



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 38, The Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople

(Wikipedia)

The Church of the Holy Apostles also known as the Imperial Polyándreion (imperial cemetery), was a Greek Eastern Orthodox church in Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. The first structure dates to the 4th century, though future Emperors would add to and improve upon it. It was second in size and importance only to the Hagia Sophia among the great churches of the capital. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453, the Holy Apostles briefly became the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church. Three years later the edifice, which was in a dilapidated state, was abandoned by the Patriarch, and in 1461 it was demolished by the Ottomans to make way for the Fatih Mosque.

The original church of the Holy Apostles was dedicated in about 330 by Constantine the Great, the founder of Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman Empire. The church was unfinished when Constantine died in 337, and it was brought to completion by his son and successor Constantius II, who buried his father's remains there. The church was dedicated to the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, and it was the Emperor's intention to gather relics of all the Apostles in the church. For this undertaking, only relics of Saint Andrew, Saint Luke and Saint Timothy (the latter two not strictly apostles) were acquired, and in later centuries it came to be assumed that the church was dedicated to these three only.

By the reign of the Emperor Justinian I, the church was no longer considered grand enough, and a new Church of the Holy Apostles was built on the same site. The historian Procopius attributes the rebuilding to Justinian, while the writer known as Pseudo-Codinus attributes it to the Empress Theodora. The new church was designed and built by the architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, the same architects of the Hagia Sophia, and was consecrated on 28 June 550. The relics of Constantine and the three saints were re-installed in the new church, and a mausoleum for Justinian and his family was built at the end of its northern arm.

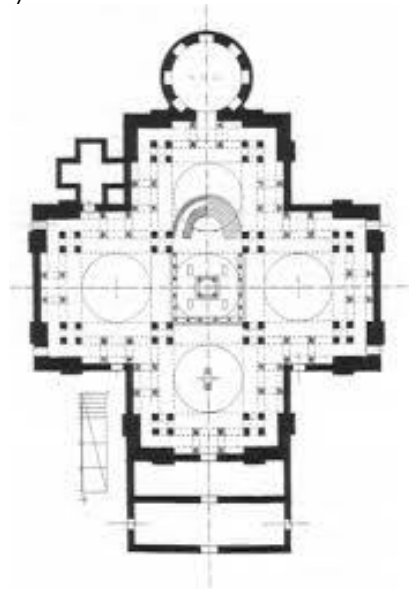
For more than 700 years, the church of the Holy Apostles was the second-most important church in Constantinople, after that of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia). But whereas the church of the Holy Wisdom was in the city's oldest part, that of the Holy Apostles stood in the centre of the newer part of the much expanded imperial capital, on the great thoroughfare called Mese Odós (English: Central Street), and was the city's busiest church. Most emperors and many patriarchs and bishops were buried in the church, and their relics were venerated by the faithful for centuries.

The grounds of the first church of the Holy Apostles built by Constantine as well as the church rebuilt soon afterward by his successor Constantius both contained a rotunda mausoleum. Little is known of the appearance of this original church except that it was cross-shaped, but the historian Eusebius (c. 263–339) gives the following description of Constantine's mausoleum and the surrounding grounds before Constantius' church was built:

"This building he carried to a vast height, and brilliantly decorated by encasing it from the foundation to the roof with marble slabs of various colours. He also formed the inner roof of finely fretted work, and overlaid it throughout with gold. The external covering, which protected the building from the rain, was of brass instead of tiles; and this too was splendidly and profusely adorned with gold, and reflected the sun's rays with a brilliancy which dazzled the distant beholder. The dome was entirely encompassed by a finely carved tracery, wrought in brass and gold.

Such was the magnificence with which the emperor was pleased to beautify this church. The building was surrounded by an open area of great extent, the four sides of which were terminated by porticos which enclosed the area and the church itself. Adjoining these porticos were ranges of stately chambers, with baths and promenades, and besides many apartments adapted to the use of those who had charge of the place."

The cruciform plan was a landmark development in Christian architecture, because it replaced a basilica plan with the centralized shrine plan. Dozens of cruciform church buildings in the late fourth and early fifth centuries were rough imitations of the Constantine-era Church of the Holy Apostles, such as St. Ambrose's Church of the Apostles in Milan, the martyrium of St. Babylas in Antioch, and the Church of Saint Simeon Stylites in Aleppo, Syria.



Conqueror's Mosque (Fatih Camii), Istanbul,
former site of the Church of the Holy Apostles.