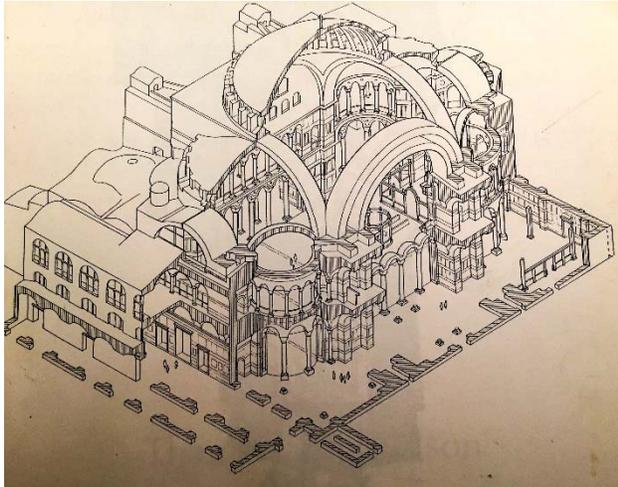


# “The Great Church of Thessaloniki”

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Isometric of Hagia Sophia

It's hard not to speak in superlatives when describing this epic cradle of civilization. During our escorted tour of Istanbul in Turkey, we were able to see such world-famous sites as Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace and the Blue Mosque, along with seldom-visited wonders.

The design of Hagia Sophia is best understood as starting at the center of the building, given that the design unfolds from the center. Standing under the apex of the dome, the building at first glance appears amorphous, but in time, the shapes become clear. To the east and west, space expands longitudinally, to the east into the forechoir and the apse, and to the west into the entrance bay. The shapes develop

both centrally around a middle axis and longitudinally, from entrance bay to the apse.

Adding to the grandeur of the space are the precious materials, subtly graded in color, that shimmer over the interim. From dark gray marble plaques of pavement rise high gray marble pedestals that hold columns of green marble with large white veins. Red porphyry columns stand in the conchs that flank the apse and the entrance. In certain locations, mother of pearl rinceau (foliage patterns) are inlaid into black marble and silver, gold, and mosaics are also part of the decorative scheme for the interior of the church.

The character of spatial enclosure boasts of an ineffable beauty, for it



Partial Interior of Hagia Sophia



Partial Interior of Hagia Sophia

subtly combines its mass with the harmony of its proportions, having neither excess nor any deficiency in as much as it is more pompous than ordinary. It is also considerably more decorous than those which are huge beyond measure; and it abounds exceedingly in gleaming sunlight. As a pastor in our tour group concluded, the interior space is not illuminated by the sun from the outside, but rather that radiance is generated within, so great an abundance of light bathes this shrine all around.



The Portraits of Angels on the Arch of the Bema

Its interiors are richly decorated with artistic mosaics depicting various religious scenes and supported by massive marble pillars. The magnificent part in the architecture of the Hagia Sophia is its impressive central dome, which has diameter of 31.24 meters and a height of 55.6 meters. It miraculously appears weightless due to the continuous chain of arched windows under it, which also served to flood the entire interior with sunlight.

The beauty of the church of Hagia Sophia is perceived as being superior to the firmament....it is not only

illuminated by the light of the sun but above all by the light of the “sun of truth” and the transcendent light of the “world of the spirit”. The physical light within the Hagia Sophia is the divine presence made palpable: it is the perceptible manifestation of the divine essence that pervades the sacred space. The level of light seems to be reciprocally related to the colors and materials of its interior decoration.

The Hagia Sophia is a spectacle of great beauty, stupendous to our tour group, those who visit and altogether to those who hear about it.... its breadth and length have been fittingly proportioned that it may, without impropriety, be described as being very long and extremely broad. The opportunities presented were seized and what have been chiefly a geometric and structural “tour de force” became something much greater. Such can be the strange alchemy of artistic creation.



The Mosaics over the Southwestern Entrance (The Horologion Gate)



Exterior Photo of Hagia Sophia