

Istanbul Revealed

Sinan's Mosques



Introduction

Previewing this book?

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Travel guidebooks for the ultra curious, Approach Guides reveal a destination's essence by exploring a compelling aspect of its cultural heritage: art, architecture, history, food or wine.

Presiding over the Ottoman empire at the height of its power, sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (ruled 1520-1566) championed the construction of large Friday mosques throughout Istanbul. Mimar Sinan, the chief royal architect who was himself a convert to Islam, oversaw this building campaign, transforming the landscape of the capital city. Sinan's mosques — designed for sultans, royal family members and high-ranking government and military officials — are sublime works of art and architecture, featuring massive domes that take on mountain-like profiles, soaring pencil-shaped minarets, masterful Iznik tile decoration and inscriptions designed to communicate God's will to the faithful. They are yours to discover.

What's in this guidebook

- **Art and architecture review.** We provide background on the great architect and his design aesthetic, isolating trademark features that you will see again and again while touring. To make things come alive, we have packed our review with high-resolution images.
- **Tour of the highlights.** Following our tradition of being the most valuable resource for culture-focused travelers, we offer a tour of Sinan's top Friday mosques in Istanbul (itinerary below). For each, we reveal its most important architectural and decorative features and offer a discussion that ties it all together.
- **Advice for getting the best cultural experience.** To help you plan your visit, this guidebook supplies logistical advice, maps and links to online resources. Plus, we give our personal tips for getting the most from your experience while on location.
- **Information the way you like it.** As with all of our guides, this book is optimized for intuitive, quick navigation; information is organized into bullet points to make absorption easy; and images are marked up with text that explains important features.

Itinerary

This guidebook offers a tour of Sinan's top ten Friday mosques in Istanbul: Atik Valide; Kara Ahmed Pasha; Kilic Ali Pasha; Mihrimah Sultan, Edirnekapi*; Nisanci Mehmed Pasha; Rustem Pasha*; Sehzade Mehmed*; Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Kadirga*; Suleymaniye*; and Sultanahmet / Blue mosque (post-Sinan)*. See our [Google Map](#) for the detailed tour itinerary. Also, to help travelers with limited time prioritize their visits, we have marked the six stops that are absolute must-sees with asterisks (*).

Contact us anytime

Our readers are our greatest inspiration. Email us at founders@approachguides.com to let us know about your experience with Approach Guides — many of our recent updates have been inspired by customers like you. We personally respond to every email.

We hope this cultural travel guidebook provides fresh insights into Istanbul's fantastic Islamic architecture and sets you on a path to making your own discoveries.

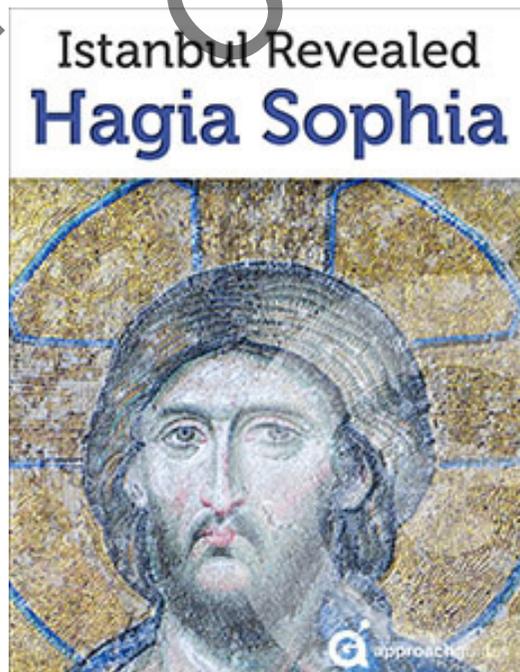
Enjoy your trip!



David and Jennifer Raezer
Founders, Approach Guides
www.approachguides.com

Other Cultural Sites in Istanbul: Hagia Sophia

A wonder of 6th century engineering Istanbul's church of [Hagia Sophia](#) stood as a symbol of the Byzantine empire for over 900 years. So great is its magnetism that it was adopted by the conquering Ottomans and converted into a mosque to signal their rightful inheritance of the empire's distinguished legacy. And the magic remains on full display today: a massive dome that appears to float weightlessly above the floor, filtered light that infuses the interior with a glow symbolic of God's wisdom and gold-filled mosaics that encourage contemplation. It is yours to [explore with Approach Guides](#).



Get the Approach Guide to [Istanbul's Hagia Sophia](#)

Istanbul Revealed: Sinan's Mosques

Version 1.0

by [David Raezer](#) and [Jennifer Raezer](#)

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—
I have built for thee, O emperor, a mosque
which will remain on the face of the earth till the day of judgment ...”
—

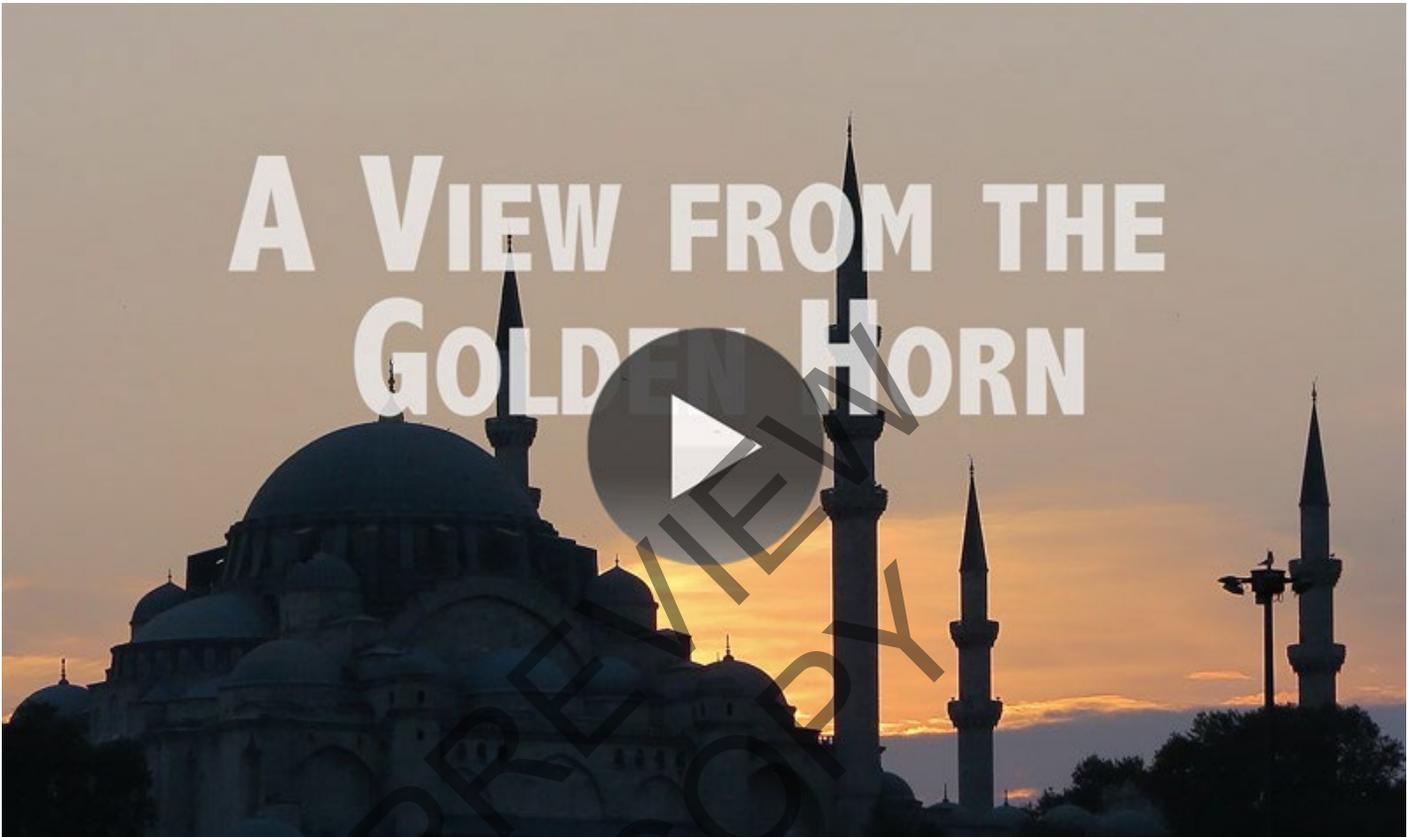
Sinan to sultan Suleyman the Magnificent,
on completion of his mosque, Suleymaniye,
as recounted in Evliya Celebi’s travelogue.

[Download a free copy of
Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s 1834 translation of
Evliya Celebi’s “Book of Travels \[Seyâhatnâme\].”](#)

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Watch Before You Go

Watch the [Istanbul episode of On Location](#), an online travel show from the creators of Approach Guides. In this quick video of Istanbul's skyline, we highlight the principal monuments in the old city (Fatih) visible from the Galata tower across the Golden Horn.



[Watch the video](#) on Istanbul's skyline.

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SETTING THE STAGE

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Suleyman the Magnificent



Fig. 1. Suleyman the Magnificent.
Painting by: Titian, 1530.

Before we introduce this guidebook's central protagonist, Koca Mimar Sinan, it is valuable to set the stage by profiling the Ottoman sultan who enabled him to leave such a profound mark on Istanbul's urban fabric: Suleyman the Magnificent ([Fig. 1](#) and [Fig. 2](#)).

Background on the Sultan

- **Reign.** Suleyman I – known as “the Magnificent” in the West and “the Lawgiver” (*Kanuni*) in Ottoman territories – ruled as Ottoman sultan from 1520-1566. He was symbolically linked to the biblical Solomon not only in name (Suleyman is Arabic for Solomon), but also as the tenth ruler in the line of Ottoman sultans (Solomon was King David’s tenth son).
- **Presided over peak of the empire.** Suleyman presided over the Ottoman empire during its golden age, fighting battles that brought its controlled territories to the greatest extent and sponsoring unrivaled artistic, literary and architectural endeavors.
- **Wife and children.** In a break with Ottoman ruling tradition, Suleyman married one of the women of his harem. Taking the royal name Haseki Hurrem Sultan, Suleyman’s wife bore him four sons: Sehzade Mehmed, Bayezid, Selim (Suleyman successor known as Selim II) and Cihangir; they also had a daughter, Mihrimah Sultan. The royal family is closely tied to a number of the mosques that we will see on our tour that follows.
- **Champion of orthodox Sunni Islam.** Although known for decadence in his youth (as we get some indication of in Fig. 1), Suleyman became increasingly pious with age and championed an orthodox version of Sunni Islam over Sufism (mystical Islam) that had prevailed under prior rulers. As part of this initiative, he established *sharia* (sacred law derived from the Quran) as the legal foundation of the empire, while placing certain areas not addressed by the Quran (criminal law, land ownership and taxation) under his sole jurisdiction.
- **Sultan and caliph.** As both secular “sultan” (head of state) and religious “caliph” (supreme religious leader), he viewed spreading Ottoman Sunni Islam through warfare as his most important role: fighting Christian infidels in the West (the Pope and the Holy Roman emperor) and Shiite Islamic heretics in the East (Safavid Persians).

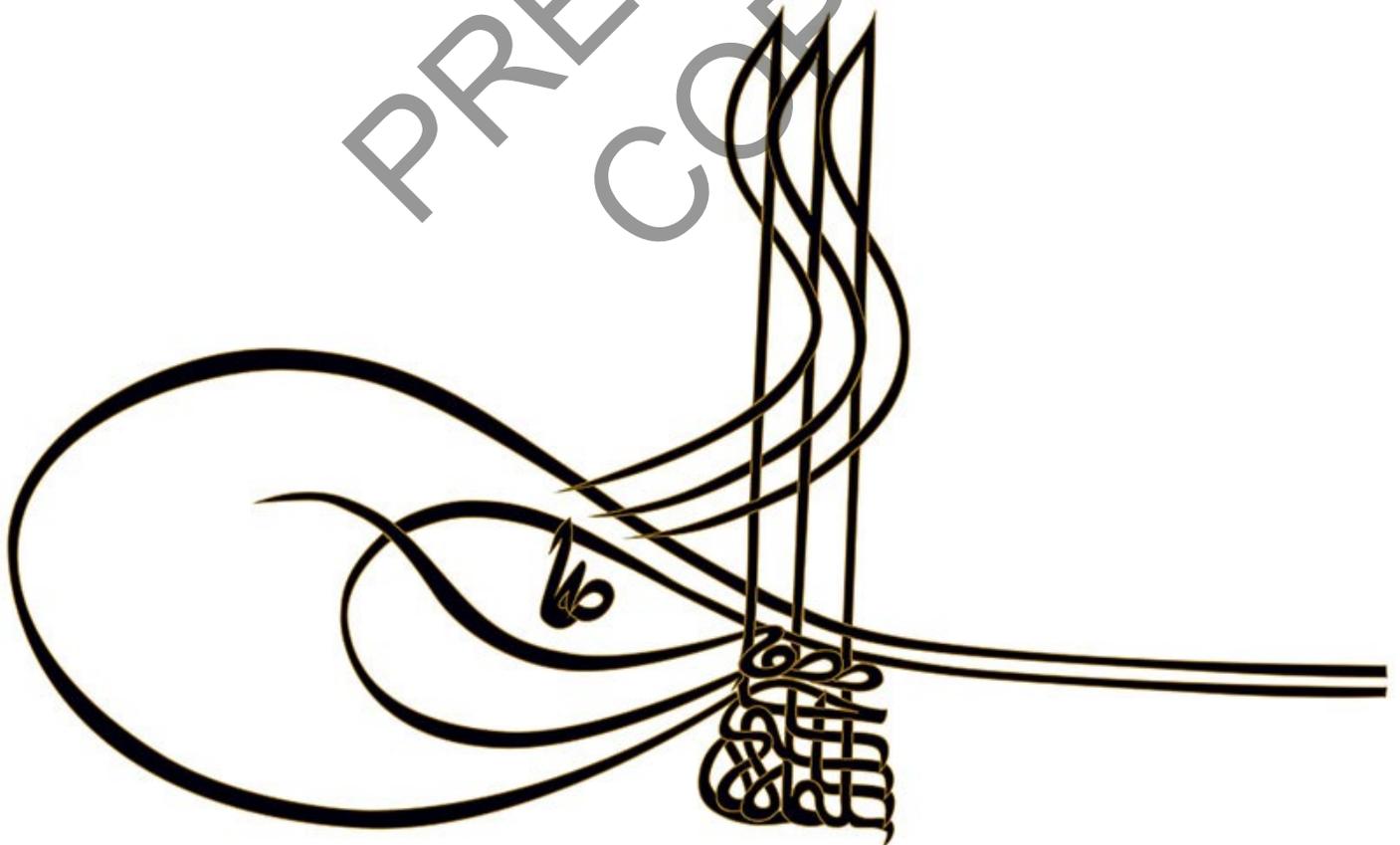


Fig. 2. Royal signature (*tughra*), Suleyman the Magnificent.

Janissary Corps as a Weapon of State

Although the janissary corps had been operative for well over a century, it gained significant momentum under Suleyman.

- **Origins.** Created by sultan Murad I (ruled 1362-1382), the janissary corps consisted of elite infantry units that functioned as the Ottoman sultan's private standing army.
- **Kul system.** In a practice likely originating in the conscription of Christian war prisoners, the corps was sustained through a "collection" or "gathering" (*devsirme*), in which Christian boys — typically under 20 years old and of Armenian or Greek ethnicity — were taken from their families in the Ottoman provinces of the Balkans and Anatolia, converted to Islam and enlisted as janissaries (Fig. 3). These *kuls*, slaves of the sultan, were subsequently trained and educated to the highest standard at the royal palace.
- **Warriors to statesman.** After completing their mandatory service in the military, janissary corps members often took on political positions in the sultan's government. In fact, the highest positions in the military and the government were reserved for these slave-converts, including grand vizier, the sultan's top-ranked government official.
- **Religious affiliation over ethnicity.** Given the prominence of non-Turkish officials, the *kul* system necessitated that the Ottoman state base itself on shared Sunni Islamic religious affiliation rather than Turkish ethnicity.

A mechanism for Suleyman's centralization of power

Suleyman used the janissary corps as means to consolidate power and assure loyalty.

- **Military protection.** While the bulk of the Ottoman military was necessarily comprised of free-born Muslim cavalymen (*sipahis*), the janissary corps gave the sultan an independent fighting force that was fiercely loyal only to him. It proved an invaluable deterrent against challenges to the sultan's authority from the ranks of the military.
- **Political protection.** The promotion of loyal *kuls* to the highest ranks in Ottoman government similarly centralized control, insulating the sultan from political challenges.

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Sinan's Style



Fig. 6. A Sinan mosque [Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Kadirga].

With the basics covered, we move on to what makes a mosque identifiable as one designed by Sinan. We begin with its fundamental features — how it is laid out and structured — and then continue with the most striking aspects of its appearance.

Author tip: *A Sinan cheat sheet of sorts, this section is a distillation of the most important things to consider when touring. For each of the ten signature mosques profiled on our tour itinerary, as much as possible, we draw reference back to these major themes. We hope it serves as a valuable resource in helping you appreciate what Sinan did to produce these inspiring works of religious architecture.*

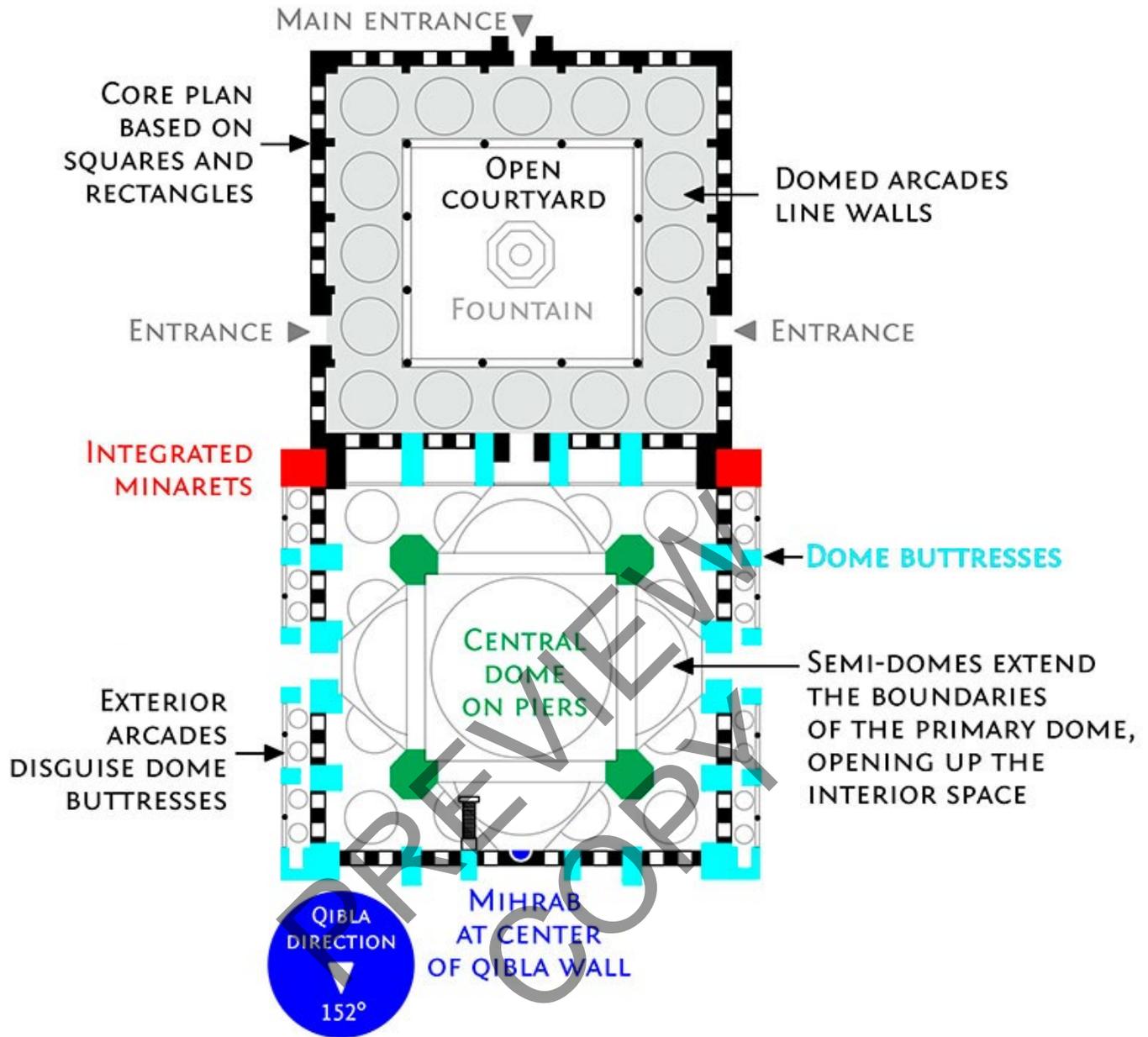


Fig. 7. Layout, typical Sinan mosque [Sehzade Mehmed].

Layout and Structural Features

- **Open courtyard with domed arcades.** The open courtyard of a Sinan mosque is typically lined with domed arcades (grey highlights in Fig. 7).
- **A massive dome at prayer hall's center.** The prayer hall has a highly centralized plan with a massive dome rising over the center (Fig. 7). Made from brick and encased in lead, the dome is the pivot around which the layout gravitates, drawing the eye of the visitor to the cen-

ter and upward.

- **Tension between straight and curved lines.** The layout for a Sinan mosque is based exclusively on squares and rectangles (Fig. 7). In stark contrast with the round dome above, there are no curved wall surfaces. This strict split — straight lines below and curved above — creates an unresolved tension in all of Sinan’s mosques, perhaps maintained for a symbolic reason: the curved surface of the dome, associated with the heavenly realm, remains out of reach during one’s earthly existence and therefore its associated form cannot be employed for earthbound walls.
- **Dome’s support system determines layout.** The dome’s support system dictates the mosque’s layout and the arrangement of its interior space. At the core of the support system is a group of four, six or eight piers (green highlights in Fig. 7); arches springing from the tops of the piers hold a transition zone (typically of pendentives) that transforms the square, hexagonal or octagonal shape of the pier grouping to the circle required hold the dome. Finally, this core is reinforced with a series of buttresses, typically embedded in the enclosure walls (light blue highlights in Fig. 7).
- **Open interior space.** The prayer hall of a Sinan mosque is a wide-open interior space that appears as a unified whole (Fig. 7): (a) to open the space along the vertical axis, it employs semi-domes to extend the central dome’s effective boundaries; (b) to open it along the horizontal axis, it has few columns, making the full expanse of the enclosed area clearly visible. This clean, modern aesthetic was chosen for a very practical reason: to maximize the available floor space for congregational prayers, the centerpiece of Suleyman’s conservative Sunni agenda. The wide-open aesthetic is very different from that of hypostyle mosques — dominated by rows of interior columns — that prevails in many parts of the Islamic world.
- **Tightly-integrated minarets.** Minarets are tightly integrated into the rectilinear walls of the courtyard and prayer hall (red highlights in Fig. 7).
- **Istanbul’s qibla direction.** Consistent with standard practice throughout the Islamic world, the qibla wall in Sinan’s mosques faces Mecca: in Istanbul, this corresponds to south-south-east at 152 degrees (dark blue highlights in Fig. 7). For purposes of simplicity, in discussing mosque layouts during our tour, we refer to the qibla wall direction as south.
- **Location sensitivity creates irregular perimeter walls.** Finally, Sinan allocated particular attention to the positioning of his mosques, considering: how they would be viewed from up close (at entrances) and far away (views from the Golden Horn were most important); how they would interact with existing mosques; and how they would relate to the natural landscape. As a result, the perimeter walls surrounding his mosques often take on irregular plans in order to balance these objectives.

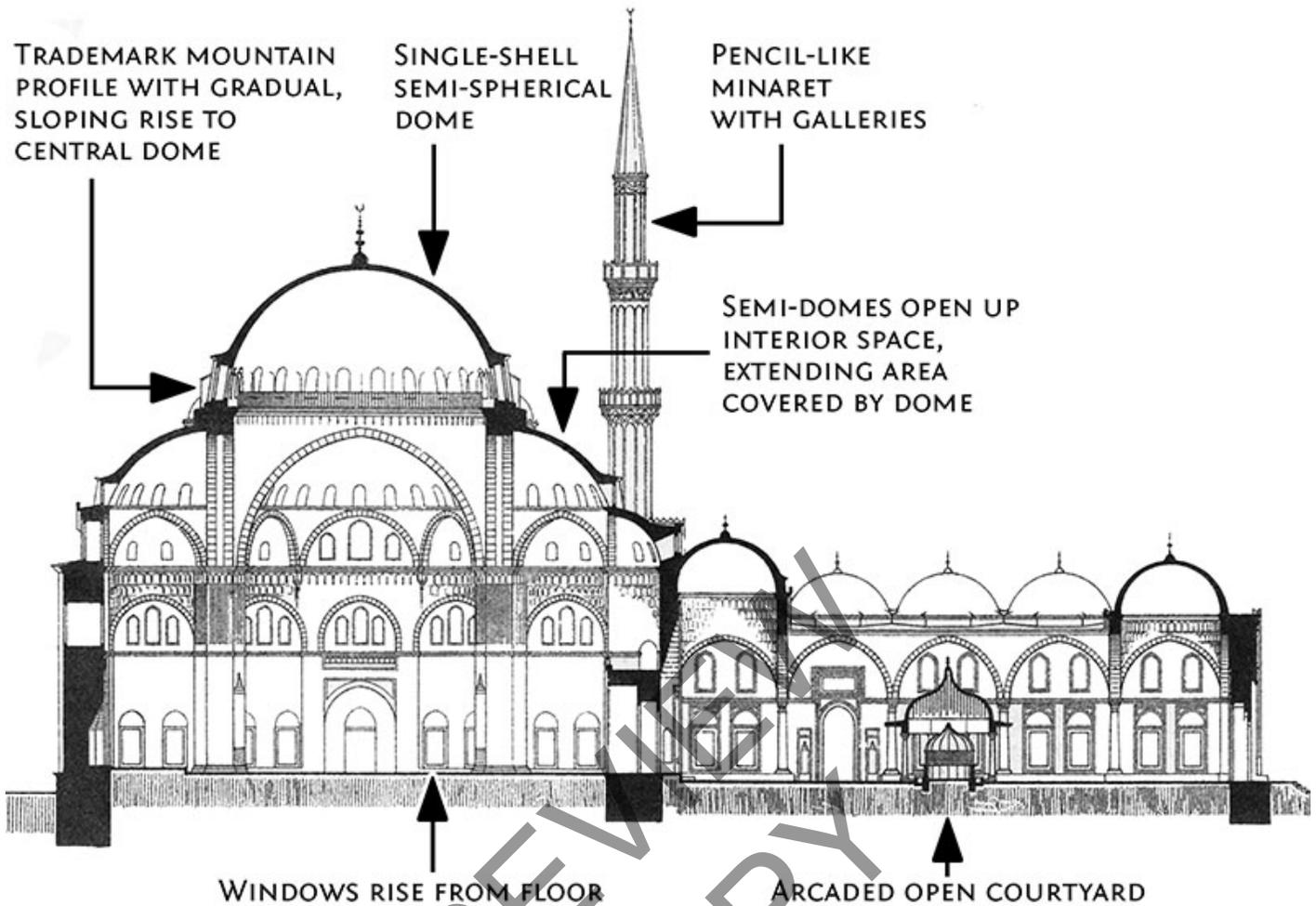


Fig. 8. View from east, typical Sinan mosque [Sehzade Mehmed mosque].
Drawing by: Cornelius Gurlitt, 1912.

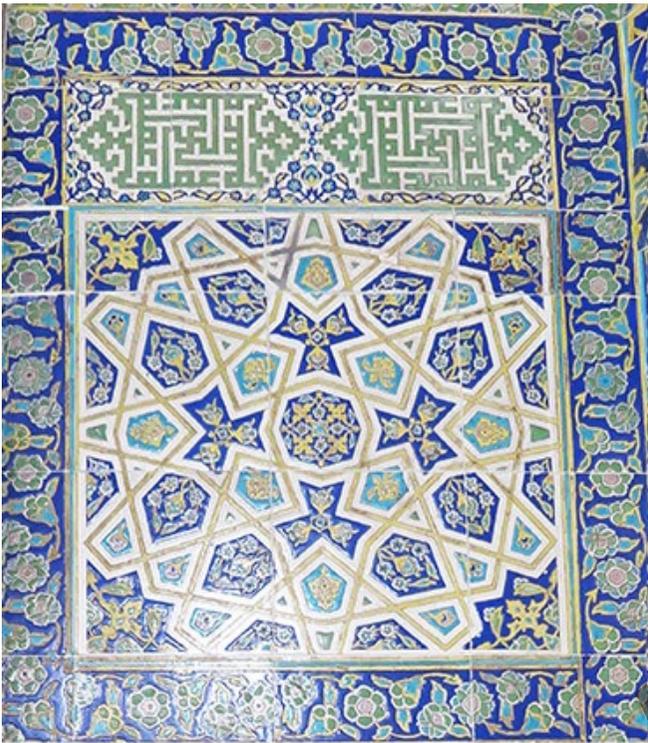
Appearance

- **Mountain-like profile.** A Sinan mosque has a mountain-like profile, emphasizing a gradual and uninterrupted rise to the dome. The effect is achieved by massing curved features — semi-domes, mini-domes and tower buttresses — around the central dome (Fig. 6 and Fig. 8). Although this changes late in Sinan's career (1569-1588) — a period in which designs reveal an even greater emphasis on the dome, so that there is no sloping mountain, only the vertical peak — it is a recurring theme on our tour.
- **Single-shell, semi-spherical domes.** Across the board, Sinan's domes are based on single-shell designs, in which the exterior and interior portions have the same shape (Fig. 8). Further, they have semi-spherical profiles, perhaps to preserve the sphere's symbolic linkage with the dome of heaven. This differs from the double-shell pointed domes built earlier in many parts of the Islamic world and those built simultaneously in Renaissance Europe.
- **Transparency between interior and exterior.** Mosque architecture in other parts of the Islamic world tends to focus on the interior, nearly to the exclusion of the exterior expression. For Sinan, however, exterior and interior were inseparable and he sought to show their

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Iznik Ceramic Tiles



CUERDA SECA TILES

- ALL-OVER COLOR WITH EQUIVALENCE OF FIGURE AND GROUND
- SMALLER, MORE INTRICATE DESIGNS
- GREATER FOCUS ON GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION



IZNIK TILES

- WHITE GROUND GIVES IMPRESSION OF DESIGNS DRAWN ON LIGHT-COLORED STONE WALLS
- LARGE-SCALE DESIGNS IMPROVE VISIBILITY
- GREATER NATURALISM

Fig. 12. Comparison, *cuerda seca* versus Iznik tiles.
Cuerda seca from Sehzade Mehmed's mausoleum; Iznik from Rustem Pasha.

Iznik tiles are another signature decoration in Sinan's mosques. In this section, we consider their trademark features, explain the manufacturing process and make suggestions for the best mosques in which to see them.

Trademark Features

Breaking from the Persian-inspired decorative tradition based on *cuerda seca* tiles that had prevailed in Ottoman architecture since the early 15th century, Sinan embraced locally-made Iznik tiles that better suited his distinctive aesthetic vision. To demonstrate what makes Iznik tiles unique, our discussion points out how they differ from *cuerda seca*.

- **Prominent white ground.** *Cuerda seca* tiles were crafted to cover the underlying brick-and-mortar building material used in Persian architecture. However, Sinan did not want tiles to function as an opaque decorative covering. Quite the opposite. Consistent with his prefer-

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TOUR MAP AND ITINERARY

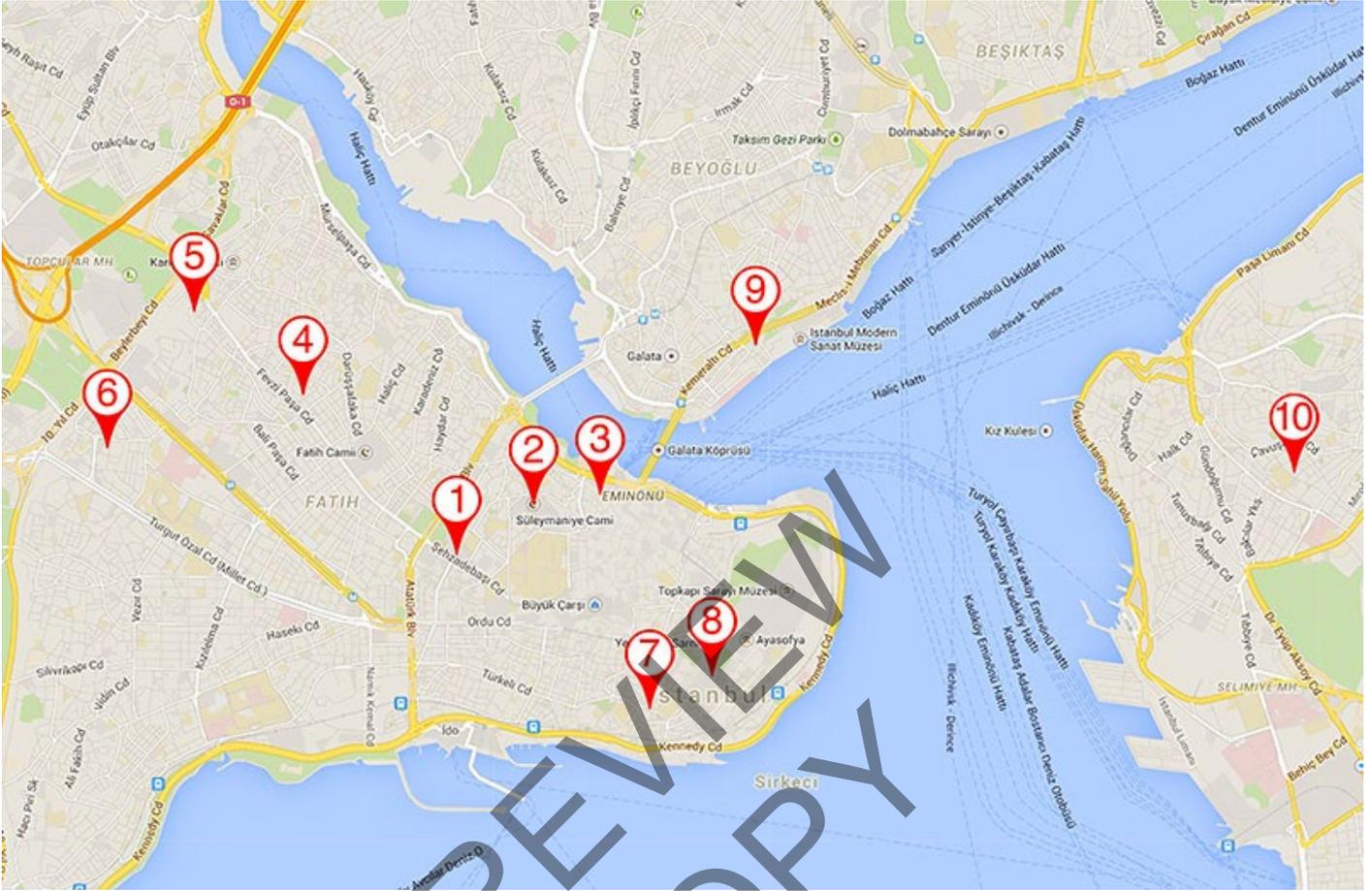


Fig 16: Istanbul map with tour itinerary. For more detail, view in [Google Maps](#).

Our tour profiles Sinan's ten best Friday mosques in Istanbul. The first eight stops on the itinerary are located in the old city (Fatih), beginning at Sinan's first sultanic commission, Sehzade Mehmed, and continuing in a counter-clockwise path. The tour then jumps across the Golden Horn to Beyoğlu before finishing in Uskudar, on the Asian side (Fig. 16).

Author tip: Look for the asterisks. To make things easier and allow you to focus on the real highlights, particularly if you have limited time, we have marked those mosques that we believe are must-sees with asterisks (*). Also, if at all possible, we suggest sticking with our touring order — especially starting with Sehzade Mehmed — since it helps in understanding the architect's stylistic development.

1. Sehzade Mehmed *
2. Suleymaniye *
3. Rustem Pasha *
4. Nisanci Mehmed Pasha
5. Mihrimah Sultan, Edirnekapi *
6. Kara Ahmed Pasha

7. Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Kadirga *
8. Sultanahmet aka Blue mosque *
9. Kilic Ali Pasha
10. Atik Valide

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Touring Tips

We offer a few tips to help you smoothly navigate your mosque visits.

- **Access.** In Istanbul, as throughout Turkey, non-Muslims are allowed access to mosques (with some restrictions, discussed below).
- **When to visit.** All of the mosques profiled in this guidebook are functioning religious structures. Although many are open throughout the day, the largest ones tend to close to non-Muslims during prayer sessions while the smallest ones are only open during prayer sessions (due to staffing constraints). To help you plan, we give suggested visiting times for each mosque on our tour.
- **Prayer times (*salat*).** It is helpful to be familiar with the five daily prayer times: *fajr* (dawn), *dhuhr* (when the sun begins to descend after reaching its highest point in the sky), *asr* (when the shadow of an object is the same length as the object itself, plus the shadow length at *dhuhr*), *maghrib* (sunset) and *isha* (when the sun's light is gone from the western sky). Since they are based on the height of the sun in the sky, prayer times change (ever-so-slightly) on a daily basis — visit this website to get up-to-date [Istanbul prayer times](#).
- **No shoes.** Before you enter a mosque's prayer hall (or step on any associated carpeted floor), simply remove your shoes and place them in the rack to the side of the entrance.
- **Conservative clothing.** Men and women should wear clothing that covers the core of the body: from knees to shoulders. Further, women are expected to use scarves to cover their heads.
- **Photography allowed.** In most cases, photography (without flash) is permitted inside the prayer hall. Under each mosque's profile, we provide the photography restrictions, if any.

Author tip: *At smaller mosques on our itinerary, non-Muslim visitors are allowed to be present during prayer services, but are asked to stand at the back of the prayer hall and refrain from photography. We highly recommend visiting at this time, as it affords unique insights available in few other places in the Islamic world. Rustem Pasha (#3) and Mihrimah Sultan, Edirnekapi (#5) are two of our favorites for prayer-session visits.*

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2. Suleymaniye *



Fig. 25. Suleymaniye, dominating the view of the old city from the Golden Horn.

Visiting

- **Location.** Near the intersection of Vefa Cd and Fetva Yks, only a ten-minute walk from Sehzade Mehmed. See our [Google Map](#).
- **Visiting hours - closed during prayer sessions.** Open daily from 9am - 5:30pm; access is restricted to the northern part of the prayer hall. It is closed during [prayer sessions](#).
- **Photography.** Photography (without flash) is allowed.

Background

- **Built.** 1550-1558; mausoleum 1566-1568.
- **Sultanic mosque.** The mosque was sponsored by Suleyman the Magnificent to serve as his Friday mosque and hold his mausoleum.
- **Prominent position above Golden Horn.** The mosque occupies a prominent position on a hill — the third of Constantinople's famed seven hills (emulating those of Rome) — overlooking the Golden Horn ([Fig. 25](#)).
- **Coincides with apex of Suleyman's power.** Suleymaniye was built at the apex of Suley-

man's power, when the borders of the Ottoman empire reached their greatest extent. Only a few years before beginning construction on the mosque, he signed a treaty (Truce of Adrianople) with the Holy Roman emperor Charles V who agreed to pay tribute for peace; this submission was a major victory for Suleyman, who viewed himself as rightful inheritor of the Roman legacy. With the western frontier under control, he looked eastward, initiating a series of battles against the Persian Safavids. While he did not achieve complete victory, he was able to credibly pronounce himself universal caliph, the successor to the Prophet Muhammad and ruler of the Islamic world.

- **The complex.** The mosque is the centerpiece of the Suleymaniye complex (*kulliye*). Other structures clustered around the mosque include Suleyman's mausoleum (and also that of his wife Hurrem), five madrasas, a medical school, a hospital, a hospice, an elementary school, a guest house and a bathhouse (*hammam*).
- **Sinan's tomb.** Sinan's tomb is also part of the complex, situated in the northeast corner (see our [Google Map](#)).
- **A historical account.** We encourage you to [download Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's 1834 translation of "Book of Travels \[Seyâhatnâme\]"](#) by Evliya Celebi (1611-1682), a travelogue based on the author's experiences in Ottoman and neighboring lands. It is an entertaining read, including this passage recounting a group of European visitors' impressions of Suleymaniye:

The humble writer of these lines once himself saw ten Franc [European] infidels skilful in geometry and architecture, who, when the door-keeper had changed their shoes for slippers, and had introduced them into the mosque for the purpose of shewing it to them, laid their finger on their mouths, and each bit his finger from astonishment when they saw the minarets; but when they beheld the dome they tossed up their hats and cried Maryah! Maryah! and on observing the four arches which support the dome on which the date A.H. 944 (A.D. 1537) is inscribed, they could not find terms to express their admiration, and the ten, each laying his finger on his mouth, remained a full hour looking with astonishment on those arches.

Afterwards ... I asked their interpreter how they liked it, and one of them who was able to give an answer, said, that nowhere was so much beauty, external and internal, to be found united, and that in the whole of Fringistun [Europe] there was not a single edifice which could be compared to this.

I then asked what they thought of this mosque compared with Aya Sofiyah [Hagia Sophia]; they answered, that Aya Sofiyah was a fine old building, larger than this, and very strong and solid for the age in which it was erected, but that it could not in any manner vie with the elegance, beauty, and perfection of this mosque, upon which, moreover, a much larger sum of money had been expended than on Aya Sofiyah.

Layout

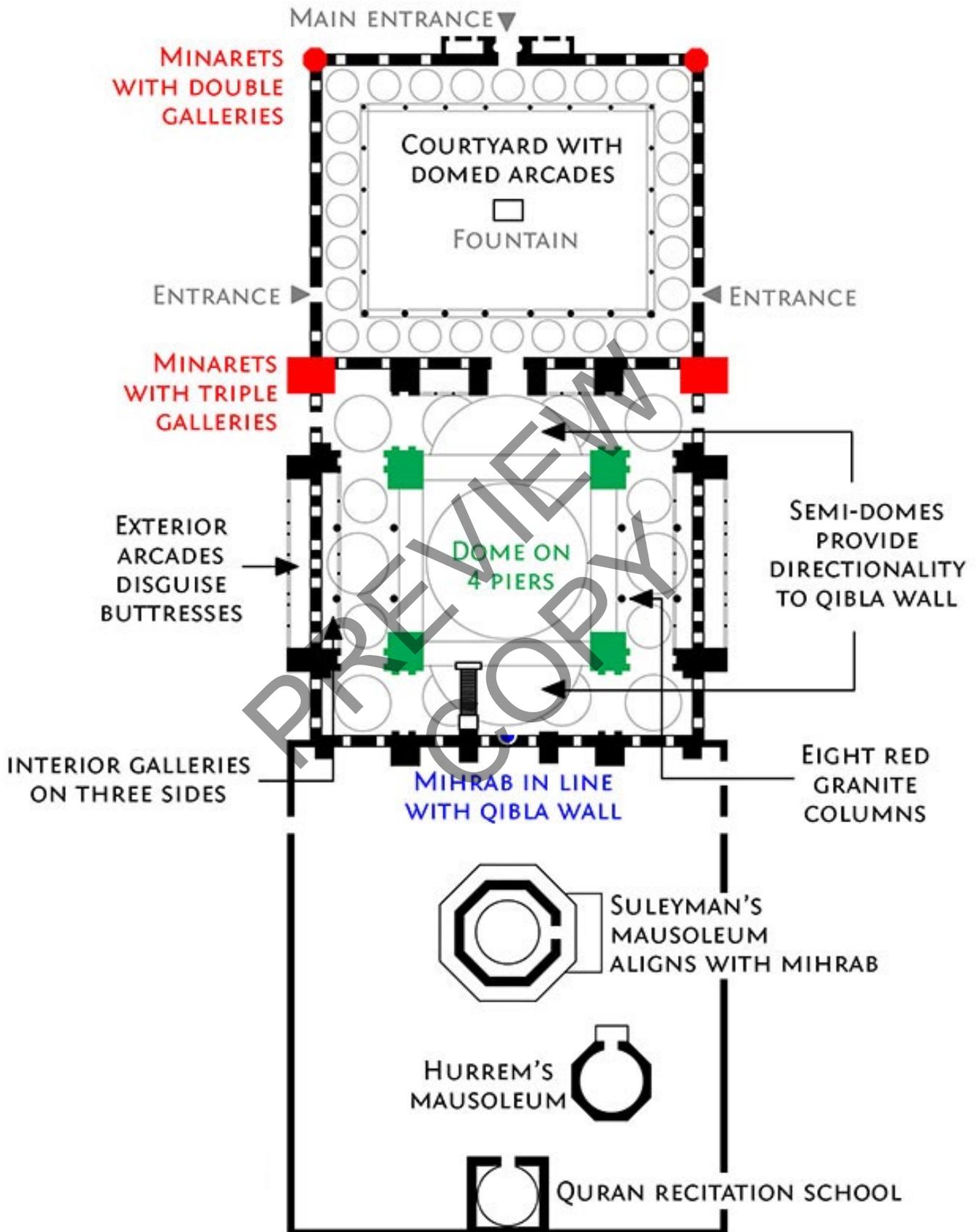


Fig. 26. Layout, Süleymaniye.

Plan Resembles Hagia Sophia

The basic features of the mosque's layout were likely inspired by Hagia Sophia.

- **Dome on four piers.** As at Hagia Sophia, Suleymaniye has a large dome supported by four massive piers in a square arrangement (green highlights in Fig. 26). Pendentives resting on the arches that spring from the piers broker the transition from square base to round dome. At 26.5 meters (87 feet) in diameter, the dome is Sinan's second largest, only exceeded in size by that of his son's mosque, Selimiye, in the city of Edirne (31.2 meters / 102 feet). To put these dome sizes into perspective versus the benchmark: Hagia Sophia's dome, given its slightly elliptical plan, ranges from 30.9-31.9 meters (101-105 feet).
- **Semi-domes afford directionality.** Again as at Hagia Sophia, semi-domes on the north and south sides extend the dome's boundaries and provide directionality, driving movement from the prayer hall's entrance to the qibla wall (Fig. 26).
- **Tympana provide light.** Also similarly, the east and west sides have no supporting semi-domes. Rather, the tympana under the dome's supporting arches are filled with windows that provide interior light (Fig. 26).

If you wish to compare the two more thoroughly, Hagia Sophia's layout is provided in Fig. 13 in the section entitled "Inspiration: Hagia Sophia."

Other Defining Features

- **Courtyard.** The marble-paved open courtyard that leads to the prayer hall is lined with domed arcades. Note that there are more domes than at Sehzade Mehmed (28 versus only 16), signaling Suleyman's greater status. A rectangular fountain is at the center (Fig. 26).
- **Four minarets.** To show its association with the sultan, the mosque has four minarets (red highlights in Fig. 26): the two on the outer periphery of the courtyard are 56 meters (184 feet) tall and have two balconies; the two at the junction of the courtyard and the prayer hall are 76 meters (249 feet) tall and have three balconies. A comparison with Sehzade Mehmed shows how the sultan's status was communicated by way of the minarets: the number of minarets is boosted (from 2 to 4) and the number of galleries is increased (from 2 to 3).
- **Exterior arcades.** Just as at Sehzade Mehmed, exterior arcades run between the large dome buttresses embedded in the prayer hall's east and west walls (Fig. 26). However, there are two levels, rather than Sehzade Mehmed's one.
- **Interior galleries.** Unlike Sehzade Mehmed, however, there are galleries lining the east and west walls of the prayer hall's interior (Fig. 26).
- **Eight columns on the interior.** Again unlike Sehzade Mehmed, Suleymaniye has eight red-granite spolia columns on the interior: four on the east side and four on the west (Fig. 26). They were required to support the tympana and the mini-domes over the side aisles.
- **Mihrab in-line with qibla.** The mihrab niche is in line with the qibla wall (blue highlights in Fig. 26).
- **Two mausoleums.** The mosque compound houses two royal mausoleums south of the prayer hall (Fig. 26): (a) the larger mausoleum of Suleyman; and (b) the smaller mausoleum of Haseki Hurrem Sultan, his wife.

Exterior

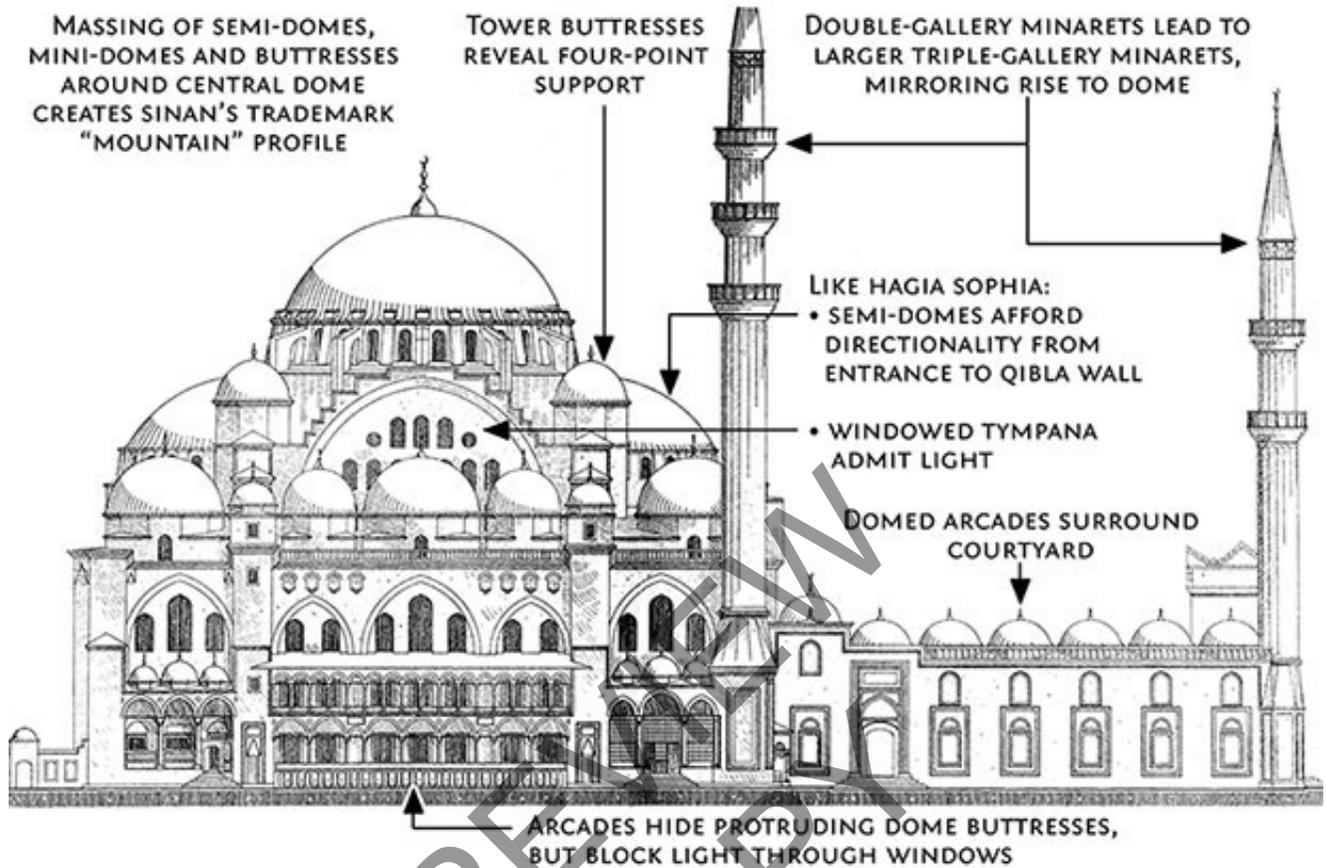


Fig. 27. View from west, Süleymaniye.
Rendering at top by: Cornelius Gurlitt, 1912.

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Interior

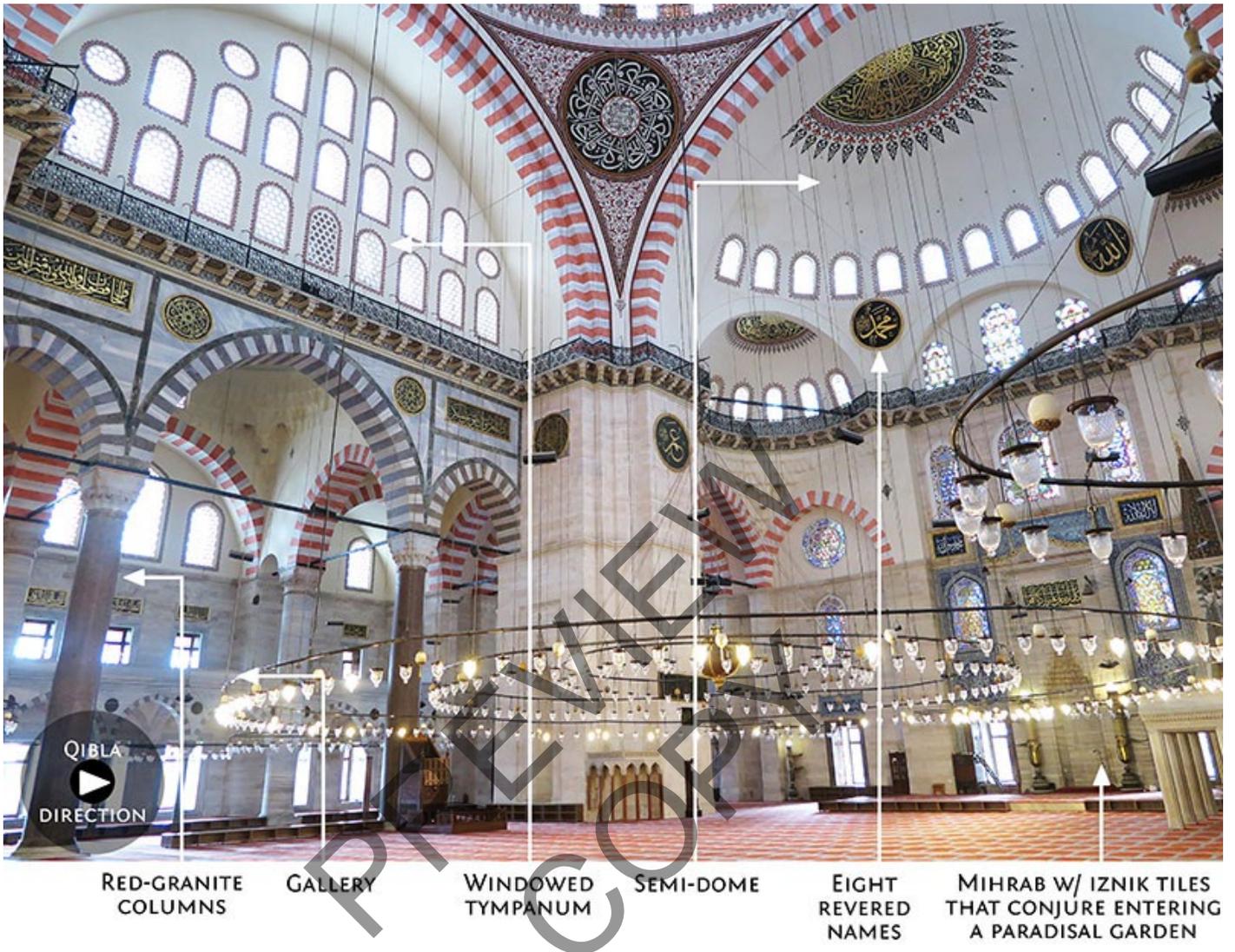


Fig. 30. Interior, looking southeast, Süleymaniye.

The View from the Entrance

- **Directionality to qibla wall.** Once inside, it is clear how the connected cavities of the semi-domes — coupled with the windowed vertical faces of the tympana — lead visitors from the entrance to the qibla wall (Fig. 30). This north-to-south directionality breaks from the centralization of Şehzade Mehmed.
- **Exedra-muqarnas combination.** As at Şehzade Mehmed, the transition from the curved surfaces of the semi-domes to the rectilinear walls is smoothed by the exedra-muqarnas combination (Fig. 30).
- **Less open interior space.** The presence of the eight magnificent red-granite columns, coupled with the galleries on the east and west sides, creates less of a wide-open feel than at Şehzade Mehmed (Fig. 30). The precious columns held great symbolic significance, however:

they had been used in earlier sultanic mosques (Mehmed II, Bayezid II) to connote royal status.

- **Eight revered names.** Repeating the model set in motion at Sehzade Mehmed, roundels on the semi-domes' spandrels and the piers' shafts hold inscriptions with the eight revered names (Fig. 30).
- **More conservative decorative aesthetic.** The walls of the prayer hall are plain and largely free of decoration, a change from Sehzade Mehmed. Decorative details are concentrated nearly exclusively in two areas: the central dome (painted) and the qibla wall (tiles) (Fig. 30).
- **Iznik tiles on qibla wall.** The *cuerta seca* tiles of Sehzade Mehmed are cast off in favor of a new aesthetic based on better-integrated Iznik tiles. As discussed in the introductory section on the subject, "Iznik tiles' white ground gives the impression that their naturalistic designs have been painted directly on the mosque's limestone walls. At Suleymaniye, unfortunately, the tiles are confined to the qibla wall, which prevents up-close inspection. That said, the designs around the mihrab are the most elaborate: the white marble mihrab appears as a doorway that "opens" into the garden of Quranic paradise, symbolized by the lush vegetation on the blue-and-white Iznik tiles and the stained-glass windows (Fig. 30).

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ROUNDELS IN PENDENTIVES
WITH QURAN'S 11:88, 15:16, 17:84, 6:102
IN THULUTH SCRIPT

QURAN'S 35: 41
IN THULUTH SCRIPT

OVERALL, INSCRIPTIONS — REINFORCING GOD'S POWER AND PROPER WORSHIP — ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LEGIBLE THAN AT SEHZADE MEHMED.

Fig. 31. Dome, Süleymaniye.

A New Dome Aesthetic

Inscriptions

Although the dome's painted decoration is not original, the inscribed Quranic verses remain consistent in content, position and style. They stress the pious beliefs of Süleyman, an orthodox Sunni Muslim who wished to encourage similar piety among the population.

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Extras

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Sinan Mosque Chronology

We provide a quick-reference chronology for the ten mosques profiled in this guidebook.

- Sehzade Mehmed * : 1544-1548
- Suleymaniye * : 1550-1558
- Kara Ahmed Pasha : planned mid-1550s, built mid-1560s to early 1570s
- Rustem Pasha * : 1561-1563
- Mihrimah Sultan, Edirnekapi * : late 1560s
- Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Kadirga * : 1571-1572
- Atik Valide : 1571-1583, expanded 1584-1586
- Kilic Ali Pasha * : 1578-1580
- Nisanci Mehmed Pasha : 1584-1588
- Sultanahmet (Blue mosque) * : post-Sinan, 1609-1617

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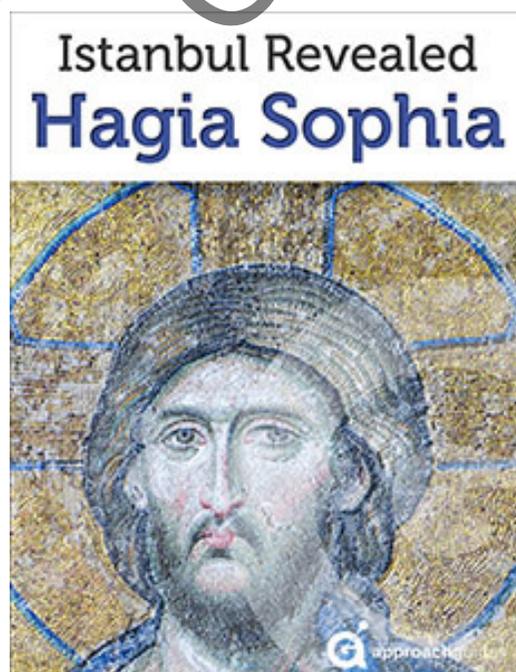
Continuing on Your Own

If you have completed the tour and wish to explore further on your own, consider these options:

- **Daytrip to Edirne.** Take a daytrip to see what is generally considered to be Sinan's masterpiece and the culmination of his stylistic development, the Selimiye mosque in Edirne. Built from 1568-1574, the mosque features his largest dome (31.2 meters / 102 feet on eight piers) and initiates the late period in his career characterized by greater experimentation. The city also has two important pre-Sinan mosques: Uc Serefeli and Old (Eski) mosque. Although the trip takes 2-3 hours each way, it is worth the time. Our [Google Daytrip Map](#) provides driving directions and some basic facts on all three mosques.
- **Visit other mosques in Istanbul.** We mark the positions of all of the other remaining Sinan mosques in Istanbul on our [Google Map](#) — simply check the box in the drop-down for "Other Sinan Mosques." As we did for those on our tour, we have marked our favorites with asterisks (*). One thing to keep in mind: some of the mosques are undergoing restorations and cannot be visited; our map indicates those that were closed at the time of writing. That said, please contact us at info@approachguides.com if you see that the restoration status of any mosques has changed and we will update the guidebook and online resources.

Istanbul's Hagia Sophia

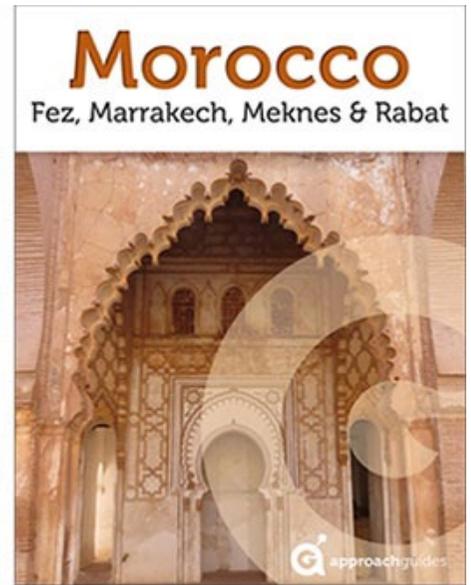
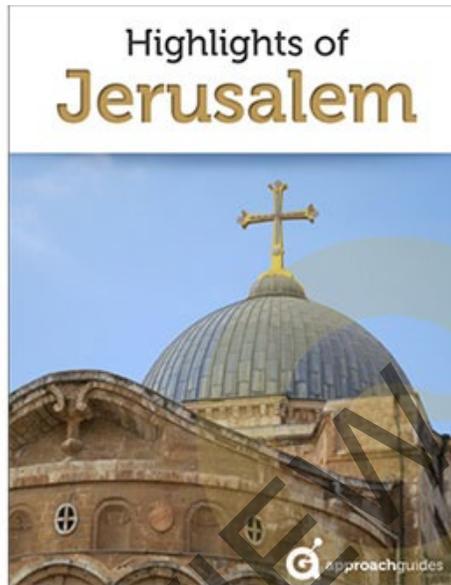
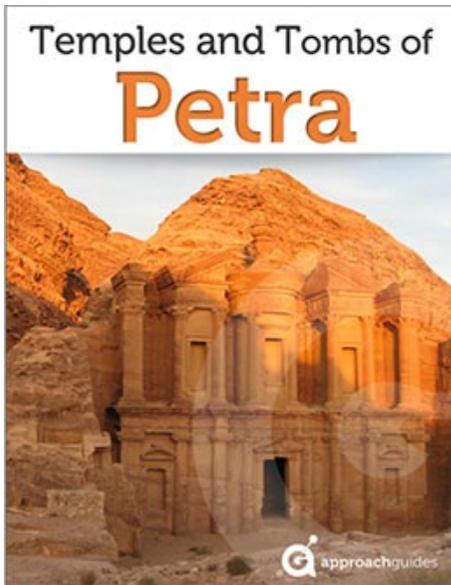
A wonder of 6th century engineering Istanbul's church of [Hagia Sophia](#) stood as a symbol of the Byzantine empire for over 900 years. So great is its magnetism that it was adopted by the conquering Ottomans and converted into a mosque to signal their rightful inheritance of the empire's distinguished legacy. And the magic remains on full display today: a massive dome that appears to float weightlessly above the floor, filtered light that infuses the interior with a glow symbolic of God's wisdom and gold-filled mosaics that encourage contemplation. It is yours to [explore with Approach Guides](#).



Get the Approach Guide to [Istanbul's Hagia Sophia](#)

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Here are just a few of our Istanbul recommendations ([see the complete list](#)):

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- **“Islamic Carpets”** A first-class review — of technique, style and regional variations — of carpets from around the Islamic world. *By Richard Ettinghausen.*
- **The Sounds of Turkey** Listen to a playlist containing a personal collection of Turkey tracks compiled by our founder Jennifer Raezer. The perfect pre-trip soundtrack.
- **Let's Visit Istanbul!** Just for kids! Join sibling Chihuahuas Bella and Harry as they travel to Istanbul with their family and cruise the Bosphorus River, visit the Blue Mosque, the Grand Bazaar and Topkapi Palace. *By Lisa Mansion and Kristine Lucco.*

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Los Angeles Times

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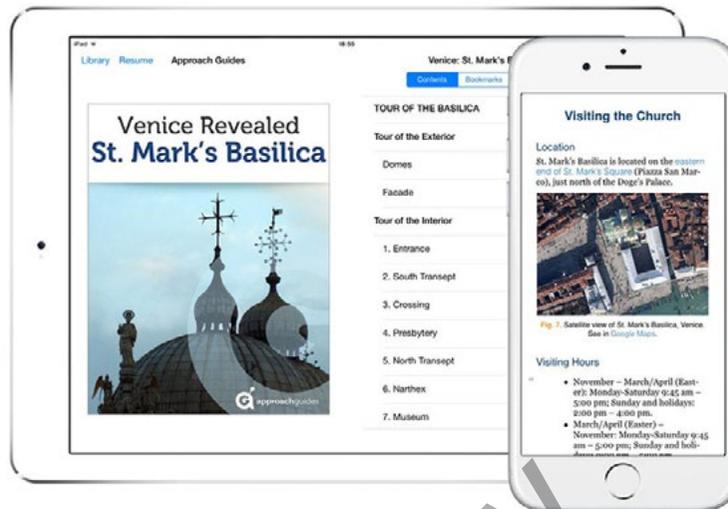
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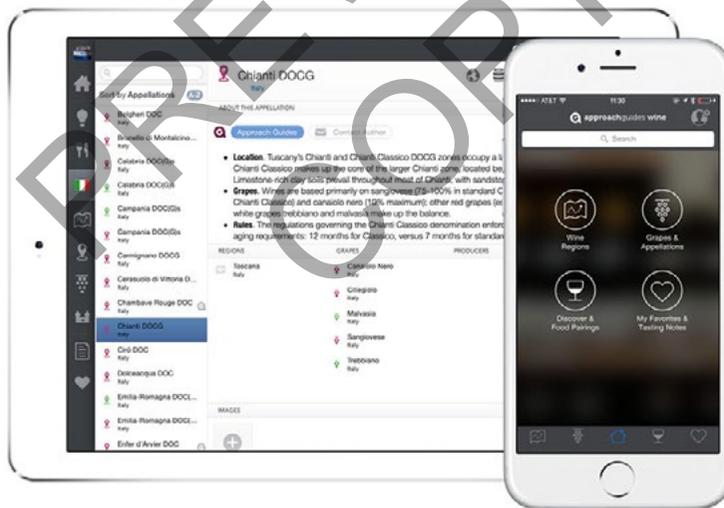
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