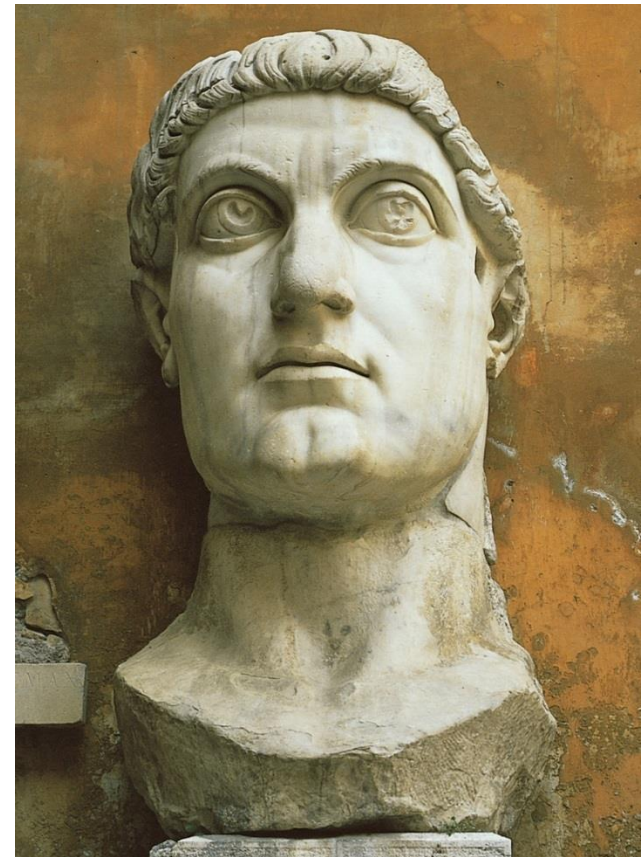


Early Byzantine Europe

Guiding Questions

- How does **patronage** affect artistic and architectural production?
- How are cultural exchanges reflected in art?

Where we were . . .



Key Point 1

- Byzantine Empire evolves out of the remains of the Roman Empire and uses the **same iconography**



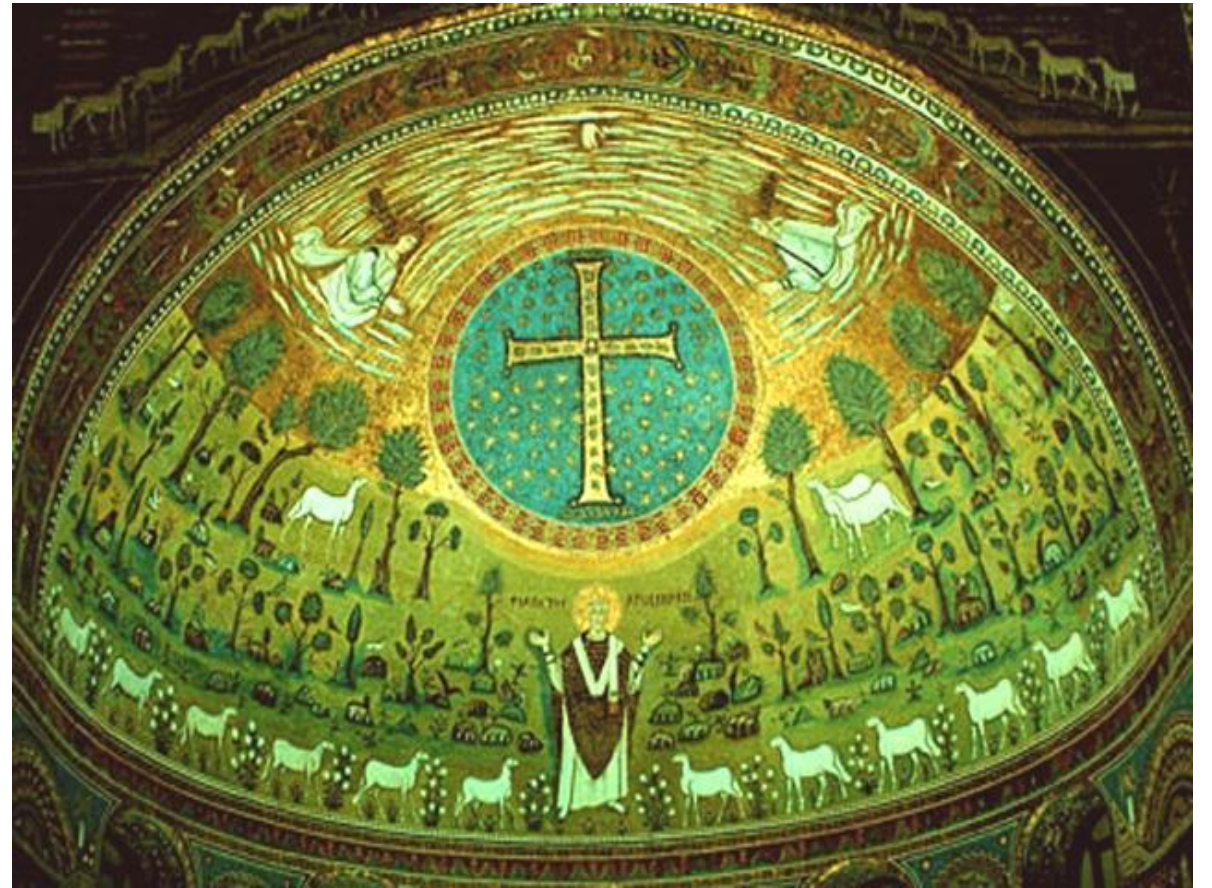
Key Point 2



- Concerned with **symbolic representations of Christian concepts**
 - Christians had completely different concerns than the Roman Empire.
 - Art took on an entirely different direction becoming less focused on realism.
 - Reflects a **hieratic style**, one of extreme formality and stylization.

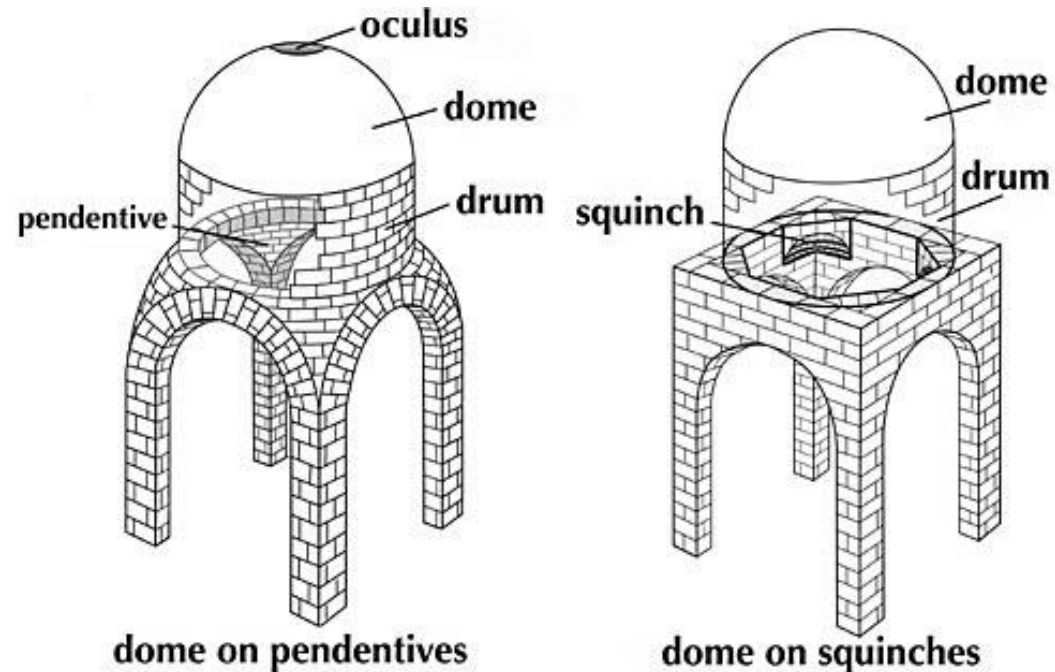
Key Point 3

- Illustrated Christian stories to a largely illiterate public.
- Art served the role of **church decoration**, meant to create an atmosphere of devotion.



Key Point 4

- Byzantine architects invented the **pendentive** and **squinch** for churches with a dome.



Pendentive: arching triangular masonry connecting pier and dome

The Illuminated Manuscript

- **The Codex**, the earliest version of book (pages bound by stitching with a cover) replaced the scroll.
- Animal skin was tanned for paper because it was more pliable than papyrus.
 - **Vellum** – calfskin
 - **Parchment** – lambskin
- **Illuminated** = to adorn, ornament, or brighten.
- Covers could be done in gold, jewels, ivory carvings, repoussé reliefs.



Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well

from the Vienna Genesis,
Early Byzantine, 500 ce. Illuminated manuscript (pigments on vellum)

CONTENT

Continuous Narrative

- Two (or more) scenes being told at one time.
- People can appear more than one time.
- Abbreviated to tell the story.
- A *transition* piece from Roman to Christian; it is more stylized than Greek/Roman imagery.
 - This is to emphasize the spirituality of the work.
 - Still maintains a strong Classical influence.
- Story of Eliezer finding Rebecca to be Isaac's wife.
- Script is Greek translation of Genesis.
 - Text was originally silver and has turned black.
- Personification of Spring is sitting by well.
 - Shows the connection to the **classical** past.
 - Represents the source of the water.



Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well

from the Vienna Genesis,
Early Byzantine, 500 ce. Illuminated manuscript
(pigments on vellum)

FORMAL/VISUAL

- Dyed a rich purple to indicate the imperial nature of the subject (the Patron was the Emperor and was restricted to imperial use).



CONTEXT

- Oldest well-preserved manuscripts containing biblical scenes.
 - Creates a separation from pagan art and Christian art.
- **Didactic** – used as a learning tool, only way to allow for images so viewers can clearly understand the narrative.
- Hebrew (Jewish) story from the Old Testament.

Jacob Wrestling the Angel

from the *Vienna Genesis*

Early Byzantine, 500 ce, Illuminated manuscript (pigments on vellum)

- Depicted in a way to make the scene easily understandable by the viewer.
 - Background details are diminished and heads are enlarged and gestures emphasized.
- Continuous Narrative – this is an example of how it was difficult to convey a continuous narrative on a folio instead of a scroll.

[Beth and Steve, 5 min](#)



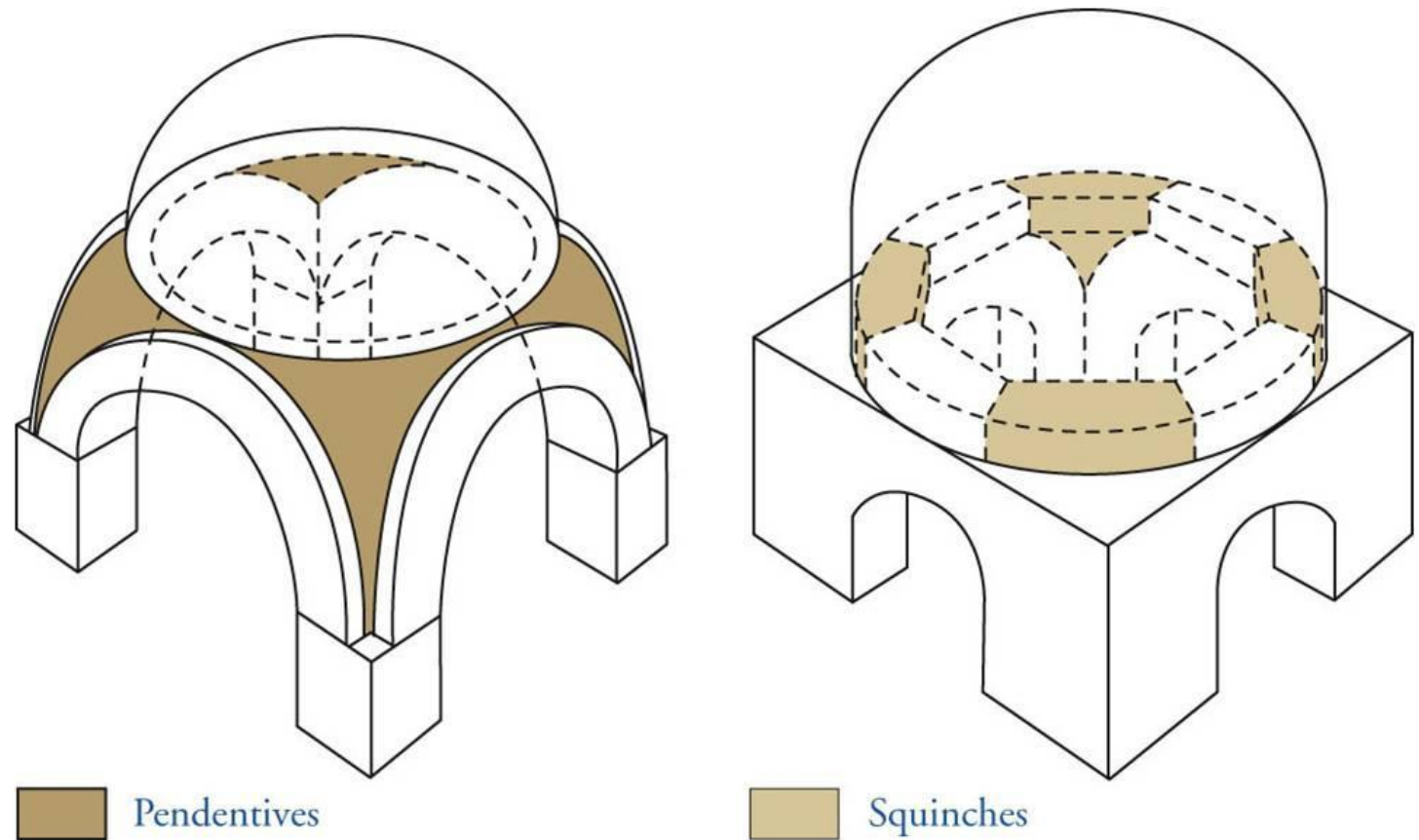
This story is from Genesis 24. Abraham wanted to find a wife for his son Isaac and sent his servant Eliezer to find one from among Abraham's extended family. Eliezer took ten of Abraham's camels with him and stopped at a well to give them water. Eliezer prayed to God that Isaac's future wife would assist him with watering his camels. Rebecca arrives on the scene and assists Eliezer, who knows that she is the woman for Isaac. This story is about God intervening to ensure a sound marriage for Abraham's son.

Jacob Wrestling the Angel, the story

Genesis 32:22-32 (NIV) Jacob Wrestles With God

- ²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."
- But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."
- ²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?"
- "Jacob," he answered.
- ²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, ^[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."
- ²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."
- But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.
- ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, ^[b] saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."
- ³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, ^[c] and he was limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

Pendentives & Squinches

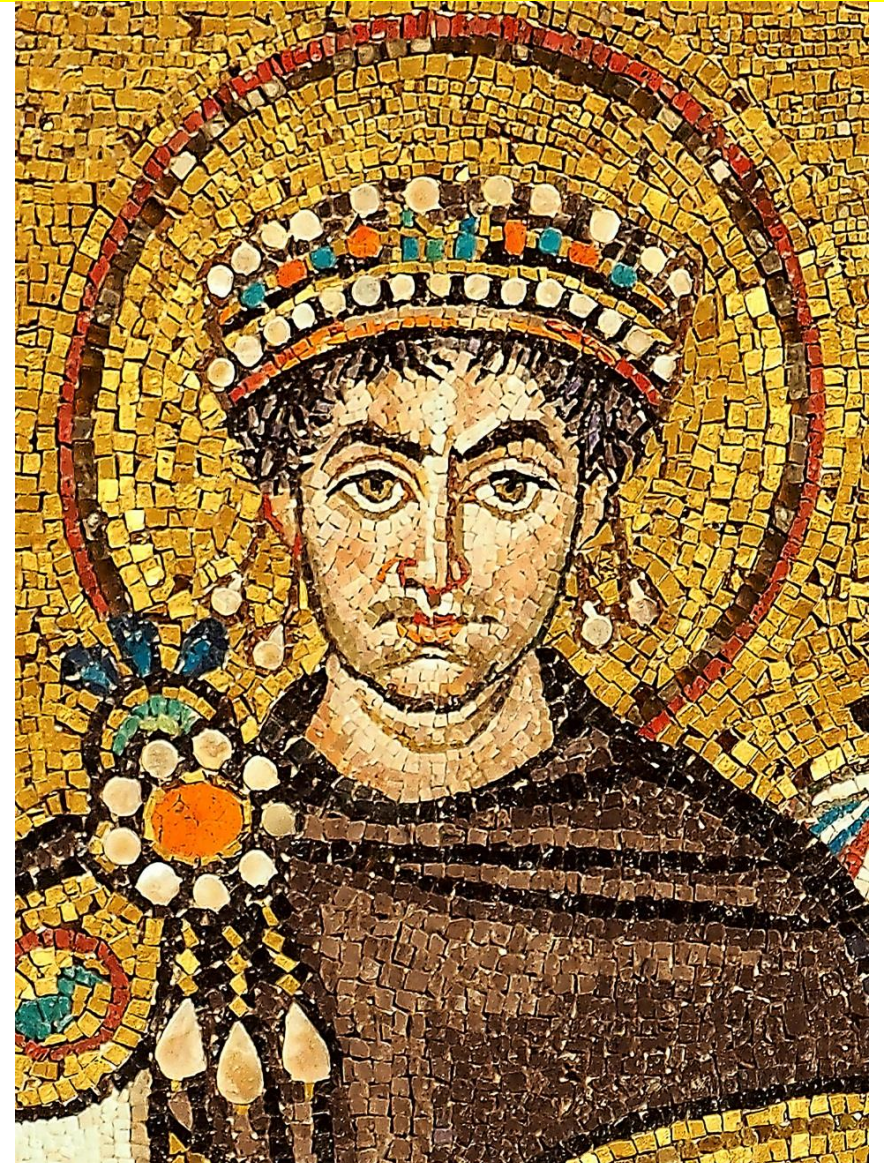


- *Most significant Byzantine feature is placement of dome over a square.*
- Combines the **axial plan** and the **central plan**.
- Weight is placed on **piers** rather than walls, which enables a dome on basilican structures.
- Squinches bridge the corners of supporting walls to form an octagon from a square base.
- Pendentives transition 4 arches into a circle.

Emperor Justinian and Early Byzantium

(527-726)

- Considered it his duty to wipeout all cult religions and any form of Christianity other than Orthodox.
- All Byzantine emperors considered themselves the earthly vicars of Jesus Christ.
 - Their will was God's will.
 - Had supreme reign (Divine Right to Rule).
 - Combined functions of pope and Caesar.
 - This was kept separate in the west (Rome).
 - Made them quasi-divine.



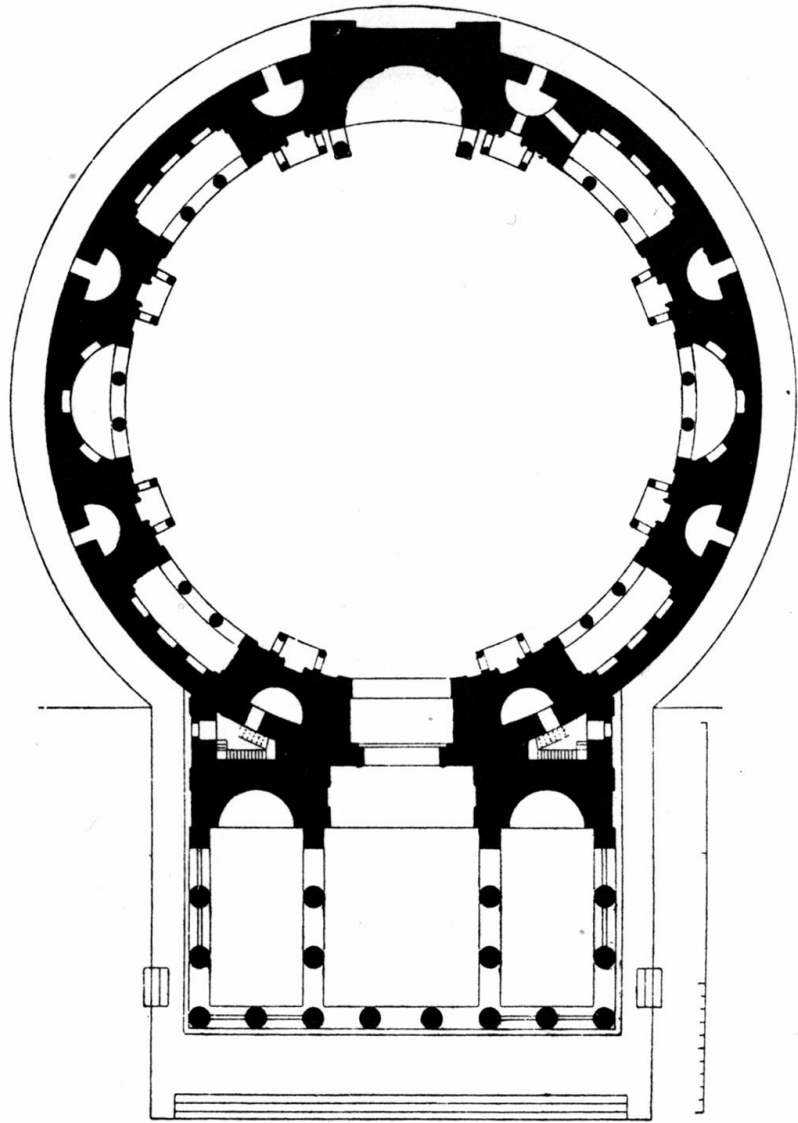
San Vitale

Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, brick, marble and stone

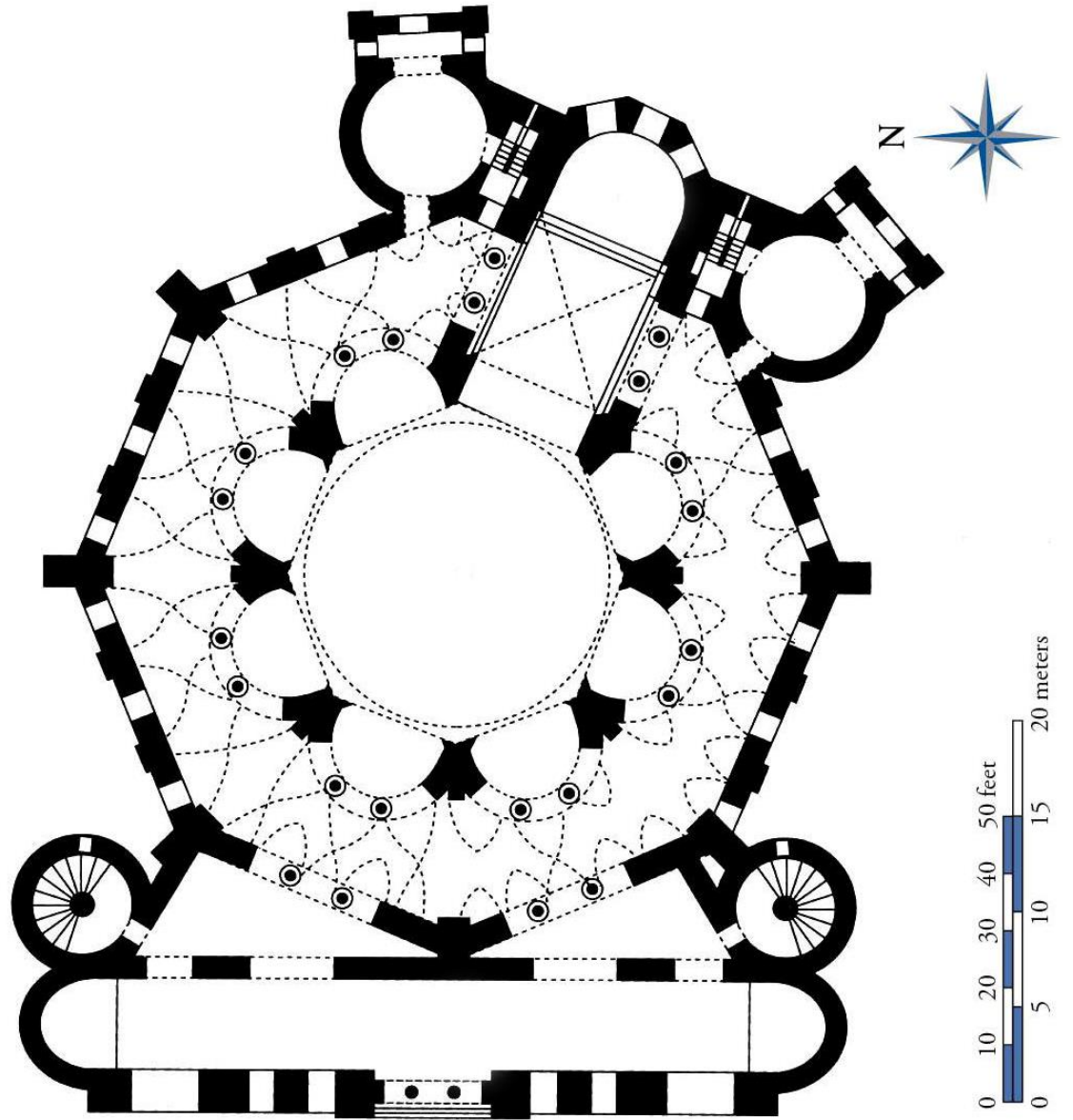
CONTENT

- **Central plan church**
 - Based on the traditional design of a **Martyrium**, a central planned shrine to honor the site of a martyrdom or a martyr's grave site.
 - Based off of pagan tholos, such as the Pantheon.
 - Dome is octagon with windows in clerestory.
- Octagonal shape suggests a transitional space between earth and heaven.
- Central domed churches are typical of the eastern Orthodox (Byzantine).
- Emphasizes the plain exterior and decorated interior.





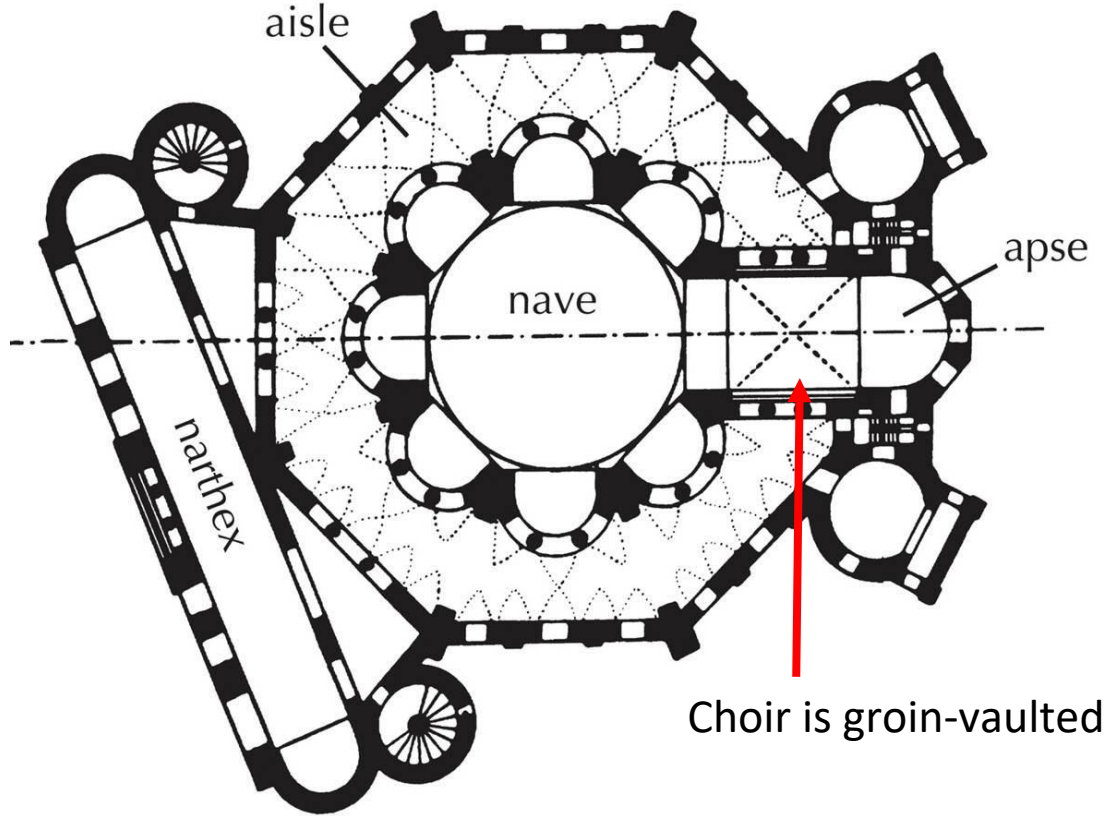
12. ROM: PANTHEON.





San Vitale

Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, brick, marble and stone

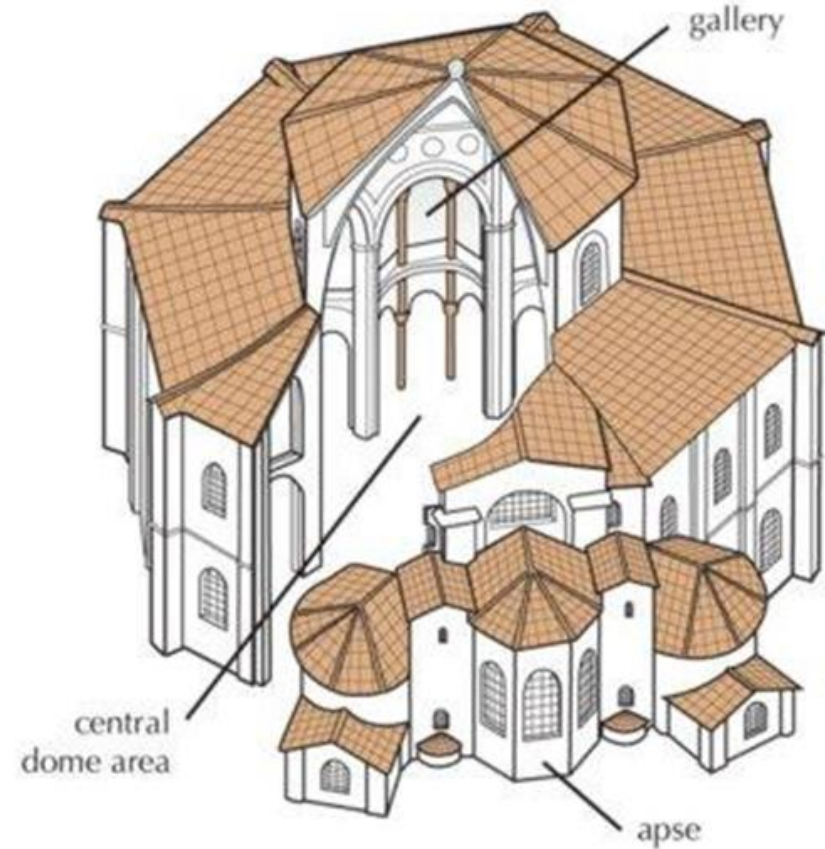
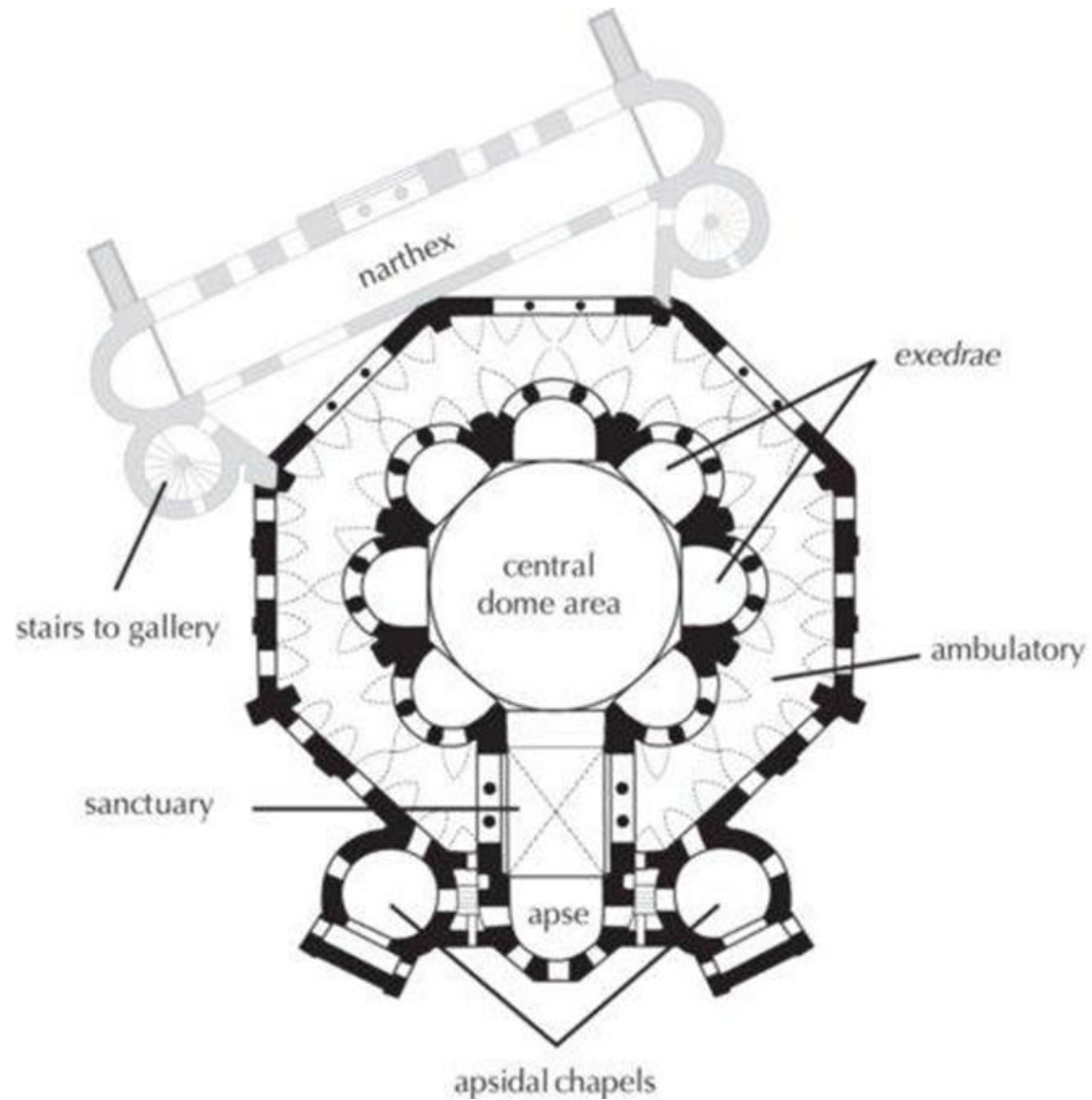


- Eight piers support rounded arches beneath inner octagon.
- **Spatially complex** space causes an emotional impact, typical of eastern Christianity.
- Spiral staircases lead to gallery.
- Off-set narthex no longer exists and may have paralleled a street.
- **Ambulatory** allows for prayer while walking.

• CENTRAL PLAN

San Vitale, plan.

Ravenna, Italy. Early Byzantine Europe. C. 536-527 CE. Brick, marble, and stone veneer; mosaic.

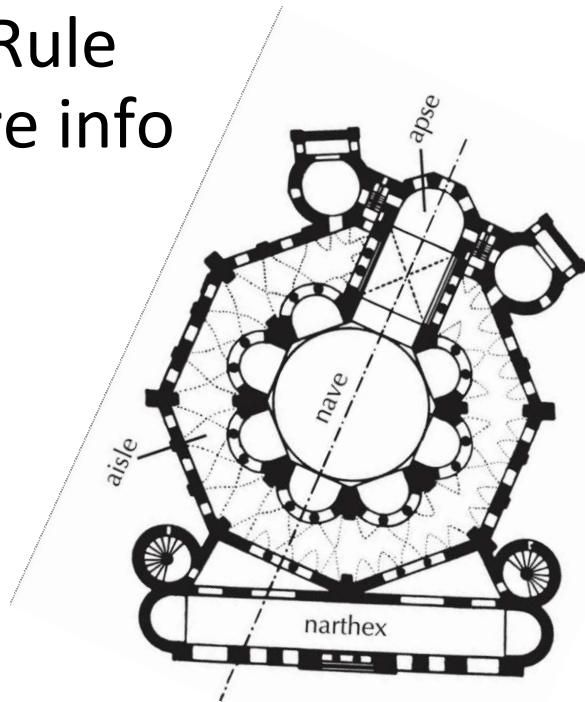


San Vitale, Interior

Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, brick, marble and stone

Demonstrates:

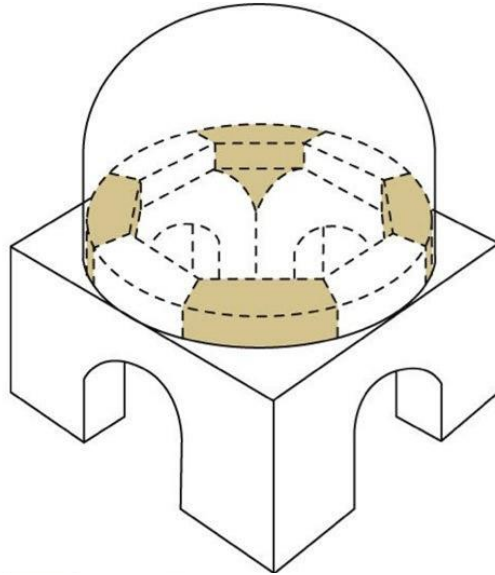
- Power and Authority via extravagant decorations.
- Divine Right to Rule via mosaic (more info coming later).



San Vitale, Interior

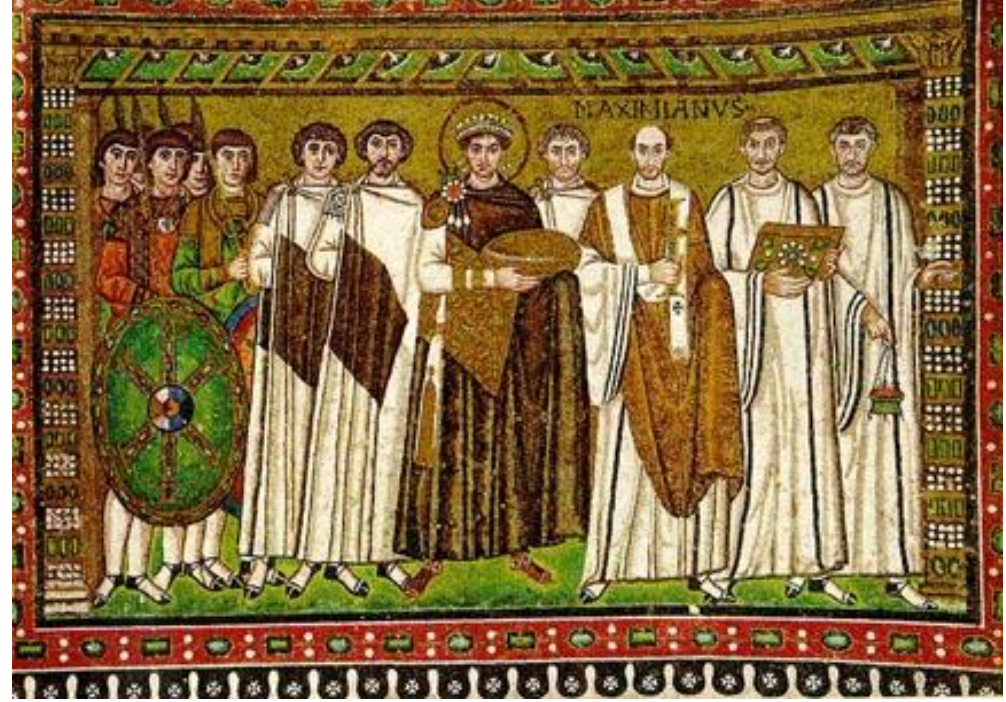
Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, brick, marble and stone

Uses squinches





Early Christian, *Christ as the Good Shepherd*



Byzantine, *Justinian*

A good way to characterize Byzantine imagery is: 3 F's and a G

- Flat – figures lack 3D effect.
- Floating – figures hover.
- Frontal – everyone is usually facing forward.
- **G**old backgrounds – depthless, conveys the spirituality of Christianity.

San Vitale, Justinian Panel

Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, mosaic

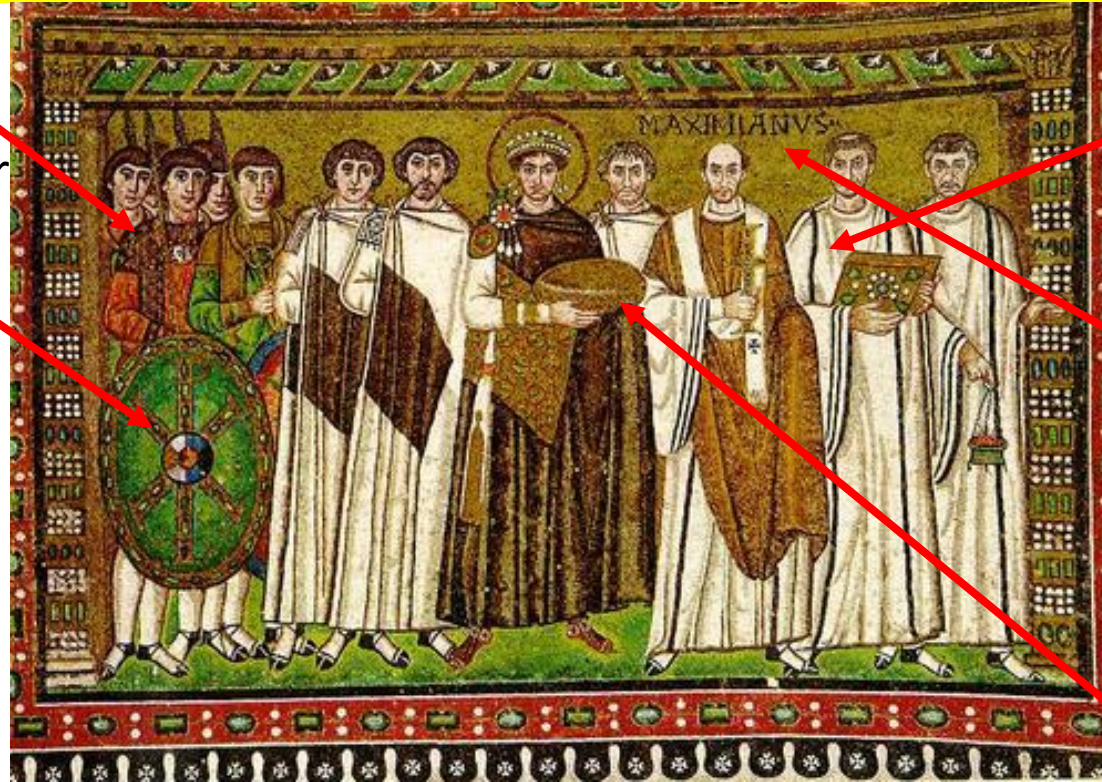
- Typical Byzantine **focus on spirituality**
- The figures are:
 - Flattened
 - Elongated
 - Placed side by side
 - Wearing stylized drapery
 - There is no indication of form or a body under the drapery
 - Face frontally
 - Big eyes, small feet
 - Seem to hover, float
- The Mosaic with gold background represents heavenly light, not of the earth and is meant to evoke the immaterial spiritual realm, as opposed to the 3D physical worldly realm.



San Vitale, Justinian Panel

Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, mosaic

- Imperial guard on one side
 - Displays his secular power
- Shield has Chi-rho-iota
 - Monogram of Christ
 - C-R-I = the first 3 letters
 - Suggests a comparison to Constantine whose soldiers painted this on their shields as they went into battle.
 - Glorifies Justinian as the defender of the Christian faith (The eastern or Byzantine Orthodox did not consider the western Christianity as the true faith and thought they were heretics).



Their frontal positioning and direct gaze suggests they are guarding this space

- Clergy on other side
 - Displays his spiritual power.
- “Maximus,” who was responsible for completing construction, is written above the bishop.
- Justinian holds the **paten**, a sacred object that holds the Eucharist bread.

Location



Apse Mosaic

- **Justinian is on the Christ's right side**
- The two are united visually and symbolically:
 - Both in purple and with halos.
 - Justinian has 12 attendants (like the 12 apostles).
- The juxtaposition (side-by-side placement) and the Imperial robes, crown, and halo implies Justinian's divine right to Rule via his role as priest-king (i.e. the laws of state and church were united in the emperor).

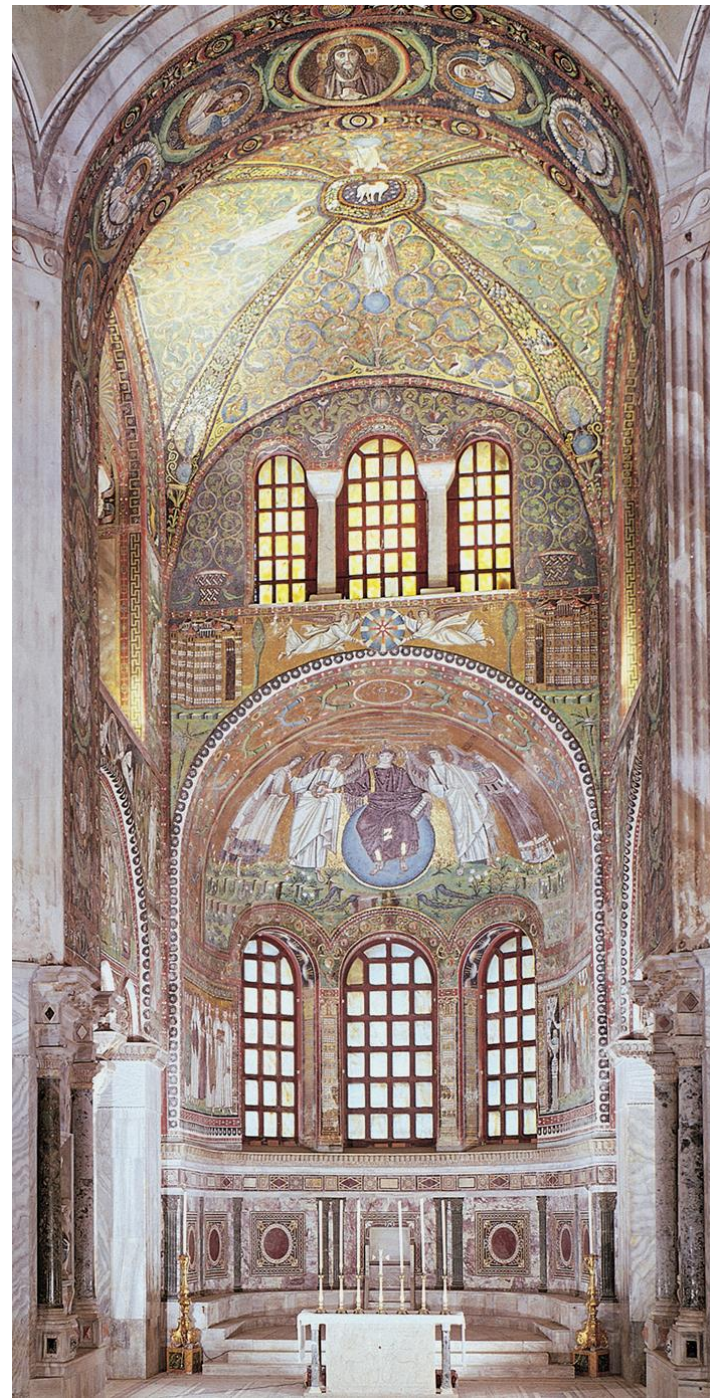


Dome and Apse Mosaics

Themes:

- Justinian's divine right to rule.
- Christ's redemption of humanity and the reenactment of it in the Eucharist.

San Vitale
Ravenna, Italy
526-547



San Vitale, Justinian panel.

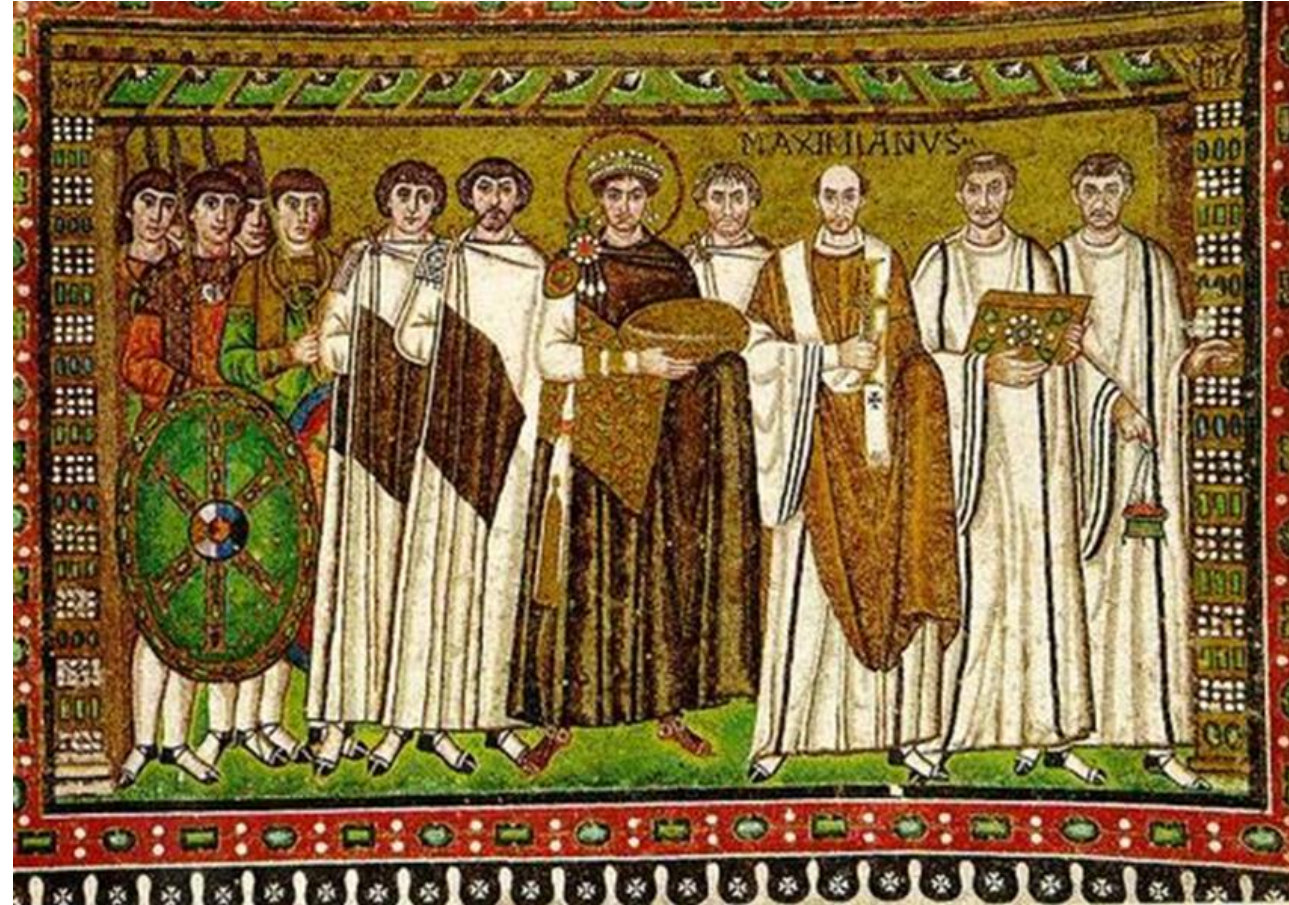
Ravenna, Italy. Early Byzantine Europe. C. 536-527 CE. mosaic.

Function (Context)

- Reinforces the idea of Justinian's union of political and spiritual authority.
- Reinforces the Byzantine "divine kingship."
- Proclaims Justinian's imperial power over the Western empire and the supremacy of the Orthodox church.

Formal (Visual)

- Mosaic is done in **tesserae**.
- The tiles are set on an angle to reflect more light and shimmer/sparkle from every angle.



San Vitale, Justinian panel

Ravenna, Italy. Early Byzantine Europe. C. 536-527 CE. mosaic.

ICONOGRAPHY

- Purple robes of royalty
- Halo around crown indicates his holiness
- Hands are covered, which is a sign of respect
- Standard facial types
- On Jesus's right hand side
- Holds gold paten
 - Bowl for communion bread



Isocephalic – when the heads of the figures line up

San Vitale, Theodora panel.

Ravenna, Italy. Early Byzantine Europe. C. 536-527 CE. Mosaic.

- Directly across from Justinian's panel.
 - On left of Christ to show her lower rank.
- Not quite symmetrical in placement.
 - Indicates her secondary role to husband.
- She holds the communion cup/chalice.
- Ornately decorated, yet two dimensional.
 - Purposefully breaks from Classicism (Paganism) to be associated with a spiritual being.
- On her hem are the 3 Magi with offerings for the infant Jesus Christ.
 - This leaves it open to interpretation that Theodora is associated with the Virgin Mary.



San Vitale, Theodora panel.

Ravenna, Italy. Early Byzantine Europe. C. 536-527 CE. Mosaic.

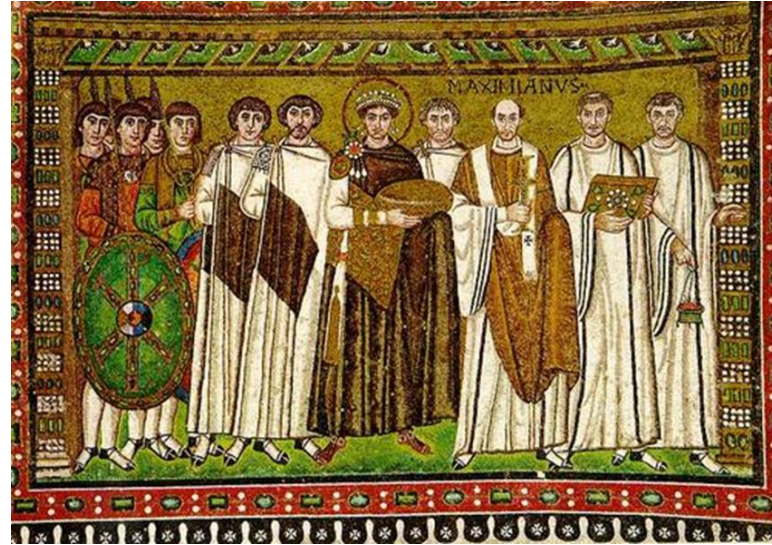
- On her hem are the 3 Magi with offerings for the infant Jesus Christ.
 - This leaves it open to interpretation that Theodora is associated with the Virgin Mary.



San Vitale, Theodora panel

Early Byzantine, Ravenna Italy, 540ce, brick, marble and stone

- Location of this mosaic and Justinian's gives the impression they are helping with the celebration of the Eucharist or Mass.
- The two panels together marks their secular and religious power.
- Neither Justinian on nor Theodora ever went to Ravenna; these panels functioned as their proxies in their absence, demonstrating their ability to rule even from afar.



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

- Byzantine characteristics:
 - Plain and unpretentious exterior.
 - Disguises the massive interior.
- Function
 - Site of emperors' coronations.
 - Palace chapel for emperors.

[Art History Abbreviated, 3 min](#)

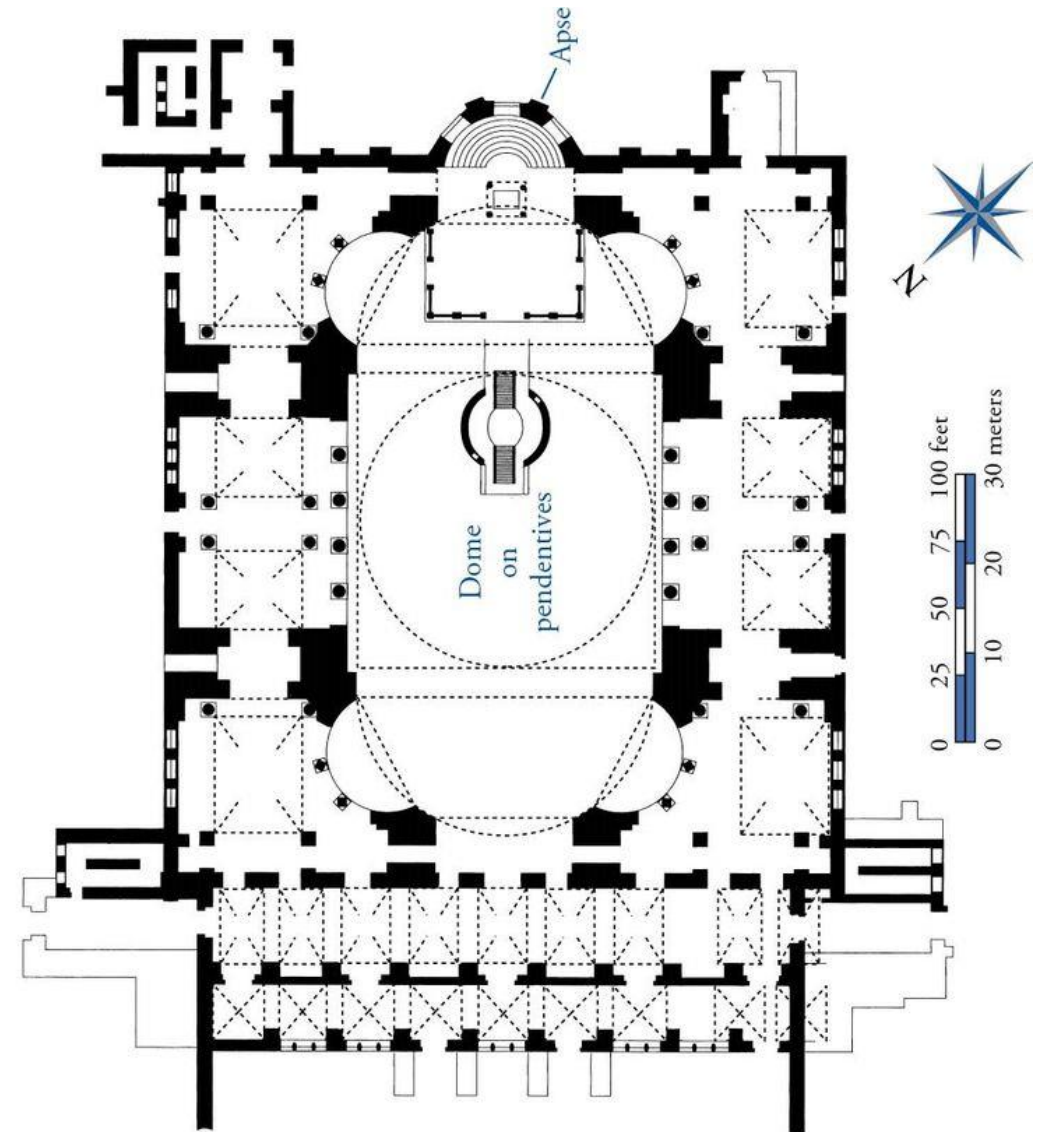
[Smart History, 11 min](#)



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

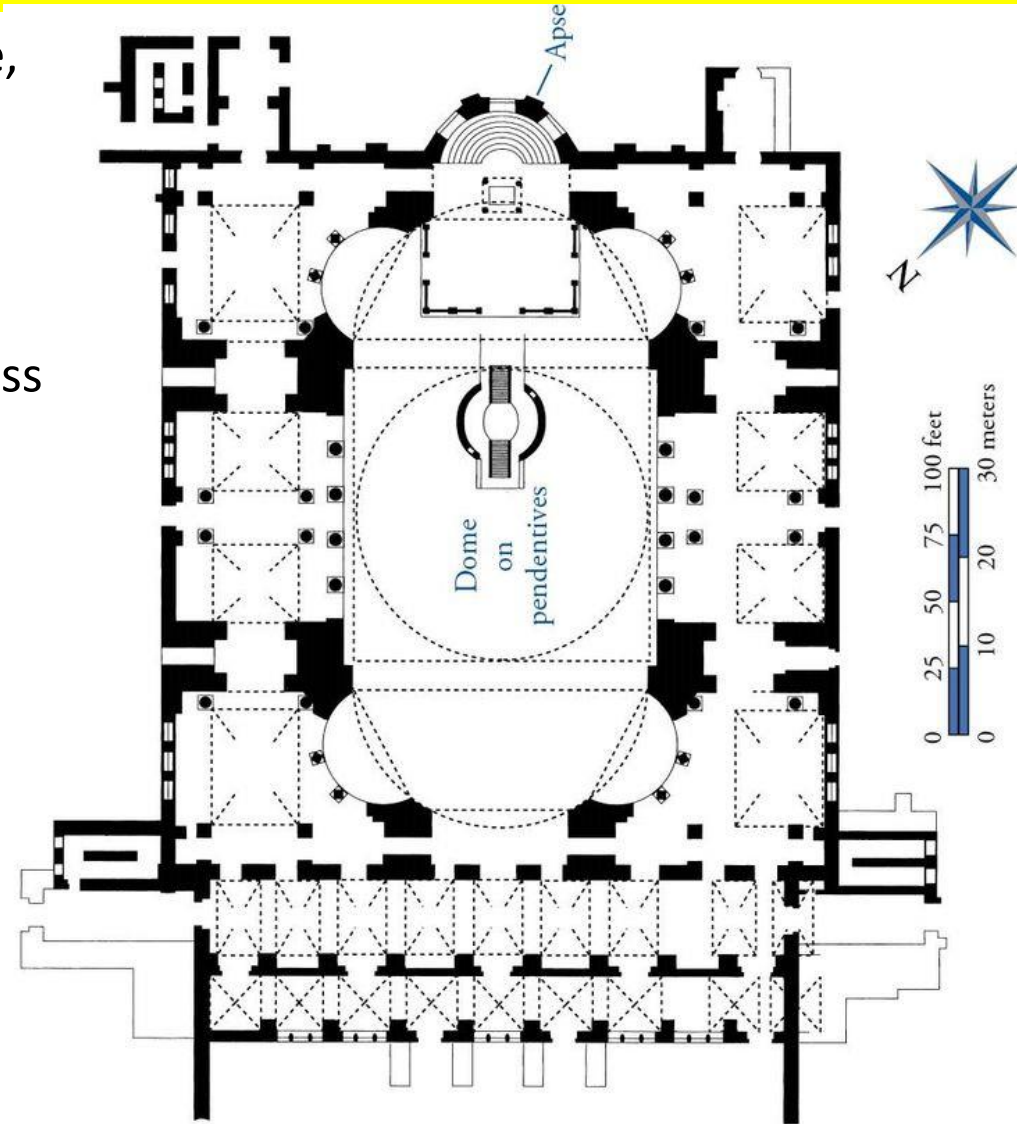
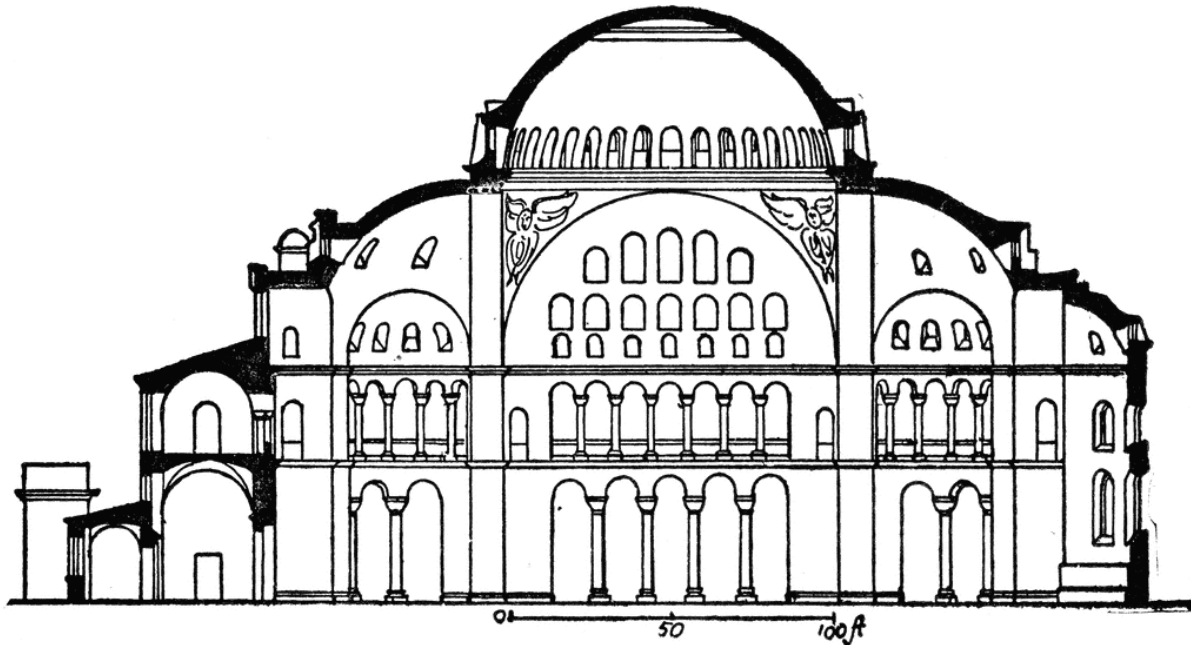
- Combines the axial (longitudinal) plan and the centrally planned church.
- Nave is made up of the main dome and two supportive domes.
- 4 **piers** support the massive dome.
- Huge nave directs attention to apse.



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

- The half-domes of the apse flow outward from the central dome, both to carve out space and support the main dome.
- Vertical emphasis – dome is 185 feet from floor.
- Original dome fell in 558; they rebuilt it 20 feet higher to have less outward thrust and added buttressing on the exterior.



Elevation and Cross-Section View

View of the entrance.

Note the visual effect of the building's recession toward the dome.

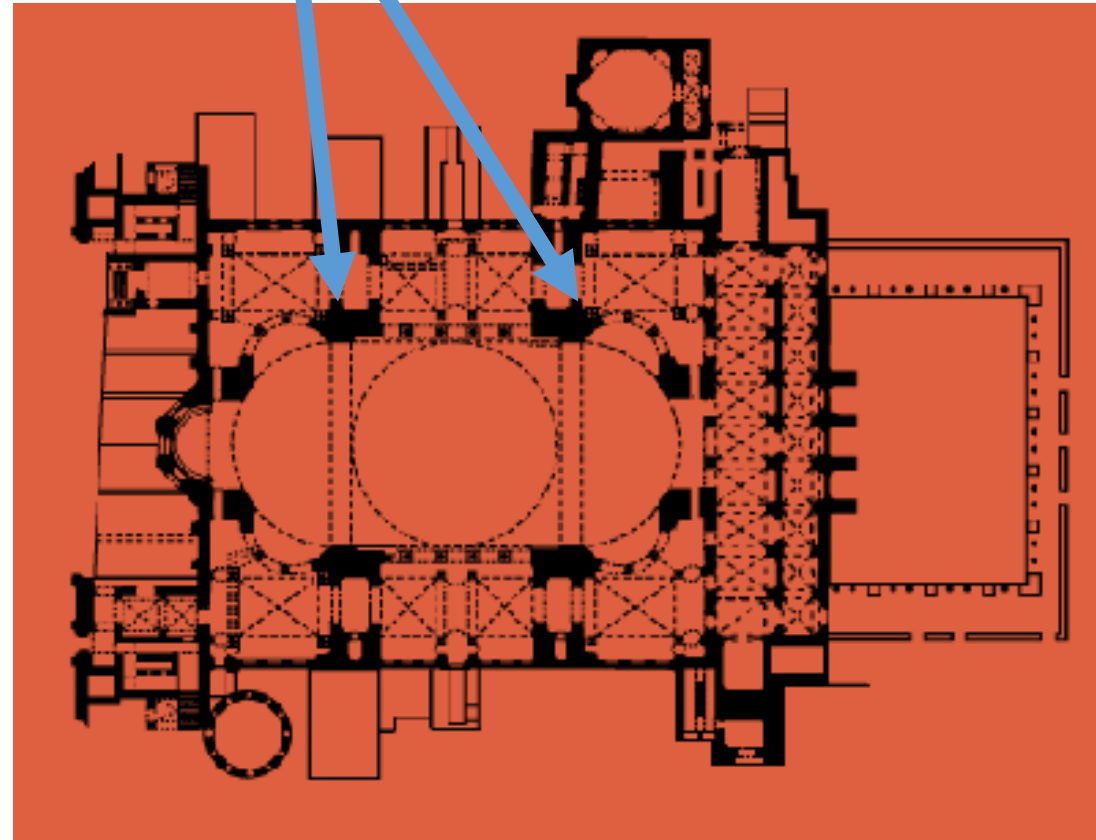


The **galleries** and **buttresses** behind the exedra wall serve to support the dome by piling up masonry that counteracts the outward thrust of the dome.





- Roman in majestic size but not in plan
- Made of **brick**.
 - A Byzantine practice.
 - **Ashlar masonry** (carved, dressed stone) is used on only on **piers**.



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

CONTEXT

- Architects were a mathematician and a physicist.
- Sets the standard for Eastern Orthodox churches with its utilization of domes.
- Huge buttresses were added later.
- Turned into a mosque in 1453 when:
 - The Minarets are added.
 - The Mosaics are covered.
- Now being turned back to a mosque(contemporary political issue)



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

CONTEXT

- Size serves 2 purposes:
 1. A tribute to God.
 2. To shock worshippers with an imposing space to make them realize their insignificance.
- Patrons: Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora.



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

CONTEXT

- Held many important relics.
 - Part of the Cross
 - The lance that pierced Christ
 - Noah's olive branch
 - The crown of thorns worn by Christ
- The mosaics are not original to the church, most were created after the iconoclasm.

FUNCTION

- Meant to communicate imperial power and to glorify Christianity.
- Combines secular and religious power; an example of power are the interior columns that were brought from Egypt.



Hagia Sophia, interior.

Constantinople (Istanbul).

Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus. 532-537 CE. Brick and ceramic elements with stone and mosaic veneer.

- **Mystical quality of light**

- Different from the Roman buildings.
 - Creates a halo of light – looks to be suspended from Heaven.
 - Light glitters in the stone mosaics.
- Interior was originally covered in tesserae in gold to glitter and reflect the light.
 - Architects wanted to create a mystical interior that outshone any other comparable structures.



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

CONTENT

- Windows on dome create a “floating” dome adds to the mysticism and spirituality.
- Lots of gold and purple, colors associated with the emperor, are used throughout the building.
- All structural supports are hidden on the inside to give the effect of mass suspended on beams of light.
- **Pendentives** provide additional curved surface for decoration, and enhances the effect of the whole ceiling structure "opening up" to the sky beyond.

AFTER ISLAMIC CONQUEST IN 1453:

- Covered Christian mosaics.
- Added 8 huge disks with Arabic calligraphy quoting Qu’ran.





- Series of semi-domes (conches)
 - Give a curving flow
 - Arcades are decorative
- Dome is 108 feet across (smaller than the Pantheon) but the nave is longer, 290 feet.

Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

- Originally had a 50 foot silver **iconostasis**, a screen that separates the nave from the altar.
- It was covered in icon images.
- It was removed when converted to a mosque.



Hagia Sophia

Early Byzantine, Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

- Mosaics on the pendentives depict **seraphim**
 - The highest order of angels.
 - Indicates that because of the height of the dome, the church is the closest access to heaven possible.
 - Could also relate to a story that the building was constructed with the assistance of angels.



Theotokos and Child

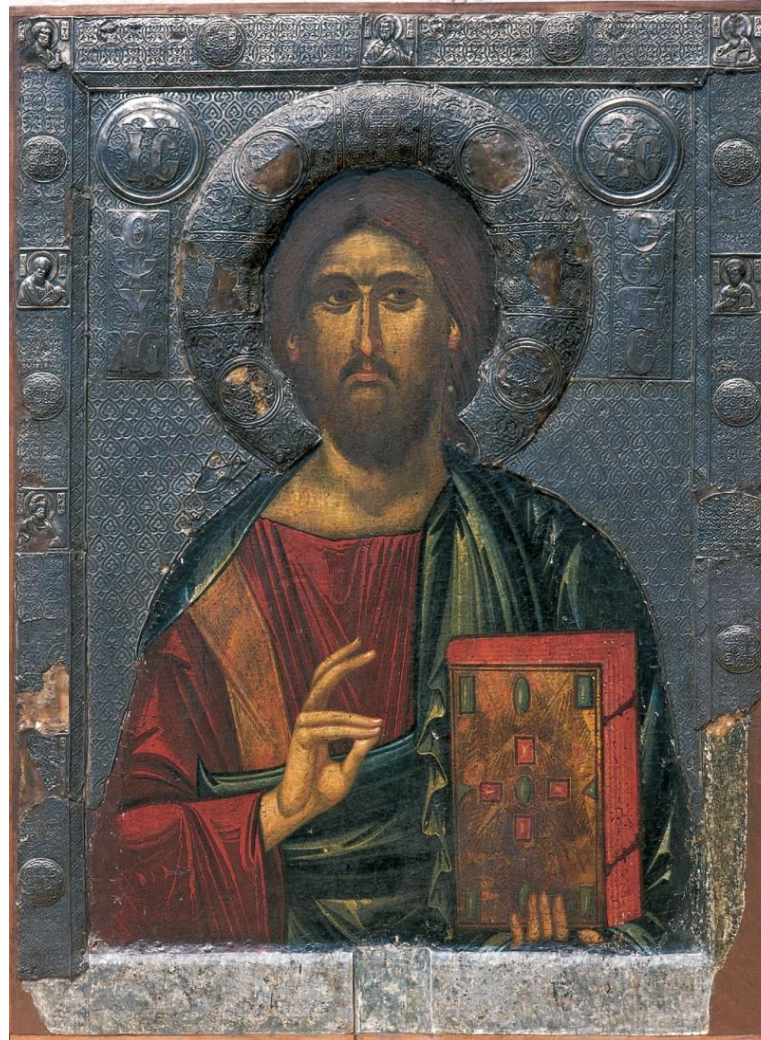
Early Byzantine
Constantinople (Istanbul), 535ce

- Commissioned the mosaic to replace one the “imposters” (iconoclasts) had destroyed (was a copy of the original).
- Echoes early Byzantine style.
- **Theotokos** = bearer of God.
- Still has Classical elements but:
 - Folds are more stylized
 - Figures are not proportionate
 - No classical references
- [Beth and Steve, 5 min](#)



Icons

- Small portable paintings of Mary, Jesus, and/or saints.
- Strong EMOTIONAL appeal to eastern Christians who worshipped and prayed to the figures in the icons.
- Byzantine Christians believed that icons allowed for more perfect communication with the divine.
 - Icons were thought to work miracles.
- For private prayer, displayed in the home but also carried during processions.
- Not naturally depicted, wanted to show spirituality.
- Usually painted on wood with encaustic or tempera.



Iconoclasm

- Devotion to icons led to the artistically devastating **Iconoclastic Controversy** (Critics thought the faithful were worshipping the images rather than the holy person it represented).
- Virtually all existing icons within the Byzantine empire were destroyed.



Iconoclasm (726-843)—Context for Virgin...George

- 627 attacks by the new Arabs, Islamics, conquered Byzantium's eastern provinces and Persia and the Sasanians.
 - Soon were attacking Constantinople
 - Almost 2/3's of the empire was lost.
- Emperor Leo III determined that it was God punishing the Christian Roman Empire for its idolatrous worship of icons and in 726 he formally prohibited the use of figural images.
- Only symbols (cross, vacant Throne of Heaven, cabinet with scriptural scrolls, etc) could be used.
- Was also influenced by the iconoclastic ideals of Islam.
- Stylized floral, animal, and architectural motifs were used for decoration.

Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George.

Early Byzantine Europe. 6th or early 7th century CE. Encaustic on wood.

Content/Visual

- Symmetrical.
- Mary is depicted as a mature woman (covered hair).
- She avoids eye contact so as not to take attention away from Christ.
- Christ looks away into the future.
- Christ is depicted like an older man and holds a scroll to symbolize he is all-knowing.
- Theodore and George (soldier saints) look directly at the viewer to encourage direct pious communication.
- Angels look towards heaven.
- Foreground – Byzantine hieratic style, frontal (except the Virgin's face).
- Contrast between foreground and background figures.
- Some spatial recession.
- Convincing drapery on Mary.
- Twist of the Virgin's body, leans on throne.
- Spatial ambiguity (depth and flatness) bridges the real and spiritual worlds.
- Strong contrast in value would appear to glow in candlelight – appears spiritual.



Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George.

Early Byzantine Europe. 6th or early 7th century CE. Encaustic on wood.

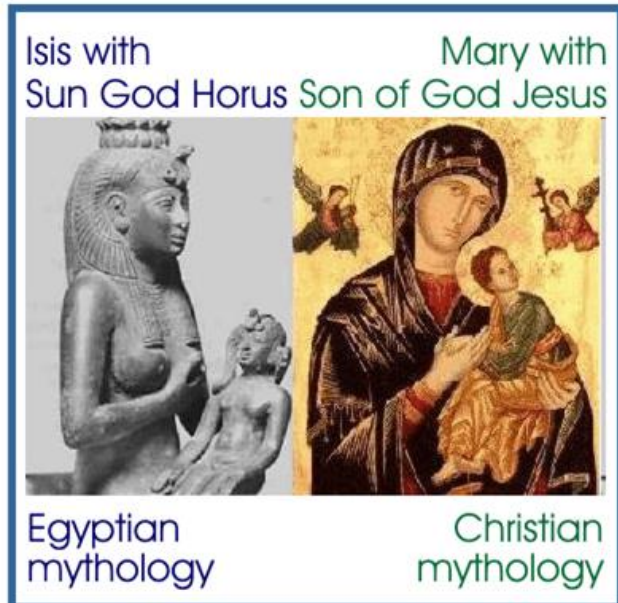
Content/Visual

- Presented as a royal image.
 - Mary in enthroned.

Context: Created in Egypt, located on Mt. Sinai.

Function: for the worshipper to seek Mary to intercede on their behalf.

- held in processions, kissed, used as a focus for prayer.

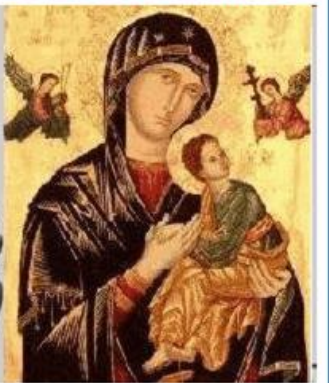


Isis with

Sun God Horus

Mary with

Son of God Jesus



Egyptian
mythology

Christian
mythology



Egyptian Ankh

Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George. Early Byzantine Europe. 6th or early 7th century CE. Encaustic on wood.



- In background 2 angels look to a shaft of light where the hand of God appears to bless them.
- Possibly 3 different artists – one for each grouping.
- OR – shows the angels as idealized/otherworldly and the saints as mortals.
- **Encaustic** = using pigments mixed with hot wax.



Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George.

Early Byzantine Europe. 6th or early 7th century CE. Encaustic on wood.

Context

- Survived the Iconoclasm because it was in an area that had lost control to the Muslim rulers.
 - Egyptian St. Catherine Monastery at base of Mt. Sinai.
- Earliest image known that depicts the Madonna and Child.
 - Establishes the iconography that remains for centuries.
 - More regal than maternal, she is imperial.
 - Purplish-blue robe and purple cushion symbolize imperial stature.
- Overly large eyes look to the left.
- NATURALISM: Classical influence
 - Modeling of the faces, ¾ view on angels, muscles, shadows, perspective.
- STYLIZATION: flatter, more symbolic, intentionally less naturalistic style used to depict the realm of the spirit.
 - Compressed space, hierarchy of scale, flat patterns, no bodies under robes.
- Possibly 3 different artists – one for each grouping.
- Spatial ambiguity (depth and flatness) bridges the real and spiritual worlds.
- Only saints have a ground line, near us, on the “earth.”

