

The Fossati brothers and the restoration of Hagia Sophia

The architects, brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati were born in the beginning of the 19th c. in an Italian speaking Swiss region.

After his studies, the elder brother Gaspare went in 1832 to Russia, where, although very young, distinguished himself as an architect. Indeed, Tsar Nicholas I had commissioned him the construction of the building of the Russian diplomatic mission in Constantinople. This time Giuseppe, the youngest brother who had just finished his studies, followed Gaspare.

The intervention of the sultan Abdülmecid I was substantial for the beginning of the works of restoration. He invited the two architects to work on the monument, which at that period of time operated as the main Ottoman mosque. The case was extremely urgent, because the temple was in a miserable condition. Apart from the restoration works, conservation of the mosaics, which, after centuries, and the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque were revealed again, took place. Fossatis first conserved them and then passed over the new plaster, which they painted with decorative elements. Indeed, Abdülmecid, who admired the monument, had decided to keep two mosaics visible, but his advisers prevented him.

We can claim, with certainty, that the Fossatis, after a two-years work (1847-1849) literally saved the monument of Hagia Sophia from the collapse and with their systematic and excellent work extended its life.

Indeed, Gaspare Fossati, before the beginning and during the works, made with pencil designs of the monument, which later became lithographs and were published in an album in 1852. This album of the Trikoglio Library of the A.U.TH. gave us the idea for the presentation of this exhibition, through which the work of the Fossatis on the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople 168 (or 170) years ago is shown.



View from the upper balcony of the northeastern minaret to the West. To the right of Hagia Sophia the Keratios Bay with the bridges and in the background the Galata Tower with the Sea of Marmara on the left. On the right of the image, in the foreground, the palace of the sultan, bounded by a wall.

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View from the upper balcony of the northeastern minaret towards the East. In front, the southeastern part of the palace's courtyard. Its wall meets, in the background, the old Byzantine seaside wall, while on the opposite land there is Chalkidion.

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COORDINATION

Ekaterini Nasta
Director of the Central Library
Dr Agathoniki Tsilipakou
Director of the Museum of Byzantine Culture

GENERAL SUPERVISION - TEXTS' EDITING

Dr Agathoniki Tsilipakou
Director of the Museum of Byzantine Culture

EXHIBITION CURATOR - TEXTS

Dr Anastassios Sinakos
Archaeologist of the Museum of Byzantine Culture

MATERIAL CURATOR of the Library & Information Center AUTH

Dr Antonis Sarayotis
Art Historian

EXHIBITION DESIGN - GRAPHICS

Anastasia Karadimitriou
Architect

COMMUNICATION - PUBLIC RELATIONS

Meropi Ziogana
Archaeologist

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Dr Georgios Boudalis
Conservator

Georgios Alexandris,
Vassilios Gratsanlis,
Vassilios Remvos
Technicians

LIGHTING

Georgios Zigas
Lighting technician

SECRETARIAL SUPPORT

Elisabeth Nikolaidou
Kyriaki Chotidou

PAMPHLET GRAPHIC DESIGN - PRINTING

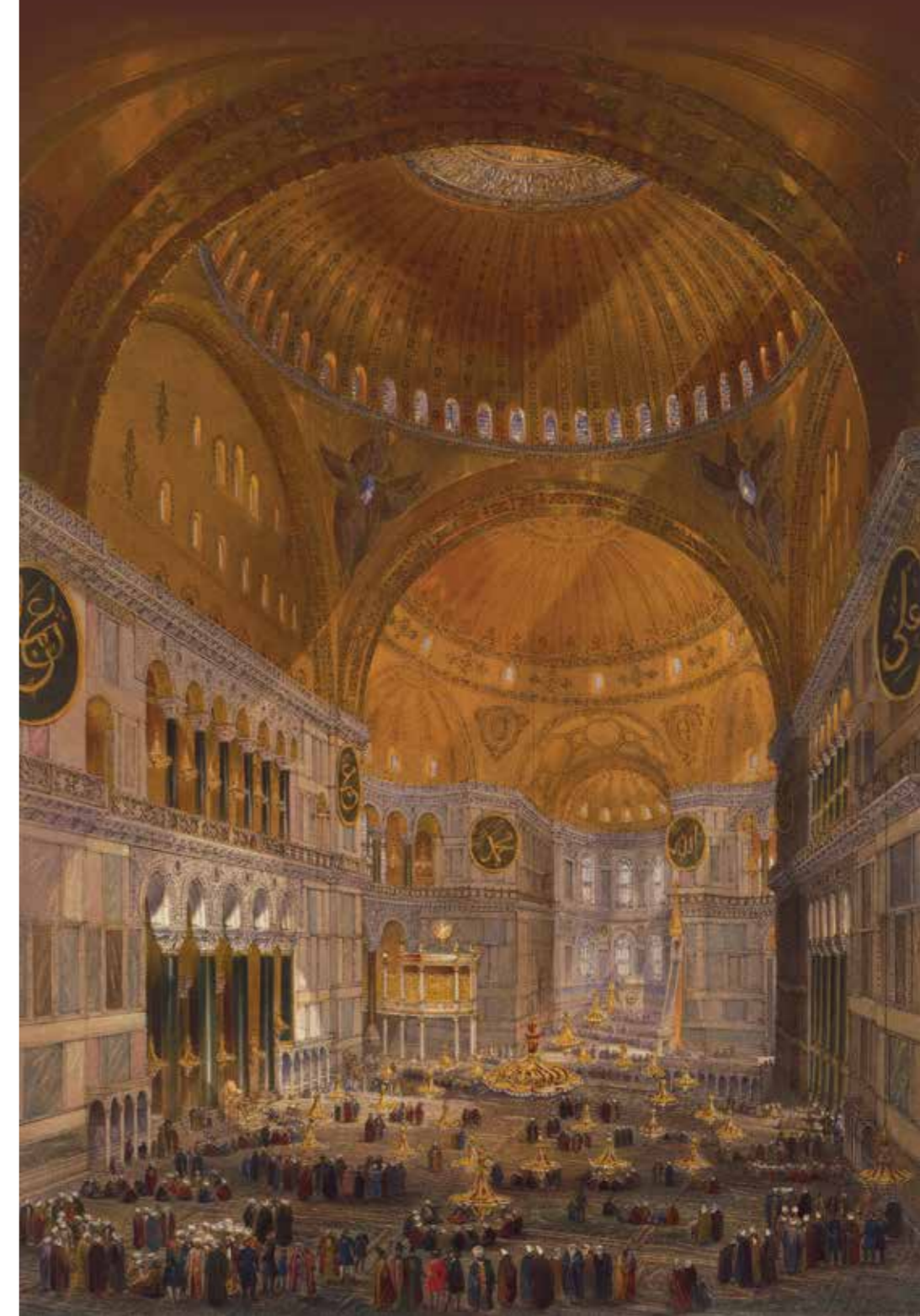
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On the cover: The interior of the church, after the restoration, looking east. It is obvious that the Byzantine church impresses the eye with its interior, contrary to the ancient Greek one, which focuses on the exterior. The vast central single space, with the appropriate architectural arrangements and the abundant natural light which penetrates through the crowd of windows, looks almost disembodied, while the visitor's gaze is directed upwards.

The Hagia Sophia of the Fossati brothers through the "Trikoglio Library" of the A.U.TH



Museum of Byzantine Culture

15 June – 15 October 2017

THE «TRIKOGLIOS LIBRARY» OF THE A.U.TH. AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EXHIBITION

This year the Library of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the second largest after the National Library and one of the most important scientific libraries in the country, celebrates ninety years of operation (1927-2017).

New acquisitions, coming from purchases and donations, were added to the Library. Most important, however, of all donations – both in terms of quantity and especially of its quality – is the library with the collections of the Greek John Trikoglou, who lived in Egypt. This donation was incorporated in 1963 in the collections of the Library and was named “Trikoglios Library”, according to the donor’s wish. It includes, among other things, about 12.000 titles of books of historical and philological content and about 1.000 engravings and photographs, while part of it has been digitized and is available in the Digital Library of the University, on www.lib.auth.gr

On the occasion of the ninety years’ anniversary of the Library & Information Centre of the A.U.TH., the Museum of Byzantine Culture organizes (15/6/2017 – 15/10/2017) a temporary exhibition under the title: “The Hagia Sophia of the Fossati brothers”, with the subtitle “through the Trikoglios Library of the A.U.TH!”. The exhibition presents the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, as it is shown through works of the Trikoglios Library of the A.U.TH.: twenty two lithographs of the church, which are framed by three maps of the City (of the 15th, 16th and 18th c.).

The exhibition wishes to discuss, among other things, the always topical issue of the protection of monuments of different peoples, cultures and religions – according to international conventions, the principles of UNESCO and of other international organizations – and to make the visitor think about the management of monuments of Greek or of non-Greek interest, of great importance or less, within or outside Greek territory.



View of the central space of the church through the northern side aisle. It is clear from this picture that the construction of the adjacent spaces fully served the emergence of the single central space.

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View of the interior of the church from the upper part of the southwestern niche. To the right of the lithograph the beginning of the southern gallery.

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View of Constantinople Color woodcarving, 1493 Engravers: W. Pleydenwuff - M. Volgemut © A.U.TH. "Trikoglios Library" L&IC

THE CITY AND THE CHURCH

Hagia Sophia is inseparably connected with the city that hosts it, the reigning Constantinople. In fact, one might say, that the church of Hagia Sophia contains and at the same time radiates the imperial grandeur of the second.

And it could not be otherwise. Constantinople, founded in 324 AD, in the place of ancient Byzantium, was endowed by its founder Constantine the Great with the most remarkable in the fields of architecture, town planning and urban infrastructure in general, known at that time.

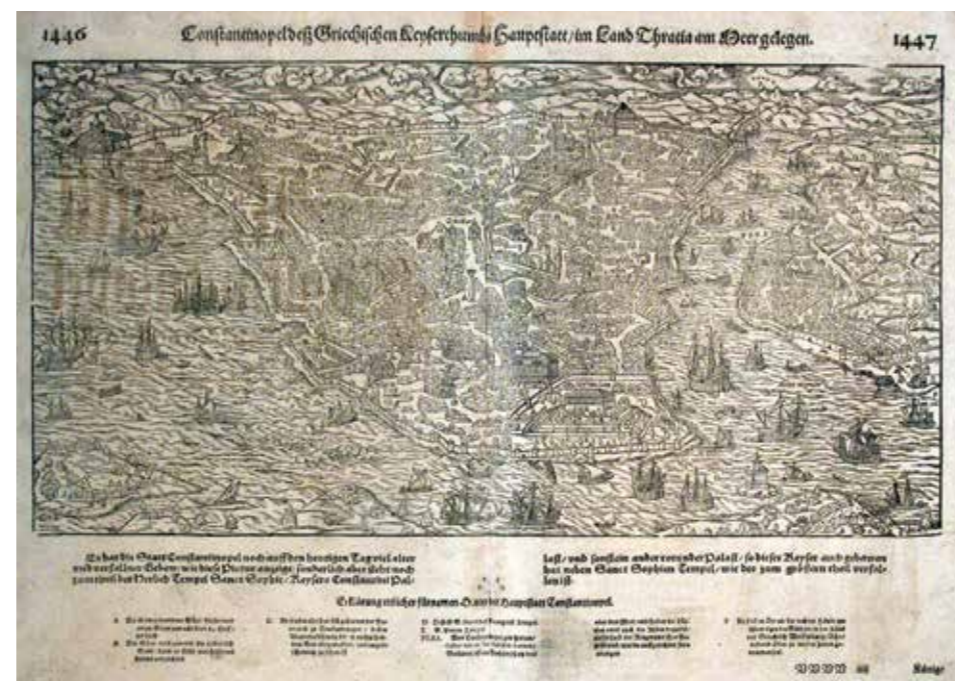
The concern for the new centre of the empire was already apparent from the choice of its geographical location. At the crossroads between Europe and Asia, this key location favored the development of trade and the economy in general, but it also offered important geostrategic advantages. In addition, the surrounding area had fertile soil, suitable for grain and vine cultivation, and a temperate climate.

Apart from the avenues, the walls, the baths and other public buildings, essential elements of the planning of Constantinople were of course the churches. Among other churches that were erected during that era, the first church of Hagia Sophia was inaugurated in 360 AD. This church was later destroyed by fire. The significance of the brilliant church, built in the same place by Justinian I in the 6th century, is seen on a mosaic above the entrance from the vestibule to the nave. It depicts the protector of Constantinople Virgin enthroned with Christ child to accept from Constantine the Great a model of the City, namely Constantinople, and from Justinian a model of Hagia Sophia.



View of the exterior from SE. Some sultans of the 16th-17th c. choose to be buried in the enclosure of the great mosque of the Empire. On the southern side of Hagia Sophia, Selim II (+1574) erected the middle of the mausoleums that appear on the image. Then Murad III (+1595) constructed the left to the west and Muhammad III (1603) the mausoleum, shown on the right to the east.

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Constantinople Color woodcarving, 1574 Engraver: S. Münster © A.U.TH. "Trikoglios Library" L&IC

HAGIA SOPHIA OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Hagia Sophia or else the Great Church is the most important monument of Byzantine architecture, which has been preserved down to modern era. It was the cathedral of Constantinople, dedicated to Jesus Christ with His attribute as the Wisdom (in Greek: Sophia) of God, and at the same time, for centuries, the largest Christian church in the world. Built in the centre of the City, Hagia Sophia was simultaneously an imperial and patriarchal church.

The Greek architects and mathematicians Anthemios and Isidoros, after the assignment of the work by Emperor Justinian I, constructed a truly unique and pioneering, for its time, building, dominated by the huge dome that literally looks like hanging from the sky. The colossal church (78 x 72 m) combines in its basic design the rectangular shape of the temples known as basilicas with a magnificent dome (height: 56 m, diameter: 32 m) in the centre of the space. The decoration inside the monument has also a high aesthetic value and combines the richness of the materials with the unmatched quality of the work. So, this amazing monument was a model for other Christian churches in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as for Ottoman mosques in Constantinople.

However, greater than the architectural and artistic value of this world-class monument – which has been included by UNESCO in the World Heritage List – is probably its enormous symbolic value and significance. It has been and is, today, especially for the Greeks, a symbol of the Byzantine Empire and of the Orthodox Church, since it is identified in the mind of the average human with Constantinople and Byzantium. This identification of Hagia Sophia with Constantinople and the past imperial grandeur, but also with the hope and the expectation of return, “ours will be again...”, is apparent, among other things, in the folk songs and the legends, which mourn about the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.



Constantinople Color copper engraving, 1750 Engraver: L. Crepy © A.U.TH. "Trikoglios Library" L&IC