

Ancient Anatolia:
the Cradle of Civilization &
the Crossroads of Empires

An Overview from the Neolithic Period to the
Later Roman Empire

Public Lecture by
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Anatolia roughly coincides with the Asian part of the Turkish Republic. Geographically as much as culturally, it has always functioned as a bridge connecting peoples, languages, religions, and trade from all directions. It is the Anatolian High Plateau where the ‘Neolithic Revolution’, i.e. the transition to farming and permanent settlement, is supposed to have taken place for the first time in world history, and Çatal Hüyük (near Konya) may have seen the development from a village to a major city as early as the 7th millennium BCE. In the mid-2nd millennium, the Hittite Empire with its centre in Hattuša was a direct neighbour and rival of Pharaonic Egypt. The iron-age kingdoms of the Phrygians (10th-7th centuries) and Lydians (7th-6th centuries) impacted the cultures and religions of the next centuries. For most of the ensuing two and a half millennia, however, Asia Minor was mostly subject to external empires: the Persian rule of the Achaemenids (6th-4th centuries) and the conquests by the Greco-Macedonians under Alexander the Great (336-323) and his Successors appear to be short episodes if compared to the more than a thousand years of Roman (or Byzantine) government. Roman rule was the result of several wars, and the exploitation by Italians was strongly resented in the century following the take-over of the kingdom of Pergamum in 133 BCE. Its advantages were only felt after Augustus (31/27 BCE-14 CE) pacified the Roman Empire. The conditions of Roman Peace then allowed Asia Minor to develop into the wealthiest area in the Mediterranean, being home to some of the largest and most numerous cities in the pre-modern world. Some of these cities, such as Smyrna (Izmir), Ankyra (Ankara) Byzantium / Constantinople (Istanbul) survived the dramatic changes that Anatolia underwent in the course of Christianization (1st-4th centuries), Sassanid, Arabic, Seljuk and Mongol invasions as well as the foundation of the Ottoman Empire (15th-20th centuries). In this lecture, such cities will serve as windows into the unique history of the Anatolian subcontinent.

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