

THE SCROLL OF HEAVEN
BYZANTIUM - CONSTANTINOPLE - ISTANBUL

THURSDAY 22 – WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER 2020 (7 DAYS)

LECTURER: CHARLES FREEMAN

£2975

- A fascinating exploration of one of the most stunning Mediterranean cities
- Wonderful mix of Greek, Roman, Christian & Islamic heritage
- Potent mix of site visits supported by visits to specialist museums
- Discover Islam's greatest architect, Sinan
- Magical boat trip down the Bosphorus
- Centrally located, comfortable hotel



Istanbul, The Suleimaniye Mosque,
from the engraving after William Henry Bartlett

OVERVIEW

“I have sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium... gather me into the artifice of eternity.” The words of W.B. Yeats are a poignant introduction to a remarkable city. Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul – stunningly positioned on a narrow promontory protected on two sides by the waters of the Bosphorus and thus easily fortified, the city was ideally placed for success. Roads linking Europe with Asia crossed here and the city also guarded the ancient trade routes between the Black Sea and the Aegean.

Istanbul is a magical place, where ancient cultures overlay each other, reinvented from generation to generation and culture to culture. Our week-long visit will be a fascinating disentangling of its history as we explore the remains of each of the cultures that left its mark on the city.

We start with the traces of its rich Greek and Roman past and its heyday as the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It was in the sixth century that the formidable Emperor Justinian created *Hagia Sophia*, the Church of the Holy Wisdom, Byzantium's most extraordinary architectural achievement. Devastatingly sacked by the Catholics of the west in the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople revived, albeit briefly, reflected in the stunning church interiors of the late medieval *Church of the Choras* (Church in the Fields). It was finally conquered by the Ottomans in 1453.

Hagia Sophia then became a mosque, joined in the sixteenth century by the fabulous creations of the architect Sinan, justly compared to Michelangelo as a creator of three-dimensional spatial magic.

By the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was in decline but the Topkapi Palace retains the atmosphere of the Sultans' courts and harems. We shall also catch the faded splendours of the last century of the empire on a boat ride, as we see the shoreline palaces on the Bosphorus, Europe and Asia to either side.

The visit will be led by Charles Freeman, a noted expert on the ancient and early Christian worlds. Constantinople has featured in several of his books and so he is particularly at home with the city and its history.

We shall stay in the comfortable **5* Sura Hagia Sophia Hotel**, located in the centre of Old Istanbul, very close to the major monuments. It has its own pool and spa for post-visit relaxation.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Thursday 22 October – We fly from Heathrow to Istanbul and transfer to our hotel in the central district of the old city. There will be a group dinner in the hotel that evening – wine, water and coffee will be included with all group dinners; water and coffee with lunches.

Day 2: Friday 23 October – Most of our morning will be devoted to the early flowering of Constantinople as an Imperial capital, starting from the ancient **Hippodrome**, possibly begun by the Emperor Septimius Severus in the second century. We shall also visit the most famous monument of all Byzantium, *Hagia Sophia*, the Church of the Holy Wisdom, built by the Emperor Justinian between 532 and 537, only rivalled by Hadrian's Pantheon in

Rome. Lunch is included today and afterwards we visit the great **Imperial Palace**, parts of which survive with the original and wonderful mosaic floors. Finally, we visit the nearby magical **Church of SS Sergius and Bacchus**, built within the precincts of Justinian's palace. We return to the hotel and the evening will be free.

Day 3: Saturday 24 October – The morning visits will be an introduction to some of the finest Ottoman mosques, particularly those designed by Sinan: we visit the **Suleimaniye Mosque**, built for Suleyman the Magnificent in the mid sixteenth century. Nearby, we walk through the ancient **Spice Bazaar** to visit the **Rustem Pasha Mosque**, a gem in miniature, also by Sinan. After lunch, which is included, we then go on to visit the **Blue Mosque**. Commissioned by Sultan Ahmet I in the early seventeenth century from one of Sinan's successors, this tremendous structure's current name derives from the ravishing use of blue tiles from Iznik. The afternoon ends with a visit to **The Museum of Turkish & Islamic Art**, one of the finest of its kind. It is particularly rich in Ottoman ceramics and textiles, especially carpets. There will be a group dinner later that evening.

Day 4: Sunday 25 October – As the nineteenth century progressed, the Ottoman Empire went into steep decline, on its way to becoming 'the sick man of Europe'. Wars with Russia and others sapped it of its once formidable power and a corrupt court ignored all the warning signs. This morning we visit the **Dolmabahçe Palace**, ordered by the Empire's 31st Sultan, Abdülmecid I, and built between the years 1843 and 1856. Previously, the Sultan and his family had lived at the Topkapi Palace, but as the medieval Topkapi was lacking in contemporary style, luxury, and comfort, as compared to the palaces of the European monarchs, a more modern palace was required. The palace was home to six Sultans from 1856, when it was first inhabited, up until the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. We have a group lunch nearby after which we visit the **Maritime (Naval) Museum** which has a fascinating range of exhibits telling the story of the Ottoman Empire's once feared navy, long the rival of Venice and its succeeding powers. We return to the hotel mid afternoon and the evening will be free.

Day 5: Monday 26 October – We spend the morning at the **Topkapi Palace** complex. The name is resonant with all that is magically associated with Ottoman power, wealth and corruption! This great palace, built round a series of courtyards, was the administrative hub of a vast empire, stretching from the Italian border to the sands of Arabia. Within these walls also lived the Sultan, his court and his harem. Lunch is included after which there will be time to explore the **Grand Bazaar**. In the late afternoon, we drive out to the edge of the ancient city to see the ancient **Theodosian Walls**. Nearby we visit the most extraordinary monument of late Byzantium, the church of the **Choras**, or **Kariye Djami**. Within, we shall find stunning cycles of Biblical stories in mosaic and fresco, created in the early fourteenth century. This visit will conclude with an early dinner in a nearby restaurant.

Day 6: Tuesday 27 October – We visit Istanbul's impressive **Archaeological Museum** which contains a wide range of Romano-Byzantine and later material. We continue to the nearby and eerily magnificent remains of one of the underground cisterns that held the city's water supplies, the **Yerebatan Saray**. We then travel by coach out of Istanbul, tracing the course of the Bosphorus as it makes its way down from the Black Sea. We stop for a group lunch at an atmospheric fish restaurant. That afternoon we shall make a spectacular journey, sailing down the **Bosphorus** - Europe to our right, Asia to our left. Along both banks of this great waterway are fabulous palaces built by the Ottoman elite. But, it is the sheer scale of the surrounding landscape that amazes one, with hilltops graced by impregnable fortresses. In the evening, we go out for Cocktails at the long renowned **Pera Palace Hotel**, beloved of Agatha Christie and her illustrious contemporaries. Our final dinner will be in a nearby restaurant.

Day 7: Wednesday 28 October – This morning you will be free to explore independently. There will be an early afternoon transfer by coach to the airport for the return flight to the UK.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2975 **Price without flights** £2795 **Deposit** £325 **Single Supplement** £395 (Double for Sole Use)

Hotel 6 nights with breakfast at 5* Sura Hagia Sophia Hotel

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA676** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1025**, arrive Istanbul **1635**

Return: **BA677** Depart Istanbul **1745**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1850**

Price includes 4 dinners with wine, water & coffee, 4 lunches with water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Charles Freeman, tour manager James Hill & our local guide

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 2 dinners & 2 lunches



CICERONI TRAVEL
2 The Square, Aynho, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX17 3BL
Telephone +44 (0) 1869 811167 Fax +44 (0) 1869 811188
Email info@ciceroni.co.uk Website www.ciceroni.co.uk

