

Byzantium

1262-1453 CE



SILK ROAD
VIRTUAL MUSEUM

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition has assembled 32 artifacts from sixteen churches and museums spread over nine different countries.

The focus is on the icons and frescoes of the period but ranging from very small, personal icons to the spectacular mosaics that decorate the Chora Church in the 14th century.

In addition, the exhibition introduces the siege cannon that played a critical role in the fall of the city.

The Byzantine Empire's final centuries, from 1262 to 1453, were marked by both revival and decline. Following the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, Byzantium attempted to restore its former glory.

Despite facing significant challenges from the advancing Ottoman Empire and internal political struggles, the empire maintained its status as a beacon of culture and learning.

This period was notable for its contributions to Byzantine art, with continued emphasis on religious themes and the development of intricate iconography and church architecture.

The eventual fall of Constantinople in 1453 ended the Byzantine Empire, but its artistic and cultural achievements left a lasting legacy on Eastern Orthodox traditions and beyond.

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FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION



OTTOMAN SIEGE CANNON (BASILICA)

Rumelian Castle, Istanbul, Turkey
Length: 8.2 metres

To conquer Constantinople, the Ottomans knew they had to breach the city's walls—defences that had stood for over a thousand years and were among the most formidable in the world.

Giant cannons were built for the task, some over eight metres long and weighing more than sixteen tons. Dragged 240 km by teams of men and oxen, they were positioned on earthen mounds, since no carriage could withstand their recoil.

The mounds had to be rebuilt after each shot, and the gun required three hours to cool and reload its half-ton projectile. On 8 April 1453, the first shot was fired. The impact cracked the foundations. The second brought the wall down. Warfare would never be the same again.

MOSAIC: “SAINT GEORGE” SLAYING THE DRAGON

1300 / 1350 (1st half of the 14th century)

Diam: 22cms

Louvre, Paris, France. OA 3110

This portable mosaic is the only round one known in existence. Although identified as St George, it is more likely to depict St Theodore Stratelates (281–319), who also killed a serpent and became a military commander—and a secret Christian. On the pretence of preparing a sacrifice to the gods, he gathered pagan gold and silver statues, smashed them, and gave the fragments to the poor. For this, he was sentenced to death and beheaded.



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WOODEN PANEL: THE ANASTASIS (1350-1375)

Dimensions: 36.2 x 26.5cms

Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. 37.751.

At the bottom of the panel are the women who, on the third day after Jesus' burial, discovered the tomb open. According to tradition, during those three days Christ descended into hell, broke down its gates, and triumphed over Satan. He raised up the righteous souls imprisoned there—Adam and Eve, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and the prophets—offering them salvation and leading them into the light.

THE BLUE DOME

Diam 7.7 metres

Chora church/Kariye Camii

Istanbul, Turkey

The church, rebuilt and decorated in the 11th and 12th centuries, is renowned for its magnificent mosaics and frescoes. The Blue Dome is adorned with intricate scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The rich blue tones, which give the dome its name, are particularly striking – achieved using costly lapis lazuli, a pigment prized for its vivid, enduring colour.



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