

A monument of the ancient Near East is revived in this visually impressive collection of architectural plates

Gaspard Fossati, *Aya Sofia Constantinople*. London: P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., 1852. 21 3/4 inches x 15 3/4 inches (552 x 400 mm), 6 pages plus a chromolithographed title-page and 25 tinted lithographic plates.

O

n the first day of Ramadan, 1849, the young Sultan Abdülmecid rode to the threshold of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia to reconsecrate it as the chief mosque of the Ottoman Empire. After an elaborate religious ceremony, the sultan bade Swiss brothers Gaspare ("Gaspard" in French) and Giuseppe Fossati, the architects who had overseen the renovation of the edifice, approach and thanked them for their work: they had restored the temple "not to what it was yesterday, but what it was in the beginning."

The present Hagia Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, was the fourth church built on the site. Its builder, the Emperor Justinian, declared that he had surpassed the splendor of King Solomon. The church was reconsecrated around Christmas 563, and the structure has remained substantially unchanged to the present day. Despite the depredations visited on the church during the sack of the city by Latin crusaders in 1204, when much of its precious furniture was looted, the structure remained basically intact. When the city fell to Mehmed II the Conqueror in 1453, it was converted for use as a mosque. In subsequent years maintenance was confined to emergency repairs, and neglect exacted a heavy toll.

By the time the Fossatis started their restoration in 1847, virtually all the lead roofing had come off: flocks of birds circulated within, and the interior was shabby and damaged in many places. More ominously, many of the columns in the upper gallery were seriously out of plumb. The Fossatis undertook to correct these problems, as well as to protect some of the concealed ancient Christian mosaics that were uncovered in the course of their work.

This volume, commemorating the building and its restoration, inaugurated a new period in which Byzantine art and architecture were no longer objects of

mere antiquarian curiosity, but of admiring imitation. Writing at almost exactly the same time, John Ruskin published *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53), a work that did much to promote a sea-change in taste toward the elaborate ornament and extravagant use of color that are typical of Byzantine and Victorian art and architecture alike.

This copy from the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, is bound in nineteenth-century half brown sheep and black pebbled cloth. On the spine is the gilt-lettered title “AYA SOFIA | CONSTANTINOPLE | GASPARD | FOSSATI.” The only private owner to have left his mark in this copy of *Aya Sofia* is Lionel Henry Pries (1897–1968), whose signature, dated October 1, 1920, appears on the front flyleaf. Pries was born in San Francisco and studied architecture at the University of California under John Galen Howard (1864–1931). He was a member of the faculty in the Department of Architecture at the University of Washington for many years. Pries’ personal bookplate and three institutional bookplates (from the University of Puget Sound and University of California, Berkeley) are on the front pastedown.

Octavo cod: fosaya