

**The Hagia Sophia
&
The Influence of the Byzantine Culture on Religious Buildings**

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Thesis

This research is to prove that since the introduction of Christianity into the Eastern Roman Empire, no other civilization has influenced religious buildings more than the Byzantines.

Perspectives and Main Focus:

This research project will focus on how the Byzantine culture has influenced many other religious buildings based on the creation of the Hagia Sophia. I will focus on the art and architecture of the Hagia Sophia and the structure itself. My primary sources as well as my secondary sources will provide insight into the Byzantine culture and the influences the Hagia Sophia has on other religious buildings built after it. My sources will provide evidence in backing up my thesis statement and argument. I am aware of the perspectives not taken in my research such as the physics of how The Hagia Sophia was built nor am I taking a war perspective in my research. My main focus is the influence the structure has on other religious buildings and that does not necessarily include only Christian religions.

Historical Significance:

Hagia Sophia is the most significant piece of architecture and landmark in Constantinople, now known as Istanbul. It is one of the greatest pieces of architecture that represents The Byzantium culture and faith. Hagia Sophia was first built around 360 BC by Emperor Constantius, son of Emperor Constantinos. It was the largest church in Constantinople until it was destroyed in 404 AD during riots. A new church was quickly built 11 years later and this church was built to be a basilica and was bigger than the first Hagia Sophia. The second church built is shown here:



Unfortunately this too was destroyed in 532 AD during the Nika revolt, which was said to be the most violent attack Constantinople has had. After the riot, Justinian, Emperor at the time demanded that a new and ever lasting church be replaced in the name of Hagia Sophia place. Emperor Justinian was going to make sure that this Hagia Sophia was going to be the most extravagant and elaborate church anyone had ever seen which is exactly what he did. By hiring state of the art mathematicians and architectures, the most significant architecture of The Byzantine's was built and is still standing today to tell the great history of the Byzantium.

Below is a photo of what Hagia Sophia looks like today.

¹ "Al Altan's Hagia Sophia", 2007. Date Viewed 1/03/2010.
<http://www.focusmm.com/civilization/hagia/history.htm>



This next photo shows what the Hagia Sophia looked in 1852.



The name Hagia Sophia, formally a church, comes from the Greek name Αγία Σοφία which translates to the church of holy wisdom. With its history of being an Orthodox Patriarchal Basilica first than converting into a mosque and now is used as a museum for

² “Hagia Sophia, Istanbul”, 2005. Date Viewed: 27/02/2010. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-hagia-sophia>

³ “Hagia Sophia, Istanbul”, 2005. Date Viewed: 27/02/2010. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-hagia-sophia>

people to view, Hagia Sophia is most importantly known for its architectural uniqueness and its religious artistic influences it has in relation to the Byzantium culture and history.

Of the empires in the city of Istanbul, Byzantium and Ottoman empires were the most well know. To this day, these two cultures are still very much visible in the city and Hagia Sophia is a perfect example that combines the cultures where people can view both the Byzantium and Ottoman cultures under one unique dome.

This photo illustrates the dome feature of the Hagia Sophia that you see today in the structure of so many religious buildings.



The Hagia Sophia described everything about the Orthodox religion. It was the most important building in the Eastern world because it stood for what the Byzantine culture was about. "Hagia Sophia summed up everything that was the Orthodox religion," says Roger Crowley, author of 1453: The Holy War for Constantinople and the Clash of Islam

⁴ "Hagia Sophia, Istanbul", 2005. Date Viewed: 27/02/2010. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-hagia-sophia>

and the West. "For Greeks, it symbolized the center of their world. Its very structure was a microcosm of heaven, a metaphor for the divine mysteries of Orthodox Christianity."⁵

Argument/Discussion

The Byzantine Empire had a major impact on the Christian religion. When Constantine, the Roman Emperor rebuilt the East Roman Empire after the fall of the West in 330 AD, he introduced the Byzantine Empire to the Christian religion. Not only did the Byzantine people now have something to worship they had somewhere to go to worship and pray, a church. One of the most extraordinary churches built in Constantinople was Hagia Sophia. Hagia Sophia is known for its impeccable art, architecture and size but most importantly this church has influenced other religious buildings to be built. Since the introduction of Christianity into the Eastern Roman Empire, no other civilization has influenced religious buildings more than the Byzantines. It was the great architectures built in the Byzantium Empire such as the Hagia Sofia that influenced other religious building to be built around the world which began with Roman Empire Constantine when he professed the religion of Christianity.

Influential Buildings After The Hagia Sophia:

After Constantine the Great (Roman Emperor) professed the religion of Christianity he began to have churches built that illustrated the Christian religion. The Byzantine people really liked the look of basilicas which was influenced by the Catholic church and Orthodox churches. One aspect the Byzantine and Islamic architecture has in common is the common dome feature in the architecture of their building. "The most celebrated example is the Taj Mahal (A.D. 1630) at Agra, India. Byzantine's advancement in

⁵ [Smithsonian](#). "Fading Glory". Dec2008, Vol. 39 Issue 9, p54-64

developing the dome created a new style in global architecture, for no other civilization had designed buildings, especially religious buildings, as did the Byzantines.”⁶

This is a photo of the Taj Mahal:

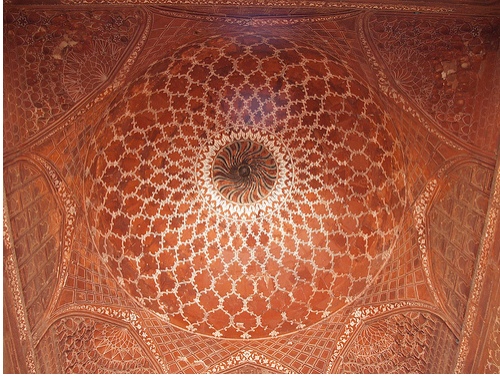


Looking at the Taj Mahal in comparison to the Hagia Sophia, there is a lot of similarities between the two. Firstly, the dome is quite similar, the four pillars that surround the building and the overall structure. Not only is the structure quite similar illustrating influence from the Byzantine's Hagia Sophia but the religious icons found inside the building are comparable as well.

Taj Mahal and mosaic art found in the dome of the building:

⁶ “Byzantine Architecture”, 2000. Date viewed: 17/02/2010.
<http://library.thinkquest.org/C005594/Medieval/byzantine.htm>

⁷ Regan, Joe. Picture was taken by my father when he recently went to India.



Hagia Sophia:



As you can see the patterns and art are quite similar between the two with the round oval shape and smaller circle in the middle, and the outer web design. This is evidence that the Hagia Sophia influenced the structure of the Taj Mahal.

Other more modern day buildings that may have been influenced by the Hagia Sophia that children would be aware of would be the Parliamentary Library in Ottawa, and the Capitol Building in Washington, DC. Although these are not religious building, the architecture of the buildings, itself could have played a role in the structure of these buildings.

Relation to Education

Through my research and understanding of the Byzantine culture and a thorough look into the art and architecture of the Hagia Sophia, I will be able to take what I have learned and teach my class about the significance of the Hagia Sophia and how it has influenced many religious building to be built. Students can also just focus on the similarities of the art and architecture of non religious building as well. After a class discussion and introduction of the Byzantines art and architecture, using examples of photos and drawing that I have researched; students will have a good idea of examples of the Byzantine style of art and architecture, which they will see in the most influential piece of art and architecture, The Hagia Sophia. Students will also be able to compare and contrast the Hagia Sophia to modern day art and architecture⁸. This research will allow students to analyze and research modern day religious building that they think could have been influenced by the Hagia Sophia and explain it through discussion and a writing assignment.

Conclusion

Overall, my research illustrates what I have learned about the history of the Byzantine culture in relation to the art and architecture of the Hagia Sophia. Through this, I have demonstrated how it has affected modern day religious structures. Many may think that this has nothing to do with Canadian history but it was the art and architecture of the Hagia Sophia that expanded Christianity into Western Europe which eventually led into Canada. This is evident because as shown in my research, we see many religious

⁸ Çakmak, Ahmet Ş, Taylor, Rabun M., & Durukal, Eser. "The structural configuration of the first dome of Justinian's *Hagia Sophia* (A.D. 537–558): An investigation based on structural and literary analysis". *Soil Dynamics & Earthquake Engineering*; Apr2009, Vol. 29 Issue 4, p693-698.

structures in Canada and all over the world that resemble the art and architecture found in the the Hagia Sophia. It is the importance of the Byzantine culture and its relation to the Hagia Sophia and how the structure has had an impact on other religious building found in Canada.

Secondary Sources/Perspectives:

Muller, Herbert. *The Uses of the Past; Profiles of Former Societies*. USA: Oxford University Press, 1957.

- I choose to use this source because it will be helpful in arguing that the religion of Christianity which was what the church of Hagia Sophia started out to practice, it influenced many other religious buildings to mimic the art and architecture of the Hagia Sophia.

Mainstone J. Rowland. *Hagia Sofia: Architecture, Structure, and Liturgy of Justians's Great Church*. USA: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1988.

- This book talks a lot of the exterior and interior design of the Hagia Sophia which will help show the commonalities between the Hagia Sophia sacred images found in the church and many other religious churches and building around the world. The book also explicitly illustrates how the church was built and why it was built the way it was by showing photographs and drawings of the church.

“Byzantine Architecture”, 2000. Date viewed: 17/02/2010.

<http://library.thinkquest.org/C005594/Medieval/byzantine.htm>

- This site has excellent information of the Byzantium structure, Hagia Sophia. This cite talks about the Hagia Sopia being the first to introduce the dome-like structure that is now seen in so many churches and religious building today. They relate the Byzantine and Islamic cultures who share the common trend of the dome feature in architecture which has been passed to the Muslims.

“Byzantine Empire”, 2010 Lycos Inc. Date viewed: 19/02/2010.

<http://www.lycos.com/info/byzantine-empire.html>

- In the beginning stages of my research, I learned a lot about the Byzantine Empire from this website. I was able to learn a lot about the Byzantine cultures and where it came from. After reading through this site, I found myself asking many questioning which lead me to develop my thesis. This website will provide the answers to the many questions people and myself have asked about the Byzantine Empire and the influence the Hagia Sophi has had on Christianity.

Çakmak, Ahmet Ş, Taylor, Rabun M., & Durukal, Eser. “The structural configuration of the first dome of Justinian's *Hagia Sophia* (A.D. 537–558): An investigation based on structural and literary analysis”. *Soil Dynamics & Earthquake Engineering*; Apr2009, Vol. 29 Issue 4, p693-698.

- This article is a great source because it talks about the structure of the Hagia Sofia and the famous dome that is replicated in many churches and religious building seen today. This article is also taken from a lesson plan perspective designed for

middle and high school students to study which will be useful to see how I can go about teaching a class about the Byzantine culture.

[Smithsonian](#). "Fading Glory". Dec2008, Vol. 39 Issue 9, p54-64

Primary Sources (All primary sources were retrieved from secondary sources):

Mainstone J. Rowland. *Hagia Sofia: Architecture, Structure, and Liturgy of Justians's Great Church*. USA: Thames and Hudson Inc, 1988.

- This book depicts many great photo's of the Hagia Sophia which I can use in my research project to demonstrate that the Byzantines were the first to build the Hagia Sophia and to have drawing and morals of religious icons in the church itself. These images will provide evidence that it was the Byzantine culture who influenced other religious building seen today to use similar religious icons as well as many churches who have the dome feature.

"Hagia Sophia, Istanbul", 2005. Date Viewed: 27/02/2010. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-hagia-sophia>

"Al Altan's Hagia Sophia", 2007. Date Viewed 1/03/2010.
<http://www.focusmm.com/civilization/hagia/history.htm>

- These sites have many photos as well that will help my readers to define and distinguish the Byzantine culture and how extraordinary the Hagia Sophia really was back in the Golden Era.

Primary source not retrieved from secondary source

- ➔ I incorporate some photos of the Tai Mahal in India so my viewers can compare and contrast the The Hagia Sophia and The Tai Mahal. I am including this because The Tai Mahal is a great illustration of a dome feature that was built after The Hagia Sophia and therefore is evidence that The Tai Mahal is a religious building influenced by the Byzantine culture and The Hagia Sophia.
- ➔ All photos of The Tai Mahal are provided by my father, as he has gone to The Tai Mahal and has taken photos which he has allowed me to use in this research project.