

ART AND FAITH (I)

BYZANTINE ART AND ARCHITECTURE

ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE



BYZANTINE ART

What is a sacred space?

- ▶ Choose an example of a site you would consider a "sacred space"
- ▶ Write a few lines describing the site (visually, historically, geographically etc.)
- ▶ What characteristics of the site make it "sacred"?



TIMELINE OF BYZANTINE ART

Early
Byzantine
(330-750)

Middle Byzantine
(843-1204)

Late Byzantine
(1261-1453)

Ottoman
empire

330 CE

c. 726-843 CE

1204-1261 CE

1453 CE

Constantinople is
made capital of the
Roman Empire

Iconoclastic
controversy

The Latin Occupation

Ottoman invasion

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

“Byzantine art” refers to the art of the Eastern Roman Empire, centred in Constantinople. It is a period characterised architecturally by churches with **simple exterior architecture** and **lavish interior** filled with detailed mosaics.





Colossus of Constantine
white marble, brick, wood, gilded bronze
c. 312-315 AD
Musei Capitolini, Rome

From Roman to Christian Imagery

- ▶ During the Imperial Roman period, Roman religion was inspired by Greek mythology. At this time, Christianity is seen as a political threat
- ▶ Legend has it that Constantine converted to Christianity because of a vision. Described by the historian Eusebius, "he saw with his own eyes in the heavens a trophy of the cross arising from the light of the sun, carrying the message, *In Hoc Signo Vincas* (In this sign, you shall conquer)."
- ▶ 7th century BCE: City of Byzantium (present day Istanbul) founded as Greek colony
- ▶ 326: Emperor Constantine selects Byzantium as his Empire's new capital, rebuilds the city over six years
- ▶ 330: Constantine names the city "Constantinople"
- ▶ 337: Constantine dies, proclaiming on his deathbed that Christianity was to become the official religion of the Empire

“There was no clear-cut line between Early Christian and Byzantine art. East Roman and West Roman - or, as some scholars prefer to call them, Eastern and Western Christian - traits are difficult to separate before the sixth century.” -Horst Woldemar Janson and Anthony F. Janson

Catacomb: An underground cemetery with recesses for tombs, constructed by the ancient Romans



Roman Catacombs



Detail of a mural painting from a Roman Catacomb

Early Byzantine Period (330–750)

- ▶ Extends from the founding of the capital to the 700s
- ▶ Byzantium's educated elite used Roman law, and Greek and Roman culture, to maintain a highly organized government centered on the court and its great cities
- ▶ Flowered especially during the reign of Justinian (527-565) as he started a project of developing the cities of Constantinople and Ravenna in Italy

Early Byzantine
(330-750)



Hagia Sophia
Istanbul
532-37

Early Byzantine
(330-750)



Hagia Sophia
(interior)

Early Byzantine
(330-750)



Mosaic: patterns or pictures made by embedding small pieces (tesserae) of stone or glass in cement on surfaces such as walls and floors.



Mosaics on the interior of Hagia Sophia



Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy



Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

Early Byzantine
(330-750)



Key features of Byzantine mosaics:

- Emphasis on richness of colour and decoration
- Abstracted figures as symbolic representations
- Flat compositions- no naturalism or illusion of depth

Interior of the Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

Early Byzantine
(330-750)



Emperor Justinian and His Attendants,
Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy
c. 547

Gold background: spiritual realm



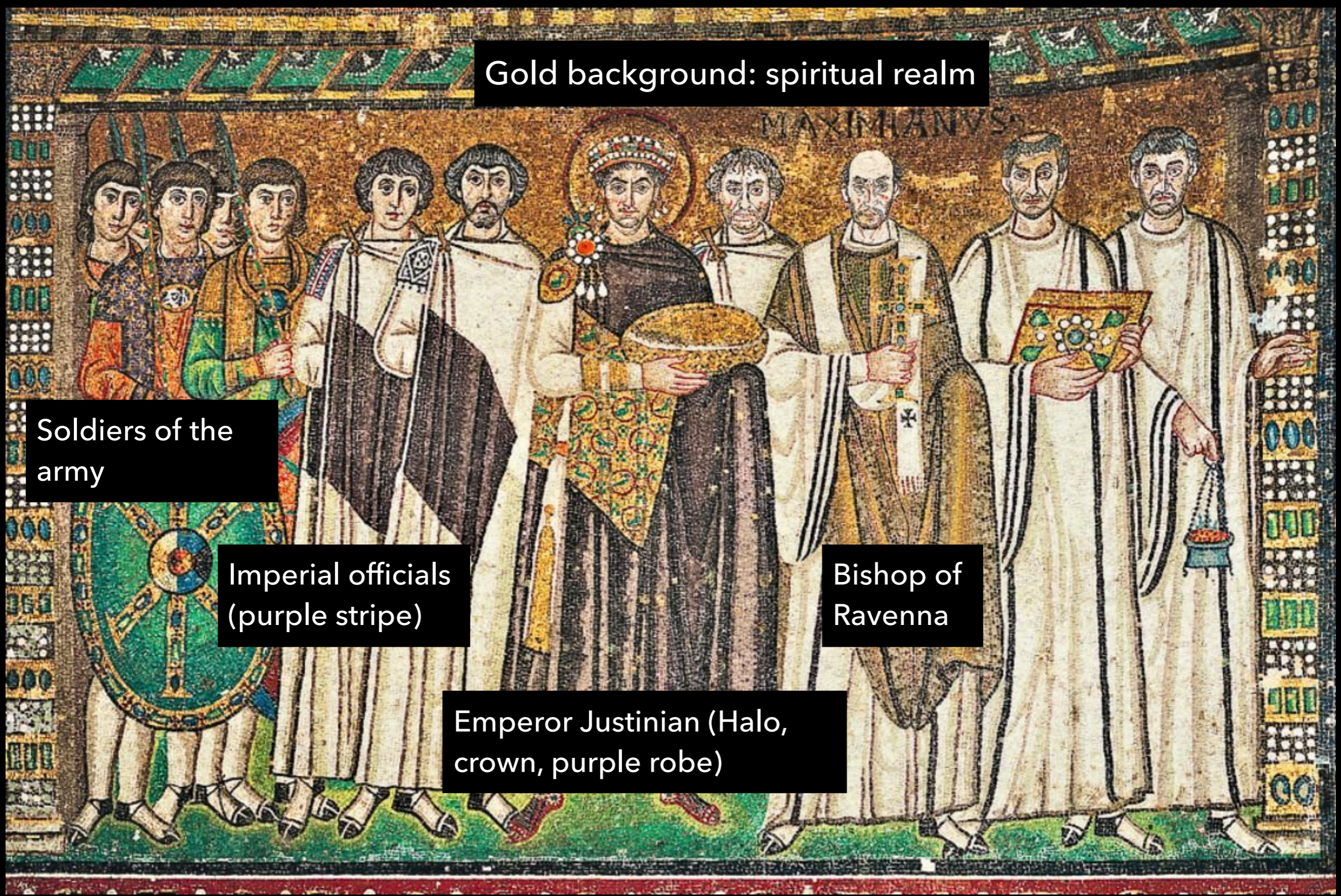
Gold background: spiritual realm

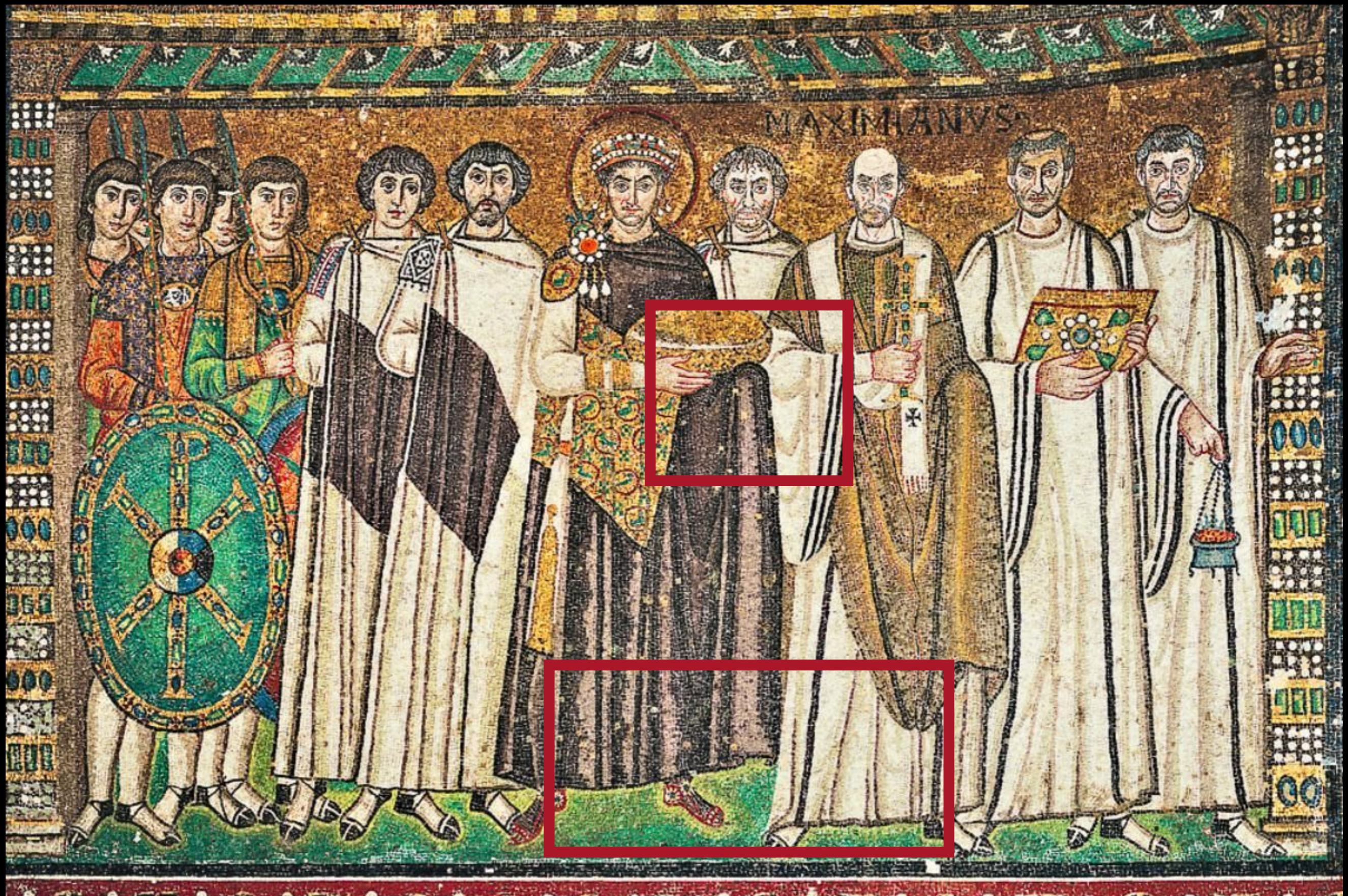
Soldiers of the army

Imperial officials (purple stripe)

Emperor Justinian (Halo, crown, purple robe)

Bishop of Ravenna





Early Byzantine
(330-750)



Ara Pacis Augustae
(Altar of Augustan Peace)
Rome
9 BC



Emperor Justinian and His Attendants,
Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy
c. 547 AD

ICON PAINTING

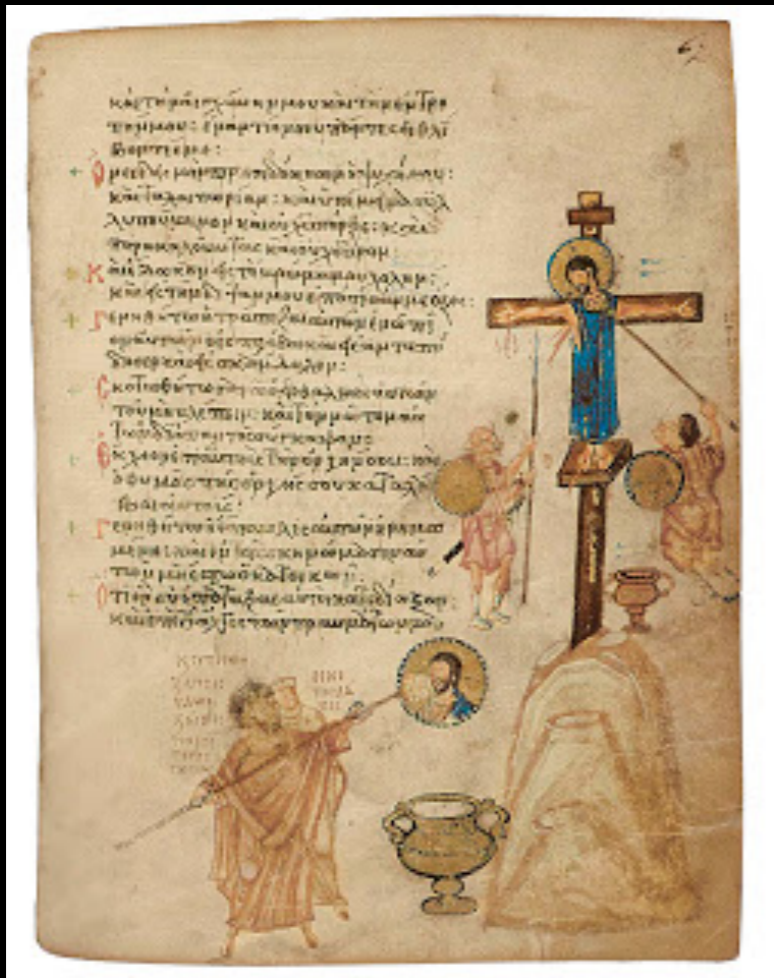


Portable Icon with the Virgin Eleousa
early 1300s

Acheiropoieta: meaning "made without hands," was an image believed to have been miraculously created.

Icon: Greek for "image" or "painting"; Sacred images representing saints, Christ and the Virgin, as well as narrative scenes such as the Crucifixion.

The Iconoclastic Controversy (726–843)



Page from the Chludov Psalter, 9th century showing Iconoclast, John the Grammarian destroying the image of Christ.

Iconoclasm: literally translates as “image breaking”; a period of the destruction of religious imagery for fear of idolatry.

Theories for Iconoclasm:

- ▶ Restricting the growing wealth and power of the church
- ▶ Fear that the worshippers veneration would be misdirected towards the images, not the holy people
- ▶ The introduction of Islam and the attempt to integrate Muslim and Jewish populations

Middle Byzantine (843–1204)

- ▶ The Iconoclastic Controversy ended in 843 with the victory of those in favor of the use of images.
- ▶ With the death of the Emperor Theophilus in 842, his widow Empress Theodora worked quickly to restore the destroyed icons, and several years of Byzantine artistic production continued.
- ▶ The Iconoclastic controversy had a profound effect on the kind of art that was created in the period following it: more standardized program of church wall decoration in its mosaics and frescos, and there was now an evolution of distinct portrait types for individual saints.
- ▶ The Middle and Later Byzantine periods continued the stylistic and thematic interests of the Early Byzantine period, but there was now a renewed interest in building new churches and decorating their interiors.

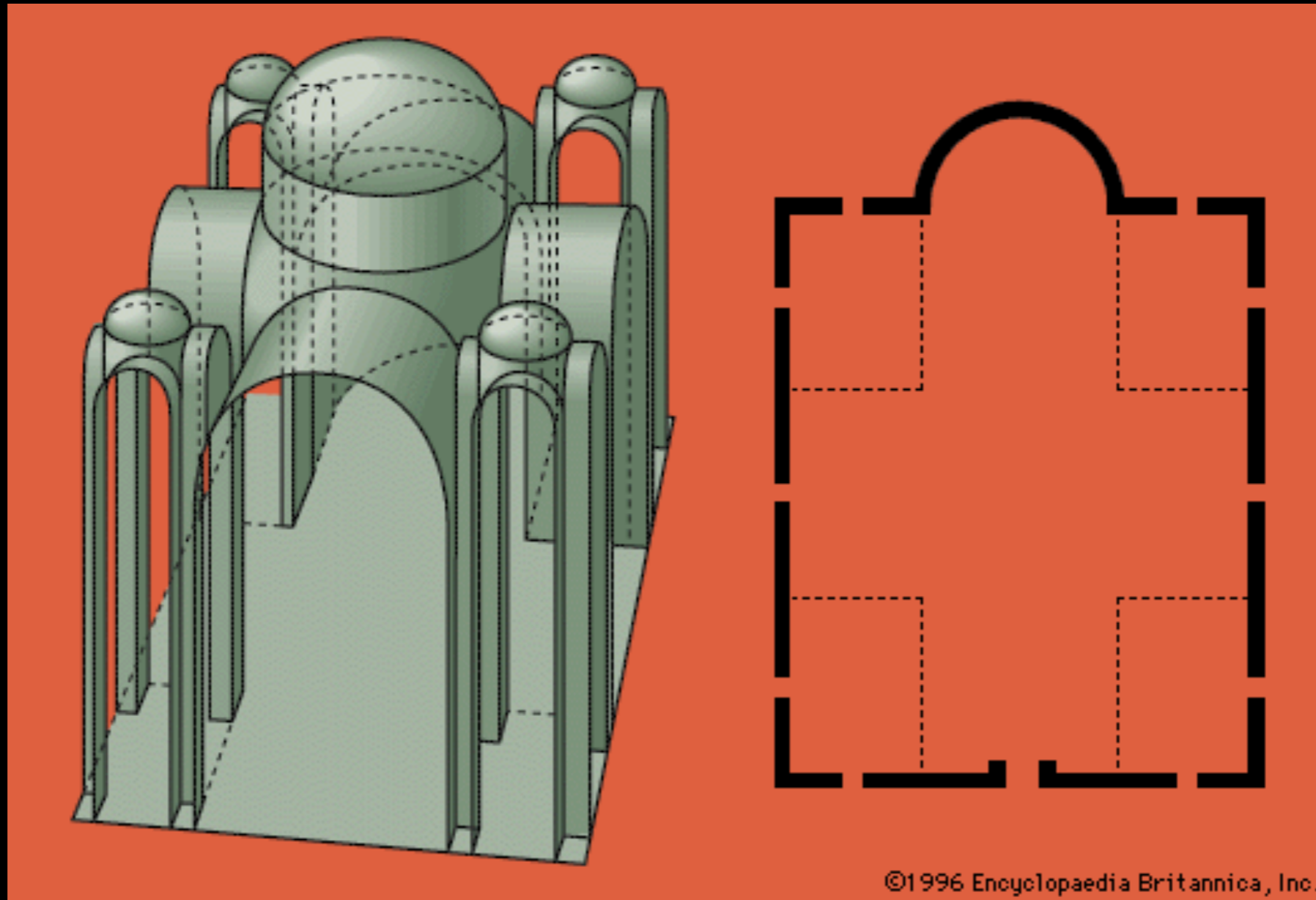
Middle Byzantine
(843-1204)



Hosios Loukas, Greece
early 11th century

"It seems that everything is in ecstatic motion, and the church itself is circling round. For the spectator, through his whirling about in all directions and being constantly astir, which he is forced to experience by the variegated spectacle on all sides, imagines that his personal condition is transferred to the object." -Photios of Constantinople





(Left) Perspective drawing of a quincunx, or five-domed church
(Right) plan of the church, showing cross-in-square design.

The Latin occupation

(1204-1261)

- ▶ Another crisis at the end of the Middle Byzantine period
- ▶ By this point, Christianity is divided between Eastern Orthodoxy (in Byzantium) and the Western Latin Christianity
- ▶ Atmosphere of distrust between the two; both claimed to be God's representative on earth
- ▶ In 1204, the crusader army enters Constantinople and over a period of three days causes great destruction and violence



15th century miniature depicting the Fourth Crusade



Also known as the 4th crusade- period of war between Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church. Over a period of 3 days, caused great destruction in Constantinople.

Late Byzantine 1261–1453

- ▶ Following the Latin Occupation, the Byzantine Empire had shrunk considerably and was left weaker
- ▶ Nevertheless, the Late Byzantine era began to renovate and restore churches.
- ▶ However, the Occupation had destroyed the economy and left the city in ruins. Artists thus used more economical materials and miniature mosaics
- ▶ In icon paintings, the suffering of the population during the Conquest led to an emphasis upon images of compassion

Late Byzantine
(1261-1453)



Chora Monastery
Istanbul, Turkey
c. 1315-21



Chora Monastery interior



FALL OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

- ▶ The Byzantine Empire ends with the Ottoman Invasion in 1453 when Sultan Mehmed attacks Constantinople and continues to expand the Ottoman Empire across Europe



Map showing the expansion of the Ottoman Empire



ISLAMIC ART



Interior of Hagia Sophia

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/opinion/hagia-sophia-mosque.html>

537: Hagia Sophia is built as a church

1453: Converted into a mosque when Constantinople fell to Ottoman forces

1934: Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the secular, modern republic of Turkey, transformed the Hagia Sophia into a museum

2020: Turkish President Erdogan converts it back to a mosque



OPINION | The Hagia Sophia Was a Cathedral, a Mosque and a Museum. It's Converting ...

Opinion

The Hagia Sophia Was a Cathedral, a Mosque and a Museum. It's Converting Again.

Changing the secular space back into a religious one is a risk for the World Heritage Site.



By **The Editorial Board**

The editorial board is a group of opinion journalists whose views are informed by expertise, research, debate and certain longstanding [values](#). It is separate from the newsroom.

July 22, 2020

On Friday, after 86 years as a museum, the great [Hagia Sophia in Istanbul](#) will once again echo with Muslim prayers. To Turkish

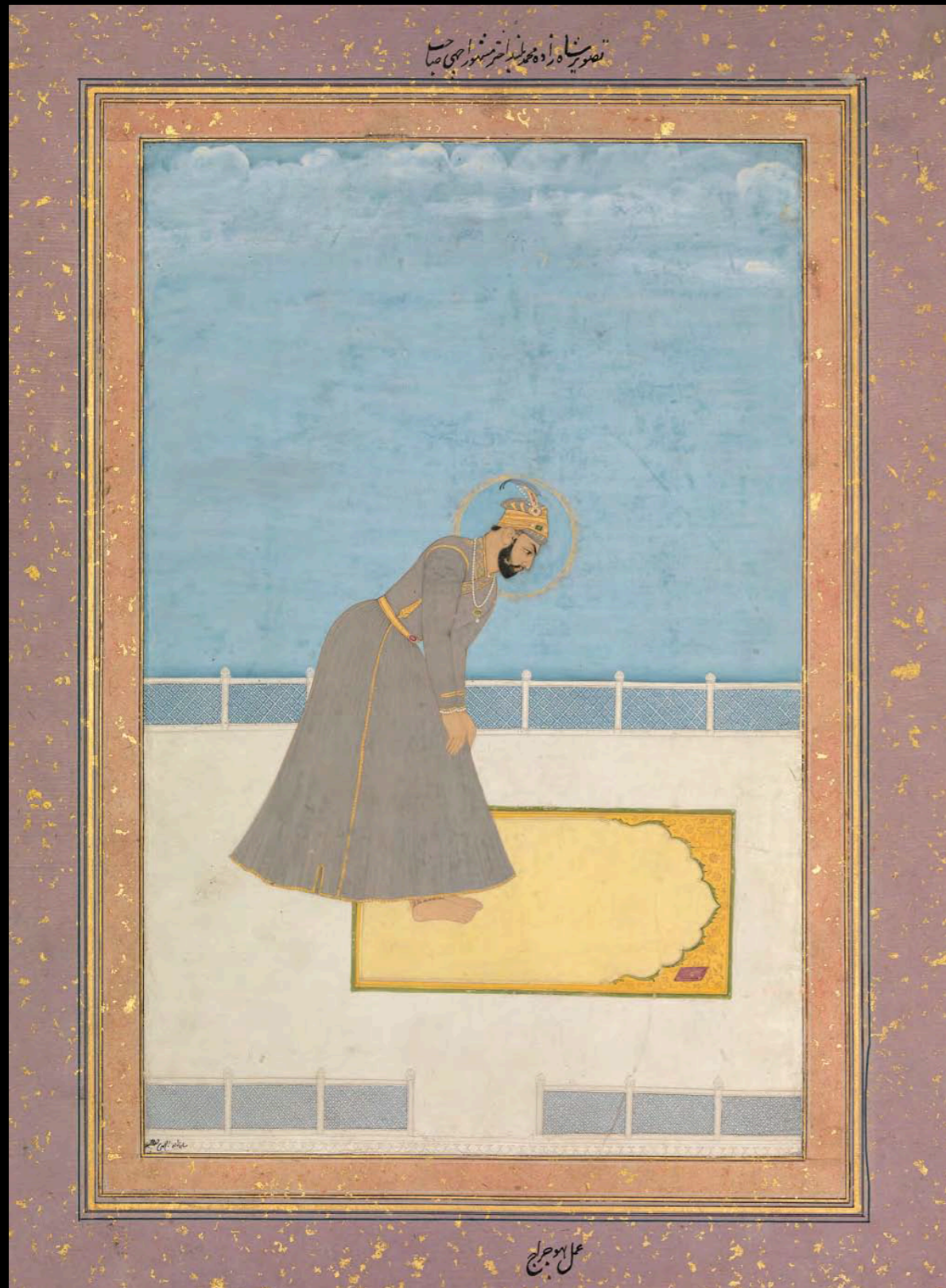
The spread of Islam

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l14x4-q_Gj4

“Islamic world” refers to regions who have historically been ruled or inhabited predominantly by Muslims- from 7th century to the present- in places across the globe from Spain to Indonesia



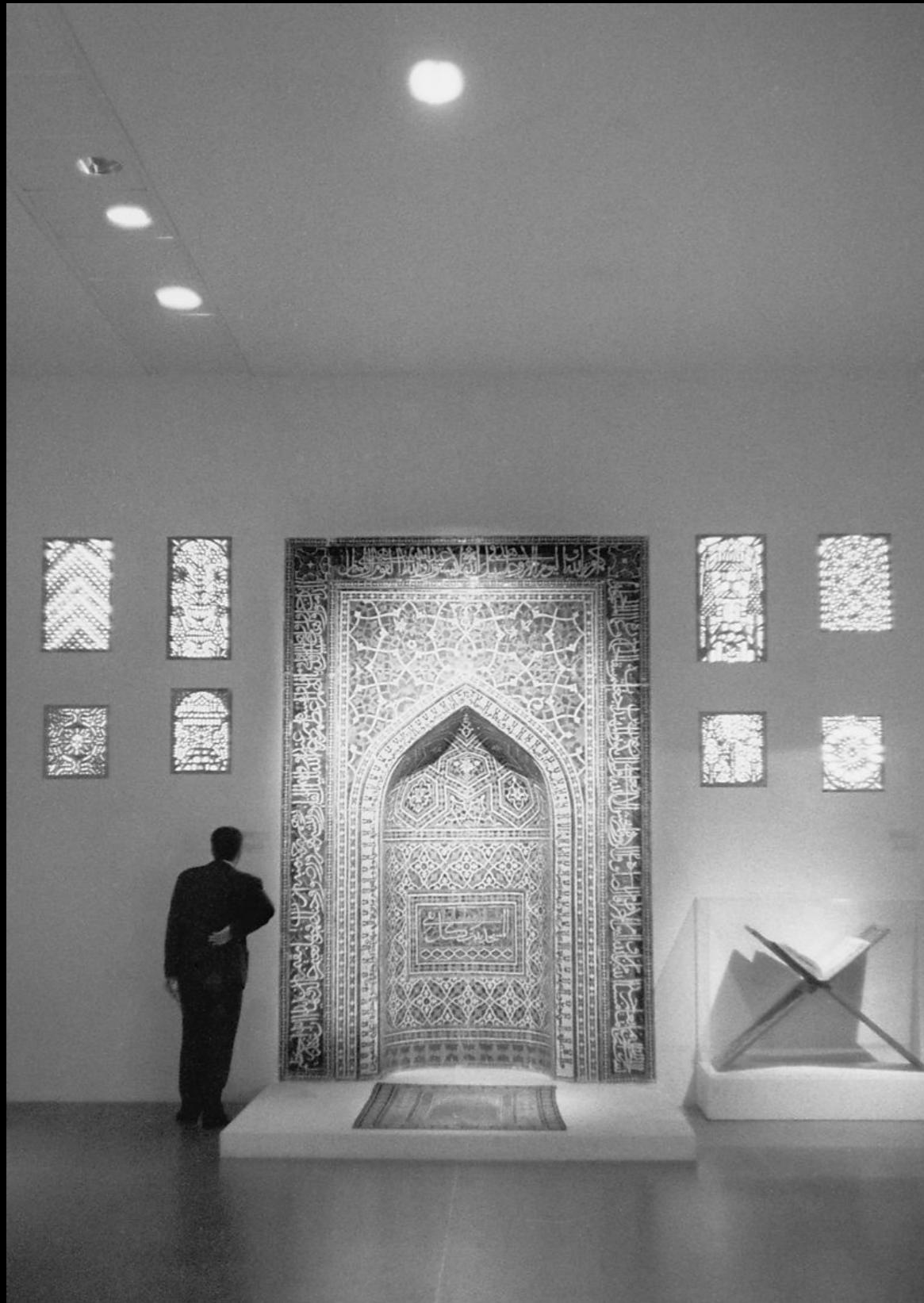
The key tenets of Islam



- ▶ Began after a revelation to Prophet Muhammad by God in the 7th century on the Arabian Peninsula
- ▶ **Monotheism:** Belief in one God
- ▶ **Prayer:** Muslims pray facing Mecca five times a day; prayer includes a recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'an
- ▶ **The Qur'an:** believe that the holy book of Islam was revealed to Muhammed over 23 years. After the Prophet's death, his successors compiled these revelations in a manuscript

Portrait of Prince Muhammad Buland Akhtar at Prayer:
Folio from an album, 17th century
India
Ink and watercolor on paper

What is Islamic art?



Installation of a Mihrab (prayer niche) at the Met

- ▶ “Islamic art” is a modern concept (created in the 19th century)
- ▶ Describes the art of all regions where Islam was the dominant religion
- ▶ Not necessarily objects created for Muslim worship, could be secular objects from an Islamic region
- ▶ Therefore important to distinguish between the religious and cultural aspects

KEY FEATURES OF ISLAMIC ART

- ▶ Islamic teachings and values
- ▶ Ornamentation
- ▶ Interconnections and influences

Key features of Islamic art



Installation of a Mihrab (prayer niche) at the Met

- ▶ **Islamic teachings and values:** even though artistic styles are very diverse across different dynasties, a shared feature are the Islamic teachings (particularly in religious forms like mosque architecture and Quran manuscripts)
- ▶ **Ornamentation:** common preference for calligraphic, floral, and geometric motifs. Generally non-figurative and non-representational
- ▶ **Interconnections and influences:** influence of trade, diplomacy and international relations (as Islamic dynasties spread around the world) is directly seen in the art

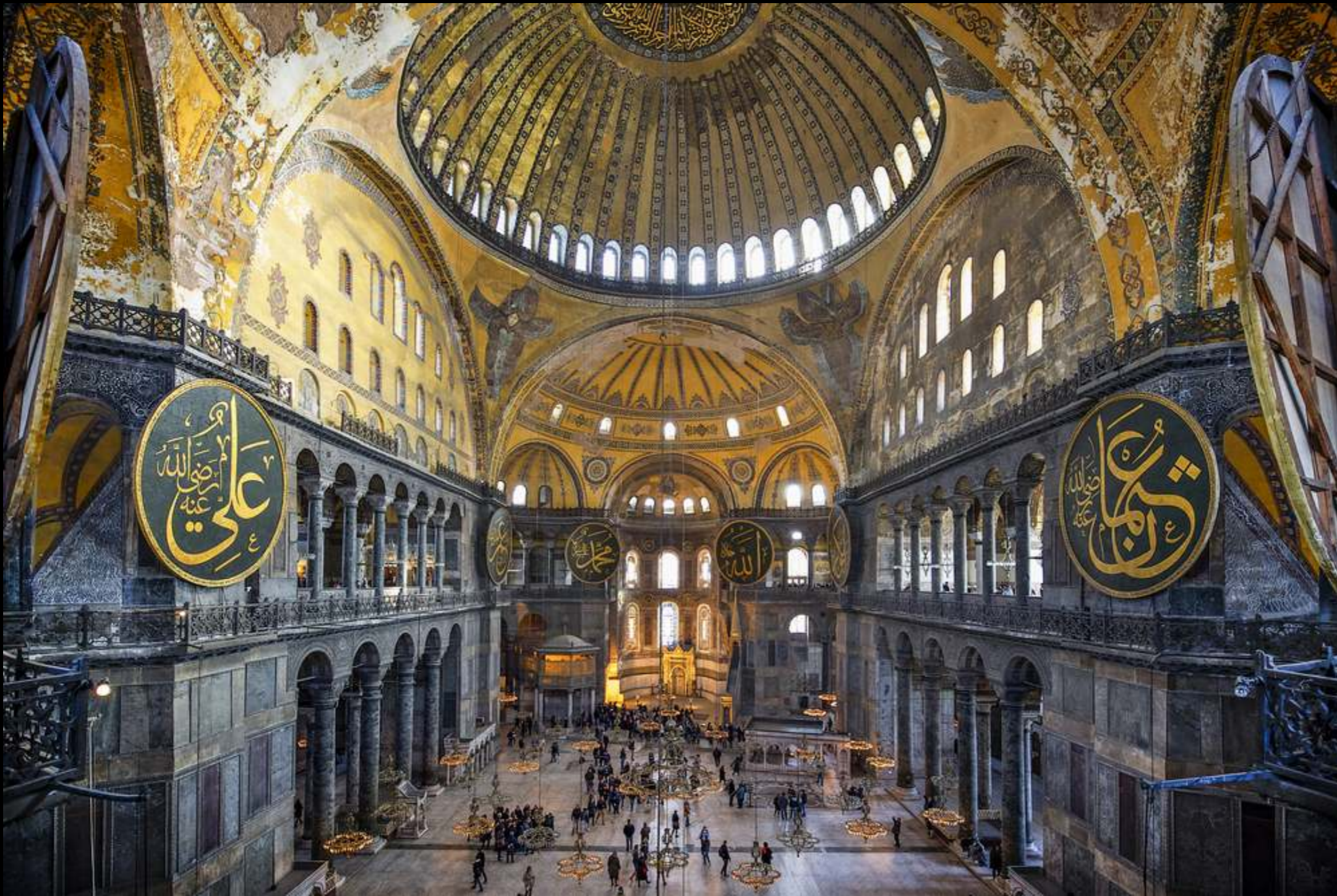
ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE



Hagia Sophia
Istanbul
532-37

Syncretism: The amalgamation of elements from different religions in one.

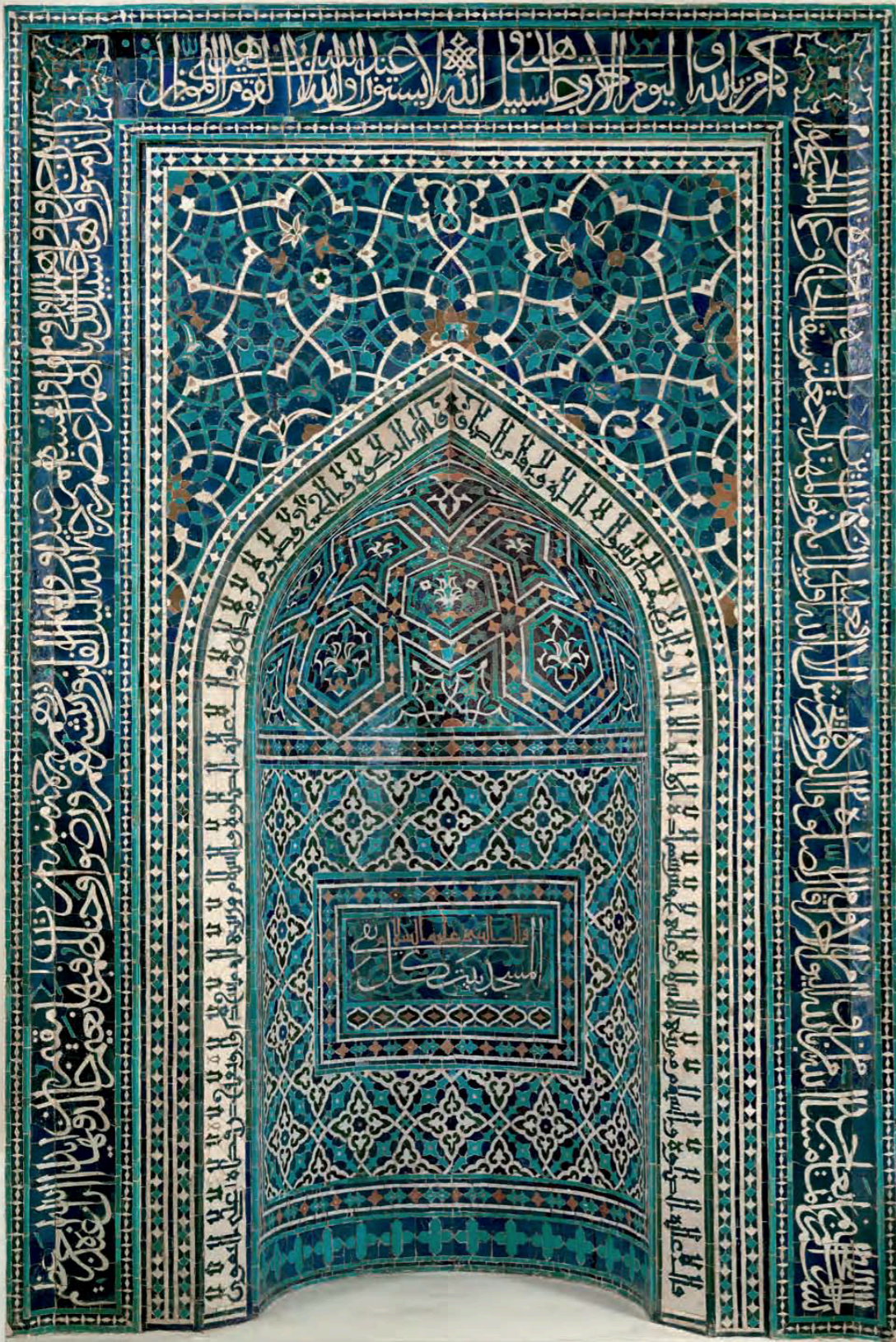
Mosque: A place of worship for Muslims, often having at least one minaret. In Arabic: *masjid*.



Contemporary image of the Hagia Sophia
Istanbul, Turkey

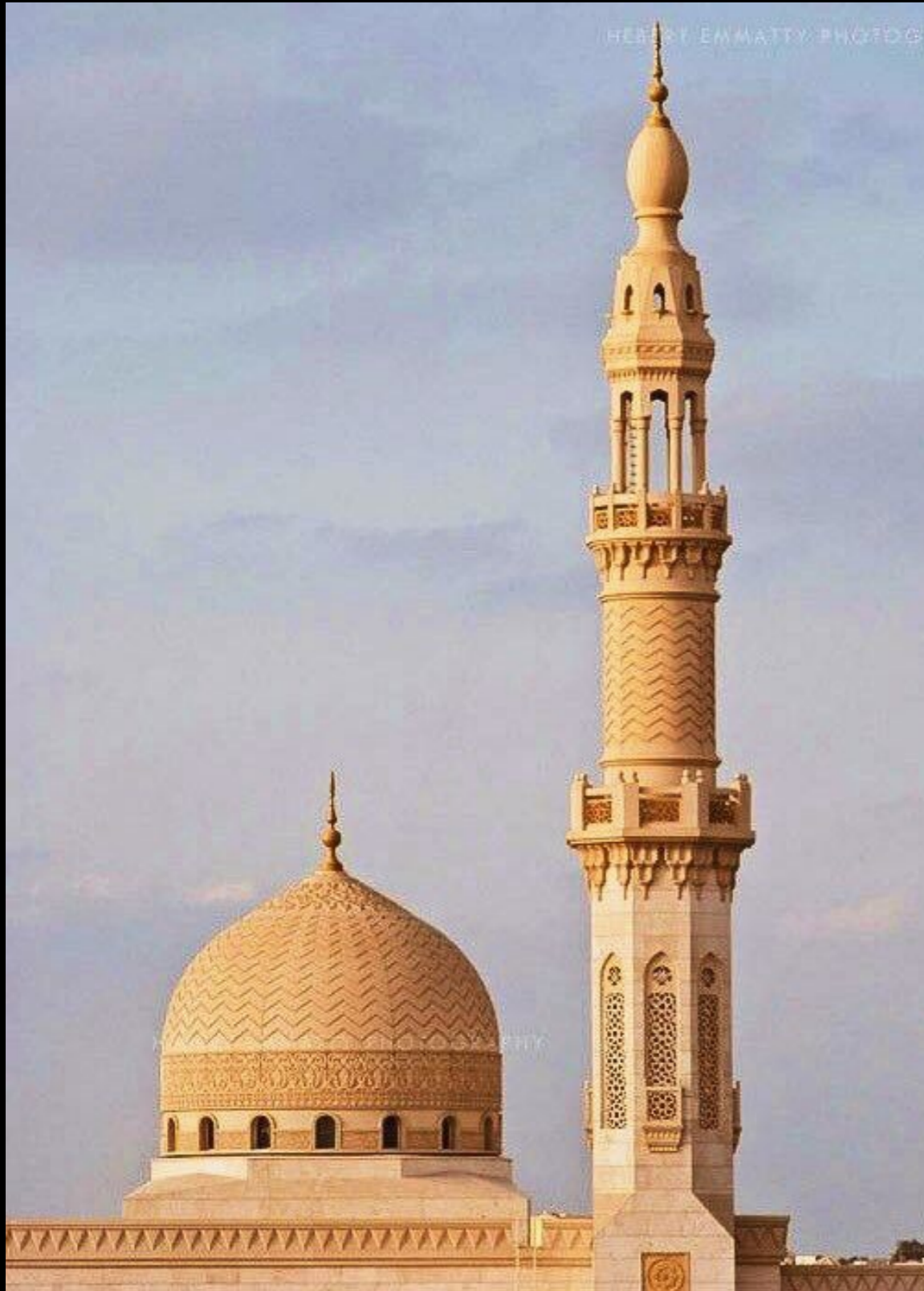
ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE

- ▶ **Mihrab:** a niche in the qibla wall indicating the direction of Mecca (usually most decorated part of the mosque)



Mihrab (Prayer Niche)
dated A.D. 1354-55
(Met Museum)

ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE



- ▶ **Minaret:** wall tower attached to the mosque; designed so the call to prayer can be heard loud throughout the city

ESSENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF A MOSQUE



- ▶ **Minbar:** staircase on which the prayer leader stands when delivering a sermon

Minbar in the Umayyad Mosque, Damascus, Syria

SYNCRETIC SITES

- ▶ Shrine in Jerusalem built by the Umayyad dynasty in the 7th century (oldest existing Islamic monument)
- ▶ The building was constructed between 688 and 691 CE under the patronage of the Umayyad caliph Abd Al Malik

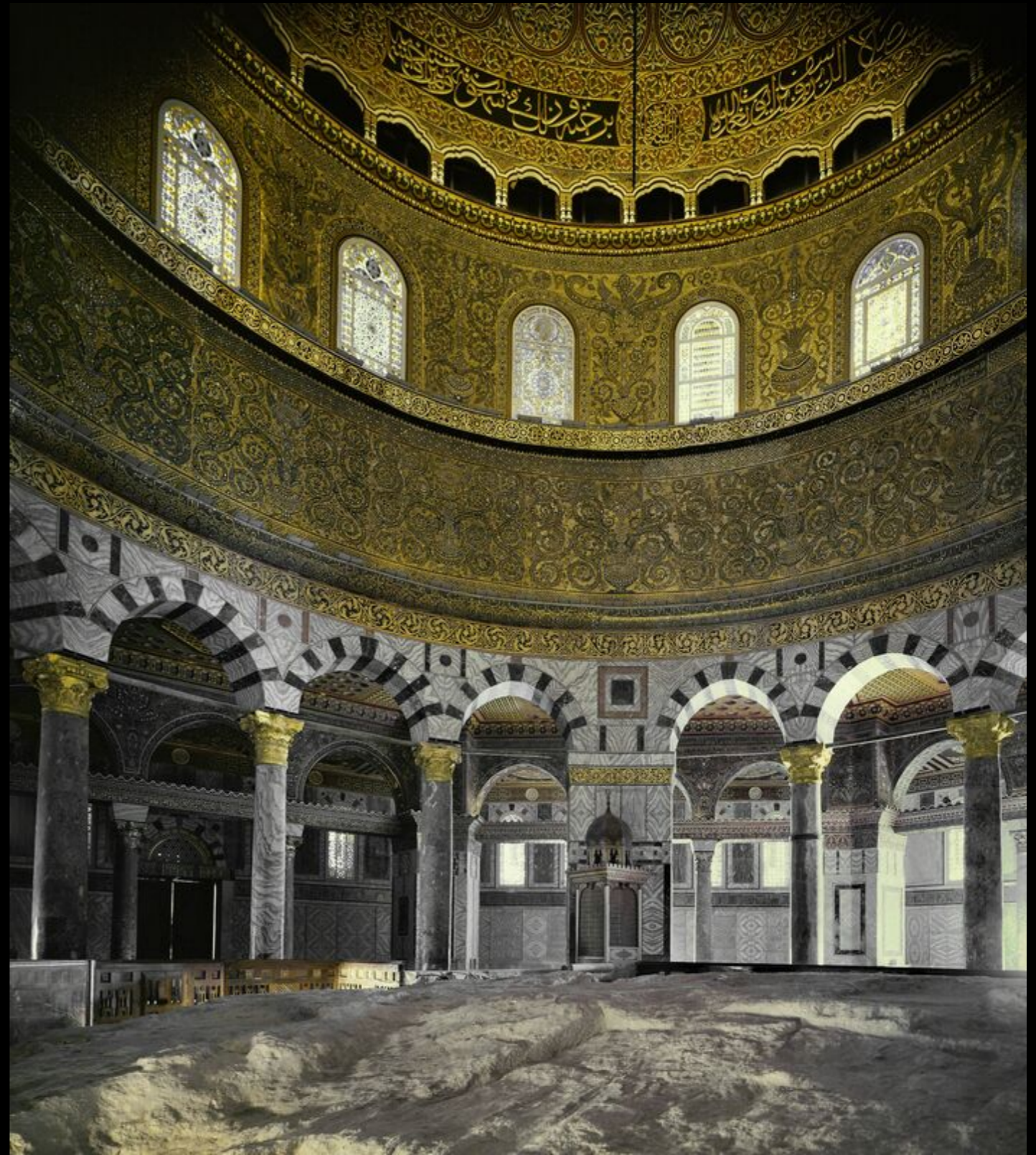


- ▶ Considered sacred for Jews, Christians and Muslims- worshipped by Muslims as the site where Prophet Muhammad began his journey to heaven and according to the Jewish tradition, as the site where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son.
- ▶ The original function and significance of the Dome of the Rock are uncertain

Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem
Completed in 692 AD



Mosaic detail from the Dome of the Rock



Interior of the Dome of the Rock (showing Foundation Stone)



The Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, Spain

Histories of interconnections and influence

- ▶ Historians believe that there had originally been a temple to the Roman God, Janus on this site
- ▶ The mosque was built by Abd ar-Rahman 784-786 (at the time one of the largest buildings in the Islamic world) who founded the Umayyad dynasty in Spain after his family was overthrown from Syria
- ▶ In Cordoba, he tried to recreate the grandeur of his home in Syria- promoted architecture and even imported fruit trees from Syria



- ▶ In 1236, King Ferdinand took over the region and converted the mosque into a Cathedral.
- ▶ In the 16th century, the cathedral's bishops suggested demolishing the structure and building a new cathedral. There was such opposition from the citizens that they came to a unique solution- to build an altar in the prayer hall.
- ▶ The architecture is therefore a unique mix of Islamic and Christian elements.

Mihrab, Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain

THE WRITTEN WORD



Ceramic Vessel in the Shape of a Mosque Lamp
1525-40 (Met Museum)

Calligraphy: The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes; from the Greek words *kallas* (beauty) and *graphos* (writing)

- ▶ Calligraphy is the most highly regarded element of Islamic art- the Quran considered to be the **word of God** was written in an Arabic script
- ▶ Figural representation was considered **idolatry**; hence the written word became important
- ▶ Used for both **communication and decoration**
- ▶ Not limited to books: tiles of buildings, ceramic vessels, paintings etc.
- ▶ A number of languages adopted the **Arabic alphabet** even though they bear no linguistic similarity.

Examples of calligraphic scripts



Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript
ca. 1180



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 1530



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 19th century

Examples of calligraphic scripts

Kufic script: long letters, angular, earliest script used for the Quran



Folio from a Qur'an Manuscript
ca. 1180

Nasta'liq script: graceful, fluid, used for literary non-Quranic works



Folio from an unidentified album
c. 1530

Shikaste script: easy to write quickly, used for poetry for its flowery, visual style



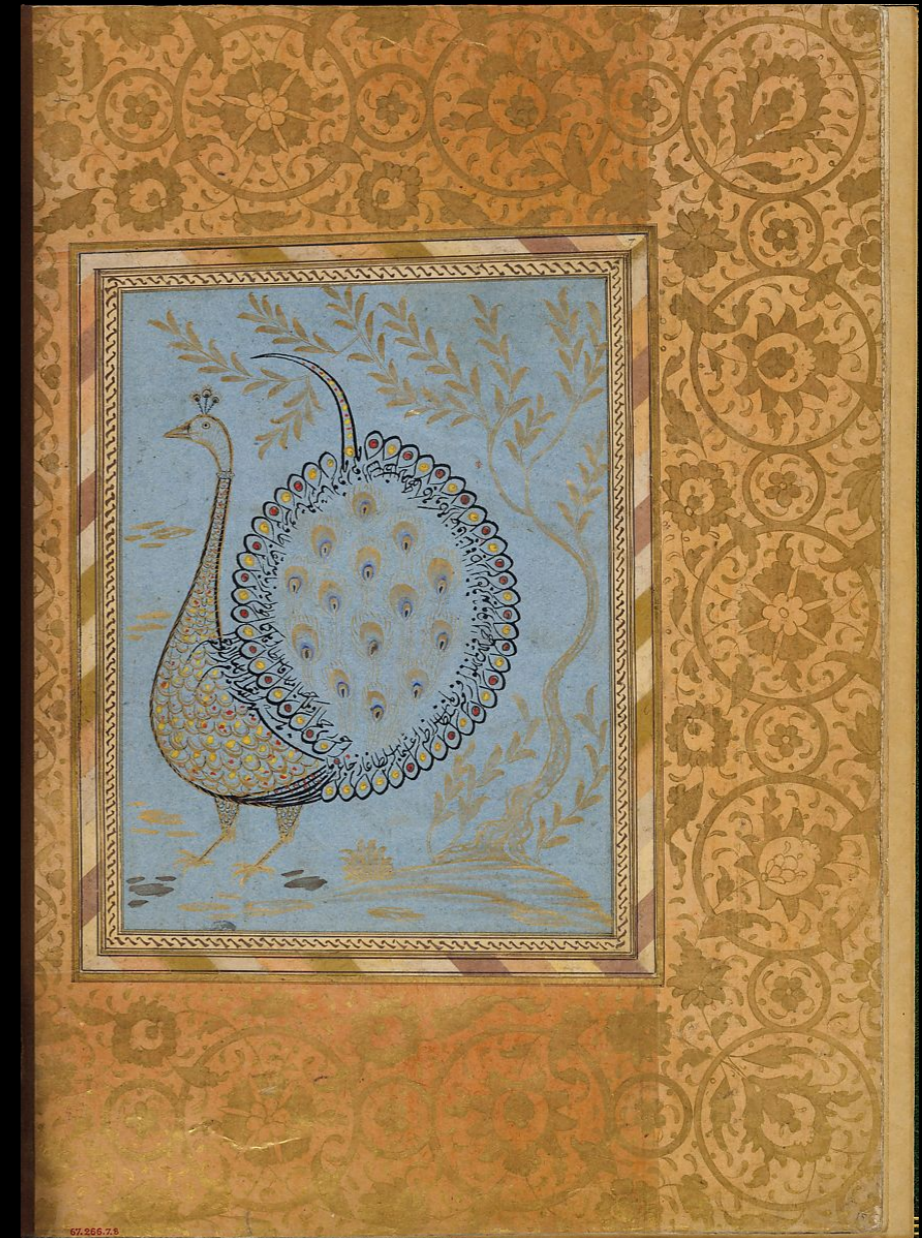
Folio from an unidentified album
c. 19th century

Calligraphy as art

Calligram: a word or piece of text in which the design and layout of the letters creates a visual image related to the meaning of the words themselves.



Calligraphic galleon
by 'Abd al-Qadir Hisari
c. 1766-67 CE
Turkey
(Met Museum)



"Calligraphic Composition in Shape of Peacock," Folio from the Bellini Album
c. 1600
Turkey
(Met Museum)

The question of figuration

- ▶ **Figurative art:** Art that draws from the real world, in particular depicting human figures (therefore always representational)
- ▶ **Aniconism:** The absence of a material representation of the natural world
- ▶ **Idolatry:** The worship of idols



Unknown artist, *Prince With a Falcon*, 1600-1605.
Courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

MINIATURE PAINTINGS

- ▶ The tradition of Persian miniature painting began around the 13th century
- ▶ Persian miniature influenced other Islamic miniature traditions, like the Ottoman miniature in Turkey and Mughal miniature in India
- ▶ The illustrations are intended to be kept in an album known as *muraqqa* (the survival rate and preservation of these is therefore better)
- ▶ Because this was an art of the court and only shown to a private audience, the constraints of depicting human figures was more relaxed- more freedom of expression and subject matter compared to public wall paintings

Incident in a Mosque
folio from Divan of Hafiz
c. 1530
Iran (Harvard Art Museum)



Visual characteristics of Miniature paintings



An Attempt on Akbar's life in Dehli in 1564
 illustration from Akbarnama
 c. 1590-95
 India (Collection of V&A Museum)

Visual characteristics of Miniature paintings

- ▶ bold, vivid colours
- ▶ packed composition that fills the page
- ▶ fine delicate lines- often made using brushes of a single hair
- ▶ small- not more than a few inches
- ▶ valued color and detail over shading and realistic perspective



An Attempt on Akbar's life in Dehli in 1564 illustration from Akbarnama c. 1590-95 India (Collection of V&A Museum)

GLOSSARY

- ▶ **Mosaic:** patterns or pictures made by embedding small pieces (tesserae) of stone or glass in cement on surfaces such as walls and floors.
- ▶ **Icon:** Greek for "image" or "painting"; Sacred images representing saints, Christ and the Virgin, as well as narrative scenes such as the Crucifixion.
- ▶ **Iconoclasm:** literally translates as "image breaking"; a period of the destruction of religious imagery for fear of idolatry.
- ▶ **Monotheism:** worship of a single god or deity
- ▶ **Syncretism:** The amalgamation of elements from different religions in one.
- ▶ **Mosque:** A place of worship for Muslims, corresponding to a church or synagogue in other religions, often having at least one minaret. In Arabic: masjid.
- ▶ **Minaret:** The tall slender tower of an Islamic mosque, from which the muezzin recites the adhan (call to prayer).
- ▶ **Arabesque:** A repetitive, stylized pattern based on a geometrical floral or vegetal design.
- ▶ **Calligraphy:** The art of writing letters and words with decorative strokes.