

15 Hagia Sophia

Names (also known as)

Greek: Ἁγία Σοφία, Holy Wisdom
Latin Sancta Sophia or Sancta Sapiencia
Turkish: Ayasofya Camii

Its full name in Greek is Ναός τῆς Ἁγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας, "Shrine of the Holy Wisdom of God".

Etymology

Hagia = holy
Sophia = wisdom

Location/Description

The Hagia Sophia is located in Istanbul Turkey, formerly Constantinople, formerly Byzantium.

It is built over a fault line and has required continual repairs from earthquake damage.

The first church on the site was inaugurated in 346 AD. For 900 years it was a basilica (church) of the Greek (Eastern) Orthodox patriarch. For most of the next 500 years from 1453 it was a mosque of the Ottoman emperor.

Since 1935 it has been ‘secularised’ as a museum (Ayasofya Müzesi).

The current building is rectangular - 70 metres wide and 135 metres long, comprising an atrium 33 metres long, the domed basilica 70 metres long (the dome itself is 55 metres high and 33 metres in diameter) and the nave 32 metres long . The four minarets rise 60 metres.

The museum received 3.3 million visitors in 2013.

Scriptural references

None. However there is much about the wisdom of God, esp. cp. men’s wisdom

Old Testament

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:

and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. (Prov. 9:9,10)

New Testament

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (James 3:17)

Brief history

The first church on the site was known as the Megálē Ekklēsiā, "Great Church" owing to its size. It was inaugurated in 346 AD but was burnt down in 404.

The second church was inaugurated in 415 but was burnt down in 532 during the Nika Revolt (religious tensions translated into team rivalry during the chariot races and resulted in riots and many fires).

The current building is the 3rd inaugurated on the site. It took only 6 years to build and was opened in 537 (in comparison Notre Dame cathedral took nearly a hundred years to build).

In 726, the emperor Leo the Isaurian issued edicts against the veneration of images and ordered the army to destroy all icons – ushering in the period of iconoclasm. At that time, all religious pictures and statues were removed from the Hagia Sophia.

Constantinople was captured during the Fourth Crusade, (1204–1261) and the basilica became a Roman Catholic cathedral. It was ransacked and desecrated by the Latin Christians. Many reputed relics – such as a stone from the tomb of Jesus, the Virgin Mary's milk, the shroud of Jesus, and bones of several saints – went to churches in the West.

Mehmet II captured the city in 1453. Minarets were built around the perimeter. Islam also forbids the representation of any living being in art so Christian mosaic icons were covered with whitewash.

In 1934, the Turkish government secularised the building, converting it into a museum. The original mosaics were restored.

(Compiler – John Tierney)

