, or being moved by the wind. This horse is very well made, and one fore and one

hind leg is raised, as if it was in the act of prancing. The knight, on its back, has his right arm raised, with the hand open, while the reins are held with the left arm. This column, horse, and knight, are so large and high, that it is wonderful to see them. This marvelous horse is said to have been placed here by the Emperor Justinian, who erected the column, and performed great and notable deeds against the Turks, in his time.

At the entrance to this church, under an arch, there is a small but very rich and beautiful chapel, raised upon four marble columns; and opposite this chapel is the door of the church. It is very large and high, and covered with brass, and in front of it there is a small court, containing some high terraces; beyond which there is another door covered with brass, like the first. Within this door there is a broad and lofty nave, with a ceiling of wood, and on the left hand there are very large and well-built cloisters, adorned with slabs of marble and jasper of various colors. The body of the church contains five lofty doors, all covered with brass, and the center one is the largest. The body of the church is the loftiest most rich, and most beautiful that can be seen in the whole world. It is surrounded by three large and broad naves, which are joined to it, so that mass may be heard in all parts of the church. The arches of the naves are of green jasper, and unite the roofs of the nave with that of the body of the church; but the summit of the latter rises much higher than that of the naves. It is dome shaped, and very high, so that a man must have good eyes who looks up from beneath; and the church is one hundred and five paces long, by ninety-three broad; and the dome is supported by four pillars, very large and thick, covered with flags of many colored jaspers; and from pillar to pillar there are arches of green jasper, which are very high and sustain the dome. In the arches there are four very large slabs, two on the right hand and two on the left, which are colored with a substance made from a powder, artificially, and called porphyry. The dome is covered with very rich mosaic work, and, over the high altar, the image of God the Father, very large, is wrought in mosaics of many colors ; but it is so high up, that it only looks about the size of a man, or a little larger, though really it is so large that it measures three palmos between the eyes ; but to him who looks at it, it does not appear to be more nor less than a man, and that is owing to the very great height it is placed above the ground.

On the floor, in the center of the part under the dome, there is a pulpit placed on four columns of jasper ; and the sides of it are covered with flags of jasper ; and this pulpit is surmounted by a capital, raised on eight very large jasper columns ; and here they preach, and also say the gospel on feast days. The walls and floor of the church are lined with flags of jasper, worked all over with ornaments, very beautiful to behold. The part between the arches, which supports the dome, was of very handsome white stone, on which many appropriate figures were inlaid, and above that there was very rich mosaic. The arched roofs of the naves surrounded the dome, except where the high altar stood, all which was worth seeing. The said arched roofs were ninety paces broad, and four hundred and ten paces round, and they were beautifully inlaid with mosaics. In the wall, on the left hand side, there is a very large white slab, on which, among many

other figures, was drawn, very naturally, without any human artifice of sculpture or painting, the most sacred and blessed Virgin Mary, with our Lord Jesus Christ in her most holy arms, with his most glorious forerunner, St. John the Baptist, on one side. These images, as I said before, are not drawn, or painted with any color, or inlaid; but the stone itself gave birth to this picture, with its veins, which may be clearly seen; and they say that when this stone was cut, to be placed in this most holy place, the workmen saw these most wonderful and fortunate images on it, and, as this church was the most important one in the city, that stone was deposited in it. The said images appear as if they were in the clouds of heaven, and as if there was a thin veil before them.

This appeared most wonderful, as a thing which God himself had shown; and at the foot of these images there is an altar, and a small chapel, in which they say mass; and in this church was shown the holy body of a patriarch, which was entire, both in bone and flesh.

The ambassadors were also shown the gridiron on which the blessed St. Lawrence was roasted; and in the church of St. Sophia there are vaults and cisterns, and subterranean chambers, which are strange things, wonderful to see. Near the church there are many fallen edifices, and doors leading to the church, closed and ruined. In the church there is a very large cistern underground, capable of floating ten galleys. All these works, and many others in this church, were shown, so that they can neither be related nor written briefly ; and so great is the edifice, and the wonderful works in the church are so numerous, that they take a long time to see. The roofs are all covered with lead. This church is privileged, and any person, either Greek or of any other nation, who commits a crime, either of robbery or murder, and takes refuge here, may not be taken hence.

On 27 Dec 537, during the Christmas celebration, Byzantine Emperor Justinian I consecrated and opened Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. It was the largest and grandest church in Christendom at that point. It was the third cathedral at the site, built by the Emperor Justinian I after the previous one burned during Nika Revolt in 532 CE.

It took over five years to plan and build the massive church, one far greater than any cathedral in Christendom at that point. Stone was brought in from all over the Byzantine Empire, including such far-away provinces as Egypt, Thessaly (in Greece) and Syria. According to records and reports, over 10,000 workers and craftsmen labored to complete the massive building. The biggest challenge was the central dome which suffered constant downward pressure. The original dome (much shorter and flatter than the one now seen) was completed in 537 but collapsed in 558 and had to be rebuilt using internal ribs. That new dome would later inspire Italian 16th century architects such as Brunelleschi (Florence's Duomo) and Michelangelo (St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican).

Constantinople and Hagia Sophia remained in Christian hands until 1453, although not

under the control of the Roman Pope. In 1054, as a result of the Great Schism, a religious and ecumenical split in the Christian Church that had been brewing for decades, the Eastern Orthodox Church was formed in Constantinople. Hagia Sophia then became the home of the Patriarch, spiritual leader to all Eastern Christians. On 29 May 1453, after over four centuries of standing as a bulwark for Christianity against Islamic armies coming up from Arabia, Constantinople fell to the Ottomans under Sultan Mehmed II and Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque. After the Turkish Revolution brought secular rule to Istanbul in the wake of the Great War, the great building was decommissioned. It became a museum in 1931.

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the importance of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, how and why it was constructed, why it was converted from a church to a mosque by the Ottomans in 1453, how its design inspired later western architects and why the great building is seen today as a cultural masterpiece.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the importance of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia and why it was constructed in the 6th century CE.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why Hagia Sophia was converted from a Christian church to an Islamic mosque by the Ottomans in 1453.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Hagia Sophia's design inspired later western architects and why the great building is seen today as a cultural masterpiece.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How did Islam spread into the Eastern Mediterranean? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Hagia Sophia (20 min)
- Videos – Hagia Sophia (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Hagia Sophia, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced Students should focus on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on Hagia Sophia. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail the importance of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, how and why it was constructed, why it was converted from a church to a mosque by the Ottomans in 1453, how its design inspired later western architects and why the great building is seen today as a cultural masterpiece.

Extension

On tour: Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom), Istanbul

While on tour, students in Istanbul can visit Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom – Ayasofya in Turkish), where they can see for themselves the building that served as the central cathedral for Eastern Christianity for almost 1000 years. Built in the 6th century under orders from Emperor Justinian, it has some of the greatest Christian mosaics surviving from the period. When the Ottomans took the city in 1453, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque and the mosaics were covered or painted over under Islamic law (this action may have actually preserved them). Some of the priceless works of art remain covered today as the Turkish government tries to find a balance between religious and secular needs. Christian and secular tourists, of course, would like to see everything uncovered. Muslims, however, point out that the Quran prohibits idol worship. It is a difficult and delicate issue. In 1930, the mosque was decommissioned and the Turkish government turned the building into a museum, and it is now one of the most visited attractions in the ancient city. Another problem is that Hagia Sophia is almost 1500 years old and badly needs conservation and restoration. Istanbul sits on top of a section of the North Anatolian Fault, one of the most tectonically active fault lines in the world (often compared to the San Andreas Fault in California) and earthquakes occasionally rock the city of 15 million people as the Eurasian and Arabian plates rub together. Hagia Sophia's structure today shows cracks that only get worse with every tremor. Turkey's financial troubles over the last 20 years, however, have made it difficult for the government to find funds. Hagia Sophia is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is considered one of the world's great wonders. International private organizations have stepped in to help fill the void, but more work needs to be done. Students should be reminded that Hagia Sophia is one of the few places on the globe today that Muslims and Christians can both claim and where people of both faiths can visit. Perhaps Hagia Sophia itself can teach us how to live together? Tickets are 25 Turkish Lira (about US\$11.50).

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/paulsilent-hagsoph1.asp
Paul the Silentiary: the Magnificence of Hagia Sophia (primary source) – from the Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- http://archive.org/stream/ser1works26hakluoft/ser1works26hakluoft_djvu.txt
Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo (primary source) – online translated full text source at the Internet Archive website. The section on Constantinople begins on page 29.
- www.doaks.org/library-archives/icfa/special-projects/moving-image-collection/hagia-sophia
Hagia Sophia (website) – from the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, this site includes short videos on specific mosaics in Hagia Sophia and the efforts now undertaken to preserve and restore them.
- www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/haso/hd_haso.htm
Hagia Sophia (website) – from the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- http://miaarnold.weebly.com/uploads/2/3/0/7/23078142/constantinople_worksheet.pdf
Constantinople Worksheet (worksheet PDF)
- www.greece.org/Romiosini/fall.html
Fall of Constantinople 1453 (website)
- www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/a-monumental-struggle-to-preserve-hagia-sophia-92038218/?no-ist
A Monumental Struggle to Preserve Hagia Sophia (web article) – from the Smithsonian Museum
- www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-hagia-sophia
Hagia Sophia (website)
- www.ayasofyamuzesi.gov.tr/en/
Hagia Sophia Museum (website) – from the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism
- <http://ww2.d155.org/cls/tdirectory/SDeodhar/Shared%20Documents/Change%20and%20Revolutions/Byzantines/Hagia%20Sophia.ppt>
Hagia Sophia (PowerPoint) – from Susan Deodhar, history teacher at Crystal Lake South High School (IL)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuBFDCLEcmw
Art History Abbreviated: Hagia Sophia (video) – short 3-minute video by Monica Hahn, Assistant Professor of Art at the Community College of Philadelphia.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=4--ZfYvvLpl
Hagia Sophia – A World's Marvel (video) – short 6-minute video appropriate for all classes.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQzpoN1iMRo
Ancient Mega structures: Hagia Sophia (video) – 50-minute video from the National Geographic Channel.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWljhb1DEQ8
Byzantium: The Lost Empire (video) – This 3 ½ hour video by The Learning Channel is far too long for any in-class showings, but is highly recommended for students and teachers who want to gain a full understanding of the Byzantine Empire. The video is in 3 parts, each approximately 1 hour in length.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yr2NLbZ6YBw
Engineering an Empire: The Byzantines (video) – This 45-minute video from the History Channel, although perhaps too long for many in-class showings, is well worth watching. Highly recommended for students and teachers.

Background Information

- <http://english.istanbul.gov.tr/Default.aspx?pid=343>
Hagia Sophia Museum (website) – from the Turkish government
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hagia_Sophia
Hagia Sophia – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire
Byzantine Empire– Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justinian_I
Justinian – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire
Ottoman Empire – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Constantinople
Fall of Constantinople 1453 – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople
Byzantine Istanbul – Constantinople: The New Rome
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople-hagia-sophia
Byzantine Istanbul – Constantinople: Hagia Sophia
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-fall-of-constantinople-1453
Byzantine Istanbul – Fall of Constantinople 1453
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-great-schism-of-1054
Great Schism of 1054 – Catholic vs. Orthodox

Key Terms

- Byzantine Empire
- Byzantium
- Constantinople
- Great Schism of 1054
- Hagia Sophia
- Islam
- Justinian I
- Orthodox Christianity
- Ottoman Empire

