

THE
Sultan Ahmed
(BLUE) MOSQUE



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Free Pamphlet



*Sultan
I. Ahmet Khan
(1590-1617)*

The Sultan Ahmed (Blue) Mosque

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque was built between 1609-1617 (the construction took about 7,5 years) by Sedefkar Mehmet Aga upon the order of Sultan Ahmed I, who ascended to throne at the age of 14 as the 14th Sultan of Ottomans. He was only 19 years old when he commissioned to build this great mosque to Sedefkâr Mehmet Aga. He showed his dedication to the construction by personally working as a labourer. He reigned the Land of Ottomans (included 3 continents) for 14 years and he passed away when he was 28 years old.

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque is a masterpiece built with the understanding of the Great Architect Sinan in the 17th century. Architect Mehmed Aga, after he was admitted to the sedefkarlık (inlaying of mother –of- pearl) and architecture department of The Palace in 1569-1570, he found himself in a new world and he worked as an apprentice and thereafter, a master-builder under the supervision of Great Architect Sinan for just 21 years. After Great Sinan's death he became The Chief Architect. Having become The Chief Architect, his first work was the

reparation of The Kaaba (which is named as “The House of Allah” in the Holy Qur’an by Allah Himself) and installation of its famous Golden Gutters.

Külliye (Sultan Ahmed Complex)

When the Ottoman Turks built a mosque, they did not limit it only to a place of worship but rather a `külliye` or ‘jami’, a large complex of buildings. Therefore, the Sultanahmet Mosque also included a hospital, a madrasah (a higher educational institution), an imaret (a soup kitchen), a primary school, a market (bazaar), and a tomb for the members of the royal family. There was also a room for an astronomer (called ‘Muvakkithane’ ‘time house’) where he made calculations of the times of prayer and other important occasions in the Muslim calendar.

Today most of these buildings are used for different purposes and the Ottoman primary school (Sıbyan Mektebi), in addition to the main centre inside the mosque (in which the visitors have chance to go in and get information about the Mosque and Islam by meeting the Imam directly), is currently used as one of the mosque’s info centres.

The Name of the Mosque

Even though it has been known with this name by most of the Westerners the Sultan Ahmed Mosque has never been called by the Turks as “the Blue Mosque” throughout the history. It was called like that by Western visitors because of its famous blue tiles from Iznik (Nicaea) that adorn the interior walls of the mosque. These are more than 21.000 in number. In those handmade tiles along blue colour



also white, green and other colours were used. However, the dominant colour when entering the mosque is obviously blue. The floral patterns represent



Earth in spring time as well as Gardens of Paradise. The beautiful decoration inside the prayer hall and the abundant light from windows give a feeling of serenity (unlike some gloomy structures) and attract people to the mosque. Thus, the construction process of the magnificent mosque called Blue Mosque by the Westerners, Sultan Ahmed Mosque by Turks which is the most well-known building of the area known as Hippodrome in Byzantine period, Horse Square in Ottoman period and called Sultan Ahmed square nowadays.

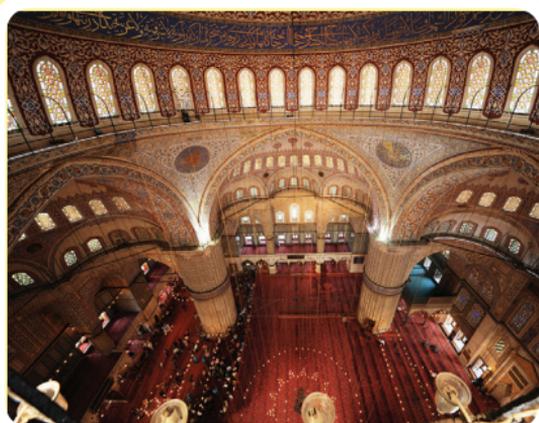
It is covered with carpet since the ritual prayer includes the act of prostration (sajdah), putting one's forehead and nose on the ground.

That is why Muslims take off their shoes before entering the mosque so that the space they pray on is also clean. (This is such a religious requirement to be clean in the place of praying like having ablution before praying and making the body and dress clean as well).

The greatest Arabic calligraphic examples on the interior walls of the Sultanahmet Mosque are produced by the famous calligrapher of the time, Qasim Ghubari. They are mostly Quranic verses and prayers as well as some attributes of Allah in Arabic language.

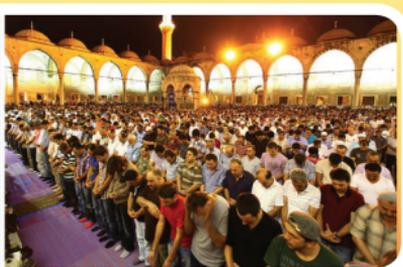
“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche

within which is a lamp; the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things.” (Qur’an 24:35)

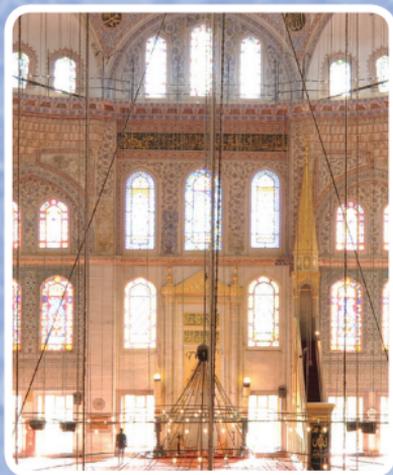


Inside the mosque there are four very large pillars with a diameter of 5 metres. These are given the name ‘fil paye’ in Turkish which means ‘elephant feet’ due to the resemblance to the sturdy feet of a huge elephant. On top of each pillar there is a quotation from the Qur’an written on a blue background with golden letters. These each represent a spiritual pillar of faith in Islam. One of the quotations (which is on top of the left rare column) is translated here to provide an example:

“And when My servants ask you about Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the prayer of the supplicant when they call upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.” (Qur’an 2:186)



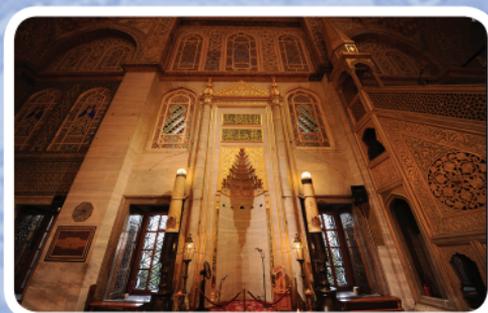
“Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.” Qur’an 2:277



Main features of the Mosque

Interior space gives the feeling of interior area of a large palace place but it also has a mystical atmosphere. Hand-made colourful original ground carpets, various chandeliers and lamps, reading desks and Qur’an manuscripts on them advance the magnificence of this religious place with a palace look. Some of these objects aren’t in their places nowadays, however Sultan Ahmed Mosque doesn’t lose much of its magnificence. This building presents the most beautiful examples of many Classical Ottoman Art disciplines from architecture to Stone Works, from china tile to hand-works, from calligraphy to timber embroidery and mine arts.

Mihrab (Niche): It looks like a cavity in the marble wall and the structure reflects the voice of the imam (pray leader) to the people praying behind.



The direction of the mihrab is the Kabah in Mecca which is the reference point for all Muslims around the world during ritual prayers.

On top of the mihrab there are two verses from the Qur’an which mention the names of some holy people mentioned in relation to a special praying place (mihrab).

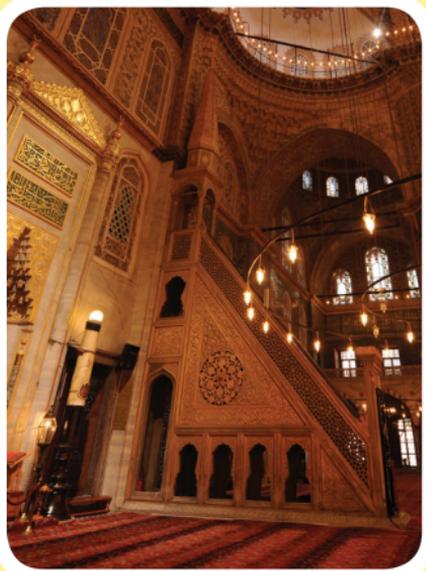
On top: **Whenever Zachariah entered the Mihrab, he found provision (food) with her (Mary). Qur'an 3:37**

Second one: **So the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the Mihrab, ("Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of John...") Qur'an 3:39**

Minber (Pulpit):

It looks like a staircase however it's used as a raised platform to deliver a sermon on congregational prayer days. These are every Friday noon time, Feast of Ramadan and the Feast of Sacrifice. On these three occasions all healthy Muslims are encouraged to attend the congregation

(it is mandatory to attend these prayers for men and the women also are allowed to attend but they were given the opportunity not to attend) and the numbers reach 10.000 inside the main hall. From this high location the Imam can be seen and heard easily by the worshippers inside. The minber is made from marble and there are eloquent stone carvings on it.



Kursi (The Chair): It is used to give a talk/lecture by scholars of religion and usually used when there is a high number of people attending the mosque. For decoration it is covered with mother of pearl.

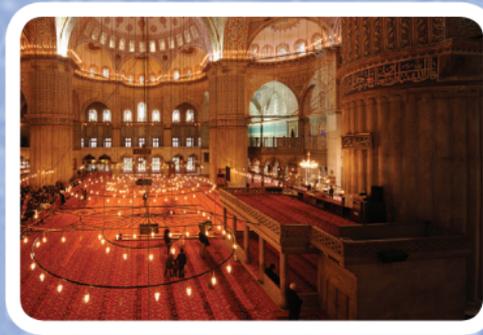


Muezzin Mahfili (Muazzin's Lodge):

After the call to prayer from the minaret finishes, the muezzin comes inside the hall and stands on a platform where he

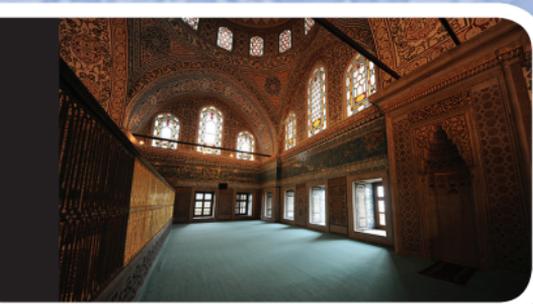
repeats the call to prayer quickly and worshippers form straight lines to pray together. This raised platform allows the muezzin to see the imam and aids his voice to be heard easily.

After the ritual prayer is finished the muezzin says certain words of glorification and praise which are then repeated 33 times by the congregation (this process is called tasbeeh and in Turkish culture a prayer bead is usually used to count).



Hunkar Mahfili (The Royal Lodge):

“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing.” Qur’an 4:58



Some Muslim rulers in the past were assassinated during prayers and therefore, as a security measure, royal lodges were built with a separate entrance. It allowed the King and leading ministers to pray with the congregation without the fear of assassination.

The dome: In Turkish Islamic architecture the dome is usually considered a representation of the heavens. The shape (hemisphere), the abundant blue colour and space inside this particular mosque somehow confirms this opinion.



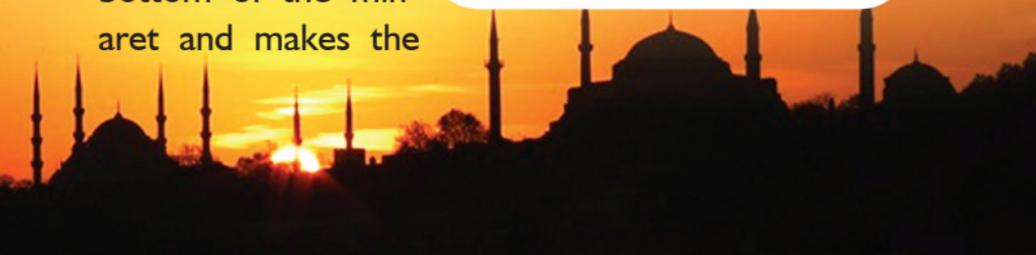
The central stone was called 'kilit taşı' which literally means 'locking stone'. This is a huge stone carefully carved and placed so that it pushes all the smaller

stones to the sides with its size and weight (locking them in a way). On the central stone there is a quotation from the Qur'an provoking thought again.

“Indeed, Allah holds the heavens and the earth, lest they cease. And if they should cease, no one could hold them [in place] after Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving.” Qur'an 35:41

Exterior of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

On the exterior part of the mosque, the most striking things are the minarets. They also mark the skyline of Istanbul. Inside the minarets there are stairs leading to the balconies and originally 16 people made the `adhan`, call to prayer, simultaneously towards different directions from the minarets. Today, with the use of current technology, one person stands at the bottom of the minaret and makes the





same announcement which was made centuries ago. The `muezzin` emphasizes the unity of God 5 times a day. The announcement is made in Arabic language and is roughly translated here:

Allah is greatest. (x4)

I bear witness that there is no god except Allah. (x2)

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. (x2)

Come to prayer. (x2)

Come to success. (x2)

Allah is greatest. (x2)

There is no god except Allah.

*Morning call to prayer has one additional sentence which means

'Worship is better than sleep'.

This is a motivational reminder that waking up at this time to worship God is more beneficial in the long run.

Ablution Facilities



These are on each side of the building. Muslims are required to be physically pure and clean at all times but especially before worship. Therefore they wash commonly used parts of their bodies including the hands, arms up to elbows, faces, and feet. Hair is sim-

ply rubbed with a wet hand. This also avoids the dirt to be carried into the prayer hall as well as disturbing smell from feet etc. The ablution facilities for Muslim women are in a covered area for privacy.

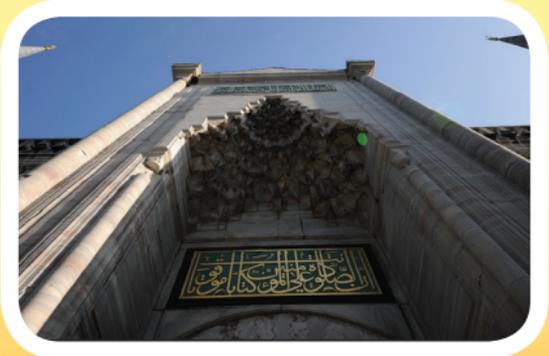


The Main Gate of the Mosque

It looks to the side of the ‘Hippodrome’ where the obelisks are. When you approach the main gate you see two Arabic notices to the approaching visitors. The first one on top is called Shahadah (Declaration of Faith) and means:

I bear witness that there is no god except Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.

The second is placed just above the arch and is a quotation from the Qur’an. This also explains the purpose of the building. It means:



“Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers at specified times.” Qur’an 4:103



Some Numbers for the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

- 6 minarets altogether. 4 of them have 3 balconies and their size is 73m and 2 have 2 balconies and 60m high.
- The size of the prayer hall is 53.50 x 49.47 (2646 m²).
- The inner courtyard has about 30 domes seated on 26 separate columns.
- The dome is about 43 metres high and is a diameter of 23.5 metres.
- Main prayer hall can accommodate up to 10.000 worshippers at a time.
- It has 260 windows.



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