

Hagia Sofia and the History of Domes

Examining the engineering of its 'suspended' dome and the rich shimmer of its interior.

Dr Sophy Downes



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presented by Dr Sophy Downes

Hagia Sofia is one of the greatest buildings in the world, and for much of its early history was considered indistinguishable from heaven itself. In this lecture we will discuss what makes it so remarkable: the engineering of its 'suspended' dome, the rich shimmer of its interior – diminished by the pillages of the Fourth Crusade, but still visible in its mosaics and its intricate light – and the reverberating acoustics which amplified the liturgies written for this holy space. We will talk about Hagia Sofia as a monument of Nova Roma, the acme of the long history of Roman dome architecture, which starts as a practical innovation in bathhouses of the Bay of Naples and ends up transforming the concept of religious space in the ancient world, and we will talk about Hagia Sofia as a mosque under the Ottoman Sultanate, a model, in conjunction with earlier Islamic architectural traditions, for the designs of Mimar Sinan, some of the most exquisite buildings of the Ottoman world.

<https://youtu.be/kvBTrFn4yLY>

Sophy Downes is a classical archaeologist, whose research interests have led her continuously further east, to Turkey and eventually Iran. She first visited Turkey in 2000 and Iran in 2002, and has returned numerous times to both, including to take up a residential postdoctoral fellowship at the British Institute of Persian studies in Tehran. [Read more about Sophy and discover the tours she leads on her tour leader page.](#)

