





The church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (now Istanbul) was first dedicated in 360 by Emperor Constantius, son of the city's founder, Emperor Constantine. Hagia Sophia served as the cathedra, or bishop's seat, of the city. Originally called Megale Ekklesia (Great Church), the name Hagia Sophia came into use around 430. The first church structure was destroyed during riots in 404; the second church, built and dedicated in 415 by Emperor Theodosius II, burned down during the Nika revolt of 532. After the riots, Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–65) ordered the church rebuilt. The new building was inaugurated on December 27, 537. The vast, airy naos, or central basilica, with its technically complex system of vaults and semi-domes, features a high central dome with a diameter of over 101 feet and a height of 160 feet. This central dome was often interpreted by commentators of the day as the dome of heaven itself. Its weight is carried by four great arches, which rest on a series of tympana and semi-domes, which in turn rest on smaller semi-domes and arcades. Tympana are vertical recessed triangular space forming the center of a decorated pediment.

Nearly a millennium later, Emperor Constantine XI was defeated and killed in 1453 by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II's forces. Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque (Ayasofya Camii), which it remained until the fall of the Ottoman Empire marked by the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate in 1922. In 1935 it became a museum, before being designated again as a mosque in 2020, generally called Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque.

The banknote was printed after the area of Hagia Sophia was no longer part of the Byzantine Empire which included Greece, but now Turkey. The significance of this main site of Eastern Orthodoxy is it remains important to Greek citizenry - 90% to 98% of Greek residents identifying as Eastern Orthodox.