

History

Fate has put Turkey at the junction of two continents. A land bridge, meeting point and battleground, it has seen peoples moving between Europe and Asia throughout history. That human traffic has left monuments and debris, dynasties and cultural legacies, which have contributed to the character of modern Turkey.

EARLY CULTURES, CITIES & CLASHES

Archaeological finds indicate that Anatolia (the land mass of Turkey within Asia) was first inhabited by hunter-gatherers during the Palaeolithic era. By around the 7th millennium BC some folk formed settlements. Çatalhöyük, which arose around 6500 BC, may be the first ever city. It was certainly a centre of innovation, locals developing crop irrigation, domesticating pigs and sheep, and creating distinctive pottery. Relics from this settlement can be seen at Ankara's Museum of Anatolian Civilisations (p444).

The chalcolithic age saw the rise of Hacılar, in Central Anatolia, and communities in the southeast that absorbed Mesopotamian influences, including the use of metal tools. Across Anatolia more and larger communities sprung up and interacted – not always happily: settlements were often fortified.

By 3000 BC advances in metallurgy allowed power to be concentrated, leading to the creation of various Anatolian kingdoms. One such was at Alacahöyük, in the heart of Anatolia, yet even this place showed Caucasian influence, evidence of trade beyond the Anatolian plateau.

Trade, too, was increasing on the western coast, with Troy trading with the Aegean islands and mainland Greece. Around 2000 BC the Hatti people established a capital at Kanesh (Kültepe, near Kayseri), ruling over a web of trading communities. Here for the first time Anatolian history materialises from the realm of archaeological conjecture and becomes 'real': clay tablets provide written records of dates, events and names.

No singular Anatolian civilisation had yet emerged, but the tone was set for millennia to come: cultural interaction, trade and war would become the recurring themes of Anatolian history.

AGES OF BRONZE: THE HITTITES

The Hatti were a temporary presence. As they declined, the Hittites assumed their territory. From Alacahöyük, the Hittites shifted their capital to Hattuša (near present-day Boğazkale) some time around 1800 BC.

The Hittites' legacy consisted of their great capital, as well as their state archives (cuneiform clay tablets) and distinctive artistic styles. By 1450 BC the kingdom, having endured internal ructions, was reborn as an empire. In

Archaeologist Ian Hodder's *Catalhöyük: The Leopard's Tale* is an account of the excavation of the site, which vividly portrays life as it was during the city's heyday.

Until the rediscovery of the ruins at Boğazkale in the 19th century, the Hittites were known only through several obscure references in the Old Testament.

TIMELINE

c 6500 BC

Founding of Çatalhöyük, the world's first city. Over time 13 layers of houses were built, beehive style, interconnected and linked with ladders. It is estimated that at its peak the city housed around 8000.

c 4000–3000 BC

Hattian culture develops at Alacahöyük during the early Bronze Age, although settlement has been continuous since the chalcolithic age, when stone tools were still in use. The Hatti develop distinctive jewellery and metalwork and weapons.

c 2000 BC

The Hittites, an Indo-European people, arrive in Anatolia and conquer the Hatti, claiming their capital at Hattuša. The Hittites go on to carve out an immense kingdom extending to Babylon and Egypt.

creating the first Anatolian empire, the Hittites were warlike, but displayed other imperial trappings – they ruled over myriad vassal states and princelings while also displaying a sense of ethics and an occasional penchant for diplomacy. This didn't prevent them from overrunning Ramses II of Egypt in 1298 BC, but did allow them to patch things up with the crestfallen Ramses by marrying him to a Hittite princess.

The Hittite empire was harassed in later years by subject principalities, including Troy. The final straw was the invasion of the iron-smelting Greeks, generally known as the 'sea peoples'. The Hittites were landlocked – hence disadvantaged during an era of burgeoning sea trade – and lacked the latest technology: iron.

Meanwhile a new dynasty at Troy was establishing itself as a regional power. The Trojans in turn were harried by the Greeks, which led to the Trojan War in 1250 BC. This allowed the Hittites breathing space but later arrivals sped their demise. Some pockets of Hittite culture persisted in the Taurus Mountains, but the great empire was dead. Later city states created a neo-Hittite culture, which attracted Greek merchants and became the conduit for Mesopotamian religion and art forms to reach Greece.

CLASSICAL EMPIRES: GREECE & PERSIA

Post-Hittite Anatolia was a patchwork of peoples, indigenous Anatolians and recent interlopers. In the east the Urartians, descendants of Anatolian Hurrians, forged a kingdom near Lake Van (Van Gölü). By the 8th century BC the Phrygians arrived in western Anatolia. Under King Gordius, of Gordian knot (p30) fame, the Phrygians created a capital at Gordion, their power peaking later under King Midas. In 725 BC Gordion was put to the sword by horse-borne Cimmerians, a fate that even King Midas' golden touch couldn't avert.

On the southwest coast the Lycians established a confederation of independent city states extending from modern-day Fethiye to Antalya. Inland the Lydians dominated western Anatolia from their capital at Sardis and are credited with creating the first-ever coinage.

Meanwhile, Greek colonies were spreading along the Mediterranean coast, and Greek cultural influence was infiltrating Anatolia. Most of the peoples of the Anatolian patchwork were clearly influenced by the Greeks: Phrygia's King Midas had a Greek wife; the Lycians borrowed the legend of the Chimera; and Lydian art was an amalgam of Greek and Persian art forms. It seems that at times admiration was mutual: the Lycians were the only Anatolian people the Greeks didn't deride as 'barbarians', and the Greeks were so impressed by the wealth of the Lydian king Croesus they coined the expression 'as rich as Croesus'.

Increasing manifestations of Hellenic influence didn't go unnoticed. Cyrus, the emperor of Persia, would not countenance such temerity in his

Homer, the Greek author of the *Iliad*, which told the story of the Trojan War, is believed to have been born in Smyrna (present-day Izmir), before 700 BC.

For further discussion of the highs and lows of life in ancient Lycia and detailed information on the sites of Turkey's Lycian coast, visit www.lycianturkey.com.

c 1200 BC

The destruction of Troy. For 10 years the Mycenaeans had besieged the city, which was strategically placed above the Dardanelles and was the key to Black Sea trade. The war was later immortalised in Homer's *Iliad*.

c 1100 BC

After the fall of the Hittites several neo-Hittite kingdoms arose, while the Assyrians and various Georgian groups encroached on southern Anatolia. It is thought that the Phoenicians brought the alphabet to Anatolia around this time.

547 BC

Cyrus of Persia overruns Anatolia, setting the scene for a long Greco-Persian rivalry. He established a series of satrapies. Later Darius I and Xerxes further Persian influence in Anatolia and forestall the expansion of Greek colonies.