

History of Anatolia

Turkey's history is everyone's history. One trip through this remarkable land, Anatolia, makes it clear that this is, indeed, the cradle of civilization. The excavations have revealed that Anatolia was the birthplace of some of the most important ancient civilizations. The world's first known settlement Çayönü 7000-4000 BC, a Neolithic city at Çatalhöyük near Konya, dates back to 6500 B.C. It was here that man created one of his first great works of art - mural paintings and painted relief sculptures that adorned the walls of the houses and domestic shrines. In the thousands of years since, the region has been home to the world's major civilizations including the Hittites, Phrygians, Urartians, Lycians, Ionians, Lydians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, and Ottomans.

The Hittites established the first state in Anatolia run by central authority in 1750 B.C. Indo-European in origin, the Hittites entered Anatolia through the Caucasus during the great migrations which began towards the end of the 3rd millennium and probably continued until the beginning of the 2nd millennium over a vast territory extending from Western Europe to India. They founded a federative feudal state which was one of the two superpowers of the age, the other being Egypt. Excavations uncovered many impressive ruins of Hittite settlements in Anatolia and fascinating artifacts dating from this period. A magnificent collection is on display at the Anatolian Civilizations Museum in Ankara. The empire was contemporary with Troy on the western coast of Anatolia.

The power of the **Trojans**, which had been an outpost against invasions from the Balkans throughout the 2nd millennium, ended with the Trojan War at about 1250 B.C. As we first read in the Odyssey, it was only through the ploy of the Wooden Horse that the impenetrable fortress was eventually conquered. Archeological excavations have revealed nine separate periods of settlement at this site including ruins of city walls, house foundations, a temple, and a theater. A symbolic wooden Trojan horse commemorates this legendary war.

Following the destruction of Troy, the Hittite Empire collapsed around 1240 BC.

The Phrygians occupied parts of Anatolia, but they first appear on the scene as a political entity after the year 750 B.C., when King Midas founded the Phrygian Empire. The Hellenic world knew of the Phrygian King. The most important remains from the Phrygians have been found in Gordion, the Phrygian capital near Ankara, which is still under excavation.

The Lycian, Lydian, and Carian civilizations in West Central Anatolia also lived their golden age during the 7th—6th centuries B.C. The Lydians, who established a state in the Aegean region towards 700 B.C. with Sardes as their capital, produced the first gold and silver coins in history. The most important architectural works to be discovered during excavations at Sardes include the Temple of Artemis, a restored gymnasium, and a 3rd century A.D. Synagogue. Xantos, the Lycian capital, is one of the most beautiful ruins of Anatolia.

Anatolia was occupied by **Persians** during 546-334 B.C. followed by the **Hellenistic period** (330-30 B.C.) with Alexander the Great's conquest of the region. Throughout these centuries, Miletus, Priene, Ephesus. and Teos were among the finest cities in the world and the Anatolian architecture of this era greatly influenced Rome.

THE PERSIANS (546 - 331 B.C.)

The sovereignty of the Persians over the people of Anatolia began in 547 B.C. when Persian King Cyrus defeated the Lydian king Croesus and began to conquer all the cities of Anatolia. This domination was to last a full two hundred years. Alexander the Great ended this rule in 331 BC at the Battle of Gavgamela which was fought near present-day Erbil.

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD (330 - 30 B.C.)

After the death of Alexander the Great, as a result of the internal struggles between his generals, this powerful kingdom was shared by them, and most of Anatolia entered the rule of the Pergamon King. Western Anatolia entered the rule of the Romans.

THE ROMAN AGE (30 B.C. - 395 A.D.)

Romans took Anatolia in the last century B.C. and called it Asia Minor. The Roman Age (30 B.C.-395 A.D.) brought new building techniques and engineering methods to Anatolian architecture. Marble became the principal material for building. The newly invented building material of bricks bound with mortar was used for the first time in the construction of functional buildings. By producing arches, vaults, and domes of large volume, Roman engineers created masterpieces of architecture throughout Anatolia. The invention of central heating by means of hot air circulating under the floors and through hollow bricks in the wall encouraged the erection of huge thermal buildings. Large baths, often combined with gymnasia, were built in all the cities of Asia Minor. The colonnaded street, which protected people from sun and rain, was a remarkable invention of Roman architecture. The imposing remains of colonnaded streets have survived in several Anatolian cities. Stone bridges and aqueducts should also be mentioned as further examples of outstanding functional architecture and engineering. Hence, Anatolian cities prospered more than ever before during this era. Many of these structures continue to fill visitors with awe. This period also witnessed the spread of Christianity in Anatolia. St. Paul established a number of churches—the most important of which were in Pergamum, Thyatira, Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Ephesus. These are known in the Bible as the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. It was here, in a small cave in Antioch in southeastern Anatolia, that Saint Peter first used the word Christian.

THE BYZANTINES

The era of **Byzantines**, inaugurated in 330 A.D. when Constantine moved his capital to Byzantium (now Istanbul), naming it first New Rome then Constantinople. Constantinople served as the capital of the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire for nearly a thousand years after the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. During this era, in parallel to the spreading of Christianity, we see great development in religious buildings and works of art. The most impressive of all was Justinian's Church Hagia Sophia, the masterpiece of Byzantine art and one of the most famous works in the entire world with its tremendous dome and colorful mosaics of the interior. The Byzantine period came to an end with the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 by the Turks.

TURKS ARRIVE IN ANATOLIA

The history of Turks covers a time frame of more than 4000 years. Turks first lived in Central Asia around 2000 B.C. Later, some of them left Central Asia and spread around, establishing many states and empires independent from each other within a vast area spanning Asia and Europe. The Turks started to settle in Anatolia during the period of the Great Selçuk Empire in the early 11th century. The Malazgirt victory in 1071 against the Byzantines opened the way to Anatolia for the Turks. Over a span of nearly a hundred years, the

Turks fully conquered the Anatolian heartland and established the Anatolian Seljuk State as a part of the Great Seljuk Empire (1075-1318). The Seljuk Empire was the first Turkish Empire in Anatolia.

The Seljuks have left us a rich cultural legacy. **The Anatolian Seljuk State** enriched the country from one end to the other with monumental mosques, universities, hospitals, fortresses, tombs, and caravanserais. These works, many of which are still standing, present us with the finest in stone and carving as well as woven art and tile decoration. Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the mystic poet and philosopher and founder of the Whirling Dervish order flourished in Konya—the capital of the Anatolian Seljuk Empire during the 13th century.

When the Turkish Seljuk State collapsed as a result of repeated Mongolian attacks, several *beyliks* from various Turkish tribes emerged in Anatolia towards the end of the thirteenth century. One of these *beyliks* was the Ottoman—*Osmanli*—*Beylik*. The Ottoman *Beylik* succeeded in establishing the union of the Turkish *beyliks* in Anatolia and thus arose the **Ottoman Empire**. The Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1453 during the reign of Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481), and this capture ended the reign of the Byzantine Empire.

During the reign of Sultan Mehmet II “The Conqueror,” the Ottoman State entered into an era of rapid development that would last until the end of the sixteenth century. The borders of the Empire extended from the Crimea in the North to Yemen and Sudan in the South and from Iran and the Caspian Sea in the East to Vienna in the Northwest and Spain in the Southwest.

The Ottomans made great additions to the already existing rich heritage of Istanbul and Anatolia. The works of the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan are still admired today by visitors. The Süleymaniye and Sultanahmet Mosques (The Blue Mosque) in Istanbul and the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne are the finest examples of this architecture. Several palaces, which now serve as museums, were also built during this time such as the Topkapi, Beylerbeyi, and Dolmabahçe palaces. The Grand Bazaar—the ancestor of the mall—with its 4000 shops also dates from that time. Traditional Turkish art forms such as miniatures, tiles and ceramics, illumination, calligraphy, and weaving flourished under the patronage of the Sultans and reached worldwide acclaim.

The Ottoman Empire lost its economic and military superiority vis-à-vis Europe, however, and began its steep decline in the 17th century. By the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire had shrunk to the Anatolian heartland, torn and depleted by war and overburdened by mass migrations of hundreds of thousands of persecuted Muslims from the Balkans, the Crimea, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and under occupation by the winners of the War. It took four more years of war to liberate Anatolia from foreign occupation under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The Republic of Turkey was established on October 29, 1923.