ANCIENT ORIGINS TOURS

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ISTANBUL

Istanbul: Gateway to History, Memory and Magic

Jim Willis

Galata Bridge, ca. 1895 (CC BY-SA 2.0)

For a moment, if one could conjure up in one's mind's eye Istanbul, a city of magic, mystery, strategic geographical importance, and historic consequence: Standing on the Galata Bridge, facing north, one gazes in the direction of the Black Sea, on whose far shores lie Ukraine and the Crimea; Bulgaria and Romania a little west of north and Russia to the northeast. To the right one points to Asia, home of a storied history that is being reconsidered and deciphered more every day as new and exciting archaeological discoveries are being brought to light. This region is Anatolia, also called Asia Minor or, in Turkish, *Anadolu*.

To the left lies Europe, old Trakya 1900 (Public Domain) and to the right lies Asia, old Anatolia (Public Domain)

To the left lies Europe, with its own rich and varied story. Here lies the portion of Turkey called Thrace, or, in Turkish, Trakya. It consists of only three per cent of the Turkish land mass but is home to 10 per cent of its population. To the south, the Sea of Marmara connects with the Black Sea at the Bosporus Strait, the famous Golden Horn, and flows into the Aegean through the Dardanelles Strait and thence to the Mediterranean.

Effects of the Deluge: The Contours of the City

If a theory called the Black Sea Deluge Hypothesis, proposed in 1997 by William Ryan and Walter Pitman, proves to be correct, then modern-day Turkey was quite different and much more tumultuous some 7,200 years ago. Sea levels around the world were rising due to the breakup of the Laurentide Ice Sheets in Canada and North America, and the Mediterranean was no different. All that separated it from the Black Sea was a rocky sill at what is now called the Bosporus. One day the barrier was inundated. A flow of water 200 times greater than that of North America's Niagara Falls poured through in a flood that lasted a full year. The Black Sea experienced a sudden and catastrophic flood that quickly drowned unsuspecting human habitations and may have inspired tales of what would later come to be described as a world-wide flood in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the early chapters of the *Bible*.

A mural in the Istanbul Archaeology Museums depicting the seaward walls of the Byzantine capital, the Golden Horn with its chains and the Genoese Colony of Galata in the 14th-15th centuries. (Argos'Dad / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Not everyone accepts this theory, of course. The Late Pleistocene Great Flood Theory, advanced in 2003, argues that more than 14,000 years ago the Black Sea was a brackish lake, rapidly drowned by glacial melt water from the Caspian Sea by way of the Manych-Kerch Spillway. This, claims the authors of the theory, was the basis for the great flood legends.

There are more theories, of course, but it is a fact of both geography and religious mythology that the Tigris and Euphrates, the two rivers that embraced Mesopotamia, both rise in Anatolia, south-east of the Black Sea. And Noah's Ark is said to be nestled somewhere on Mount Ararat, located in Eastern Anatolia near the borders of Iran and Armenia. The legend and the local flood are thus intertwined. Is this, then, the genesis of the flood epics?

Neptune Sending a Deluge to Troy from Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' (1606)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain)

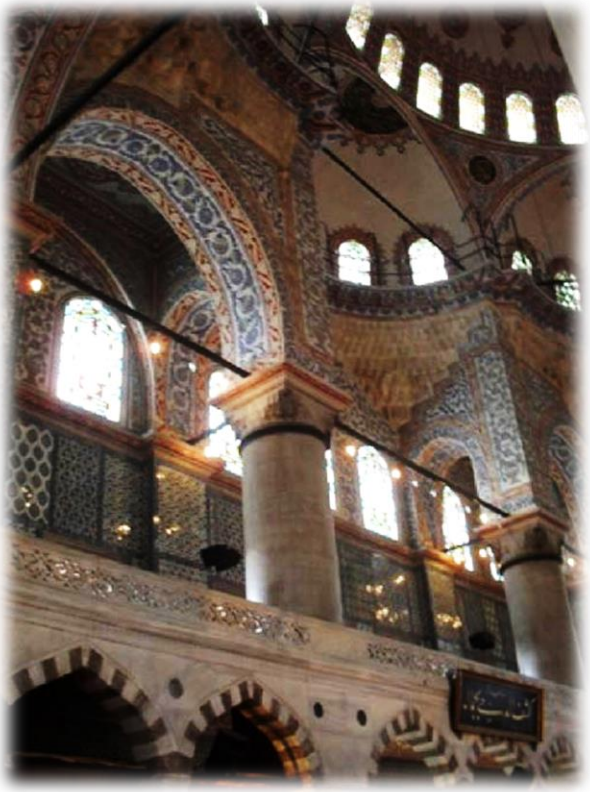
DNA Blue Eyes

Another curious fact of history concerning this area was put forth by Professor Hans Eiberg, a scientist working at the University of Copenhagen. Using DNA studies drawn from all over the world he has proposed that every blue-eyed individual now alive is related to a single person who lived in the area around the Black Sea and experienced a genetic mutation between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. From there the trait rapidly spread west into Europe, because blue-eyed mates in a brown-eyed world were considered an exotic catch.

The Trade Route Junction

The Hagia Sophia, now a museum (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

Unlimited riches flowed through Istanbul down through the ages. For more than 1,500 years the most enduring trade route in history served as a conduit for Chinese textiles as they made their way from Asia to Europe. In 139 BC China was unified under the Han Dynasty and the Silk Road, from Xian in the East to Antioch and Constantinople in the west, was officially opened, but it had been explored and utilized for a thousand years before that. More important than trade goods, however, was the fact that along with the caravans, flowed ideas and cultural exchanges. In Istanbul, where east met west, religions, mythologies, and customs collided in riotous abandon.



Indeed, they still do. The old city showcases living artifacts that reflect the transition from Byzantium to Constantinople to Istanbul. There is no better example than Hagia Sophia, probably one of the most prominent landmarks in Turkey. For 916 years it was the largest cathedral in the world. Then, for 482 years it was an imperial mosque of the Ottoman empire. Now it is a museum.

Likewise, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, usually called the Blue Mosque because of the tiles that adorn its interior walls, has been famous ever since the start of its construction in 1609.

Interior of the Blue Mosque with mosaics. (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

The Grand Bazaar is visited by untold thousands of people each year who come to gaze at the wonders for sale, barter and dine on the unique cuisine of Turkish delights.

Alley in the Grand Bazaar with mosaic tile work on the arched domes. (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

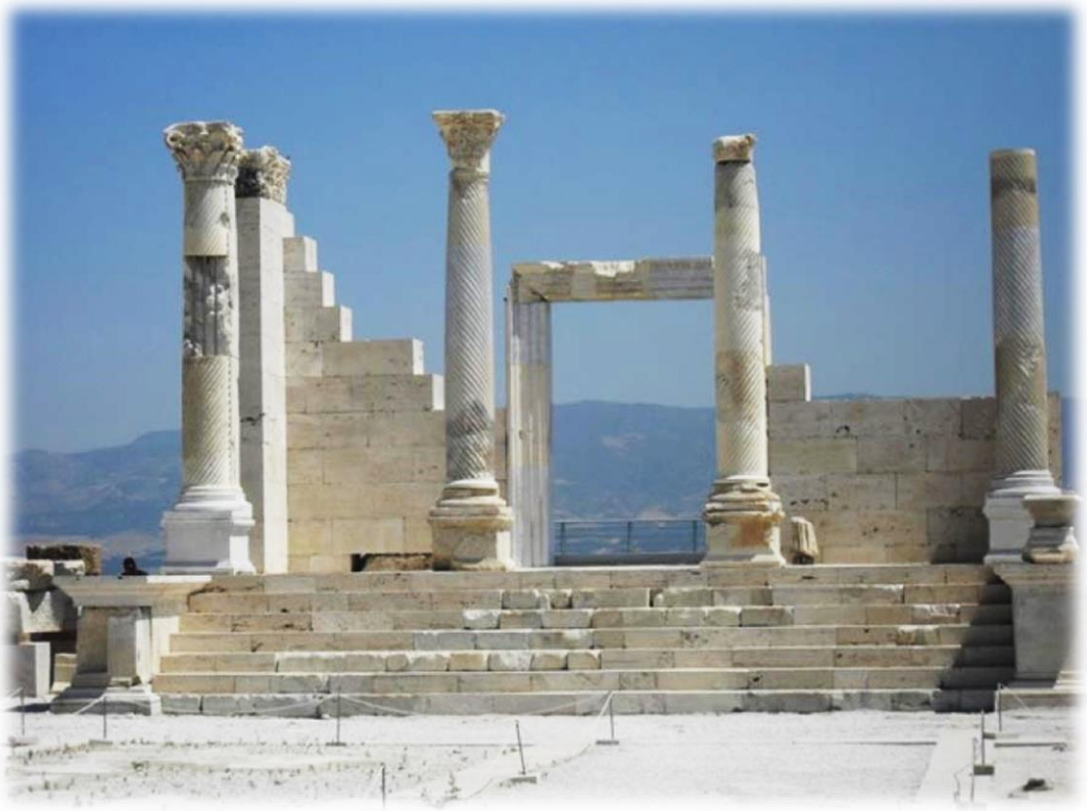
But buried deep beneath the tourist spots and popular attractions lies an ancient human history that is rapidly coming to light. It is commonly taught that modern man's civilization began further south, in Mesopotamia, the 'land between the rivers,' and in Egypt. But relatively new archeological discoveries are turning that premise upside down. More and more it seems that it began right here, in ancient Anatolia and Cappadocia, with, perhaps, a boost from an even more ancient culture.

Ancient Anatolia

Most history books devote a lot of pages to describe the first Hittite settlements, built at the same time as the famous city of Troy on the western coast of Anatolia. A lot of ink has been used to convey the epic saga, first told by Homer, of the Trojan War that took place at about 1250 BC, when the Trojans repelled numerous attacks of Greek invaders, until they were duped by the strategy of the famous Trojan Horse. After the final collapse of the Hittite dynasty came the Phrygian culture, founded by none other than King Midas of the golden touch. Their capitol city of Gordion, near Ankara, is still under excavation.

The Procession of the Trojan Horse in Troy by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1760) National Gallery (Public Domain)

Following them came the Lycians, Lydians, and Carians, who, each in turn, believed their nations would last forever. They were followed by the Persians, and then the Romans. It was during the Roman occupation that Anatolia began to be called Asia Minor. From 30 BC until 395 AD, a period now called the Roman Age, new building techniques employing mortared bricks and marble masterpieces are still viewed with wonder. Central heating, created by circulating hot air under floors and through walls, along with large baths, stone bridges, and aqueducts were the marvel of the age.



Temple at Laodicea built in the Antonine period, second century AD (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

Legend has it that St. Paul himself established churches in Pergamum, Thyatira, Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Ephesus - the Seven Churches of Asia Minor who received the prophetic letters that form the second and third chapters of the *Book of Revelation*. The church of Antioch was said to be the place St. Peter gathered his small congregation to worship in a cave. In 1963 this cave was designated by the Pope in Rome as the world's first church.

From Byzantium to Constantinople

When Constantine moved his capitol to Byzantium in 330 AD, he first called the city New Rome, and later Constantinople. It became the capitol of the Eastern Roman Empire for almost a thousand years after the fall of Rome in 476 AD. This period lasted until the successful conquest of the city in 1453 by the Turks. Constantinople then became Istanbul.

The Fall of Constantinople, late 15th early 16th century (Public Domain)

Pre-History: Catalhöyük and Göbekli Tepe

This is what has been advocated regarding the history of Turkey, Istanbul, Anatolia, and the heartland of Cappadocia. It is a rich and varied story to be sure, filled with crusaders, conquests, competing religions, transfer of wealth, and political intrigue. But undergirding it all is an even richer and much older story that is now being uncovered. Çatalhöyük, now thought to be perhaps the world's oldest settlement, dating back to 6500 BC, demonstrates artwork in the form of murals, relief carvings, and paintings that indicate a sophistication far beyond that which was thought possible for people of that time.

Reconstruction of a Catalhöyük Room (Elelicht/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

In 1995 a researcher named Klaus Schmidt, then with the German Archaeological Institute, began to dig at a place in southeast Turkey called by the locals, Potbelly Hill, or Göbekli Tepe. What Schmidt found there caused him to report: *"In 10 or 15 years, Göbekli Tepe will be more famous than Stonehenge. And for good reason!"*

He had uncovered a complex of immense stone pillars arranged in sets of rings. The tallest are 18 feet high (5.5 meters) and weigh 16 tons. Carved into their surfaces were bas-relief totemic animals of prey—a whole menagerie. The surrounding hillside was littered with flint tools from Neolithic times—knives, projectile points, choppers, scrapers, and files. The T-shaped pillars appeared to form a very complex structure.

What made the discovery so fantastic was this: Göbekli Tepe was built 11,600 years ago, older by far than the traditional dates suggested for the Great Pyramid of Giza and thousands of years before Stonehenge. And, so far at least, there is no evidence whatsoever of existing agriculture in the surrounding area. The temple seems to have been built, impossibly, by hunter-gatherers with no communal support structure except for hunting teams that would fan out, kill what game they could, and bring it back to the workers.

Göbekli Tepe scorpion pillar (Image: ©Alistair Coombs. Scorpius constellation (Arote/AdobeStock;Deriv.)

How did a hunter-gatherer culture supply the manpower to carve and move 16-ton rocks? It must have taken hundreds of laborers. What motivated them? Religious temples supposedly didn't come into play until generations after the Agricultural Revolution, but here was a huge temple complex found springing up from the landscape thousands of years before religion was thought to have been organized enough to even attempt such a thing! And if anything, the work seemed to 'de-volve' rather than 'e-volve'. The most sophisticated building happened first, at the bottom of the dig. It appears that later generations built on top of it. Their work exhibits less and less skill with each succeeding layer. It thus seems as though Göbekli Tepe illustrates the unraveling of an even older tradition as well as the emergence of a new one. Eventually, it was completely and deliberately buried like a time capsule, preserving it intact so that it could be dug up and studied in 1995.

Puzzle-map of archaeological sites in Turkey. Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

Andrew Collins has written a scholarly but very engaging and accessible book on this subject. *Göbekli Tepe: Genesis of the Gods* goes into minute detail about the origins of civilization. In it, he details his long search for, and discovery of, the place he considers to be the real Eden, the birthplace of modern man's civilization, in a landscape not far removed from Göbekli Tepe. In his words: "*Adam and Eve, as our first parents, are merely metaphors for humanity as it existed before we woke up to our "nakedness." Before this time we had lived in a state of innocence and grace that was taken away from us, and ever since that time we have been made to suffer and toil, not only in body, but also in spirit. The eternal golden age of hunting and foraging, when people were free to experience life on their own terms, would appear to have been halted by a cataclysm, arguably the proposed comet impact of 10,900 BC, and this changed everything. From these ashes arose people who wanted to tell us that thinking for ourselves and making decisions based on our own vision of life were essentially wrong, immoral even, and that whenever we have such thoughts we should feel guilt and shame, exactly what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden ... the future would now be shaped in the wake of the Neolithic (Agricultural) revolution*".

Yeni Valide Mosque in Üsküdar (circa 1895) (CC BY- SA 2.0)

Uncover the Mystery

Loss of innocence, indeed. And loss of a way of life not seen since. Can humans ever regain what this lost civilization once experienced? Or is mankind destined to "toil by the sweat of his brow" for the rest of his days, knowing that, in the end, he will never again return to Eden?

As interesting as the discovery of Göbekli Tepe was, there seem to be even more discoveries to be made. The ancient trail of humans into this area may take unexpected twists. Scholars are beginning to look to the north and east, down from the Urals and over from the Caucasus mountains, into places such as Siberia, to discover even more ancient and remote tracks laid down by our human ancestors and cousins. More mystery awaits.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Topkapi Palace, Showcasing Ottoman Splendor And Opulence

Dr. Micki Pistorius

Night view of Topkapi Palace from across the Bosphorus (Lefteris Papaulakis / Adobe Stock)

Centuries before Versailles, Buckingham Palace and the Kremlin Palace, on the shore where the Western world meets the East, cupped by the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus Strait and the Golden Horn, there rose a palace of such splendor, called Topkapi, where Ottoman sultans lived in lavish luxury, entertained kings, princes and foreign dignitaries, hoarded and displayed their riches and treasures and kept a harem of 1,000 concubines. Topkapi's grandeur is tangible evidence of the Islamic Ottoman victory when Constantinople, the last bastion of the Roman-Byzantine Empire, finally fell.

View of the Fourth Courtyard of Topkapi Palace secluded behind the Walls of Constantinople (EvrenKalinbacak/Adobe Stock)

On May 29, 1453, 21-year old Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror of the Ottoman Dynasty, finally brought the Byzantine Empire to its knees by conquering Constantinople. Not only did the Fall of Constantinople herald the end of the Middle Ages, it also changed military history as the Theodosian Walls were not approached by siege towers, but relentlessly bombarded with gunpowder, until the city surrendered. The city was sacked, looted and the men, women and children mercilessly raped, even on the altar of the Hagia Sophia, but when the dust settled and the survivors and conquerors regained their senses, Sultan Mehmet II began to transform the city into one of the most beautiful and exotic the world has ever seen, crowned by a majestic palace complex, today called Topkapi Palace, a place of ostentatious splendour, showcasing the Ottoman supremacy.

Designing The New Palace

Sultan Mehmet II did not immediately settle down in Constantinople - informally called Istanbul. For six years he launched military campaigns against Serbia, Morea and Trebizond, before he returned and triumphantly rode his horse through the Adrianople Gate of Constantinople. His Greek historian and biographer, Michael Critobulus recorded that the sultan, living in his Old Palace (*Eski Saray*) in the Beyazit district, built a so-called pleasure pergola called the Tiled Kiosk, or Cinili Kiosk, overlooking the Golden Horn, and he was so inspired by this location that he decided to build himself a New Palace (*Yeni Saray* or *Saray-ı Cedîd-i Âmire*) on the ruins of the Byzantine acropolis. Situated on the Sarayburnu (Seraglio Point), it had spectacular panoramic views of the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus Straight and the Golden Horn, as well as the historical peninsula (now Fatih District of Istanbul). The land side was protected by the Theodosian Walls and the side facing the sea was protected by the Byzantine Walls of Constantinople. The location for the New Palace was perfect.

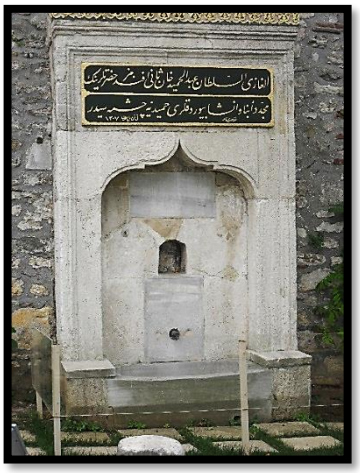
The entry of Sultan Mehmed II into Constantinople through Adrianople Gate, by Fausto Zonaro (1854–1929) (Public Domain)

According to Critobulus in his History, Sultan Mehmet II "*took care to summon the very best workmen from everywhere – masons and stonecutters and carpenters ... For he was constructing great edifices which were to be worth seeing and should in every respect vie with the greatest and best of the past*." Sultan Mehmet II certainly took a personal interest in his New Palace, positioning his personal quarters at the highest point of the promontory. Sultan Mehmet II valued silence and privacy, thus the palace was unique in its design, with centred courtyards and gardens, flanked by administrative, housekeeping and private buildings. Grilled windows and hidden passages ensured the discretion for the royal family and the sultan would often use these to eavesdrop on conversations. Strategic water fountains muted private conversations, eunuchs maintained a strict regime in the harem and the Janissaries, elite imperial bodyguards, guarded the sultan and his household. The principle of imperial seclusion is a concept embedded by Sultan Mehmed II in his 1477- and 1481-*Kanunname Code*.

Over centuries, Topkapi Palace was extended by subsequent sultans, eventually covering about 700 000 square meters. The New Palace was named Topkapi in the 18th century during the reign of Mahmud I. Topkapi Palace was home to all the Ottoman sultans for a period of nearly four centuries, until the reign of Abdulmecid I (1839-1860), when they moved to the ostentatious European-style palaces such as the Dolmabache Palace built on the shores of the Bosphorus. The Dolmabache Palace was the residence of Ottoman sultans from 1853 until 1889, and from 1909 until 1922, when the Ottoman reign was abolished and Turkey gained independence.

Aerial view of Topkapi. Twin towers of the Gate of Salutation separates the public First from the enclosed Second Courtyard. The Tower of Justice peaks with the harem complex flowing to its right. The kitchen chimneys of the Second Courtyard in the left front. The Third Courtyard with the Audience Hall and the Library of Ahmed in the middle. In the right corner in front are the buildings of the Fourth Courtyard. (mehmet / Adobe Stock)

The First Outer Courtyard



Enclosed by the imposing wall and an entrance through the Imperial Gate, the First Courtyard was once a service area, where a hospital, college and bakery were situated. The public had access to the First Courtyard, to submit their petitions and they gathered here to witness public beheadings and the executioner washing his hands and sword in the so-called Executioner's Fountain.

Executioner's Fountain (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

The mustering point for the Janissaries was situated here and the sixth-century Byzantine Hagia Irene (just behind the larger famous Hagia Sophia) was strangely not converted into a mosque, but rather into an arsenal and later a military museum. Behind the Hagia Irene, palace craft workshops were later converted into the Royal Mint where the imperial coins were pressed since 1727.

Gate of Salutation with the Twin Towers (SERHAT AKAVCI / Adobe Stock)

The Second Courtyard

Sultan Mehmet II built the Gate of Salutation, leading to the large Second Courtyard, with the stables on the left and the kitchen-complex on the right. Only the sultan and his mother the Valide Sultan, were allowed to pass through this gate on horseback, as all others including the grand vizier, had to dismount. The impressive twin towers of the gate were constructed by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520 – 1566), who commissioned several improvements to the palace. The stables now house the Museum of The History of Science and Technology in Islam.

Doors to the Domed Chamber of the Imperial Council (Steve Lovegrove / Adobe Stock)

The Second Courtyard was known as the Council Square where dignitaries were received during pompous state ceremonies. On the left is the Tower of Justice, built by Sultan Mehmet II, topping the Domed Chamber or Divan, constructed later by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, where the imperial council held their meetings. Members of the imperial council were well aware of being covertly observed by the sultan from behind a grill, as he could access the Tower of Justice unseen from the harem.

Behind the Domed Chamber stretches the External Treasury, also added by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, where the taxes and tributes from all over the empire were stored in large jars. Currently this building serves as a weapons museum, including ornate embellished swords, chainmail and even bows made by the sultans themselves.

The former Imperial Treasury houses the armory collection today
(Cobija/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

Adjacent to the stables on the left are the quarters of the Tressed Halbediers, one of the oldest buildings of the palace. These men were woodcutters, responsible for supplying firewood to the harem, but also during military campaigns, they were to fell woods impeding the advancing army. The term “tresses” refer to the sidelocks hanging down their cheeks and they wore high collars to prevent them from looking around inside the harem. The barracks are tiled with Iznik tiles and displays beautiful woodwork, given the trade of its occupants. The tack room of the stables held the sultan’s gold and silver saddles, as well as bridles and tack, all decorated with jewels. The stable attendants and the Halbediers had their own mosque and bathhouse.

The palace kitchens with the chimneys (Birol / Adobe Stock)

Opposite the stables in the Second Courtyard, ten chimneys indicate the kitchen complex - built by Sultan Mehmet II - which was a hive bustling with activity. Chefs and staff had to serve the royal family, the harem and all the palace attendants' daily meals, as many as 12,000 people, and cater for state functions. Understandably the kitchens were expanded by Suleiman the Magnificent, as the palace populace had increased by then. In 1574 the kitchens were destroyed by a fire, but restored by the architect Sinan. The sultan's food was prepared in the Imperial kitchen - tested by a royal taster and the cooks themselves as a precaution against poisoning - and then there were pantries and a separate confectionary house. Six master chefs and a hundred apprentices concocted a host of confectionaries including *macun*, prepared by roses, musk, poppies galangal root, Indonesian peppers and spices.

Sultan Mehmet II was a stickler for protocol. Not only did he compose the administrative, fiscal, penal and military regulations for governing the empire, he also composed rules for table manners. Sultan Mehmet II abolished the practice of sultans eating their meals with others and the ceremonial sharing of a meal with the troops. The rule was finally broken by Sultan Abdulaziz (1861 – 1876) who dined with Crown Prince Edward VII of England. Sultan Mehmet II had a preference for caviar, roe, shrimp and oysters. Ambassadors would be treated to lamb and chicken kebabs, roasted pigeons, pilaf, vegetables and pastries. At the end of their meals, they were served sherbet, a sugar sweetened ice with rose petals, and jasmine. The snow used for the sherbet was brought in from the Mudanya and Bursa mountains.

Currently the kitchens house displays of ceramics, glassware and silver, as well as Chinese and Japanese porcelain, brought to Turkey along the Silk Route.

The palace's fountains and ablution needs were supplied by 40 cisterns below the entire Sarayburnu district. A Byzantine cistern lies just beneath the Sultan's pathway leading from the Gate of Salutation to the Gate of Felicity, the entrance to the Third Courtyard and the private residence of the sultans.

Gate of Felicity leading to the Third Courtyard (nejdetduzen / Adobe Stock)

The Third Courtyard

The Gate of Felicity was built by Sultan Mehmet II and Sultan Mahmud (1808 – 1839) added his calligraphic seal into the keystone. When the gates are shut, the outside world is completely locked-out. Immediately to the right upon entering the Gate of Felicity is the Audience Room, built by Sultan Mehmet II and restored by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, where the sultan received the grand vizier, religious scholars and ambassadors. The façade is richly decorated and the sultan's throne – dating to Sultan Mehmet III (1595 – 1603) – has four wreathed columns, supporting a decorated dome inlaid with precious stones. Fountains splatter water both inside and outside the Audience Hall, not just as an adornment, but also to mute the conversations. The sultans usually received ambassadors 'coincidently' on the same day that the Janissaries' – their bodyguards – received their pay, as a display of military might.

Main entrance to the Audience Chamber, with the small fountain of Suleiman I to the right, and the large gifts window to the left (JoJan / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Here the grand vizier would formally present the sultan with the decrees decided upon by the imperial council. Between the Door of Petitions and the Door of Offering is a large window where visiting ambassadors would display their gifts. The Door of the Sovereign led to his private garden and the inner palace courtyard. Ambassadors brought into the presence of the sultan had to fold their hands in front of them, lower their heads and keep their eyes downcast and would speak through interpreters. Visiting kings, khans and foreign princes and dignitaries were all received in the Audience Hall.

Library of Sultan Ahmed III with the fountain (miklyxa / Adobe Stock)

Directly opposite the Audience Room is the Library of Sultan Ahmed III, with a beautiful ornate fountain at its entrance. It is considered a masterpiece of the Tulip Period (1718 – 1730). Sultan Ahmed III was a calligrapher and a bibliophile, extending the use of the library to the occupants of the Third Courtyard. The doors and windows are adorned with mother-of-pearl and ivory inlay and 32 windows provide enough light to read the books. The Ottoman Dynasty were great statesmen who placed a high premium on education. Bright young teenagers were conscripted and educated in the palace grounds, of course in the Qur'an, but also in Arabic, Persian and Islamic sciences, law, history, geometry, poetry, music and calligraphy. Great emphasis was placed on protocol and etiquette. In the sports field they were trained in wrestling, archery, and of course in military practices. Some crafts such as saddle-making, leatherworks, and wrapping turbans were also available. The skills were taught in the lesser and greater chambers lining the Third Courtyard gardens.

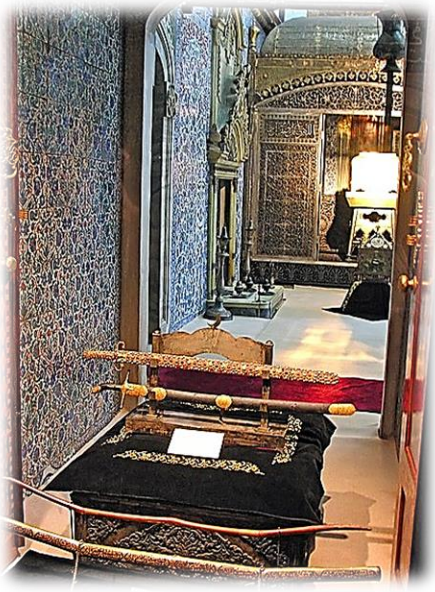
Other utility chambers, on the right of the courtyard were the Dormitory of the Campaign Pages were the sultans' and palace elite's wardrobe and turbans were laundered and kept, as well as the prayer mats. These rooms are currently exhibiting the imperial costumes, such as an exquisite kaftan of Sultan Mehmet II, who of course also decreed new dress codes. On the death of a sultan his clothes were carefully folded and packed away.

The Topkapi dagger (Prof.dr.arda/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

The Pavilion of the Conqueror in the corner, was built in 1463 by Sultan Mehmet II on a cliff and has a commanding view of the Golden Horn. Plunder from various conquests were exhibited here. Sultan Selim the Grim (1512 to 1520) announced: "*Let the treasury which I have filled with gold bear the seal of whichever of my successors can thus fill it with loot, otherwise let it continue to bear my own seal.*" Described as "glittering with thousands of precious and semi-precious stones" the collection includes the jewels of the sultans, that reverted to the state upon their deaths – but the women were allowed to be private owners of their jewellery. Outstanding pieces are the diamond encrusted suit of chainmail of Sultan Mustafa III (1757 – 1774) and the famous Topkapi dagger (1741), he commissioned as a gift for the Shah of Persia, but the Shah passed away before it could reach him. The 86-carat Spoonmaker's diamond, discovered in a rubbish heap in Istanbul in the 17th century and bought for three spoons, is also exhibited here. Curious items are the bejewelled plumes used to decorate the sultans' turbans. The sultans' pocket money - used for constructing madrasas, mosques and fountains – was funded by the taxes of Egypt.

Portrait of an aged Sultan Mehmet II in a bejewelled turban by Paolo Veronese (Public Domain)

The dormitories of the palace staff line the back of the Third Courtyard. The Butler's Dormitory housed those responsible for serving the sultans' and their families' immediate daily needs, as well as tending to candles in the candelabrums. All attendants to the sultans had to be scrupulously clean. The Dormitory of the Treasury was built by Sultan Mehmet II and housed those responsible for the treasury and the jewels and the Treasury of the Chamberlain was where the sultan's weapons and some of his pocket money were kept.



On the right of the Third Courtyard is the Privy Chamber, built by Mehmet II as his private apartments. One enters into the Fountain Hall, with a bench where the sultan would often sit and contemplate, on the right is the Petition room, a fine example of decoration with Iznik and Kutahya tiles, inscribed with verses from the Qur'an, culminating at the centre of the dome. In winter Sultans Mehmet II, Suleiman, Bayezid II and Selim I would spend days here studying and reading. On the left stands a gilded silver throne of Sultan Murat IV (1623 – 1640), where princes would sit before they approached the enthronement ceremony in front of the Gate of Felicity.

The chest containing the Holy Mantle of the Prophet Mohammed and the swords (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Some of Islam's most holy relics are displayed in these rooms. Following Selim I's conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Holy Mantle of the Prophet Mohammed or the Mantle of Felicity has been kept in this room, locked in a chest, but visitors can only peek at it from the doorway, as no-one is allowed access to the room. Two of the Prophet Mohammed's swords are displayed in front of the chest holding his mantle. A glass cabinet in the anteroom holds hairs of his beard, a tooth and a letter written by him, as well as an impression of his footprint. The *aghas* were the brightest young boys, chosen to be in attendance of the sultan and to take care of the relics and they lived in an adjacent dormitory, currently used to display portraits of the sultans. The *aghas* also had their own mosque, which was actually the palace's oldest mosque, currently used as the Topkapi Palace library, displaying invaluable manuscripts.

In front of the Privy Room is a sundial built by Mehmet II and aside is a marble incense mortar, designed to catch the dust from cleaning the Holy Mantle, to save it from being trampled on.

The Harem

Initially Sultan Mehmet II's wives and concubines still inhabited his Old Palace. The harem, consisting of a labyrinth of more than 400 rooms, nine bathhouses, two mosques, a hospital, laundry and of course the living quarters of the sultan (the Privy), his mother, wives, concubines, children, eunuchs and attendees, developed over centuries in four phases, starting mostly with Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent.

The Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs
(mehdi33300 /Adobe Stock)

Initially the harem was entered from the Third Courtyard through a smaller Aviary courtyard, which is now the exit to the harem. Currently a newer entrance is used next to the Imperial Council in the Second Courtyard, through the Gate of Carriages, built by Sultan Murad III in 1587, leading to a domed anteroom, where the chief eunuch kept documents. Then follows the Fountain Hall of the Black Eunuchs, from where the sultan gained access to the Tower of Justice, and then the paved Courtyard of the Eunuchs, who had their apartments on the left. The Chief Eunuch's apartment had several rooms as well as a bath. Most of this courtyard was restored in 1665 after the fire. The buildings rise up to three storeys, with the princes' school on the upper storey. The sultans' gentlemen in waiting also had their quarters here.

At the end of this courtyard is the Main Gate to the harem itself, opening onto a guardhouse, a domed vestibule or antechamber. To the left a door leads to the Gallery of the Concubines, and the paved courtyard of the concubines and the wives; the centre door leads to the paved courtyard of the Valide Sultan, the Queen Mother - and the door to the right leads to the Golden Road and the sultan's chambers – the Privy Rooms.

Courtyard of the Concubines (Ilhan Balta/ Adobe Stock)

Turning left through the passage to the courtyard of the concubines and wives, one notices this is the smallest and most unimposing of the harem courtyards. There were three separate two-storey apartment blocks for the women. Only the women who had borne the sultan a child lived in the top storey apartments for the wives. They had their own rooms facing the Golden Horn.

The concubines and servants shared communal rooms in their apartment block. The hospital, bathhouse and laundry were also situated here. There was a special chamber for the final ablution of the dead and a Gate of the Dead. This section of the harem is reached by the stone stairs called the 40 Steps.

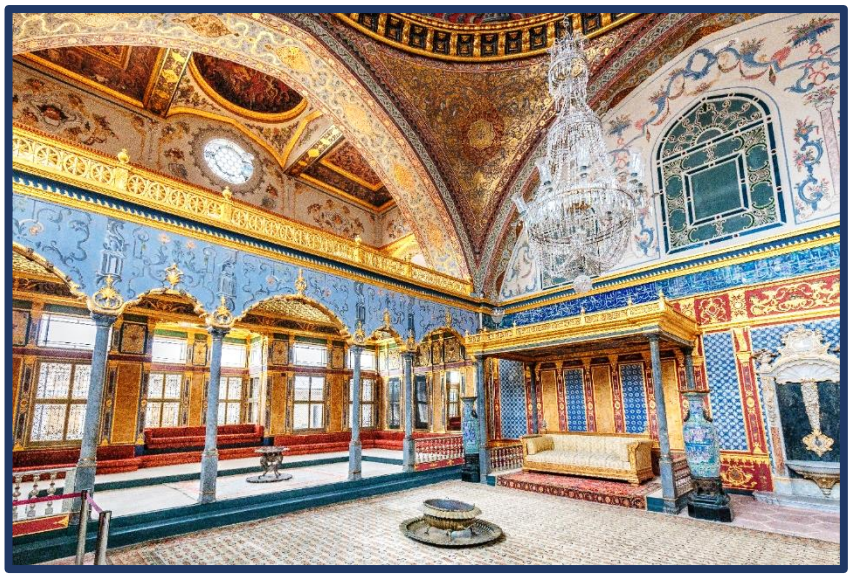
Exhibit representing the Queen Mother and her attendants in her apartments (Public Domain)

In the block designated for the Queen Mother, her large, paved courtyard was the centre of the harem's activities. Like most of the harem these apartments were constructed by Sultan Murad III (grandson of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent). The Queen Mother's attendees and concubines occupied the lower floor. The Queen mother and her ladies in waiting occupied large opulent rooms, some of the most beautifully decorated, and also restored after the fire. The sultan's rooms can be accessed through the Queen Mother's rooms. The Queen Mother's room currently on display has a second storey added by Sultan Selim III (1789 – 1807), characterized by rococo décor, tiled walls, fountains and fireplaces. Sultan Selim's mother also had downstairs apartments, where she was entertained by dances and recitals of the Qur'an.

Baths of the Sultan with gilded grill (Public Domain)

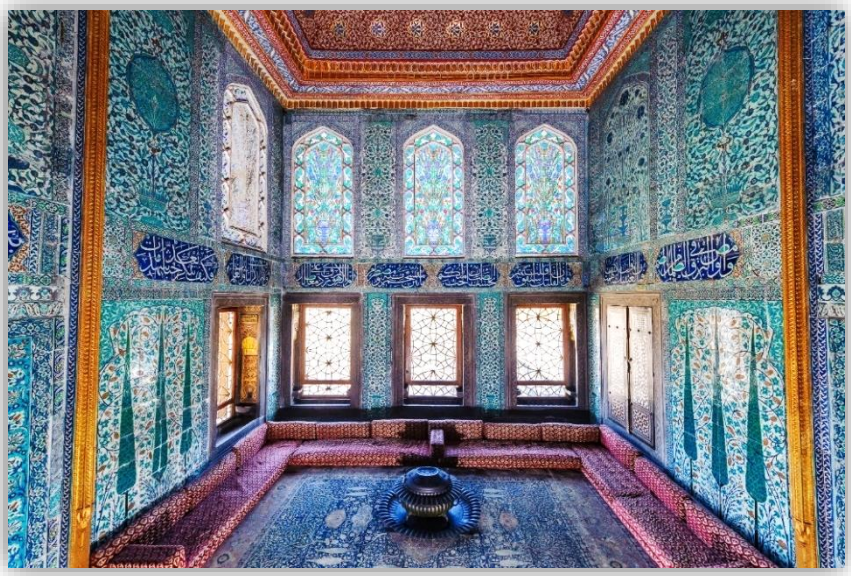
Of note is the Queen Mother's bathroom, built in the 16th century and often restored over the centuries. Bathhouses had cold warm and hot sections, a caldarium, a tepidarium and a frigidarium. Natural sunlight filtered through the ceilings. Adjacent to the Queen Mother's bath complex was the sultan's own bath complex. Marble baths were separated by gilded golden grills, to protect the occupants from being murdered. From the sultan's bathroom he could gain access to his Imperial Throne Room.

Interior of the Imperial Hall
(RuslanKphoto / Adobe Stock)



The sultan entertained his close family members in his Imperial Hall or Throne Hall, with the largest dome in the palace. It was also restored to its current splendour after the fire of 1665. Royal weddings would take place here with dignitaries in attendance. The Queen Mother could also access this room from her apartments. A door led to the small dining chamber (rebuilt by Ahmed III) and another to a series of antechambers, including the Fountain Hall and finally a door led to the sultan's bedroom.

The Privy Room of Sultan Murad III is one of the oldest and original rooms in the palace, built in 1579 and decorated with blue-and-white and coral-red İznik tiles. A large fireplace with a gilded hood faces a two-tiered marble fountain - the flow of water was meant to prevent any eavesdropping. The two gilded baldachin beds date from the 18th century. A door leads to the Twin Kiosk apartments of the crown prince. Adjacent to Sultan Murad III's privy chamber are the chambers of sultans Ahmed I and Ahmed III.



Interior of the Twin Kiosk of the princes (akira1201 / Adobe Stock)

The Twin Kiosk of the Crown Prince dates from the reign of Sultan Murad III and consist of two rooms, with a conical ceiling and the windows in coloured glass offer a view across the high terrace and the garden of the pool below. The crown prince lived here in seclusion, until his education was complete, whereafter he would be sent to govern an Anatolian province, to gain experience in administering the state.

Open courtyard of the Favourites (Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

The Courtyard of the Favourites or the Chamberlain's courtyard was an open courtyard overlooking the harem's pool. This building later became the residence of Sultan Abdulhamid I and his family.

All along the length of the harem, separating the complex from the Inner palace courtyard runs the Golden Road, a narrow passage extending from the Courtyard of the Harem Eunuchs. The sultan used this passage to pass to the harem, the Privy Chamber and the Imperial terrace. The Courtyard of the Queen Mother, the Courtyard of the Chief Consort of the Sultan, the apartments of the princes, and the private apartments of the sultan, all open to this passage.

The Baghdad Pavilion (RuslanKphoto / Adobe Stock)

The Fourth Courtyard

The Fourth Courtyard, situated right at the end of the palace complex, facing the Sea of Marmara and overlooking the Golden Horn, was an innermost private sanctuary for the sultan and his family, and consists of a number of pavilions, kiosks gardens and terraces.

Circumcision is viewed as a rite of purity in the Islamic religion and in 1640 Sultan Ibrahim added this kiosk for the circumcision of the princes. The blue and white panels dating from the time of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent were moved here. Sultan Murat IV in 1635 commissioned the construction of the Yerevan Kiosk - which was used to store the sultan's ceremonial turbans - and in 1638 the Baghdad Kiosk, with its cushioned divan seats along the walls, to celebrate the Ottoman victories at Yerevan and Baghdad. The gilded İftar Pavilion, has a spectacular view over the Golden Horn and this is where the sultan practised the custom to break his fast (iftar) during the fasting month of Ramadan after sunset. The Terrace Kiosk, the only wooden structure in the inner palace, was mainly used by the sultan to watch sporting events and entertainments in the garden. It is situated next to the Tulip Garden.

The Mecidiye Pavilion (nejdetduzen / Adobe Stock)

The Grand Kiosk, or Mecidiye pavilion along with the Wardrobe Chamber, was built in 1840 by Sultan Abdülmecid I as an imperial reception hall because of its splendid location, pesenting a panoramic view on the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus. It has a strong European influence and is decorated with French furniture. Right next to the Grand Kiosk is a restaurant where heads of state such as Queen Elizabeth II, First Lady Jackie Kennedy and President Richard Nixon have all been entertained, while watching the ship-traffic on the Bosphorus.

A staircase descends to the Royal Hall, a double columned portico with a marble terrace and a pool, extending towards the Golden Horn. A watch tower built by Sultan Mehmet II on top of the walls was converted into the Tower of the Chief Physician. The Chief Physician also acted as pharmacist for the sultan and shared this accommodation with the Chief Tutor. Pharmaceutical instruments are now exhibited here.

Surrounding the whole complex of the First to the Fourth Courtyards are the outer palace gardens. Of Sultan Mehmed II's three garden pavilions, constructed in 1473, only the Tiled Kiosk (Çinili Köşkü) – his so-called Pleasure Palace - has survived which now houses the Islamic ceramics collection in the Istanbul Archaeology Museums complex, adjacent to the Topkapi Palace. Next to the First Courtyard towards the city lies the Gülhane Park. Entering the gate and passing by the Procession Kiosk, anyone can now gain access to the old imperial rose garden, to escape from modern stress, stroll along the garden paths and contemplate the lifestyles of the Ottoman rulers, which almost surpasses the imagination – Topkapi is a wonder to behold.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

The Many Incarnations of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul

Dr. Marion Dolan

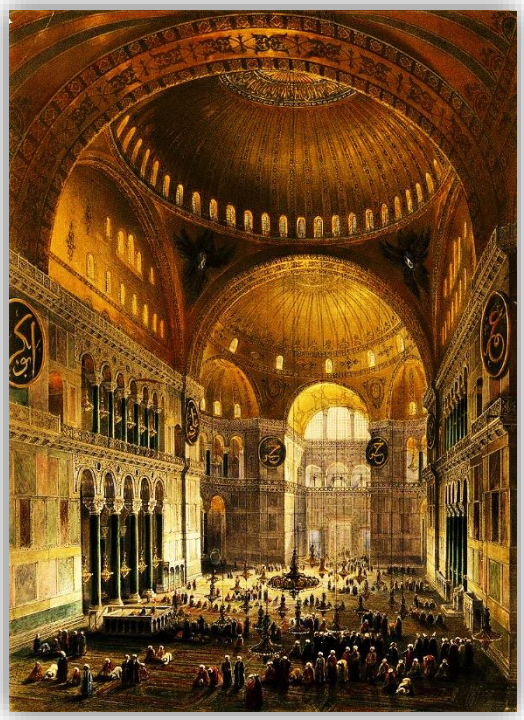
Night Time over Hagia Sophia or Hagia Sophia Church of the Holy Wisdom in Istanbul, Turkey (Savvapanf Photo / Adobe Stock)

Towering over Istanbul atop one of its highest hills, Hagia Sophia has stood for over 1,500 years as an architectural wonder, one of the largest and most remarkable Christian churches ever built. Its numerous incarnations have continued from the sixth to the 21 centuries. Hagia Sophia, meaning 'holy wisdom', was commissioned by Emperor Justinian (482-565 AD) as the Imperial Byzantine cathedral for the capital city of the Roman Empire, the spiritual center of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Hagia Sophia is the third Christian cathedral on the site; all built within 200 years. The first Christian cathedral on the site was a basilica-style church commissioned by Roman Emperor Constantine I and was inaugurated in 360 AD. This initial church was partially burned and after a long reconstruction it was inaugurated in its second incarnation in 415 AD by Emperor Theodosius II.

Theodosian capital for a column, one of the few remains of the church of Theodosius II (Derzsi Elekes Andor / CC BY-SA 4.0)

This second basilica church stood for more than 100 years until 532 AD when it was looted and burned again during civil riots. Within just 39 days of its destruction, Emperor Justinian quickly began building over the charred ruins. He initiated the construction of a new church that would be entirely different in style and size, his glorious new "*Megalo ecclesia*"

or colossal church. He had it designed to serve as the patriarchal cathedral of the imperial capital of his vast empire.



Gaspare Fossati's 1852 depiction of the Hagia Sophia as a mosque, after his and his brother's renovation. Lithograph by Louis Haghe. (Public Domain)

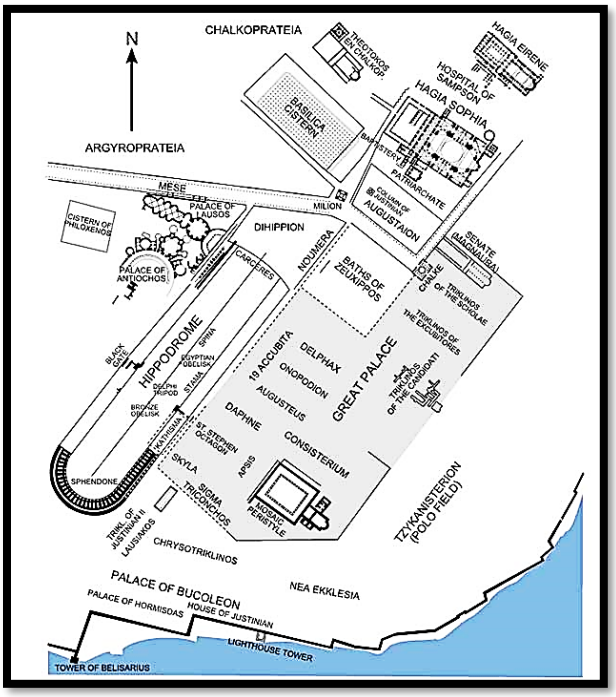
After the Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople in 1453, Sultan Mehmed II (1432-1481) immediately converted Justinian's renowned cathedral into the city's principal Islamic mosque. For almost 500 years Hagia Sophia remained an active mosque until 1931 when Turkey was ruled by military leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (c1881-1938) who established the Republic of Turkey. His reign determined the mosque's next incarnation.

Hagia Sophia in 1937 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The enormous church/mosque had deteriorated greatly over time and was closed to the public for four years and thoroughly modernized. Then in 1935 the historical sanctuary was re-opened, not as a religious structure, but as a museum operated by the secular Republic of Turkey. As a museum the magnificent complex of Hagia Sophia remained one of the most visited and admired architectural masterpieces ever created. That role ended in July 2020 when the Turkey Council of State annulled the 1934 decision and reclassified the building as a mosque/part-time museum. The building is now officially known as the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque; in spite of its changing functions through the centuries its initial

name has been retained. Through its transition from cathedral to mosque to museum to mosque/museum, soon to be mosque only, controversies have raged and wars have been fought, but Justinian's spectacular church survives as a marvel of human ingenuity.

Reclaiming sacred space has been a long tradition enduring from the time when ancient temples and shrines were originally created. When a religious site was available or a new community or conqueror took over, the traditional religious locations were almost always recommissioned for the preferred religion of the newcomers. Romans transformed Celtic and Druid sites; Christians took over Roman temples and Muslim mosques; Muslims converted Hindu mandirs into mosques; Buddhist monks changed Hindu shrines to Buddhist Temples; Spanish priests transformed Inca and Aztec temples into Christian churches. Once a particular site has been deemed holy, it seems to remain sacred forever. Many reasons for this can be found. The most obvious is convenience; a new structure is not needed and the location is usually ideal and already adapted for sacred rituals. Also the native group habitually used that space, so it is easier to introduce a new religion and over-ride the old. For Hagia Sophia, also called St Sophia, it would have been impossible to create a more impressive place of worship.



The imperial district of Byzantine Constantinople, with the Great Palace and the approximate locations of its main buildings (based on literary descriptions), the Hippodrome, the Hagia Sophia and the surrounding structures. (Cplakidas /CC BY-SA 3.0)

Founding Constantinople

In the early fourth century Emperor Constantine, along with his chief ministers, his Praetorian Guard and his mother Helena, departed Italy and reestablished the capital of the Roman Empire in a new city, more favorably protected from the barbarian hordes that were destroying the lifestyle and culture of Rome. Named for himself, the new Roman capital city of Constantinople was dedicated in 330 AD. The city's position was perfectly situated between East and West, ideal for defense, trade, and convenience. Constantinople served as the gateway between the mainland European continent and Western Asia. The new city's access by sea was ideal since it was situated between the Bosporus Strait in the East and the Sea of Marmara to the West, which emptied into the Mediterranean Sea. To insure safety from barbarian attacks, Constantine immediately constructed a sturdy, protective wall system around the entire city. During the fifth century Emperor Theodosius II doubled the existing walls of Constantine. These additional walls served as a powerful deterrent to attacks from either land or sea. Within the impenetrable Theodosian

Walls, the secure capital city was able to develop great prosperity and fill the new city with magnificent palaces, churches, domes, towers and thriving international markets with luxury goods from the entire known world.

Upon founding his new city, Constantine established numerous Christian churches. In 313 AD Constantine had put an end to three centuries of Christian persecution by Roman authorities by issuing the Edict of Milan; although the emperor did not convert to Christianity himself until on his deathbed in 337 AD. His reign was the first to allow Christians to worship openly in both the Greek East and the Latin West. He donated valuable land and properties for their use in constructing churches in Rome and was equally generous to Christianity in Constantinople. In 381 AD the first Council of Constantinople acknowledged that the bishop of Constantinople, "being now the New Rome" had rights equal to those of the bishop of Rome.

Byzantine mosaic depicting Empress Theodora (sixth century) flanked by a chaplain and a court lady believed to be her confidant Antonina, wife of general Belisarius.
(Public Domain)

Emperor Justinian And Empress Theodora

Justinian (482-565 AD) was the nephew and adopted son of Emperor Justin; it is thought that he engineered his uncle's successful reign. Like many young men, Justinian fell in love with the wrong woman; her name was Theodora (c.500-548). She was considered an ill-fated match for the heir to the ruler of the Roman Empire. Her father worked as the bear-keeper at the Hippodrome in Constantinople, and she was a well-known, reviled entertainer and prostitute. She seemed to have had a religious experience and reformed her nefarious lifestyle. Theodora became involved with political movements in Constantinople where the couple probably met. Justinian was determined to marry her but his aunt, the Empress, and the Church were vehemently opposed. Not one to give up he just delayed his nuptials until after his aunt's death. Soon after in 525 AD, Justinian married Theodora at the empire's capital cathedral, the second Hagia Sophia.

Two years after their marriage Emperor Justin died and Justinian inherited the throne of the Byzantine Empire. Together they were crowned co-Emperor and Empress; Justinian assured that she would rule with him, with equal power not as royal consort. The Empress had a strong influence on Justinian and worked at his side, signing new bills and introducing laws. Theodora was a huge source of support for Justinian but she also created her own base of power and was immersed in all aspects of politics during their reign. They initiated a spectacular campaign of

building and renovation throughout the Empire; yet little survived except their masterpiece of architecture, Hagia Sophia.

Court of Emperor Justinian with (right) archbishop Maximian and (left) court officials including Belisarius and Praetorian Guards; Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. (Metropolitan Museum)

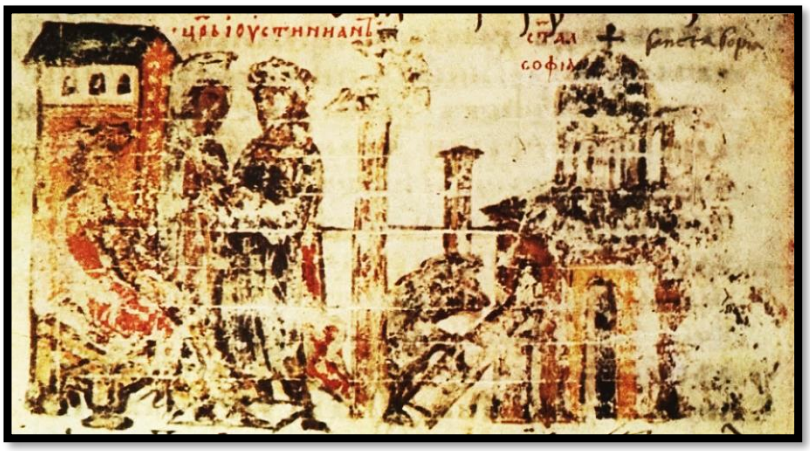
In the mid-sixth century the early Greek scholar and historian Procopius (c.500-after 565) wrote a vicious account of Theodora and her morals or lack thereof, but today she is regarded as a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church. She worked to reform women's rights which were few at that time and was compassionate in assisting the less fortunate where she could. During the 38-year reign of Justinian, he struggled to revive the glorious realm of the Roman Empire of the past. He rewrote the antiquated Roman law code, transformed the infrastructure of the city and was a prolific builder. His chief goal was "restoration of the Empire". He recovered many of the territories once under Roman rule, including parts of Italy and North Africa, uniting them again with the Byzantine Empire. Much of his military success was due to the admirable skill of his general Belisarius. He contributed immensely to Justinian's triumphant reign; together they almost doubled the size of the empire.

But all was not well in Byzantium. The royal's extravagant lifestyle, the military expansion and extensive building programs overtaxed the population which motivated a violent civic revolt in 532. Palaces and churches were looted and burned, prisoners were released and countless buildings were destroyed. Angry mobs even threatened destruction of the palace and the lives of sovereign officials. Officials were packing their belongings and recommending that Justinian flee the city as well. In the midst of the chaos Theodora intervened, refusing to even consider deserting the royal palace nor her position as empress. Some of her words at the time were recorded: *Who is born into the light of day must sooner or later die; how could an Emperor ever allow himself to be a fugitive? May I myself never shed my imperial robe nor see the day when I am no longer addressed by my title. If you, my Lord, wish to save your skin, you will have no difficulty doing so. As for me, I stand by the ancient saying: purple is the noblest winding-sheet.*

Needless to say, Justinian did not desert the capital city but quelled the mob and restored order to the city although many lives were lost in the process. The Nika Revolt, as it is called, demonstrated very markedly that ignoring his subjects' demands and over-taxation would not be tolerated. To appease the angry citizens Justinian and Theodora vowed to rebuild the city as well as Constantine's ruined cathedral. They would create the most magnificent church in all of

Christendom, the crown jewel of the Byzantine Empire that would even change the history of architecture.

In 548 Theodora died probably of cancer which was a grave loss for Justinian; he ruled for almost another 17 years and died in 565. They were both buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Hagia Sophia was their greatest achievement; the expert Byzantine sculptors carved their initials in the column capitals throughout the nave. It remained the largest Christian cathedral in the world for almost a thousand years until the new St Peter's Basilica in Rome was completed in 1626. The cathedral served as the central gathering place for all religious, civic and communal events in the Byzantine Empire. Hagia Sophia was the cathedral of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople, the mother church of Orthodox Christianity just as St Peter's is the mother church of Roman Christians.



Construction of church depicted in codex Manasses Chronicle (14th century) (Public Domain)

Creating Hagia Sophia

To assure the perfection of his new cathedral, Justinian hired the most talented *mechanikoi* or architects known, Athemios from Tralles, an expert in mathematics, conical sections, projectional geometry and Isidorus from Miletus, who was a learned professor and engineer. Together, sparing no expense, they constructed a church in harmony with the cosmos and so beautiful it seemed "not created by human hands". The combination of geometry, light, harmonic proportions and cosmology achieved by the architects of Hagia Sophia created an exquisitely composed religious space bathed in spiritual light. Both astronomy and optical science were applied in the design and décor of the cathedral.

Astronomically aligned, the designers positioned the longitudinal axis of the cathedral using the traditional east-west orientation, aligning at 33.5 degrees south of East. The cathedral faces the rising Sun on the winter solstice as calculated by means of Ptolemy's ancient astronomical formulae in use at that time. This solar alignment was intentionally planned to capture natural illumination for the church interior, even on the shortest day of the year. The architects incorporated numerous visual effects in accord with the Late Antique concepts of light and wisdom to reinforce the spiritual power of the sacred space in order to enhance the religious experience of those attending. The cathedral they created impelled historian Procopius to declare that "*one might say that its interior is not illuminated from without by the sun, but that the radiance comes into being within it, such an abundance of light bathes this shrine*".

Unbelievably, Hagia Sophia was completed in only six years (early 532-late 537). Because construction was initiated so quickly, only 23 days after the Nika riot, it is thought that the

architectural plan had already been worked out and agreed upon. Another factor contributing to the church's swift completion was the reuse of building materials gathered mostly from ancient temples around the Mediterranean. More than 140 massive monolithic columns carved from marble were imported from Egypt, Ephesus, and Thessaly. Two huge marble urns from Pergamum, carved during the Hellenistic era, were positioned at the nave entrance.

Lustration urn brought from Pergamon by Murad III. Carved from a single block of marble in the 2nd century BC. (Public Domain)

The interior walls of the cathedral are covered with marble and glowing mosaics that compete in beauty only with each other, but those that survive today were not part of the original building. The church's golden mosaics were probably created about 40 years later. The cathedral's remarkable mosaics, icons and paintings were destroyed at various periods in its long history. The magnificent mosaics that decorate the cathedral walls today date from various periods depending on whether spiritual images stood in or out of favor with the Church. Fierce differences between proponents and opponents of religious icons resulted in the ban and destruction of innumerable precious artworks.

The iconoclast period in the Byzantine world began in 726 during the reign of Emperor Leo II who thought that people were worshipping the religious statues, paintings and icons themselves rather than the holy persons they represented. Similar to the Muslim and Jewish ban of idolatry, images and icons were prohibited in churches and public places from 726 to 787. Hundreds of treasured artworks were removed and destroyed, even the magnificent mosaics on the walls of Hagia Sofia. A second Byzantine iconoclasm (814 - 842) was declared by Emperor Leo V.

Imperial gate mosaic (Public Domain)

The majority of the church's surviving mosaics were created in the next few centuries. The mosaics of Hagia Sophia were created with specially-chosen highly-reflective crystal and glass tesserae; some were covered with gold or silver. The craftsmen carefully tilted the tiles at various angles to catch the light, making them sparkle even more brightly. The Byzantine mosaicists of Constantinople were admired and in demand as the best in all of Europe. Most mosaics depicted religious scenes or royalty but others were non-figurative, simply meant to highlight the walls. The entire cathedral interior was glazed in reflective surfaces which allowed the directed sunlight to bounce from wall to wall, floor to ceiling in amazing ways.

The enormity of the interior space of Hagia Sophia, illustrated by by Philippe Chaperon (1893) (Dlvdaniel /CC BY-SA 4.0)

The cathedral enclosed the world's largest interior space and its dome construction was a new development in architectural history. The cathedral's majestic dome reaches 55 meters (180 feet), the largest ever built and is supported by 40 ribs that curve to form a web. The dome is surrounded with 40 windows around the base that allow light to penetrate from all directions. The rays of sunlight create dramatic lighting effects and the illusion that the dome is hovering overhead. "*The walls seem to float and the dome to be suspended to a golden chain to Heaven*", as reported by Procopius.

The spectacular dome of Hagia Sophia was not unique but the culmination of the lofty vault architecture of the Roman West was built with bricks not concrete. Roman domes were constructed using concrete, for example the dome of the famous Pantheon. The massive weight of the large dome remained a problem for the building. The dome partially collapsed due to an earthquake in 558 AD (restored in 562). There were two further partial collapses from earthquakes in 986 and 1354; the dome was rebuilt to a smaller scale and the church was reinforced with buttresses on the exterior for further support. Substantial repairs were made in 869, 989 and 1346; the church has since withstood numerous earthquakes.

View upward to domes (Tranxen/ CC BY0-SA 3.0)

Upon entering the doors of Hagia Sophia, the clergy and parishioners crossed into a spiritual experience that eliminated the boundary between the Earthly and Heavenly realms. When the magnificent cathedral was completed, Justinian entered jubilantly observing the splendor around him. Comparing his undertaking with the legendary Solomon, he proclaimed, "*Glory to God who has thought me worthy to finish this work. Solomon, I have surpassed thee!*"

The Fourth Crusade

During the 12th century the Byzantium Empire began its slow reduction in size as various territories were chipped away by the Ottoman Empire's continual drive for expansion. The turning point came in 1204 when Constantinople was overwhelmed during the Fourth Crusade (1202-04). This horrific assault on the city was the final act causing the Great Schism between the Roman Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. The Crusade formed to retake Jerusalem from the remnants of Saladin's empire. While traveling to the Holy Land the 'holy warriors' looted, raped, burned, and razed their way through Constantinople, sparing no one and nothing. They destroyed large areas of Byzantium as well that which was quickly absorbed by the rising Ottoman Sultanate. Even the famous cathedral was not spared but ruthlessly plundered of its treasures and ravaged thoughtlessly. Byzantium could not recuperate from this brutal assault on its people and its culture, cruelly perpetrated by fellow Christians. From 1204 onward the Byzantine Empire was no more; it retained the name but had no significant power. By the 15th century all that remained of the vast Byzantine Empire was the city of Constantinople and a few small outlying towns. It was the only remaining Christian stronghold in the East.

Eight centuries later in 2004 the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople visited the Vatican where Pope John Paul II expressed his regrets over the Crusaders' sacking of the city. The Greek Orthodox Church finally received an apology for the shameful crimes of the Crusaders 800 years later.

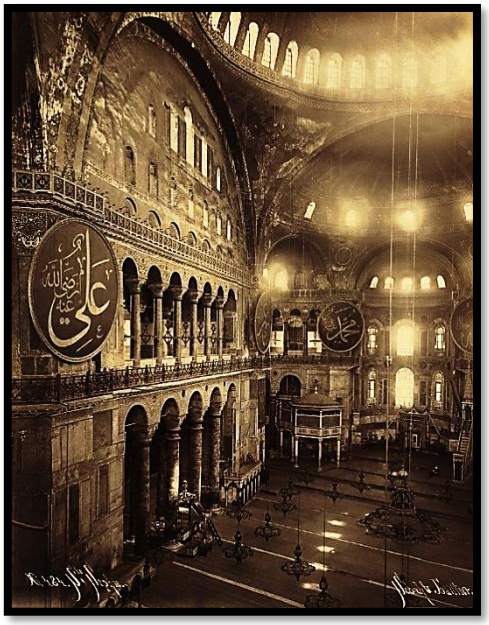
Nave and south aisle from the north aisle by Gaspare Fossati (1852)(Public Domain)

Ottoman Conquest

The Ottoman military had been expanding their territories east of the Mediterranean for nearly 250 years. Positioned on the border of Europe, the wealthy city of Constantinople had always been their ultimate goal but the city's strong Theodosian defensive walls protected it from military attacks. Sultan Mehmed II ruled the Ottoman Empire during two different periods, from 1444 to 1446 and then again from 1451 to 1481. Mehmed II, the son of Sultan Murad II, was viewed as the most cosmopolitan of all Ottoman Sultans. He was very well educated and fluent in six languages. In 1453 Mehmed II began a long military campaign to take control of the biggest prize

in the East, Constantinople. The people of the city fought ferociously and the Ottomans bombarded the walls for weeks but the Byzantines would not capitulate willingly. Towards the end of their 53-day siege, omens began to appear; first there was a lunar eclipse, always a bad sign. A few days later the holiest icon of the Virgin was being carried through the streets as a devotion and it slipped from its platform and fell to the ground. After that tragedy a violent thunderstorm followed. The next morning the city was blanketed in a thick fog; that same night the dome of Hagia Sophia glowed with an unearthly red glow which was also seen by the Turks. The citizens felt that God had abandoned them; many sought shelter in the great cathedral.

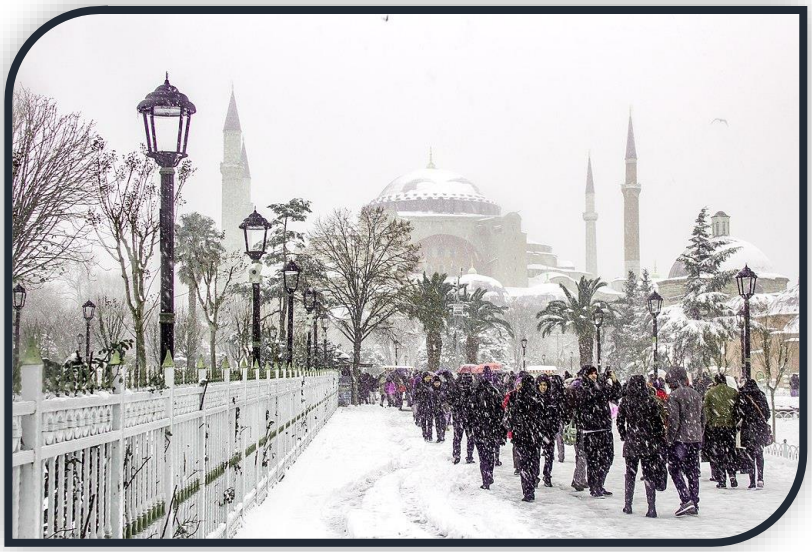
Soon after that, Mehmed began his final assault on the walls of the mighty city and a section finally give in to the Ottoman cannons. The last vestiges of the Roman Empire and the last stronghold of Christianity in the East had fallen to Mehmet, when only 21, bringing an end to the Byzantine Empire. Mehmed allowed all Orthodox Christians who survived to remain in the city and to practice their religion freely. He moved the capital of the Ottoman empire from Bursa, Turkey to Constantinople changing its name to Istanbul.



Photograph by Sébah & Joaillier (c. 1900–1910) (Public Domain)

An unusual quirk of history provided a surprising ending to Constantinople similar to its beginning. The last Byzantine emperor was Constantine XI, successor to the founding Roman Emperor of the city, Constantine I. Additionally, Constantine XI was the son of Byzantine Empress Helena, just as Constantine I was the son of a Roman-Byzantine Empress named Helena. Mehmed the Conqueror brought the end of the Roman Empire, a 1,500 year history of the longest nation-state to ever exist in human history.

Three days after the conquest Mehmed converted the Orthodox Hagia Sophia into the Islamic Imperial Mosque in order to show religious dominance over the city. The esteemed cathedral that had dominated religious life in the Byzantine world would henceforth perform a similar function in the world of Islam. The cathedral was adapted from Christian to Islamic usage and new architectural elements were introduced with the addition of four minarets on the exterior for the call to prayer, a huge chandelier, a mihrab that indicated the direction of Mecca, Islam's holiest site, and a minbar or pulpit for prayers led by the imam. The Muslim ban on imagery was similar to that of the two iconoclastic periods. Fortunately, they did not destroy any of the Christian artworks but covered most of Hagia Sophia's golden mosaics with plaster.



Hagia Sophia in the snow, December 2015 (Leandro Centomo/CC0)

Earthquakes and time have deprived Hagia Sophia of many of its mosaic masterpieces but those remaining have always been well preserved by the Turks during their 500 years of use. Hagia Sophia has seen emperors crowned and married, babies baptized, church councils convened, victories celebrated, and culprits seeking asylum. Hagia Sofia is the greatest surviving masterpiece of Byzantine architecture. It now carries the characteristics of two different cultures, the Byzantine and the Islamic which will continue on in its next incarnation, hopefully open for all to appreciate its unparalleled beauty and diverse history.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

The Incredible Subterranean Basilica Cistern

Wu Mingren

Part of the Basilica Cistern . Photo source: Wikimedia.

Hidden beneath the city of Istanbul (Constantinople), Turkey, are hundreds of ancient cisterns that stored and supplied water to its inhabitants in the ancient past. The largest of these is the Basilica Cistern. So spectacular is the cistern that one could easily mistake it for a sacred subterranean temple. The Basilica Cistern is located just 150m south-west of the famous Haghia Sophia, and was built by the Byzantine emperor, Justinian I, in 532 AD. This cistern is 138 meters in length and 64.6 meters in width, covering an area of almost 1,000 square metres. This cistern is capable of holding up to 80,000 cubic metres of water.

An incredible work effort went into its construction, with 336 marble columns supporting the structure, each measuring nine meters in height, and arranged in 12 rows of 28 columns each divided by a distance of five meters. It is said that the majority of these columns were recycled from older buildings (a process known as 'spoliation'), possibly brought to what was then Constantinople from the various parts of the Byzantine Empire, as well as those used for the construction of the Hagia Sophia. This recycling of columns may have been done to save cost, or to give the cistern a boost of prestige. Perhaps the most iconic example of spoliation is the re-use of the heads of Medusa as the bases of two columns located in the northwest corner of the cistern. According to tradition, the heads were oriented sideways and inverted to counter the power of Medusa's deadly gaze, though it is more likely these orientations provided the proper sizes to support the columns.

One of the Medusa heads in the Basilica Cistern. Photo source .

It may be pointed out that the name of this cistern is derived from the fact that it stands under the site where a Roman *basilica* (a large, open, public building where business or legal transactions could be carried out) once stood. This basilica is believed to have been built sometime in the third or fourth centuries BC. After Constantinople was devastated by the Nika riots of 532, the Basilica Cistern was part of the Emperor Justinan's rebuilding project. The *basilica*, however, unlike the cistern, no longer exists today.

Although the Basilica Cistern is a popular tourist destination today, it was not always so. In fact, sometime before the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Basilica Cistern was closed, and seemed to have been forgotten by the city authorities. It was about a century later that the cistern was re-discovered. In 1545, the French scholar, Petrus Gyllius was in Constantinople researching Byzantine antiquities. He was told by local residents that they could obtain water by lowering buckets in their basement floors. Some even claimed that they could catch fish this way. Gyllius decided to explore the neighbourhood, and managed to access the cistern through the basement of one of the houses in that area. Nevertheless, the Ottoman authorities did not seem to take note of this discovery, as the cistern became a rubbish dump. It has, however, been restored thrice since then. In the late 1980s, the silted-in floor was dredged, and added lighting, elevated walkways, and a café were added for the convenience of visitors. Although the cistern holds only a small amount of water today, fish can still be found in it, so as to keep the water clear.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

ISTANBUL - ADIYAMAN - NEMRUT

Mount Nemrut, Apex Of The Kingdom Of Commagene

Dr. Micki Pistorius

Mount Nemrut, Turkey Located in the city of Adiyaman is a mountain 2,150 meters high. (Samet / Adobe Stock)

Crowned by Mount Nemrut, the territory of the Kingdom of Commagene, landlocked by Syria on the south, Cilicia on the west, Cappadocia on the north-west, Sophene on the north-east and Osroene on the east, was not very large in circumference, and it did not even last a full two centuries from 163 BC to 17 AD. However, its lack in size and duration was made up for by its rich prelude in history and its fourth king, Antiochus I Theos, whose megalomania led to millions of people visiting his kingdom and paying tribute to him even today, as he intended.

Anatolia in the early first century AD with Commagene as a Roman client state (Caliniuc/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

Antiochus I Theos claimed himself a god, but there is no denying that his royal lineage was impressive. He was the creator of Mount Nemrut and the monumental pantheon of statues of himself and the

gods on the mountain summit provide ring-side seats to history unfolding on the staged landscape before them. Gazing towards the east over centuries, the headstone of Antiochus would have seen the rise and fall of the Achaemenid Dynasty, as well as the Parthians; and gazing towards the west he would have seen the advance of Alexander the Great, the rivalry between the Seleucid and Orontid Dynasties for control of Armenia and finally the Roman legions marching into his land, swallowing his little Kingdom of Commagene.

Historical Backdrop

The Achaemenids were a royal Persian Dynasty (730 – 330 BC) whose vast empire stretched from Egypt and south-eastern Europe in the west – including Armenia - to the Indus Valley in the east. During the eighth to seventh centuries BC, the province of Sophene (in Armenia) was part of the Kingdom of Ararat (Urartu). By 600 BC it was ruled by the Orontids of the Kingdom of Armenia.

Cyrus interrogates the king of Armenia by Noël Coypel, Museum of Grenoble (Public Domain)

The origin of the Orontid Dynasty of Armenia is shrouded in mist. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (370 BC) the partly fictional biography of Cyrus the Great, (r 559 – 530 BC) founder of Persia's Achaemenid Empire, mentions the unnamed King of Armenia. His name is supplied later by fifth-century BC Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi in his *History of Armenia* as 'Orontes'. Both references to this Orontes as the original King of Armenia, who met with Cyrus the Great, has been reviewed as legendary rather than factual. Tigranes, son of Orontes was the legendary Armenian prince, contemporary and friend of Cyrus the Great. According to Movses Khorenatsi, the Median King Azhdahak feared the alliance of Armenian Tigranes and Persian Cyrus. He devised a plan where he married Tigranuhi, the sister of Tigranes, in order to lure and kill him. However, Tigranuhi warned her brother of the plot. Tigranes marched against Media at the head of an army comprising of forces from Cappadocia, Georgia, Caucasian Albania, and Greater and Lesser Armenia – which included Commagene - and killed Azhdahak.

19th-century imaginary rendition of Tigranes (Public Domain)

Around the fifth century BC, the Persian Cyrus the Great's descendant, Achaemenid King Darius I the Great, supressed a rebellion of the Armenians, and he appointed satraps, who regularly intermarried princesses of the Achaemenid Dynasty. Xenophon – of the famous March of the Ten Thousand – makes mention in his *Anabasis* (401 BC) of a certain nobleman called Orontes I, satrap of Armenia, who pursued the Ten Thousand Spartans. Darius' descendent Artaxerxes II (405/4 - 358 BC) King of Kings of Persia at that time, gave his daughter Rhodogoune in marriage to Orontes I. Thus, by the time of Artaxerxes' reign Orontos was no longer a legendary figure, but a historical one and the Orontid Dynasty could claim linage to King Darius the Great of Persia.

In the 380's BC King Artaxerxes II was displeased with his son-in-law Orontes' failed negotiations with King Evagoras I of Salamis in Cyprus and Orontes fell into disfavour. By 362 BC he led a revolt against Artaxerxes II, but at the last minute changed sides and sold out his fellow conspirators. Scarcely eight years later in 354/3 BC he seized Pergamon, but again returned it to Artaxerxes III. Orontes I died in 344 BC.

Orontes I Gold coin held at the National Library, Paris (dated to 362 BC) (CC0)

Alexander The Great Enters The Stage

In 336 BC Darius III succeeded to the throne of Persia and the satrapy of Armenia belonged to Orontes II. In 331 BC the forces of Persian Darius III and Macedonian Alexander the Great faced each other at the Battle of Gaugamela. Orontes II fought on the side of the Persians, but his son Mithrenes, fought on the side of Alexander. The Achaemenid Empire collapsed due to the conquest of Alexander the Great and Alexander appointed Mithrenes as satrap of Armenia. Mithrenes remained satrap until 317 when he was replaced by a successive Orontes. Some historians dispute whether Alexander even conquered Armenia at all.

After Alexander's death in 323 BC his empire was divided among his generals, the Diadochi. Several territorial wars ensued, and it seems Mithrenes declared himself King during the confusion of these wars. Eventually the Seleucid Empire (312 – 63 BC) was founded by the Macedonian General Seleucus I Nicator.

Alexander the Great, victorious over Darius at the battle of Gaugamela by Jacques Courtois (1650) (Public Domain)

Seleucid And Armenian Concurrent Timelines

Antiochus I Soter, son of Seleucus I Nicator became the ruler of the Seleucid Empire in 281 BC. By 272 BC Orontes III was King of Armenia, Sophene and Commagene, but he was murdered in 260 BC. Orontes III had lost Sophene to Antiochus II Theos who had succeeded his father Antiochus I Soter in the winter of 262 BC and reigned until 246 BC. Antiochus II Theos was eventually murdered by his first wife Laodice. (The Seleucid Antiochus II Theos should not be confused with Antiochus I Theos, King of Commagene)

In Armenia Orontes III was succeeded by his son Sames I and his son, King Arsames, who ruled from 260 to 228 BC and had taken Sophene back. Queen Laodice had appointed her son Seleucus II Callinicus Pogon as king of the Seleucid Empire, but he had to battle his brother Antiochus Hierax for the crown. King Arsames of Armenia supported Antiochus Hierax against Seleucus II Callinicus and at Battle of Ancyra around 237 BC, with the support of Mithridates II of Pontu, Seleucus II was defeated. Seleucus II retreated to the eastern provinces. In 225 BC he fell from his horse and died.

King Arsames of Armenia was succeeded by Xerxes as the ruler of Sophene and Commagene in 228 BC, while his brother Orontes IV ruled Armenia.

Seleucus II was succeeded by his son Seleucus III Soter, called Seleucus Ceraunus, who was murdered and then followed by his brother Antiochus III the Great (222 – 187 BC). In 223 BC, several Seleucid satraps rebelled against King Antiochus III, including Artabazanes (Upper Media), Molon (Lower Media), Alexander (Persis), and Achaeus (Asia Minor). By 220 BC Antiochus III had put down most of the rebellions. Unnerved by the rebellion of the satraps in 212 BC, Antiochus III invaded the Xerxes' land and defeated him after laying siege to the city of Samosata. To keep the peace Antiochus III arranged for Xerxes to marry his sister, Antiochis, who promptly had her new husband murdered.

Xerxes was succeeded by his brother King Orontes IV from 212 to 200 BC. He founded the shrine at Armavir dedicated to Apollo (Mithra), a golden statue of four horses pulling a chariot with Apollo as God of the Sun.

King Orontes IV of Armenia (c. 212—200 BC). Engraving by German artist Josef I. Rotter. (Public Domain)

By 200 BC after Antiochus III had conquered both Armenia and Sophene, he installed the Armenian generals Artaxias I and Zariadres as governors in the respective kingdoms. However, a new red threat advanced from the west. Roman legions marched over Anatolia, bent on expanding the Roman Empire.

At the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BC Antiochus III was finally defeated by the Romans. Governors Artaxias I and Zariadres took advantage of Antiochus' III defeat and declared themselves independent. Artaxias, was a member of the Armenian noble family of Artashes, related to the Orontids and became the first king of the Artaxiad Dynasty of Armenia in 188 BC.

Antiochus III the Great was defeated in the west, but he had eight children and he was succeeded by his two sons Seleucus IV Philopator who ruled from 187 to 175 BC, when he was assassinated, and then by Mithridates who ruled under the regnal name Antiochus IV Epiphanes from 175 to 164 BC. (Not to be confused with the last king of Commagene Antiochus IV Epiphanes).

Persecution by Antiochus by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1873) (ruskpp /Adobe Stock)

Antiochus IV Epiphanes lived in Athens at the time of his brother's death. Seleucus IV Philopator's young son, the crown prince, was a hostage in Rome, which paved the way for Antiochus IV Epiphanes to claim the throne – some say he usurped it. He was a generous ruler who scattered coins to people in the streets and made ample donations to temples. He held opulent banquets and was considered eccentric, often walking among the commoners in the street. After his brother's assassination he opted to maintain good relations with Rome. He was not so generous towards the Jews under his suzerainty. He issued several decrees forbidding many traditional Jewish practices and began a campaign of persecution against devout Jews. This triggered the Maccabean Revolt in 167 BC.

King Mithridates I the Great of Parthia took advantage of Antiochus' IV troubles in Judea, and attacked the Seleucid Empire from the east. Antiochus IV Epiphanes sent a commander to supress the Jews and led his army against the Parthians. He was quite successful and managed to reoccupy Armenia. He died of disease in 164 BC and the Maccabees attributed his death to divine intervention, due to his impiety displayed towards the Temple of Jerusalem. His death changed the fate of Commagene, lying snug in Armenian territory.

Punishment of Antiochus, engraving by Gustave Doré (1866) (Public Domain)

Under the reign of King Mithridates the Great, Parthia was transformed from a small kingdom to a mighty empire. Due to his accomplishments, he has been compared to Cyrus the Great (r. 550–530 BC), the founder of the Achaemenid Empire. "Mithridates" is the Greek attestation of the Iranian name Mihrdāt, meaning "gift of Mithra". Mithra was the name of the ancient Iranian sun god and a prominent figure in Zoroastrian religion, where he bestowed *khvarenah*, or kingly glory – the divine empowerment of kings. Mithra was worshipped during the Achaemenid Empire, as well as the Seleucid period, where he was associated with the Greek gods Apollo or Helios, or the Babylonian god Nabu.

Map showing Commagene as a tributary kingdom of the Armenian Empire under Tigranes the Great (Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias)

The Kingdom Of Commagene

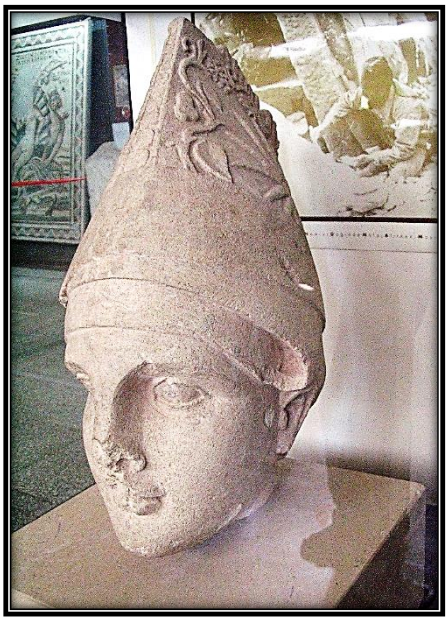
At the time of the death of Antiochus IV in 164 BC, Commagene formed part of Sophene but the local satrap, Ptolemaeus took advantage of the turmoil of the fall of the Seleucid Dynasty and established himself as the first independent King of Commagene. Ptolemaeus, through his father King Orontes IV claimed supreme Orontid lineage and therefore split from the Artaxiad rulers of Sophene. Ptolemaeus made the city of Samosata, founded by Sames I at the previous Neo-Hittite site of Kummuh, his capitol. Ptolemaeus' son and successor Samos II Theosebes Dikaios (r. 130–109 BC) built the fortress at Samosata. Samosata is situated on the Euphrates and two millennia later, in 1989 the whole city and the fortress was submerged by the Atatürk Reservoir. Sames' II successor was Mithridates I Callinicus.

Mithridates I Callinicus (109 BC–70 BC) was the King of Commagene who introduced Greek blood into the royal lineage by marrying the Syrian Greek Princess Laodice VII Thea. Laodice's father was the Seleucid King Antiochus VIII Grypus, while her mother was a Ptolemaic princess and later Seleucid Queen Tryphaena. This union facilitated the Orontid Dynasty to claim ancestry to Alexander the Great. This marriage may also have been part of a peace treaty between the

Kingdom of Commagene and the Seleucid Empire, but the marriage heralded the transmission from Persian to Hellenistic culture.

The King of Kings Tigranes the Great with four vassal Kings surrounding him (Public Domain)

A contemporary of Mithridates Callinicus was Tigranes II the Great, King of Armenia and descendent of the Artaxiad Dynasty. During his reign of 40 years (95 – 55 BC) Tigranes II expanded his empire and won battles against the Seleucids, Parthians and Romans. He called himself King of Kings and never appeared without the attendance of four vasal kings at his side. His greatness is not contested but his demeanour of self-aggrandizement was probably surpassed by the son of neighbouring King Mithridates Callinicus and Queen Laodice VII Thea, namely Antiochus I Theos of Commagene (reigned 70–30 BC).



Head of Antiochus I Theos from the plateau now in the museum at Gaziantep (Klaus-Peter Simon / CC BY-SA 3.0)

King Antiochus I Theos of Commagene

Antiochus I Theos Dikaios Epiphanes Philorhomaios Philhellen (r. 70 – 30 BC) meaning 'the just, eminent god, friend of Romans and friend of Greeks' was a direct descendant of the Diadochi, Seleucus I Nicator of the Seleucid Empire, Ptolemy I Soter of Egypt, Antigonus I Monophthalmus of Macedonia and Asia, Lysimachus of Thrace and the Macedonian regent, Antipater. He was also a descendant of Darius the Great. He commemorated his first direct ancestor, his father Mithridates Callinicus with a *hierothesion* (holy burial areas for Commagene royalty) at Arsameia on the Nymphaios, which had by then become a royal seat of the Kings of Commagene, although the capital was still Samosata.

A processional way up the mountain at Arsameia is interrupted by three stations, discovered by archaeologists in the early 20th century. The first station has a fragment of a Mithras relief, depicting *dexiosis* – a king shaking hands with a god (Mithras in this case) illustrating the king and the god being on equal footing, implying the king is a god on the same level. The second station is another *dexiosis* and a hallway carved into the rock leading up to a chamber. At the third station is an inscription by Antiochus I Theos relating the construction of the *hierothesion* and instructions to observe the cult. The inscribed wall is crowned by a *dexiosis* relief of either Mithridates Callinicus or Antiochus I Theos shaking the hand of the naked Hercules.

King Mithridates or Antiochus I of Commagene shaking hands with Heracles (CC BY-SA 2.0)

About two kilometers (1.24 miles) away from the *hierothesion* lies the site of the palace buildings of the Commagenian rulers, today it is the ruins of the Mameluke castle. Antiochus I Theos married Isias, daughter of King Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia. They had a son, Mithridates II, who commemorated his mother Queen Isias and his sister Princess Antiochis and her daughter Aka I, with a *hierothesion* at Karakus Tumulus. Karakus means 'black bird' and the site was named after the eagle on one of the pillars. The tumulus is encircled by groups of three Doric columns topped with steles, reliefs and statues of a bull, lion and eagle. The inscription reads: "*This is the hierothesion of Isias, whom the great King Mithridates (she being his own mother) … deemed worthy of this final hour. And … Antiochis lies herein, the king's sister by the same mother, the most beautiful of women, whose life was short but her honours long-enduring. Both of these, as you see, preside here, and with them a daughter's daughter, the daughter of Antiochis, Aka. A memorial of life with each other and of the king's honour*".

Eagle topped column at Karakus Tumulus (Sailingstone /Adobe Stock)

Antiochus I Theos called himself a 'friend of the Romans' yet like a good politician he had to negotiate treacherous waters when it came to protecting his kingdom. He married his daughter Laodice to Parthian monarch Orodes II, yet he sold out intelligence to the Romans regarding Orodes' son Pacorus' I military manoeuvres. Yet when Pacorus was defeated and killed by the Romans, Antiochus gave refuge to his fleeing soldiers. Roman General Publius Ventidius Bassus laid siege to the capital Samosata, where Antiochus offered to buy Venditus off. Roman Commander in Chief Mark-Anthony personally took command of the siege, but failed and eventually accepted Antiochus I Theos' payment of 300 talents – 700 less than what he had offered Venditus!

Depiction of the order of the pantheon at Mount Nemrut before it fell to ruins (sevenkingdom /Adobe Stock)

Monumental Mount Nemrut

Antiochus I Theos was not known for his military successes or expanding his empire. His megalomania manifested in the monumental tomb on Mount Nemrut, where he seated himself in a pantheon of gods, on the eastern and western side of the mountain, symbolizing his eastern and western lineage.

Although Mount Nemrut is one of the highest peaks, east of the Taurus Mountains, Antiochus I Theos built a tumulus on top of the mountain extending its height with 49 metres (161 feet). He needed to be closer to the gods and further away from people. The gods seated on the eastern and western terraces are copies of each other and present the syncretism of east-meets-west religion. From left to right, these were: Antiochus himself, Anahita-Tyche the goddess of Commagene, Zeus-Orosmasdes-Ahura Mazda, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes, and Artagnes-Bahram-Heracles-Ares. The statues are flanked by a lion and an eagle on each side.

Head Anahita Goddess of Commagene (SPICA-VEGA PHOTO ART / Adobe Stock)

King Antiochus is dressed in Phrygian boots and like Orosmasdes holds a *barsom*, a bundle of twigs, symbolizing sacred fire used during the Mithraic rituals.

The goddess is Anahita (coupled with Tyche), representing the fertile land. She holds a cornupia of fruits and a garland of flowers in her hands. A *calathus* – Greek symbol of fertility, had broken off the statue.

Orosmasdes or Ahura Mazda (coupled with the Greek Zeus) is the creator deity in Persian Zoroastrianism, who during the Achaemenid period was invoked on his own, as attested to in the Behistun Inscription of Darius the Great. By the time of the reign of Artaxerxes II, Orosmasdes formed a trinity with Mithras and Anahita.

Mithras (coupled with the Greek Apollo, Helios and Hermes) is the Zoroastrian sun god, shown beardless, wearing a Phrygian cap.

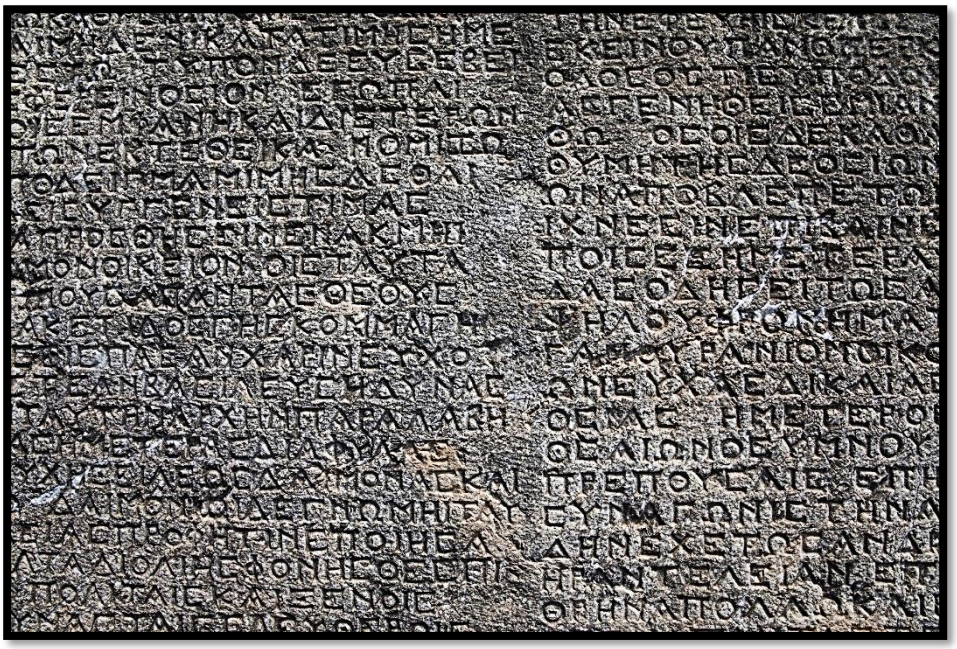
Mithras-Helios, with solar rays and in Phrygian cap shaking the hand of Antiochus I of Commagene. Relief on Mount Nemrut. (Public Domain)

Artagnes /Verethragna / Bahram (coupled with Greek Herakles and Ares) was the hypostasis of "victory" and in the Zoroastrian hierarchy he is the helper of the seven divine entities emanating from Ahura Mazda. He is associated with the planet Mars – as is the Greek war god Ares.

Besides the colossal statues of the deities, 85 reliefs of Antiochus I Theos' ancestors are paraded on the north terrace. The relief of the lion horoscope is on the west terrace, depicting stars and the composition of the planets Jupiter, Mercury, and Mars as they were on July 14, 109 BC – the date of the coronation of his father. Antiochus Theos was knowledgeable in Hermeticism and practiced astrology, and he linked the Commagenian calendar year to the cycle of Sirius, as was used by the Egyptians as the basis for their calendar.

Antiochus I Theos inscribed an edict or nomos, explaining his genealogy, instructions for portions of the tax to be allocated to priests and rituals to be performed at the site, and even instructions to erect sanctuaries over the kingdom for those people who did not have the means to visit the site. The king was a pious man who regarded his kingdom as the domain or dwelling place of the gods, and they should be honored with festivals and sacrifices. True to form Antiochus I Theos also included the festivities to honor himself: On the 16th day of every month his birthday should be celebrated and on the tenth of each month, his coronation. During these festivities, those chosen to represent himself and the gods, shall wear golden crowns – paid from the taxes from the villages – and incense and herbs shall be sacrificed and the natives and the visitors shall be entertained by musicians and nourished with wine and food. He even provided drinking cups.

These *hierodules* – in service of the cult – shall never be made slaves and be free of any other duties. Antiochus I Theos had foreseen that this practice would continue for generations, for the offspring of the *hierodules* were bound by the servitude to the cult.



The nomos of Antiochus Theos on Mount Nemrut (yusuftatliturk /Adobe Stock)

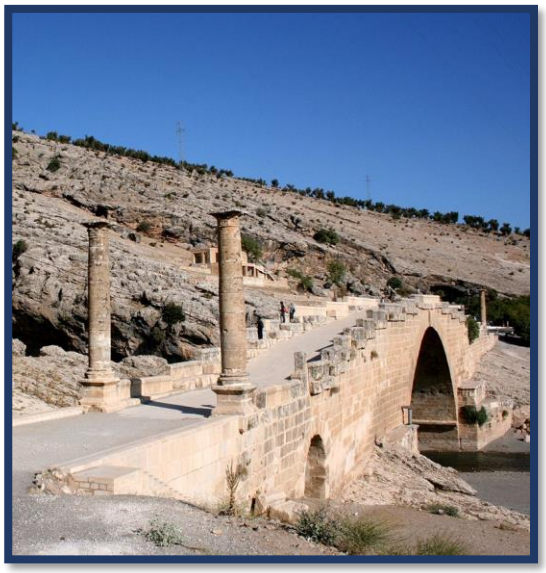
Antiochus I Theos also warned the wrath of the demons and gods "*shall pursue both himself and his descendants, irreconcilable with every kind of punishment*" whomever desecrated or violated the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the sanctuary was violated and damage to the noses indicate iconoclasm. Possibly the heads could have fallen during earthquakes, although the bodies of the statues were built to withstand earthquakes.

Decline Of The Kingdom Of Commagene

It is not recorded how Antiochus Theos died in 30 BC, some speculate he was killed by Phraates IV of Edessa. Neither is it known if he was entombed at Mount Nemrut. He was succeeded by his son Mithridates II (20 BC–12 BC) who was an ally of Mark Anthony in the Battle of Actium, but after Octavian's victory, he allied himself with Octavian/ Augustus. Mithridates II had to cede the town of Zeugma to Augustus who needed to build a bridge over the Euphrates there, to simplify access into Syria.

Relief of Mithridates II of Commagène and his sister Laodice at the top of a column at the west of the Tumulus of Karakus, Turkey (Bernard Gagnon/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Roman legion Legio XVI Gallica, garrisoned in the ancient city of Samosata to begin a war with Parthia, had built the Severan bridge spanning the Cendere Çayı (Chabinas Creek), a tributary of Kâhta Creek near Arsameia.



Severan Bridge with the columns of Roman Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus and his second wife Julia Domna seen from the south. (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Mithridates II was succeeded by his son Mithridates III (r. 20 – 12 BC), and he was succeeded by his son Antiochus III Epiphanes (r. 20 BC – 17 AD), who married his full-blooded sister Iotapa. When he died his son Antiochus IV was too young to take the throne. Roman Emperor Tiberius stepped in to annex Commagene and incorporated it into the Roman province of Syria.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his sister Iotapa were raised in Rome and were part of the court of Antonia Minor, youngest daughter of Mark Anthony and niece of Emperor Augustus. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was a friend of Caligula, Antonia's grandson. In 38 BC Emperor Caligula, reinstated his friend Antiochus IV as a client king in Commagene, but the fickle emperor changed his mind and deprived Antiochus IV of the throne. Only when Claudius became Emperor was Antiochus IV reinstated as client king in 41 BC. During his reign he served Rome by supressing a rebellion in Cilicia, he served under General Domitius Corbulo against King Tiridates I of Armenia, brother of the Parthian King Vologases I of Parthia in 59 AD and supported Vespasian's nomination for Emperor. By then he was considered the richest of the tributary kings of Rome. He even sent his son Epiphanes to aid Vespasian's son Titus in the siege of Jerusalem. After a successful reign of 34 years, he was accused by Caesennius Paetus, the governor of Syria, of conspiring with the Parthians against the Romans and in 72 AD he was deprived of his kingdom. Emperor Vespasian finally incorporated Commagene into the Roman Empire. Antiochus IV lived out the remainder of his days in Sparta with his two sons. Thus the sun set over the Kingdom of Commagene.

Sunset over Mount Nemrut (nejdetduzen /Adobe Stock)

Sadly, after the Roman conquest, the site of Mount Nemrut fell to ruins until it was discovered in 1881 by Karl Sester a German engineer. In the mid-20th century archaeologist Theresa Bathsheba Goell collaborated with archaeologist Friedrich Karl Dörner to excavate Nemrut and Arsameia. Later she moved her excavations to Samosata. Mount Nemrut was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987. Although Antiochus I Theos tomb has never been discovered, millions of people flock to his mountain and climb the processional way to the terraces to watch the sunset along with the decapitated heads of the gods. Antiochus Theos' no longer serves wine or food.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Mount Nemrut Magnificent Monument To Megalomania

Giant seated statues of Nemrut Mountain (IzzetNoyan/ Adobe Stock)

Jim Willis

In 1881, a German engineer by the name of Karl Sester was surveying transport routes through what was then the Ottoman Empire. Some local people who lived in the area and worked for him shared some interesting news which he subsequently reported. Although they could not identify the specific ancient routes he was looking for, they told him about some monumental statues that lay in ruins on Mount Nemrut or Nemrut Dag. Motivated more by his own curiosity than professional goals, he hired a Kurdish man named Bâko to show him the site.

Representation of what the Nemrut pantheon looked like before the heads fell off. (CiddiBiri/ Adobe Stock)

His reports were met with such interest that the very next year the German Archaeological Institute formed a scientific expedition to investigate. Otto Puchstein was working in Egypt at the time but was instructed to meet with Sester to do some preliminary work. What he found was so intriguing that he returned with archaeologist Osman Hamdi and sculptor Osgan Effendi. Much of what is known today about the history of this important site is due to the work of these adventurers. Sester and Puchstein discovered a long inscription written in Greek, which told the story about why the monuments had been erected. By 1883 it was published in a book written in French called *Le Tumulus de Nemroud Dagh*. Although no serious archaeological work had yet been done on site, the story caught on, and the public at large began to hear about the *hierothesion, an ancient Greek word meaning 'holy seat',* on Mount Nemrut.

Friedrich Karl Dörner. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Enter Theresa Goell and Friedrich Dörner

Once the story became known, history seemed to intervene. It was not until after the Second World War that Friedrich Karl Dörner could get about the business of revealing the secrets of the mountain, which involved the search for a hidden burial chamber and various historical facts that revealed the politics behind this extraordinary era. Although Dörner is usually credited with putting together the details of the site, it is really because of the work of Theresa Goell, sometimes called the 'Queen of the Mountain', that one gains insight into what transpired in this important region of the world. Her biography tells the story of how a 40-year-old divorcee was able, at tremendous personal cost, to break into the male-dominated world of archaeology, especially in the Middle East. She believed that the mountain was, in her words, 'too oriental' for the classically trained archaeologists of her day. They were much more interested in studying the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. At the same time, the 'orientalists' of Asia considered the site 'too classical', meaning too European. So, she devoted the rest of her life to uncovering the fascinating story Mount Nemrut had to tell, including her search for the burial chamber of King Antiochus, a monumental megalomaniac if there ever was one.

During the 1950s, two archaeological teams were at work simultaneously. One was directed by Dörner, the other by Goell. Their agreement was that Goell would work at the summit of the mountain, using Dörner as an expert of ancient epigraphy, or inscriptions. Dörner, when not otherwise engaged, would conduct excavations at the foot, and utilize Goell as an assistant. In this way, the two would collaborate from 1953 to 1956, and then come together for a final season in 1959.

The artificial, man-made peak of Mount Nemrut with the eastern row of gods.(Bjørn Christian Tørrissen /CC BY-SA 3.0)

Goell was obsessed with, again in her words, 'leaving no stone unturned'. She took her work seriously. There is probably not a single boulder on the mountain today that she did not excavate to find out what was underneath it. She made boreholes in the tumulus, looking for hidden chambers. Visitors today can still detect traces of her excavation's dynamite explosions. Nevertheless, her work was in vain in one great respect. The tomb of King Antiochus remains hidden to this day.

In 1973 Goell conducted field research on Nemrut for one last season. During that year she supervised the renovation of steps that lead to the colossal thrones of the East Terrace. Poor health prevented her from producing an overreaching article that documented her entire research, although for a while she placed the blame on having to wait for Dörner, who was still working on the ancient inscriptions. But she did manage a number of short field reports and a few popular science articles. In 1983 she commissioned Donald Sanders to write what she intended to be her definitive *magnum opus*, but it took him 13 years before he was able to complete the two-volume work entitled *Nemrud Dağı: The Hierothesion of Antiochus I of Commagene*. It was published in 1996, 16 years after her death.

West Terrace: Sandstone Stele / Stelae of Persian (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Dörner continued on until 1984, serving as a consultant for 12 years after his formal retirement, and eventually produced a book published in 1987 entitled *Der Thron der Götter auf dem Nemrud Dağ.* It tells his version of the story about life on the mountain. Finally, Nemrut Dag was ready to receive visitors, and tourism to the site, now on the UNESCO World Heritage List, began in earnest.

The Policy of Alexander

Nemrut Dag illustrates a prime example of what is called Hellenism. Up until the time of Alexander the Great and his conquests, pillage was the name of the game when it came to invading armies. The idea was to overcome a country's defenses, gather up as much loot as could be found, including slaves, and either settle in the conquered territory or march everything back to the home country. That was how Babylon, for instance, went about the destruction of the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

But Alexander had different ideas. He was looking for something more permanent. After conquering a nation such as Anatolia he would leave behind instructors who would superimpose the Greek culture and language over that of the existing nation, in effect making them Greek. The Greek language and system of political structure was the unifying thread that wove a world culture together. The Romans, who came along later, found it such an efficient system that they kept it in place as they conquered what was to become the Roman Empire. They even kept Greek as the official language of the land, rather than Latin. That was why, for instance, the Christian *New Testament*, written by Jewish authors during the era of the Roman Empire, was penned in Greek rather than Hebrew. It was all due to Alexander's penchant for Hellenism.

Head of the eagle and the god (JK/ Abode Stock)

The Cult Of King Antiochus I of Commagene

Mount Nemrut, situated in southeast Turkey, bridges east and west, Europe and Asia. Built by the Hellenistic King Antiochus I Theos of Commagene, who lived from 69-34 BC, it was constructed as a monument to himself and his own glory. Seeking independence from the Seleucid Empire, he literally transformed the entire top of the mountain, with great statues and images that faced both the rising sun over Asia and the setting sun over Europe. It was an ambitious project, described in texts and artwork in what was by then the world-wide accepted language of Greek. Greece, Persia, Armenia, and local Anatolian cults all find representation in this project.

Head of Antiochus I Theos of Commagene on the western terrace of the Nemrut Dağı, Turkey. (Bernard Gagnon/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

To carry out his policy of maintaining balance between eastern and western cultures, he established a rather unique approach to religion. The fact that he built the Antiochus monument on the highest mountain in his kingdom, even going to the trouble of placing it on top of an artificially constructed mound of crushed rock that towers an additional 164 feet (50 meters) into the sky, and then building a statue of himself surrounded by gods, speaks to a cult-like religion, at best. Similar, almost identical, terraces facing east and west depict the pantheon of his religion. They are protected by a lion and an eagle. Huge limestone slabs feature relief images showing a royal handshake between the deities. Portraits of Antiochus' Greek, Persian, and Armenian ancestors remain unfinished. On the east terrace, a stone altar similar to a stepped pyramid implies that religious ceremonies were conducted here.

The reason so much in known about this site is because of an extended engraved inscription in Greek. Called a *nomos*, it relates detailed information about both the political and historical aspects of how the whole site was constructed and why the new religious cult was formed. The *nomos* is located both on the East and West terraces. It goes on to say that the site is a mausoleum, built after the king had already enjoyed a 'life of many years.

Line up of the gods and the eagle at Nemrut (psynovec/ Adobe Stock)

It was established so that the cult should celebrate the life of Antiochus throughout the kingdom on certain festival seasons, but especially here on Mount Nemrut. Detailed instructions are

included saying how the festivals were to be carried out. Apparently, according to the text, these details were revealed by the king's daimones (demons), who made it possible for him to be so successful during his reign. In ancient times *daimones* were considered to be guardian spirits, not necessarily evil beings as was later the case. They were represented in the monumental statues which now form the central tourist attraction of the mountain. They consist of Antiochus himself, the goddess of Commagene, Zeus, also called Orosmasdes and Ahura Mazda; Apollo, known variously as Mithras, Helios, and Hermes; and Artagnes, who is Bahram, Heracles, and Ares in different religious traditions. A careful examination of these names reveals elements of Persian Zoroastrianism as well as examples representing the Greek Pantheon. To this is added the figure of the goddess, Anahita/Tyche presumably to insure fertility in the land.

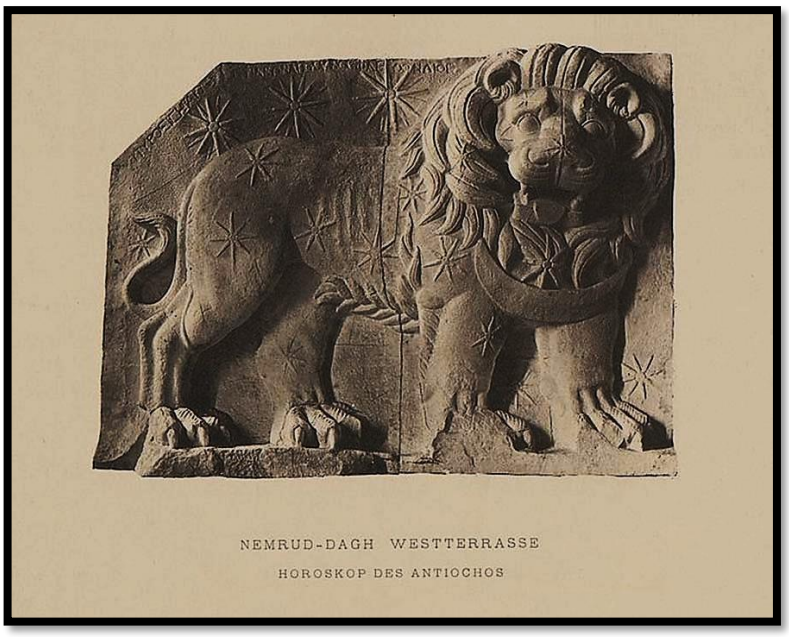
Theresa Goell discovered that although most of the statues had collapsed and fallen down off the dais, the goddess was preserved intact right up until the 1960s, when she was struck by lightning and lost her head. Some of the fallen sculptures have been deliberately disfigured, probably by later Christians and Muslims who were expressing their disdain for what they considered to be heathen idols or false gods.

Head of the Goddess (Anna/Adobe Stock)

The image that has provoked more questions than any other is undoubtedly that of a bas-relief lion, decorated with 19 stars that seem to reflect the constellation Leo. A necklace shaped like a sickle hangs from his neck, which probably symbolizes the crescent moon. Three stars can be seen above its back, which are often interpreted as Mars, Mercury, and Jupiter. All this brings to mind the old adage, 'as above, so below'. If this diagram actually reflects the position of the heavens when the whole *hierothesion* was constructed, it adds fuel to the fires of astrological speculation about the essential but illusive meaning the builders sought to convey.

It is a building technique used to this very day. *A visit to* the Hoover Dam in the American Southwest, for instance, reveals an impressive sculpture consisting of two huge winged figures standing over an inscribed star chart. Its purpose is described by a pamphlet issued by the United States Department of the Interior: "*The chart preserves for future generations the date on which president Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated Hoover Dam, September 30, 1935. In this celestial map, the bodies of the solar system are placed so exactly that those versed in astronomy could calculate the precession (progressively earlier occurrence) of the Pole Star for approximately the next 14,000 years. Conversely, future generations could look upon this monument and determine, if*

no other means were available, the exact date on which Hoover Dam was dedicated." The system obviously works, just as it has for thousands of years.



The Lion with the Stars (Public Domain)

Whatever it was that moved Antiochus to construct his monument, it certainly has stood the test of time. One can only assume that if he is somehow looking down on the thousands of tourists who flock here every year to pay him tribute, he is smiling.

References used in this article are available on [Ancient Origins Premium]

ADIYAMAN - URFA - GOBEKLI TEPE

Göbekli Tepe, Birth of Civilization and Religion

Jim Willis

Before the invention of pottery, before the birth of agriculture, before the advent of what is now called civilization, there was Göbekli Tepe.

Top Image Ancient Site of Gobekli Tepe in SanliUrfa, Turkey, The Oldest Temple of the World. (Haluk/ Adobe Stock)

In one of the most stunning archaeological discoveries of the 20th century, indeed, perhaps of all time, the birth of civilization was pushed back by more than 6,000 years. And subsequent findings are adding even more to the mystery.

Ancient Site of Göbekli Tepe in Southern Turkey (Brian Weed/ Adobe Stock)

In the Beginning: A Holy Place

The site that is causing all the stir has also moved the gaze of historians north, into ancient Anatolia in south-eastern Turkey, to face the perplexities of 'In the beginning'. No longer is it safe to say that civilization began in Mesopotamia and Egypt. That honor now resides in the area spreading out from Şanlıurfa, long thought to be the birthplace of Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism. Called 'Potbelly Hill' by local natives, because of its rounded, protruding shape, the entire area of ancient Anatolia is rich in Biblical lore, but Göbekli Tepe's origins extend back much further in time. The elaborately carved T-shaped pillars, found within a series of circular structures, were erected some 12,000 years ago, predating the traditional dates for even the Egyptian pyramids by at least six millennia.

Göbekli Tepe PIlars in the Sanliurfa museum. (Cobija / CC BY-SA 4.0)

The dating is firmly authenticated and accepted by experts the world over. That is why the site has caused such a stir. Before the discovery of Göbekli Tepe it was standard theory that the Agricultural Revolution, with its guarantees of a stable food supply, brought about the first settled communities and led to the invention of writing and eventually the birth of established religion.

Now that idea has been upended. Göbekli Tepe was almost certainly built by hunter-gatherers as a religious ritual center. Klaus Schmidt, director of excavation until his death in 2014, called it "the first human-built holy place." He believed that evidence clearly seemed to indicate that it was religion that led to the Agricultural Revolution, rather than the other way around. Something about the countryside itself seemed to call out to scattered bands of subsistence hunter-gathers to build what he called a "regional gathering place".

Home to a Semi-Sedentary Population?

Dr. Lee Clare, the current director of excavation, disagrees with this assessment. He believes that Göbekli Tepe was home to a semi-sedentary population from its very beginning. This leads to a spirited argument. What could possibly have caused wandering bands of foragers to join together in one area, somehow organize themselves into a complex society organized enough to construct such an edifice and many others like it in the surrounding countryside, and begin the long march towards civilized modernity?

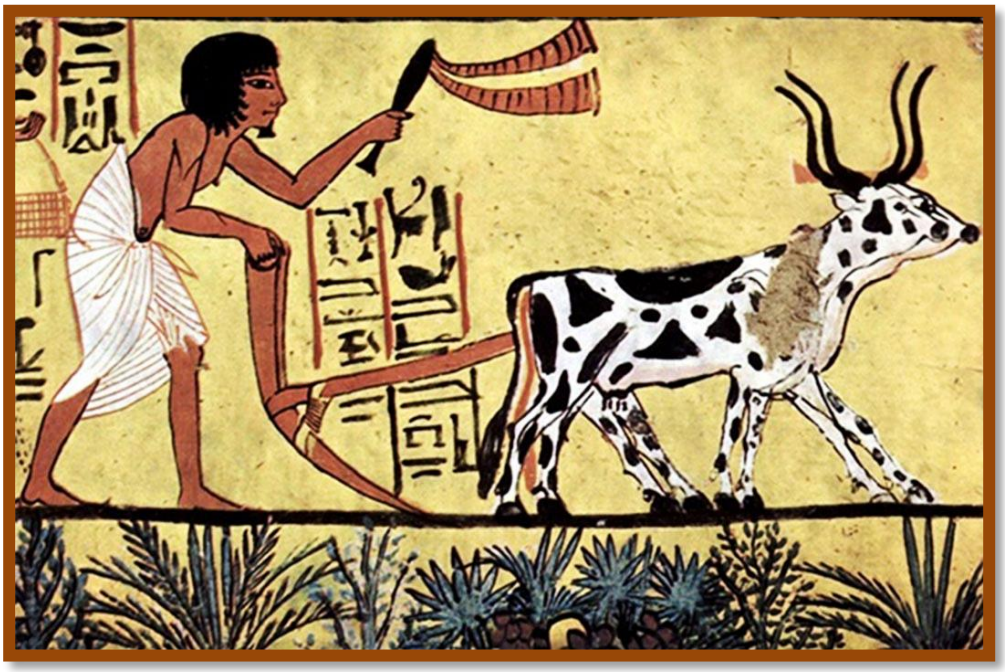
It had to be a powerful motivational force. One gigantic pillar found still resting unused in the quarry is estimated to weigh 50 tons! Why would they have wanted to move and erect such mammoth stones? Given the iconography carved into the standing T-shaped columns and the human-shaped images, some of which are 20 feet (six meters) tall and weigh up to 20 metric tons, the motivation seems almost certainly to be spiritual in nature. There is nothing at all practical about the structure in terms of meeting the needs of a subsistence-based culture.

Did the pillars support a roof? That is the theory, but no one really can say for sure. What is known is that images of carrion birds, jaguars, foxes, scorpions, cranes, storks, ducks, snakes, boar, aurochs, gazelle, wild donkeys, and what might be construed as sacred symbols, are carved in raised relief into the stone. The whole edifice exudes mystery, but since ground-penetrating radar indicates that only about five percent of the structures have been excavated, there is obviously a lot more to be learned in the coming years.

Animal motifs on the pillars (Suzi/ Adobe Stock)

The Mystique of Göbekli Tepe

Despite all the physical information that will surely come, the mystique of Göbekli Tepe is the aura that surrounds it—the fact that its very existence refutes all traditional wisdom concerning mankind as a species and how he began his march to the present day. As strange as it seems, one discovery completely upended a long-held story about the gradual development of agriculture which lead to settled communities and specialized labor forces, religious hierarchy, trade, warfare, and all the rest. Slowly, one assumed for the last hundred years, the human race grew from huddling in caves and temporary brush dwellings to highly organized, complex societies. Now all that has to be rethought. History, especially the transition from Paleolithic to Neolithic cultures, was nowhere near as neat and simple as once thought. Things were a lot more complicated. Mankind, it turns out, comprises an enigmatic people capable of surprising quirks and complex behaviors.



Ancient agriculture. Mural in the burial chamber of Sennedjem (circa 1200 BC) (Public Domain)

The Birth of Agriculture

This is the region that gave birth to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, in which Cain the agriculturalist, a man of the soil, killed his brother Abel, who was a keeper of flocks and herds. God, according to *Genesis* 4, accepted the sacrifice of a lamb from Abel's flock, but rejected Cain's offering of vegetables from the field. In a fit of jealousy, Cain murdered his brother, was banished, and immediately went out and built a city.

Does this ancient story carry echoes of the historical reality found at Göbekli Tepe? The evidence seems to indicate it was here that nomadic herders in the tradition of Abel gave way to settled agriculturists such as Cain. Cain's way of life was victorious. It was this area that saw the development of domestic grains formed from wild einkorn, emmer wheat, and barley. It also celebrates the place where beer was first produced. It would seem that ever since the beginning, when people gathered for social reasons, they came to party.

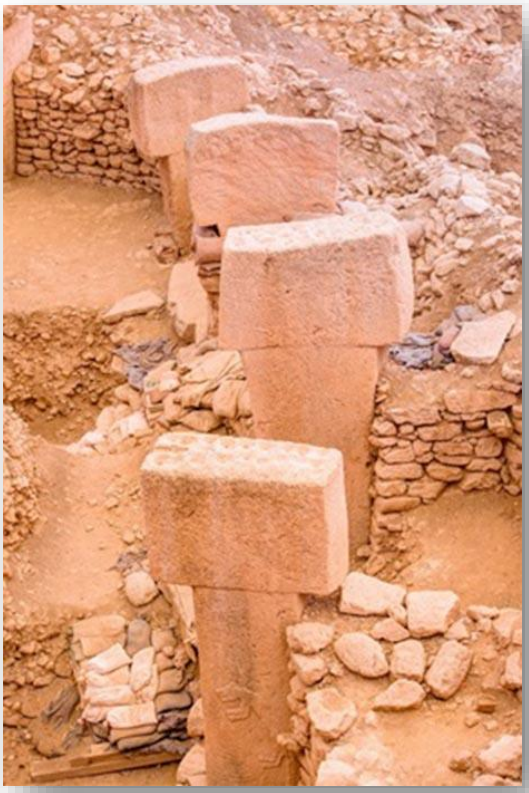
Great Pyramids of Giza, Egypt at sunset. (John Smith/Adobe Stock)

Skilled Construction

Until the discovery of Göbekli Tepe no one suspected human beings who lived that long ago could possibly have constructed such massive, complex structures. The reason Egyptologists have long resisted pushing back dates for the construction of the Giza Pyramids is that they had firmly decided no society anywhere on earth could have possessed the building skills necessary to undertake that kind of project before the third dynasty.

Then Göbekli Tepe proved that they could do such things at least 6,000 years earlier. The time span between the building of the pyramids and the present day is as long as the time span between Göbekli Tepe and the building of the pyramids.

The site known as Building D is the best preserved of all known structures at the dig. Twelve T-shaped pillars form a circle around two larger, central pillars that stand some 20 feet high. They are carved out of limestone from a nearby quarry and inserted into pedestals in the bedrock. But Building D, as impressive as it is, is by no means definitive. A variety of variations exist. Some are circular, others rectangular. Some show a transitional form between the two. Building C is built in three concentric rings, possibly reflecting different periods of use.



Göbekli Tepe's T shaped pillars (muratart / Adobe Stock)

Some of the early construction features doors and windows. Others do not. If families ever lived in the buildings, as the new semi-sedentary hypothesis suggests, they must have worked on the roof, and their entrances likely would have been located there, similar to Hopi Kivas, which were accessed by ladder. This same architectural feature is found in the above ground ancient city of Çatalhöyük, not far away.

When viewing all this the thought immediately comes to mind that Göbekli Tepe couldn't possibly have sprung up overnight. A society doesn't wake up one morning and say: "Let's build a massive, multi-ton complex in the middle of nowhere!" It is an intriguing concept. Who taught the original builders? Is there evidence of an even earlier culture buried someplace, its presence ground away by ice ages and the relentless sands of time?

The Birth of Religion

Charles C. Mann, writing for *National Geographic* magazine in June, 2011, called the Göbekli Tepe temple site 'the birth of religion'. There are so many carved shamanic totem animals that it appears he was correct. Was Göbekli Tepe essentially a religious site? This is a hot topic of debate. Professor Schmidt certainly thought so. He believed that the site was deliberately buried when it no longer served its original spiritual function. But new evidence points to the fact that early theories of a ritualistic burial after religious purposes had grown obsolete may have been premature. Backfilling may be simply the result of natural causes such as erosion and the work of gravity over time, or even deliberate use of former materials in the construction of new buildings. This is, after all, how tells developed all over the Near East.

There is no mistaking the possibility of religious iconography however. Whatever the content of their faith, the animal envoys carved in such detail probably mean that it had something to do with the religion now called Animism, coupled with a strong Shamanic component. This is the belief that spirit animates everything in nature. Animals, trees, rocks, landscape, and humans are all in Mother Earth's protective embrace.

Astronomy

But the alignments of the stones themselves make it appear just as obvious that Astronomy might have figured into the picture. The very structure of Göbekli Tepe seems to bring the heavens down to earth. The many site lines that zero in on certain stars, planets, and the moon cannot be coincidental.

The central huge monoliths were cut from nearby limestone quarries and transported by hand to sockets hewn into the bedrock where they were then erected. This was probably when the images were chipped out. One school of thought interprets these images as abstract representations of the human form. Arms, hands, legs, and even loin cloths with belts and some kind of carrying bags are clearly seen.

Are they images of powerful people or ancient gods? No one knows for sure.

Animals feature prominently in animistic religions. They were pictured in vivid detail in the caves of western Europe 25,000 years before Göbekli Tepe was constructed. The stone relief representations might be just another manifestation of this ancient religion.

Much of the site is covered by an artificial roof. (Mehmet/ Adobe Stock)

Preserving the Site

Much of the site today is covered by a large, artificial roof. This is because the Global Heritage Fund and its various partners conducted six conservation studies between 2014 and 2015 to diagnose weather problems resulting from weather damage. Turkey can endure extreme temperature swings, and once exposed to the elements, material that lay safely buried, even for thousands of years, can deteriorate rather quickly.

The Surrounding Area

Although Göbekli Tepe has garnered the bulk of the publicity, recent finds in the surrounding area are slowly attracting attention as well. An article in the *Daily Sabah* reports that a team of archaeologists led by Nihat Erdoğan and his team from the Mardin Museum uncovered evidence in the *Boncuklu Tarla* (Beaded Field) settlement that included "buildings, cultures, social lives, and burial traditions of the people who lived in northern Mesopotamia during the ceramic Neolithic period between 10,000 BC to 7,000 BC". The buildings had "rubble stone walls with

foundations hardened by clay". Sometimes called mini-Göbekli Tepes, these new finds indicate the presence of an even more developed and wide-spread culture in the area.

Göbekli Tepe is not an easy place to reach. (Teomancimit / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Göbekli Tepe is not an easy place to reach. The builders were probably motivated by what they saw and felt on the landscape, not by where they found it convenient to work. There is no nearby, convenient water source. There were no towns, villages, or fields because these had not been developed yet.

As far as anyone knew when Göbekli Tepe was discovered, it was by far the largest building project ever attempted by humankind up to that point in history. But even more amazing is the fact that there seem to be no precursors. Just as fully developed cave art seems to have arrived full blown with no lead-up, in the case of some megalithic architecture there is no trial and error, no history of evolving concepts, no evidence of any practice sites. And to further add to the mystery, the most sophisticated construction seems to have happened first, at the bottom of the dig. It appears that later generations built on top of it. But their work exhibits less and less skill with each succeeding layer. Göbekli Tepe thus appears to illustrate the *unraveling* of a tradition rather than the *building* of one.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

The beginning of time. Ancient site of Gōbekli Tepe in Turkey. (Haluk /Adobe Stock)

Anatolia's Gōbekli Tepe And New Mexico's Pueblo Bonito – Similar Necropolis Sites?

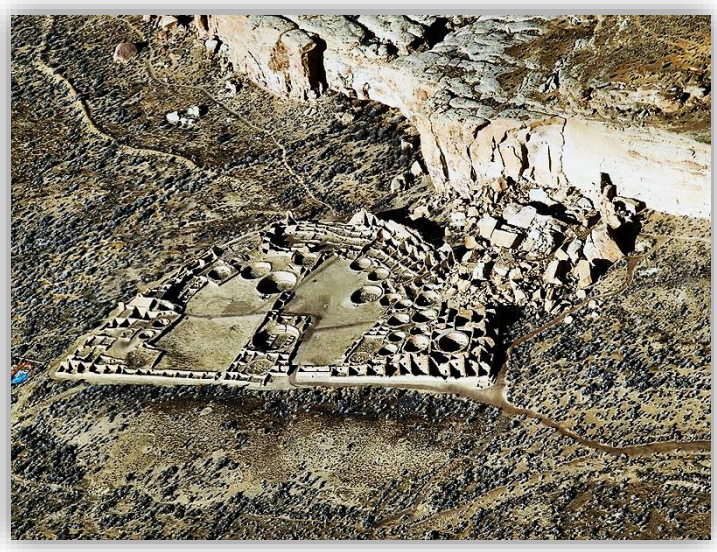
Ralph Ellis

How would one describe Gōbekli Tepe, and all the other Tepe sites in the Şanlıurfa Province, south-eastern Anatolia? One might opine that these ancient sites contain a cluster of circular enclosures, with many rectangular buildings behind them. The circular enclosures often contain benches around the perimeter, and two monolithic standing stones in the center. And there is a possibility that these enclosures were roofed, and perhaps oriented with cosmic alignments or symbolism. Astonishingly one can find similar structures at the opposite side of the globe, at Puerto Bonito in the Chaco Canyon, New Mexico.

The archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe: main excavation area with four monumental circular buildings and adjacent rectangular buildings (Image: German Archaeological Institute, photo E. Kücük)

Chaco Canyon

Between 900 and 1150 AD, Chaco Canyon, situated in north-western New Mexico, was a major center of culture for the ancestral Puebloans. Here are several large building complexes that were initially thought to be towns; or, since they are walled, perhaps they qualify as citadels. The handful of these so-called citadels that reside within the Chaco Canyon all contain a cluster of seemingly ritual circular enclosures, plus many rectangular buildings behind them. The circular enclosures often contain benches around the perimeter, and sockets in the center that may have contained standing stones. And there is a possibility that these enclosures were roofed, as the circular sockets are thought to have held wooden pillars; and the entire Chaco site is replete with solar and lunar alignments.



Aerial view of Pueblo Bonita in Chaco Canyon (Bob Adams/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

So even on the surface, there are many similarities between the Gōbekli Tepe and Chaco sites that are intriguing, to say the least. But there is more. These Chaco Canyon sites, especially the main Pueblo Bonito 'citadel' - have been re-evaluated in recent years, because there is no real sign that these vast citadels were actually inhabited. Many of the tall 'apartment blocks', which reach up to four floors in height, have no easy access (no corridors); the individual rooms have no natural light; and there are no chimneys to allow fires for cooking or for warmth. In other words, these multi-story room complexes are completely hopeless and unusable as apartment blocks, which begs the question: what were these vast citadels, and their prison-like rooms, really for?

Pictograph at Chaco Canyon may depict the supernova of 1054 AD. This supernova and the Moon were in this configuration when the supernova was near its brightest. An imprint of a hand at the top signifies that this is a sacred place (Alex Marentes / CC BY-SA 2.0)

Since these citadels are undoubtedly aligned with Solar and Lunar alignments and transits, archaeologists are now suggesting that Chaco was a seasonal ritual center. People came to this temple site during the spring and autumn months, when weather conditions were more tolerable, and paid homage to the gods. And perhaps some of the more influential visitors were initiated into the mysteries of the cosmos at this great temple site, with the circular enclosures representing the zodiac or the cosmos, as could have happened at Gōbekli and Karahan Tepe. Chaco Canyon may have been the 'Eleusinian Mystery School of the Americas'. Whatever the spiritual purpose of these circular enclosures may have been, when their secret rituals were completed the faithful pilgrims would have eventually departed and travelled back to their homes, leaving the site in the care of a few guardians and priests.

A Place Of Pilgrimage

In other words, the Chaco Canyon temple complexes may have been akin to the Masjid al-Haram temple site in modern Mecca; a name which either means Sacred Mosque or Forbidden Mosque depending upon whom one consults. Just as in modern Saudi Arabia, people from all over north and south America may have made a Hajj-style pilgrimage to Chaco, at least once in their lifetime, to gain the blessings of the gods. This new reappraisal would actually make a great deal of sense of the Chaco site. But if Chaco was a seasonal temple, was Gōbekli Tepe a Hajj pilgrimage site too? Not just a settlement, nor a simple temple for the local population, but a site of pilgrimage for peoples from all over Mesopotamia. Were the thousands of grind-stones discovered at Gōbekli Tepe not simply for making bread for the local population, but to cater for the thousands of pilgrims who made the long summer trek to this sacred site?

Similarly, was the purpose of the large bakery and butchery facilities discovered at Giza perhaps not to feed the construction workers, but rather to cater for the pilgrims who arrived at this premier pilgrimage site of the Mediterranean? These facilities were especially useful for the many bread and meat offerings that pilgrims were expected to sacrifice to the gods; thus creating a new class of perennially overweight priests.

Chaco's smaller kivas (congregational space for ceremonies) numbered around 100, each hosting rituals for 50–100 worshipers; the 15 much larger "great kivas" each held up to 400. (Public Domain)

Ancient Necropolis

While these suggestions are quite possible, the design of the Pueblo Bonito 'citadel' in Chaco Canyon may actually provide a better understanding of these ancient sites. What is the purpose of all those completely uninhabitable prison-like rooms that line the perimeter of this site? Due to their rather baffling design, it has been proposed that these rooms or cells were

merely structural - designed to buttress the large and straight back wall of the site. But it is unlikely that five rows of cells or rooms would be needed for the structural integrity of the rear wall. And even if the designer did think this was necessary, these rooms could still have been equipped with corridors, chimneys, and skylights to make them more habitable. So why this curious design?

Ring enclosure at building C, Gobekli Tepe
(© DAI, Göbekli Tepe Project)

Perhaps the answer can be found by travelling back to Edessa (modern Sanliurfa) and to neighbouring Gōbekli Tepe once more. Just to the south-east of Edessa and Gōbekli Tepe, lies the royal Edessan necropolis of Sogmatar, which contains a series of truncated round-tower 'tombs' atop some small rolling hills. The tombs have rolling-stone doors and descending passageways down to small subterranean caverns. Although these towers and chambers are similar to Egyptian pyramids in their overall design, these were not tombs in the Egyptian tradition, but a necropolis in the Judaic tradition. These tower-tombs were actually 'sarcophagi' (literally, 'body-eaters') where the bodies of the dead were laid out in the small subterranean caverns for a year or two, to decompose. Eventually, the bare bones of the departed would have been gathered up and taken home in an ossuary-box.

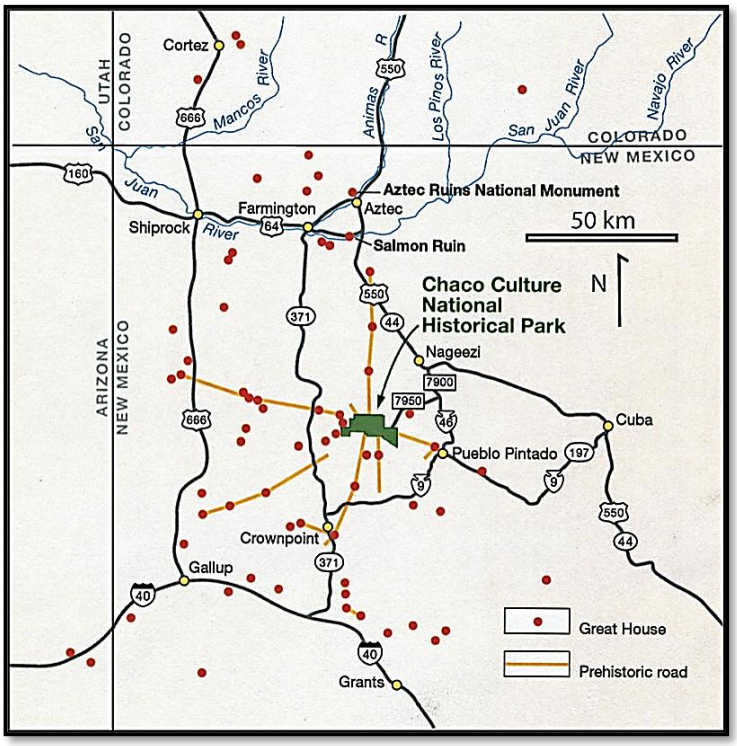
This author proposes that uninhabitable 'apartment rooms' at Pueblo Bonito were a vast necropolis for the people who resided in a remote and enigmatic location in Chaco Canyon - just as Sogmatar is in a remote and enigmatic location in the undulating 'badlands' to the south-east of Edessa and Gōbekli Tepe. Andrew Collins once described Sogmatar as being 'sinister' - and while the site does not really justify that term, it is certainly occult (hidden) and enigmatic.

The circular enclosure with the rectangular storehouses behind it. Ruins of Chetro Ketl in Chaco Canyon (Public Domain)

Thus, people would come to Chaco Canyon with their dead, from all over the central Americas, to perform a sacred ritual of death and perhaps rebirth in one of the many circular enclosures. These are round ritual enclosures that may have represented the zodiac and thus the cosmos, because the solar and lunar alignments of Pueblo Bonito have been well documented. With the ritual complete, the body would be respectfully placed in one of the many rectangular storehouses at the back of the Pueblo Bonito site (or one of the other nearby 'citadel' sites), until the body had completely decomposed. This was an uninhabitable room that had been deliberately designed without windows or chimneys, to minimise smells and flies and to promote a more esoteric decaying process. Entombed in perennial darkness, just as at the Sogmatar necropolis, the decaying deceased could face towards the curving and revolving transit of the Sun- and Moon-gods, for their souls to merge as one with the divine. Then a few years later, the family would come to collect the bones and handsomely reward the guardians of the necropolis site for their services.

Travelling To The Necropolis Centers

While this makes a great deal of sense for the Chaco Canyon site, does this describe and explain the nature and usage of Gōbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe as well? Were the Anatolian Tepes necropolis centers, with the dead passing through the rituals of death and rebirth in the circular enclosures, before being laid to rest in the square 'storerooms' that lay just behind? If so, this would be an interesting development in the understanding of the site, as not only would it imply fairly sophisticated technologies to construct these megalithic enclosures, but also a fairly sophisticated transport network to supply these centers with sufficient trade to justify their existence. How far can one travel with a corpse, to reach a necropolis? Sogmatar is only 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) from Edessa, or just over a day's travel, so within easy reach. But the road network that surrounds Chaco Canyon suggests that people travelled from much further afield to reach the Chaco Canyon necropolis. So, which prosperous cities were served by this vast and obviously wealthy necropolis site? Where did their funerary trade come from, and how far did it travel?



Prehistoric roads and great houses in the San Juan Basin, with the Chaco Canyon in the middle, superimposed on a map showing modern roads and settlement (Public Domain)

That New Mexico may have had a large necropolis complex should not be too unexpected, as many cities around the world constructed similar complexes. Although this does imply a thriving and wealthy population residing within perhaps 150 kilometers (93 miles) of Chaco. In addition to the royal necropolis at Sogmatar, the cities of Edessa and Harran also had the plebeian necropolis at Shuayp, which is a vast complex of underground tunnels and niches for the dead. But these are haphazard complexes, displaying none of the architectural refinement and celestial symbolism of Gōbekli Tepe and Chaco. In a similar fashion, both Rome and Paris had extensive underground catacombs for the upper and middle classes, with the Paris complex being said to hold the remains of over six million people. Sending the dearly departed safely into the afterlife was big business in these early eras, and could easily have supported the vast constructions that can be seen at Chaco Canyon - if there were sufficiently large populations in the region to supply the trade.

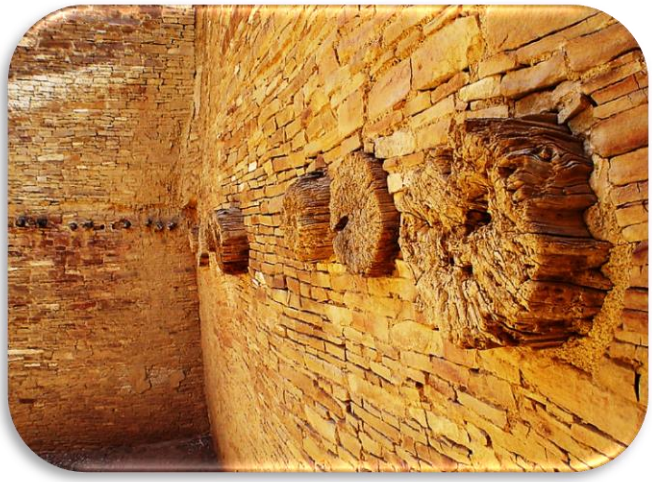
Timeline Conundrums

The only fly in the ointment for this new comparison and exploration of these sites, is the vast time and distance that exists between these very similar temple complexes. Gōbekli Tepe is being dated to 11,500 – 12,000 years ago, while the Chaco Canyon constructions are being dated to just 1,000 years ago - which represents a gaping 10,500 year lacuna between their potentially conflated chronologies. Could traditions as similar as this really span continents and millennia, while remaining true and faithful to their original designs and traditions? Is that really possible?

A comparison between Gobekli T-Taules and Balearic T-Taules. (Image: Courtesy Ralph Ellis)

Having said that, it should be noted that similar geographic and chronological lacuna has existed before, with reference to the T-shaped Taule monoliths found on the Mediterranean Balearic island of Manorca, (Spain) which reside in circular enclosures in a very similar fashion to the Gōbekli and Karahan Tepe sites. Indeed, the Balearic Taules are also closely associated with subterranean pillar halls, which are more rudimentary than the subterranean pillar-halls at Gōbekli and Karahan Tepe, but are nevertheless remarkably similar. And yet despite the many similarities between these sites, there are 4,000 kilometers and 8,000 years between them - and that is a problem.

The other problem with dating Pueblo Bonito in particular, is the lack of carbon-14 dating on the site. In 1996 Windes and Ford completed the 'Chaco Wood Project', which attempted to date the Pueblo Bonito 'necropolis' by investigating the many large wooden lintels and supports used throughout the site. However, they only used dendrochronology, rather than C-14 dating, and derived a 250-year period of occupation from the ninth to 12th centuries AD. But why would one not want to confirm these tree-ring dates, with the more reliable C-14 dating method? Especially as these are pristine wood samples, which would have experienced little C-14 contamination from limestones or soot from hearth-fires.



Chaco interior wall, showing log and stone construction, Chaco Cultural Historic Park, New Mexico (Steven C. Price / CC BY-SA 3.0)

There are manifold problems with dendrochronology. The first is that tree-ring growth and therefore width can be determined by: precipitation, canopy cover, pests, nutrients, CO_2, cloud-cover, surface orientation, disease, and perhaps also by temperature. A tree in a desert will not grow very well, despite the temperatures being very high; which is probably why many trees are better suited to monitoring precipitation rather than temperature. This was summed up in the 19th century by Liebig's Barrel Law, which stated that a tree would be limited by the least available growth factor from the list above. Perhaps a good test of tree sensitivities, would be to compare forest oak trees with willows, which grow by perennial rivers. If willow tree-rings can be directly compared with forest oak rings, then one might have more confidence that temperature is more dominant than moisture; but such a research project is as yet unavailable.

Many of the growth factors just mentioned are either local, regional, or species dependent, so how can one possibly compare a lowland juniper log, with reference tree-ring data from a bristlecone high up in the Rocky Mountains? A bristlecone may suffer a poor year (thin rings) due a lack of temperature high up in the Rockies, while a lowland tree may have had a great year (fat rings) due to increased moisture. And despite these regional differences, how can one rely on any tree-ring width? A quick personal study by the author of a recently harvested forest in Wales presented different tree-ring widths from trees in the very same forest (which were all planted at the same time). Some logs displayed different ring-widths within the very same trunk, so a ring-core taken in the 3-o'clock position would be different from a core taken in the 7-o'clock position, and thus the calculated dendrothermology temperatures and dendrochronology dates would be different within the same tree-trunk. The same is true of strip-bark trees like the bristlecone, where periodic bark stripping promotes a burst of ring-growth.

The question arises does one interpret those suddenly wider rings as representing climatic temperature, or a natural growth stimulus?

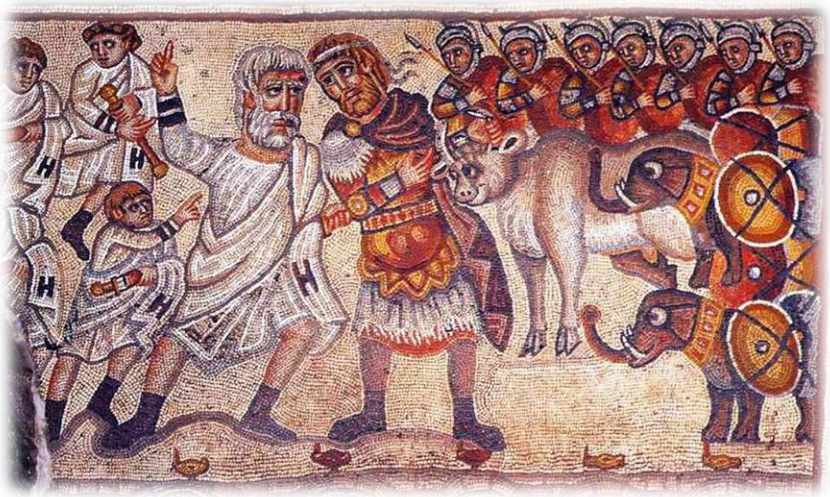
Furthermore, if archaeologists determine that the Chaco site is less than 2,000 years old, are the dendrochronologists going to even bother checking Chaco tree-ring signatures with data from 11,000 years ago? Probably not. The result of all these many problems is that dendrochronology can be regarded as modern snake-oil science, especially if it is not supported by C14- dating which has fewer potential errors.

Having said all this, there are other factors from Chaco and Gōbekli Tepe that point towards a great gulf of time existing between these two sites. Gōbekli appears to have firmly existed within the pre-pottery Neolithic era, with flint-working and stone bowls being in use throughout the site's chronology.

A ceramic bowl excavated from Pueblo Alto, Chaco Canyon (1030 to 1200 AD) (Public Domain)

Conversely, at Chaco there is an entire hill composed of discarded pottery shards, thought to be the result of offerings to the gods. (Although the similar pottery hill in Rome was based on economics rather than religion, because it was too expensive to recycle wine and oil amphoras.) So it is likely that there is indeed a huge chronological gulf between the Gōbekli, Balearic, and Chaco 'necropolis' sites. Was the design for these theorised 'cities of the dead' slowly moving ever westwards over millennia? But how could this have been achieved, without any evidence for intermediate necropolis sites over those missing millennia? And without any real evidence for early Atlantic crossings? This is a mystery still to be solved, but the tantalizing similarities and connections remain.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium



Bar Kamza (King Izas) presents a sacrificial calf to the Jerusalem priesthood, in 68 AD in order to foment the Jewish Revolt. (Bar Kamza from Huqoq Excavation Report 2017 – Ralph Ellis provided)

The Enigmatic H-Symbol Linking Gōbekli Tepe, The Priesthood And The Zodiac

Ralph Ellis

Could the strange H-symbol on the tunics of first century Jewish high priests of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem resonate with the similar H-symbol, that was deemed sacred almost 10,000 years prior by the priesthood of Gōbekli Tepe, considered the first temple of humankind? In addition, at Gōbekli Tepe, the H-symbol is often bracketed by two opposing C-symbols. It has been suggested that the Gōbekli Tepe C-symbols represent the Crescent Moon, because a C-Moon symbol is clearly represented elsewhere on these pillars. The Crescent Moon and Sun symbol found at Gōbekli Tepe were extensively used by the later Persians and Phoenicians. The equally enigmatic 'handbag'-symbol from Gōbekli Tepe was also widely used in Persia, indicating that these very ancient symbols were maintained and adopted into later religious symbolism. So perhaps the H-symbol could indeed have remained sacred for millennia, to become a central component of first century Judaism.

The Sun-Moon symbols at Gobekli and the H-symbol bracketed by C-symbols at Gobekli. (Image: © Alistair Coombs)

The Crescent Moon Bracketing the H-Symbol - Orion

If the C-symbol represents the Crescent Moon, the question arises, what might the H-symbol symbolize? Is it possible that the H-symbol may represent the outline of the constellation of Orion, which can indeed be viewed as an H-shape? Unfortunately, due to the precession of the equinox, Orion would barely have been visible from Gōbelki Tepe at the time of its construction, as it was much lower in the sky in that era and only just about rose over the horizon at midnight by the end of September. So, the megalithic temple would indeed have had to be located on the top of a hill in order for Orion to be observed from it. However, visibility restrictions aside, the Crescent Moon can indeed be seen to bracket Orion on September 30, 9500 BC in the same manner as the Gōbekli Tepe depiction. Although the bracketing would not be quite as close as is shown on the megaliths, the Crescent Moon can widely bracket Orion over a 14-day period.

The planisphere (9500 BC) plotting the 14- day period of the Crescent Moon – (the Moon is obviously not to scale). The Crescent Moon C-symbols are spaced to the east and west, with the H-symbol of Orion in the due south position in the September night sky. (Image: © Ralph Ellis)

The C-Moon symbols do indeed face towards H-Orion just as they do on the megalithic stones. So, it is quite possible that the Gōbekli Tepe priesthood were depicting this cosmic conjunction in the night sky, as could be seen from the hill at Gōbekli Tepe.

First Century H-Symbol In Jerusalem

The question remains: Were the Jerusalem priesthood still depicting Orion as an H-symbol on their tunics, many thousands of years later? Actually, this is entirely possible. The Persians were still using the Gōbekli Tepe 'handbag' symbolism many years later, so these traditions can indeed endure to span millennia. The Jerusalem priesthood were indeed interested in the constellations and the zodiac, as the many ancient synagogues decorated with zodiac mosaics demonstrate. The magnificent Nazarene zodiac at Hamat Teverya on the Sea of Galilee, is a testament to the enduring sacredness of the zodiac and cosmos within Nazarene Judaism.

Pillar 43 from Gōbekli Tepe in Turkey shows three ‘handbag’ carvings along the top. (view /Adobe Stock)

And just as a reminder, the king who was meeting with the Jerusalem priesthood in the Huqoq mosaic was King Izates-Jesus of Edessa (Bar Kamza). King Izates-Jesus was a Nazarene Jew, and his capital city was at Edessa, (present-day Sanliurfa) which resides very close to Gōbekli Tepi, although it is unknown how much of the Gōbekli Tepe site was visible in the first century AD. The H-symbol was displayed on the tunics of the high priests when they met with this very same King Izates-Jesus of Edessa.

Zodiac Enclosures At Gōbekli Tepe

So why was this H-symbolism of Orion, or the full (H) symbolism of Orion and the Crescent Moon, so important to the Gōbekli Tepe designers and priesthood? The answer may lie in the design of Gōbekli Tepe’s circular enclosures.

Detail of hanging fox pelt of Pillar-18 in Enclosure D (Suzi/ Adobe Stock)

These monuments or temples comprise a number of circular enclosures containing a ring of pillars, with one or perhaps two central free-standing pillars. The H-symbols are concentrated upon Pillar-18 in Enclosure-D, so could Pillar-18 represent the constellation of Orion? This is quite conceivable, since Pillar-18 is a humanoid figure, just as Orion is often depicted, and the H-symbols are concentrated on the prominent belt of this Orion pillar. And instead of Orion having a sword hanging from his famous belt, he is depicted here with a hanging fox-pelt. But the symbolism of the prominent belt and fox-pelt is strangely similar to classical depictions of Orion.

Gōbekli Tepe Enclosure-C, the free-standing T-pillars have been decapitated (mehmet/Adobe Stock)

Inspecting the wider Gōbekli Tepe complex, it is noticeable that Enclosure-D and Enclosure-C contain two central free-standing pillars, surrounded by a circle of 12 smaller pillars, so are Enclosures C and D depictions of a zodiac? A zodiac consisting of 12 constellations is highly likely to have evolved in many cultures, due to the annual orbit of the Earth totaling roughly 360 days. This orbital period is the reason why there are 360 degrees in a circle. Dividing a 360-degree circle into smaller segments the obvious divisions would be: eight segments of 45 degrees-days, 10 segments of 36 degrees-days, 12 segments of 30 degrees-days, or perhaps 15 segments of 24 degrees-days. But since a 30-degree-day month accords very well with the 29.5 day synodic lunar month, the most logical and useful division of the heavens is into 12 segments that dovetail with the orbit and phases of the Moon.

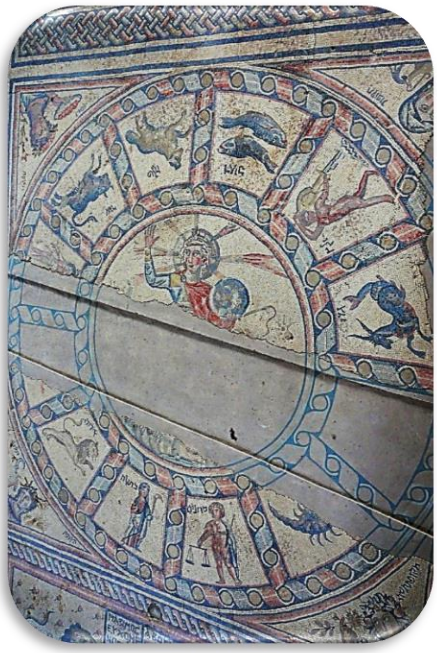
Thus, the standard zodiac consists of 12 major constellations that follow the path of the ecliptic - the belt of the cosmos that the planets also follow, as viewed from earth. And in Enclosures C and D one notices two rings of 12 pillars that may well mimic the zodiac constellations. In reality Orion lies below the ecliptic, so it is not a component of the zodiac ring, and would have to be depicted as being either inside or outside the zodiac ring - depending upon if one is looking at a northern or southern zodiac. And this is what one appears to see at Gōbekli Tepe, Enclosure-D appears to represent a southern hemisphere zodiac, with Orion-Pillar-18, being placed inside a circle of 12 constellation-pillars.

Ringmasters Of The Zodiac

Such a depiction is quite reasonable since in the ancient world the precessional zodiac was a central component of many ancient religions, with the magnificent zodiacs at Dendera in Egypt, Hamat in Judaea, and the Mithraeum of Rome, being prime examples. But who was the king of the zodiac - the master of ceremonies at the center of the zodiac who observed and controlled the slow cosmic dance of the precession of the equinox? There are many candidates.

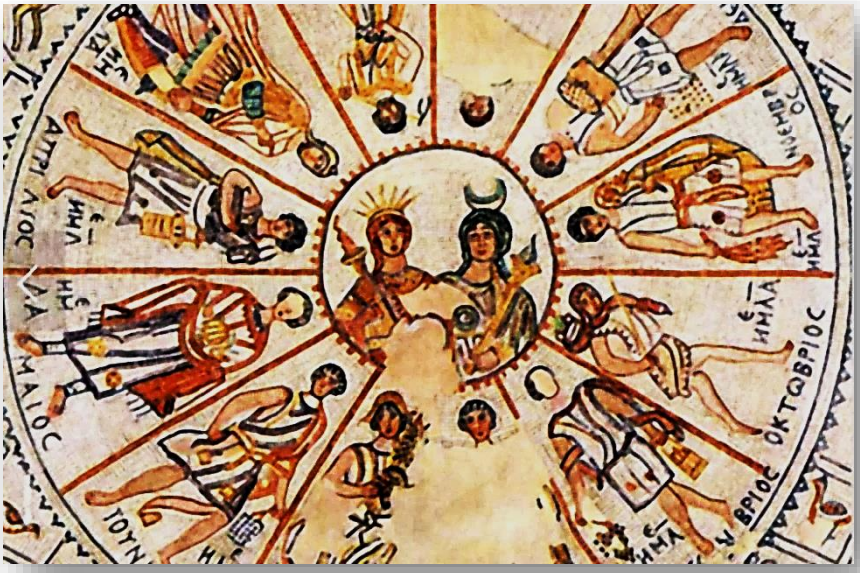
.The Dendera zodiac, with celestial and ecliptic equators marked. The Great Bear is a Great Hippo. (Image: Ralph Ellis provided)

In the Greco-Egyptian Dendera zodiac the central figure or ringmaster of the zodiac is a hippopotamus. The Egyptian priesthood were obviously looking up at the night sky and observing the central constellations, which rotate around the celestial and ecliptic poles, and the most prominent of these is Ursa Major, the Great Bear. It would appear likely that the original depiction was of the Great Hippo, but when these traditions moved north into colder climates - where the northern priests had never seen a hippo - the Great Hippo became a Great Bear.



The Jewish Hamat Teverya zodiac at Galilee. The ringmaster is the Greek Helios. (Image: Ralph Ellis provided)

In the magnificent Jewish zodiac at Hamat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the ringmaster is Helios the Sun god in his four-horse quadriga chariot. This imagery is slightly incongruous because this is a Nazarene Jewish zodiac, and yet the image they chose for the Sun was the decidedly heretical Greek Helios. This was probably due to the Judaic prohibition on iconography, which meant that the Jews did not have a recognizable image for the Sun. Since the Near East was predominantly Greek in the first century, the high priest of the Hamat zodiac, a man who was called Jesus Sapphias (or Jesus Gamala) - utilized Greek iconography for the ringmaster of the zodiac.



The Bet Shean Zodiac of the Monastery of Lady Mary with Jesus and Mary as ringmasters (Image: Ralph Ellis Provided)

Moving slightly south of the Sea of Galilee to Bet Shean one finds the Monastery of Lady Mary zodiac mosaic, which is a later Christian copy of the Hamat zodiac. Here the constellations have been anthropomorphized into two central male and female Sun and Moon characters, surrounded by 12 disciple-months (notated in Greek as January to December). But a depiction of the Sun and Moon surrounded by 12 months is the same as an annual (or precessional) depiction of the zodiac constellations - they rotate together and form the same iconography. Seeing this symbolism in a Christian cathedral, it can only be Jesus and his wife Mary Magdalene being depicted as the Sun and Moon, surrounded by their 12 disciple-constellation-months.

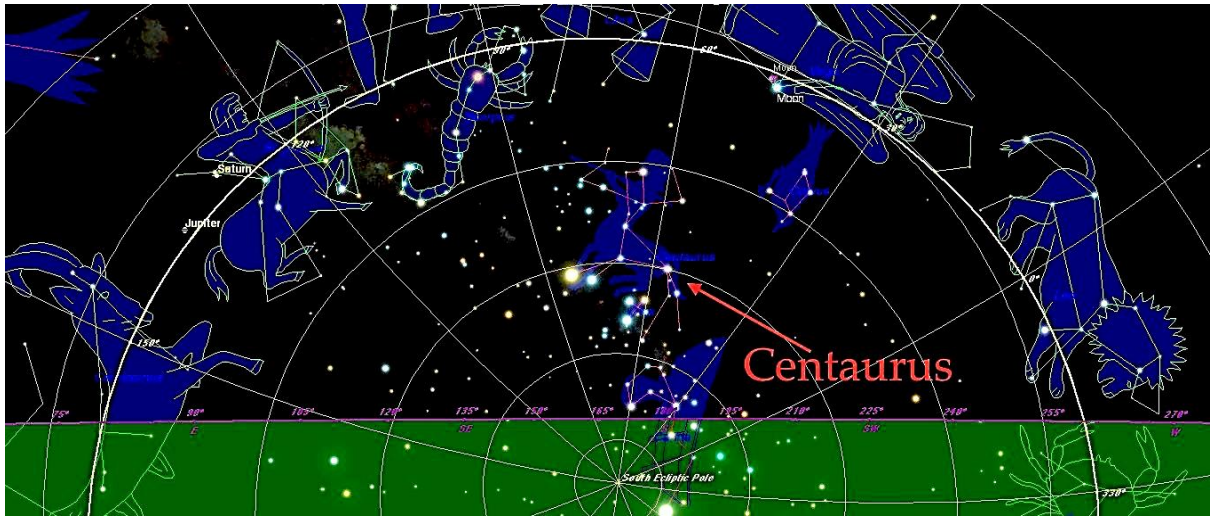
Mithras killing the Bull of Heaven (Taurus) so the ring master is Orion-Mithra (Public Domain)

Mithra and Gilgamesh both act as Orion ringmasters. The famous iconography in a Mithraeum is the Tauroctony, which is an image of Orion-Mithra killing the cosmic bull, Taurus. This is a depiction of the precessional change from the Great Month of Taurus (bull) to the Great Month of Aries (sheep), and to bring about that change Orion had to terminate the next-door constellation of Taurus with his sword or bow. This is the same imagery being described in the Gilgamesh epic, where Gilgamesh is again a depiction of Orion. In a very similar fashion Gilgamesh is tasked with killing the Bull of Heaven (the Great Month of Taurus) to usher in the new Great Month of Aries. As with many stories and mythologies from ancient times, this was a tale of the deeds of the cosmic gods who ruled over the lives of men.

Doppelganger Zodiacs At Gōbekli Tepe

From these ancient depictions of the zodiac, one can make several deductions regarding the Gōbekli Tepe temples and the zodiac. Depicting a zodiac, the central controlling figure can be envisioned as Ursa Major, because that is the central constellation observed in the night sky. But in a planisphere depiction that central image can instead be the Sun and Moon, which can be envisioned as being at the center of the cosmos. But in 1750 BC Taurus was changing to Aries, and so the most prominent lord of the heavens in that era was Orion, who appears to be threatening to kill the next-door constellation of Taurus. If anyone is going to kill Taurus in order to end the Great Month of Taurus, it has to be Orion. Thus, one has the imagery of both Mithra and Gilgamesh killing Taurus with his bow (shield) and club (axe), to transition the cosmos from the Great Month of Taurus into the Great Month of Aries.

So, a depiction of Orion as the ringmaster of the precessional zodiac would be perfectly obvious in the 18th century BC, because he was a central character in this cosmic drama. But at Gōbekli Tepe one may well see Orion (Pillar-18) being honored with a central position in the zodiac circle, even way back in 9,500 BC - which may seem unusual. In addition, since there were two central anthropomorphic standing pillars inside Enclosure-D, it may well point to another constellation depicted here, so what constellation would the other stone represent? The other free-standing pillar in Enclosure-D is Pillar-31. It is also anthropomorphic and very similar to Pillar-18, but is not decorated to the same degree - it has no C- or D-symbols on its belt. So, what constellation could have been depicted by the second pillar?



Gobekli Tepe looking South, 9,500 BC, on Feb 11th, midnight with Centaurus in the ascension, well above the horizon (Image: © Ralph Ellis)

Since Orion is in the center of the Enclosure-D circle, rather than being outside it, this may suggest that Enclosure-D represents the southern hemisphere zodiac, and the only other bright constellation in the southern hemisphere is Centaurus (not to be confused with Sagittarius), which resides on the opposite side of the zodiac to Orion. In which case Centaurus would be a February constellation rather than a September constellation. And due to precession in this early era, Centaurus would reside quite high in the heavens and would be easily visible from the Gōbekli Tepe temples. So, Enclosure-D may well represent a southern zodiac, containing its two brightest constellations, Pillar-Orion and Pillar-Centaurus.

If this is true, then this may go some way towards explaining the similar Enclosure-C that resides next to Enclosure-D, which also contains 12 pillars around the perimeter, and two free-standing pillars in the center. There are two zodiacs that depict the heavens above, one for the northern hemisphere and one for the southern hemisphere, and this is what one may observe here with these two adjacent circular zodiac temples. There are of course many other circular enclosures at Gōbekli Tepe, but these may represent alternate views of the cosmos - depicting the cosmos on alternate celebration dates or perhaps in different eras. Perhaps as one zodiac went out of date, as the slow movement of precession changed the orientation of the heavens, the old zodiac was buried and a new one constructed. It would require further investigation and evidence to determine if this is a possibility.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Harran Sanliurfa, City of Prophets and Jerusalem of Ancient Anatolia

Jim Willis

Harran Ruins. (Gerry Lynch/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Lord said to Abram: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing". (Genesis 12:2). "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going". (Hebrews 11:8). "Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Ibrahim the true in Faith? For Allah did take Ibrahim for a friend". (Qurʾān 4:125)

Abram, Abraham, Ibrahim

Abram, Abraham, Ibrahim, by whatever name he is called, he is considered to be the spiritual father, in many cases the actual biological father, of 12 million Jews, two billion Christians, and one billion Muslims. Many claim that he was history's first monotheist. And yet, upon closer inspection, it becomes obvious that few people understand him. They may know some things about him, but aside from a few stories here and there, they don't really know him. Perhaps if they did, his followers would not fight so much.

Journey of the Family of Abraham by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1650-1660) Musei di Strada Nuova (Public Domain)

He was born into a family that shared a long and rich tradition of nomadic wandering and trekking across the landscape, although never very far from an urban center of trade. They were given various labels — *Aramean, Aramu, Arabu* — that eventually coalesced into the word *Arab*. Although the Bible does not specify exactly the place of his birth, many Jews and Christians have concentrated on *Ur Kasdim*, or 'Ur of the Chaldeans'. That would put him down in Mesopotamia. But the great rabbinic scholar Moses Nahmanides argued that his true place of birth was further north, in the land near Harran. Muslims unequivocally claim that honor for the city of Urfa, modern Şanlıurfa. Wherever the place of his birth is located, however, there is little doubt that soon after he came into the world his father moved the family to the ancient city of Harran (or its biblical spelling of Haran), where he lived for almost seven decades. Harran is in Şanlıurfa Province, in present day Turkey.

The sacrifice of Abraham by Nicolaes Maes (1653) Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Public Domain)

Abraham's early history is fragmented but colorful. In just a few short Bible verses and a plethora of legends one can piece together a tapestry of incidents that do more to arouse curiosity than answer questions. The young Abram (the name means 'the father is exalted') is said to have been born into a family that earned its daily bread by making and selling pagan idols, a strange beginning for one who is said to be the father of monotheism. At the ripe young age of 75 he hears the voice of God calling him to submit and follow the command of the Almighty. That is when things really heat up. In only a few Bible verses one is told that he gathered up his family and set out for the land of Canaan, some 300 miles (482 kilometers) to the south, whereupon he promptly panicked and continued on to Egypt, almost caused an international incident, returned to Canaan,

circumcised himself (no easy task!), fathered two sons, abandoned one of them, set out to sacrifice the other before he was stopped at the last minute by divine intervention, fought a great war and, at its conclusion, along with the mysterious Melchizedek, instituted the custom of tithing and participated in the first communion service 2,000 years before the birth of Christ. He then bought some land, buried his wife, started another family and lived to the age of 175. Along the way he managed to unknowingly entertain two angels who were on their way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. With all this activity to his credit, is it any wonder that his name appears so often in the Hebrew Bible, the Islamic Qurʾān, and the Christian New Testament?

All this took place after Abram submitted to the will of God, in the process earning a new name. With that simple act of faith, he became *Abraham*, which means 'father of a multitude'. For this reason, Muslims (the name means 'one who submits') revere him. Through his son Ishmael, with whom he is said to have the built the Kaaba in Mecca, greatest of all holy Islamic sites, he formed the basis of what would later become the faith of Islam. Through Isaac, his second son, descended the 12 tribes of Israel and their spiritual offspring, Christianity.

Şanlıurfa/Urfa skyline. (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Jerusalem of Anatolia

Şanlıurfa, along with the nearby ruins of Harran, is often called 'the home of the patriarchs'. It is not just known for being the birthplace, or at least a dwelling place, of Abraham. It is a city of prophets. Job himself, famous for his patience and his own submission to the will of God, is said to have faced his travails there. Jacob, after his fallout with Esau, fled back to his grandfather's home country of Harran to escape his brother's wrath. There he married the women who would give birth to the 12 patriarchs of Judaism.

Thus, it is not without reason that Şanlıurfa and Harran are often called 'the Jerusalem of Anatolia'. Jews, Christians, and Muslims call this place sacred, and flock to experience its long-standing sense of holiness, history, and awe. Close by are Göbekli Tepe and Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark is said to have concluded its first and only voyage. The Garden of Eden is close by, at the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, if one cares to read the ancient texts literally.

Castles and Museums

One of the finest museums in all of Turkey is located in Şanlıurfa. It houses the famous Urfa Man, usually considered to be "*the oldest naturalistic life-sized sculpture of a human*" to be found anywhere in the world. It dates back to the time of Göbekli Tepe, more than 11,000 years ago. Pottery was not yet invented when some unknown artist created this masterpiece.

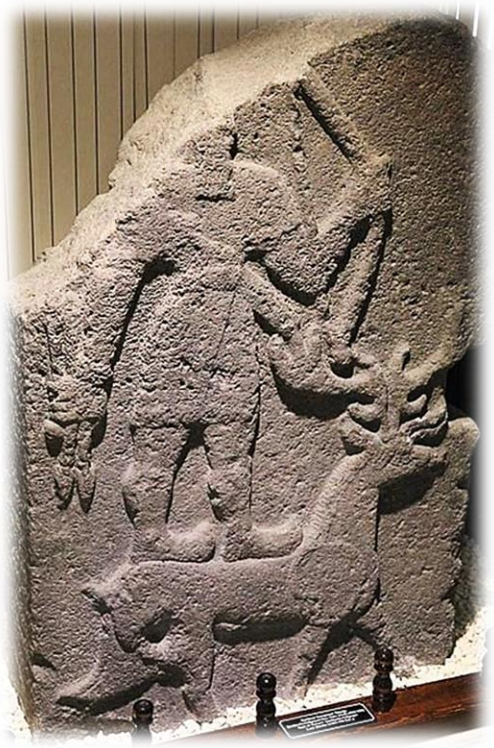
High on a nearby hillside stand two Corinthian columns that rise above the ruined walls of a castle. It is rumored that from here the evil King Nimrod catapulted Ibrahim down into a valley of flames below, but when Nimrod's daughter, after falling in love with the prophet, leaped into the fire, God turned the flames into water and the burning wood into fish. This marked the creation of Ayn-i Zeliha Lake, where tourists gather in droves to feed the sacred fish.

Khalil Ibrahim, Sacred Fish Lake at Sanliurfa (MSinjari/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

Şanlıurfa remained a strategic city long after biblical times. The Greeks called it Orrhoe or Osrhoe. Seleucus Nicator of Antioch made it the capitol of his eastern realm during the period of history following Alexander the Great's campaigns that resulted in what is now called Hellenism, or the overlay of Greek culture and language upon that of indigenous, conquered peoples. Macedonian veterans who served here, missing their home country, named it after their native province of Edessa.

Edessa, Urfa, Sanliurfa

During the time of the Romans it became a center of Christianity, even if the brand practiced here, called Monophysitism, was later declared heretical. The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451 AD, decided that Jesus Christ had both a divine and a human nature, melded in what was called hypostatic union. Monophysitism declared he had only one divine nature. Of such doctrinal disputes wars have been fought and thousands killed. Edessa became a great city of learning. Many ancient scientific works were translated here, along with detailed commentaries. Had the scholars not done so, they might have been lost forever, because they made their way in Arabic translations into far flung capitols where they escaped the fires of Alexandria, which destroyed so much of ancient wisdom.



When Edessa was sacked by the Kurdish Zengi Dynasty in 1146, it disappeared from history for a while. This is typical of Mongolian conquests, but it reappeared as Urfa. When the local population resisted the French attempts to meld it into Syria during the Ottoman period, it was awarded the right to receive the honorific 'Şanlı' to its name. Thus, Urfa became Şanlıurfa, and remains so to this day.

Relief of a Hittite weather god from Gülpinar. Sanliurfa Archaeological Museum. (Klaus-Peter Simon/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Ancient Harran

One might think that Şanlıurfa and Harran came into their own during biblical times. After all, the 'City of Prophets' and 'the Jerusalem of Anatolia' certainly imply that. A walk through the famous bazaars and old ruins, while surrounded by legends and stories of old, spark such thoughts. Even Turkey's fertile crescent restaurants, featuring kebabs and Turkish cuisine, recall earlier times.

The significance of this area goes back much further in time. This location marks, quite simply, the birth of modern civilization. It is here that agriculture and animal husbandry came into their own. It took the discovery of Göbekli Tepe to unveil the truth, but civilization did not begin down river at Sumer or along the Nile in Egypt. The art of agriculture was discovered and developed right here in Anatolia. That discovery led to the biggest change in human development the world has ever seen. It made possible cities, trade, settled occupations, writing, division of labor,

disputes over land, wars, traffic, morning commutes, ecological disasters, global corporations, and all the other comforts modern civilization hold near and dear.

This is the place where it all began. In one cultural, quantum leap, and in a very short time, man moved from the Stone Age unto the path that led to modernity. When building projects first began here, humanity consisted of wandering bands of hunter gatherers. Shortly after, they launched the most ambitious construction projects the world has yet uncovered. So the question hangs high in suspension over the history concerning ancient days in Şanlıurfa province. Did the Neolithic people who once lived here wake up one morning and decide to change their way of living? Did they invent civilization? Or were they taught the necessary skills by a people whom history has forgotten?

Ruins of Harran/Şanlıurfa, Turkey. (Ben Bender/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Likewise, another question permeates the very air of Şanlıurfa. Is this the place monotheism began as well? Was there ever a historic figure known as Abraham who woke up one morning and heard the voice of God? Or is he a composite mythological figure, representing a number of men whose lives were intertwined into one compelling story? For that matter, did he, or those who may have inspired his story, ever exist at all?

Whatever the answer, he is at the center of three world-wide monotheistic faith traditions. If he never existed in reality, he would probably have had to be invented. Maybe that is why Şanlıurfa and its surrounding environs are so important. Maybe they are not infused with the person of Abram, or Abraham, or Ibrahim. Maybe what is more important is his echoing story. He is not remembered because he was a god. Precisely the opposite. He is remembered because he was not a god. He was the prototypical human being who launches out on faith — who leaves the safe confines of where he feels comfortable in order to strive for something better just over the horizon. In doing so he submits his life to a new concept, a new understanding, a new way of experiencing the holy.

In this sense he embodies what Bruce Feiler, in his excellent book with the simple title, *Abraham*, calls "the *ur* man, the man who reminds us that even though God may have cut the umbilical cord with humans, humans still need nourishment from God."

Harran Castle (Acar54/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

Ultimately, that is why people today still make the pilgrimage to Şanlıurfa. They go there, maybe without realizing it, because they need to experience what it is to *"go out, not knowing* (exactly) *where* (they are) *going."* Abraham was not a Jew. If he lived at all, it was long before the time of Moses. He was not a Christian. He preceded Jesus by some 2,000 years. He was not a Muslim. The Prophet Mohammad's vision was still 2,500 years in Ibrahim's future. His story reveals a flawed man rather than that of a saint. But his is the story in which is captured the hopes and dreams of everyone. And that story began in Şanlıurfa.

References used in this article are available on [Ancient Origins Premium]

Harran, City of Sin, Crusaders And Caliphs

Dr. Micki Pistorius

Ruins of Paradise mosque and madras university Harran. (bekir/Adobe Stock)

Dusty winds blow around the desolate ruins on the arid plain of Harran, and the mirage of the heat conjures up images of what was once the site of a medieval hub of science. Har means ‘fire’ in Arabic, perhaps referring to the parched land, but it was not always so. Around 6200 BC on the banks of the Balikh River in north-western Mesopotamia (now south-east Turkey) a major tributary of the Euphrates River, an agricultural settlement developed, which later evolved into Harran. Early Arabic texts, known as *Kitab al-Magall* or the *Book of Rolls*, as well as the *Syriac*

Cave of Treasures both state that Nimrod, descendant of Noah's son Ham, had built the towns of Harran and Raha (Edessa/Urfa), a few miles to the north.

Ehulhul The House of Sin

Harran lies about 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) north-west of Ur, which was the capital of the first dynasty Sumer and seat of the moon god Sin or Nanna. The temple at Ur was called E-gish-shir-gal, meaning the 'House of the Great Light'. Sin was represented by the crescent moon, also symbolic of bull horns. Sin was thus considered the patron god of shepherds and cowherds, the source of livelihood of the people of the lower Euphrates. During the wars of the Isin-Larsa period, (circa 2000 BC) a faction of the priesthood of Sin fled Ur, and following the Euphrates up north, they finally settled in Harran, which had by then developed into a walled city. The priesthood established the temple called Ehulhul, meaning the 'House of Rejoicing' for the moon god Sin. Sin of Harran was a guarantor of the word of kings between 1900-900 BC, as his name was witness to the forging of international treaties, much as one would swear "*as God is my witness*" an oath of truth today. Sin was worshipped well into the third century AD.

Abraham departs out of Harran by Francesco Bassano (1560) (Public Domain)

Terah, the father of Haran, Nahor and Abraham and their sister Sarah, migrated from Ur of the Chaldees to settle at Harran. Perhaps Terah was one of the priesthood who had fled Ur. Terah died at Harran (according to *Genesis* 11:24 at the age of 205) and Harran was also known as the City of Nahor (*Genesis* 24:10), but this could refer to Terah's father, who was also called Nahor, descendant of Shem, son of Noah. Abraham and his nephew Lot migrated south to Canaan and later Abraham's grandson Jacob returned to Harran, where he worked for Laban to obtain his daughters Leah and Rebeccah in marriage. Guides in Harran will point out what is believed to be the house of Abraham among the dirt covered ruins of ancient Harran.

Ebla, Syrian site of most famous for the Ebla tablets, an archive of about 20,000 cuneiform tablets (Anton Ivanov Photo/ Adobe Stock)

Harran Target For Trade And Conquest

Harran was located on the caravan route that ran from Nineveh to Carchemish and later the fourth-century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus noted its significance as a crossroad to Persia: "*From there (Harran) two different royal highways lead to Persia: the one on the left through Neo-Assyrian Adiabene and over the Tigris; the one on the right, through Assyria and across the Euphrates*". Several archaeological finds attest to Harran's importance as a trade location. The Ebla tablets, (discovered in 1974 by Italian archaeologist Paolo Matthiae) speak of an Eblaite princess Zugalum, who became Queen of Harran and royal letters from the city of Mari also confirm Harran was part of the Eblain Kingdom in the 19th century BC. The Assyrian tablets from Kültepe, speak of the *karum* - or Assyrian trade colonies.

Harran obviously became a target for raids during the Bronze and Iron Ages. In the 18th century BC, Assyrian King Shamshi-Adad I (1813–1781 BC) launched an expedition to secure the Harranian trade route from hostile forces. In the 14th, 13th and 12th centuries BC, during the Hittite Period to Middle Assyrian Period, Harran and the surrounding region became the battlegrounds of the Hittites, the Mitannis and the Assyrians. Harran was burnt by Prince Piyashshil, younger son of King Suppiluliuma I. During the Middle-Assyrian period, in the 13th century BC, Assyrian king Adad-Nirari I boasted that he reconquered the "fortress of Kharani". The annals of Tiglath-Pileser I, (1100 BC) report that he had a fortress there and mentioned that he was pleased with the abundance of elephants in the region. During the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Shalmaneser III restored the Temple of Sin in the ninth century BC. In 763 BC, Harran was sacked during a Harranian rebellion against the Assyrian king. In 650 BC the Temple of Sin was restored again by Ashurbanipal.

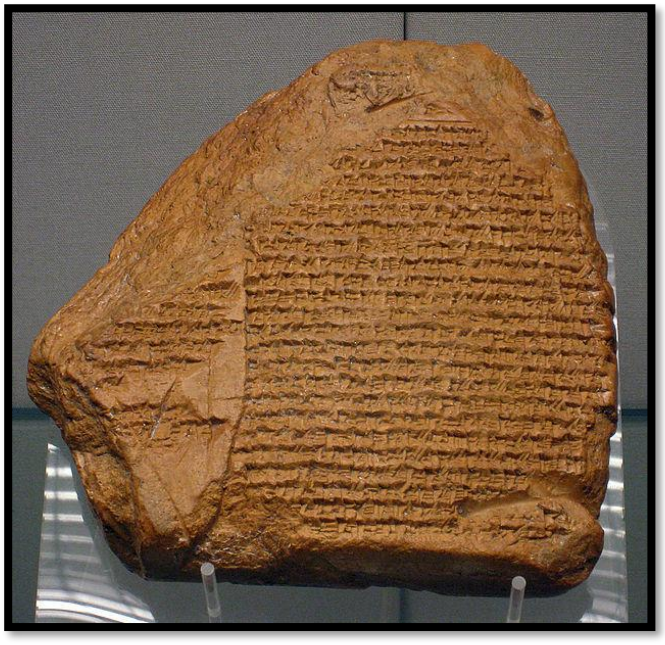
The Fall of Nineveh
by John Martin
(1829) (CC BY-SA 4.0)

By 639 BC during the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Babylon and Medes threatened Assyrian territory and this was the beginning of the end of the Assyrian domination. In 612 BC after a three-month siege, these forces captured Nineveh. The entire population, including King Sin-šar-iškun, was brutally massacred and the city burnt to the ground. Ashur-Uballit II proclaimed himself king and managed to flee to Harran with the remainder of the Assyrian troops. In 610 BC Pharaoh Necho II decided to side with the Assyrians against Babylonian King Nabopolassar and King Cyaxares of the Medes. Harran was under siege for a year and finally fell in 609 BC. Assur-Uballit II fled to the Egyptian city of Carchemish, which was under the rule of Pharaoh Necho II. From Carchemish they tried to recapture Harran but failed. The Babylonians, under crown prince Nebuchadnezzar, finally defeated the Egyptian forces and remnants of the Assyrian forces at the Batlle of Carchemish in 605 BC. It was Babylonian King Nabopolassar's last battle and he died shortly after, to be succeeded by his son King Nebuchadnezzar II. Harran was now under the control of the Medes, who had a reputation of sacking religious temples. The Temple of Sin lay in ruins.

Basalt stela of Nabonidus of Harran praying to the moon god Sin, the sun and Venus. British Museum. (Jona lendering / CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Restoration Of Ehulhul

By 556 BC Babylon prospered under King Nabodinus, who made no genealogical claim to the Chaldean dynasty of Babylonian rulers, but he could have been related through marriage. However the Adad-guppi stele discovered at Harran, refers to Addagoppe, an Assyrian priestess and devotee of the moon god Sin in Harran, as the mother of King Nabonidus. According to Professor Paul-Alain Beaulieu, Canadian Assyriologist, at the University of Toron, Addagoppe originated from Harran. Alexander the Great's *The Dynastic Prophecy*, written after the conquest of Babylonia corroborates that Nabonidus would have originated in Harran, as it regards Nabonidus as the founder and sole representative of the dynasty of Harran. It is suggested that Addagoppe could have been transported as a slave to Babylon after the sacking of Harran in 609 BC, and that her son Nabonidus was married to one of Nebuchadnezzar II's daughters, giving him access to the throne. An inscription of Addagoppe's dreamt prediction that her son would become king, inscribed on the pavement steps of the northern entrance to the Great Mosque at Harran, was discovered by D.S. Rice: *Through you I will bring about the return of the gods [to] the dwelling in Harran, by means of Nabonidus your son. He will construct Ehulhul; he will complete its work. He will complete the city Harran greater than it was before and restore it. He will bring Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna in procession back into the Ehulhul.*



Nabodinus chronicle. British Museum (ChrisO / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Like his mother, King Nabodinus was a devotee of the moon god Sin and endeavored to replace Sin with Marduk, the Babylonian deity, which made him very unpopular with the Babylonian priests. For a period of ten years Nabonidus was in self-imposed exile in Tayma in Arabia and in 542 BC when he returned to Babylonia, he journeyed to Harran, where he restored the Temple of Sin, Ehulhul, as predicted in his mother's dream. During Nabodinus' reign Sin was granted a large array of epithets, including some previously unheard of, such as "shining god", "light of mankind", "exalted god" and "exalted lord". After the rebuilding of the Ehulhul, Nabonidus used the following titles: *"I am Nabonidus, the great king, the strong king, king of the Universe, king of Babylon, king of the Four Quarters, the restorer of Esagila and Ezida, whose destiny Sîn and Ningal while he was in his mother's womb decreed for the lot of royalty; the son of Nabu-balatsu-iqbi, the wise prince, the reverer of the great gods, am I*." Ehulhul was not only a temple, but also a center for astronomy.

The Babylonians were shocked at the betrayal of their god Marduk by their king and turned to King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered the Babylonian Empire by 539 BC. King Nabodinus was exiled. Harran was now part of the Achaemenid Empire. The city remained in Persian hands until 331 BC, when Alexander the Great entered the city. After Alexander's death, it became part of the Seleucid Empire, the capitol of the province of Osroene and veterans of Alexander's army were settled there. The city flourished.

Harran Under Roman Rule Becomes Carrhae

The Seleucid Empire was conquered by the Parthians and in 53 BC, Harran once again enters history when Roman General Marcus Licinius Crassus invaded Parthia. Crassus, a member of the Third Triumvirate – Julius Caesar and Pompey being the other two members – in his quest to seek military glory, decided to invade Parthia without the permission of the Senate. Although the veterans of Alexander's army sided with him, he was lured into a trap on the plains of Harran by the Parthian General Surena. The Roman troops were no match against the Parthian cavalry army of heavy cataphracts and light horse archers. Crassus was killed when the peace negotiations took a wrong turn. The Battle of Carrhae was a decisive victory in favor of the Parthians, but the battle for the control of the city lasted many years.

Detail from the breastplate of Augustus Prima Porta, showing a Parthian man returning the aquila lost by Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae
(Till Niermann/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Roman emperor Lucius Verus (r.161-169 AD) attempted to take Harran and was successful but the outbreak of an epidemic thwarted the conquest. Finally in 195 AD the Roman emperor Septimius Severus managed to conquer Osroene. Severus' successor Caracalla journeyed to Harran in 217 AD to visit the Temple of Sin, but was murdered there by Macrinus, prefect of the Praetorian guard. In 295 AD Narseh, a son of Shapur I declared war on Rome and defeated Gaius Galerius – who later became emperor – at Harran.

Fourth century AD Emperor Julianos Apostata was a supporter of the esoteric approach to Platonic philosophy, also known as theurgy and Neoplatonism which accepted the creation of humanity as described in Plato's Timaeus. These are the principles of Hermes Trismegistus. He restored pagan temples which had been confiscated since Constantine's time and on February 4, 362, he promulgated an edict to guarantee freedom of religion. This edict proclaimed that all the religions were equal before the law. In 363 AD Julianos Apostata restored the walls of Carrhae / Harran and made a sacrifice to Sin to aid him in his attempt to overthrow the Sassanian empire.

For a few hundred years Harran/ Carrhae was ruled by the Sassanid Empire and the Byzantine Empire, intermittently until finally in 640 AD, Harran /Carrhae was conquered by the Muslim Arab General 'Iyāḍ b. Ghanm.

Islamic Harran Centre For Science

During the reign of the last Umayyad Dynasty's Caliph Marwan II (744 – 750 AD), the government of the Islamic empire, stretching from Spain to parts of Central Asia, was seated in Harran. They built the Paradise Mosque, recently excavated at the northern and western gate of the Harran city walls and considered the oldest mosque in Anatolia.

The mosque minaret became the astronomy tower, with Andromeda galaxy in the background - Ruins of the ancient city of Harran (muratart/Adobe Stock)

The Sabean or Mandaean teachings of Hermeticism, had spread to Harran. The Aramaic term *Ṣabi*, means 'to baptize' and the Mandeaens considered John the Baptist the greatest prophet. The Mandaeans claimed direct descent from Noah, which probably can be related back to the history of Nimrod and Abraham, both descendants of Noah, featuring in the pre-history of Harran and neigboring Edessa. The Sabeans of Harran acknowledged Hermes Trismegistus as their prophet and the *Hermetica* as their sacred text. Hermes as a prophet is identified as Idris or Enoch in the Quran. They fused Neo-Platonic philosophy with Babylonian astrology, considering the planets as embodying spiritual beings created by God as part of the universe, especially the moon, which embodied Sin. Thus, the cult of Sin continued well into the Middle Ages in Harran.

The Umayyad reign was followed by the Abbasid Dynasty and the capital was moved from Harran to Baghdad. In 830 AD Caliph al-Ma'mun was shocked by the scandalous behavior of Harran's Sabeans, whom it was believed sacrificed young men and maidens to the sun god (Shamash) and moon god (Sin). He gave them an ultimatum to convert to one of the "Religions of the Book", namely Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.

Ruins of the Ulu Cami University at Harran (Gerry Lynch/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

During the eighth and ninth centuries Harran became the epicenter for Islamic science and ancient Greek texts on astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, natural sciences, and medicine were translated in Arabic and taught in the madras, located just south of the mosque. The minaret of the mosque, also served as an astronomical observatory. In 1956, archaeologists found blocks, turned face down and used as steps at the entrances of the mosque, but when they were turned around, they turned out to be sixth century BC steles from the Ehulhul, the Temple of Sin.

Impression of Al-Battani (Public Domain)

Famous scientists of Harran include Al-Battani (858 – 929) considered the greatest astronomer of medieval Islam and called the "Ptolemy of the Arabs" and Hammad al-Harrani (d.1202) poet and historian who wrote the history of Harran, now lost.

Ruins of Harran Castle believed to be built on top of the Ehulhul Temple of Sin (sayilan /Adobe Stock)

The notice board outside the Kale or castle of Harran states that it was built by the Umayyad Caliph Marvan II (744 – 750). Harran was ruled by the Numayrids from 990 AD. In 1032 the temple was destroyed during an uprising of the rural 'Alid-Shiite population, but it was restored along with the Kale or castle by the Numayrids in 1059. The Ayyubids restored the castle in 1192 and the Mamluks in 1315. Some believe the original Temple of Sin, Ehulhul was located under this castle, but there are no traces of it left.

Harran Lost By The Crusaders And The Muslims

Christianity had survived in Harran, next to Islam, Judaism and the Sabeans. By the beginning of the 12th century the crusader victors were set on retaining their conquered lands and fending off Muslim onslaughts on their territories. The Battle of Harran on May 7, 1104 was fought between Seljuk Turks and Prince Bohemond of Antioch, Tancred, Prince of Galilee and Count Baldwin of Edessa, who distracted the Turks towards Harran, to relieve the siege of Edessa. However the crusaders' battle plan failed when the Turks, under command of Sokman of Mardin, feigned flight and were pursued by the crusaders. Whilst a fierce battle ensued on the plains of Harran, Jikirmish of Mosul entered Harran and took the city. History repeated itself reminiscent of the Battle of Carrhae fought on those same plains between the Romans and the Parthians almost a thousand year before.

By 1171 Saladin had founded the Ayyubid Dynasty and Harran served as the resident of Ayyubid princes. A century later in 1260, the city was laid to ruins by the invading Mongols. The ancient citadel, mosque and university remained in ruins. By the 18th century the Ottomans settled people there, who are the ancestors of the current population, supplemented by Syrian refugees. The rivers had dried up and the fertile lands turned to dusty plains, covering a rich history, believed to have commenced with the descendants of Noah.

Conical beehive houses in Harran (Velit Nejat Duzel /Adobe Stock)

In the early 20th century T.H Lawrence – Lawrence of Arabia - surveyed Harran as an archaeological site. Archaeological digs were active during the 1950's and revived from 2012 under direction of Professor Mehmet Önal, Professor of Archaeology at Harran University. The conical beehive homes, constructed from mud, were typical abodes in Harran since 3,000 years ago and some built in the 16th century from the bricks taken from the Harran Castle, just across the road, are now popular tourist attractions. A short walk across the field leads to the ruins of the Paradise Mosque and the university, where ideas, philosophies and knowledge lie scattered among the broken bricks and discarded old coins, and somewhere one might just find the footprint of Abraham.

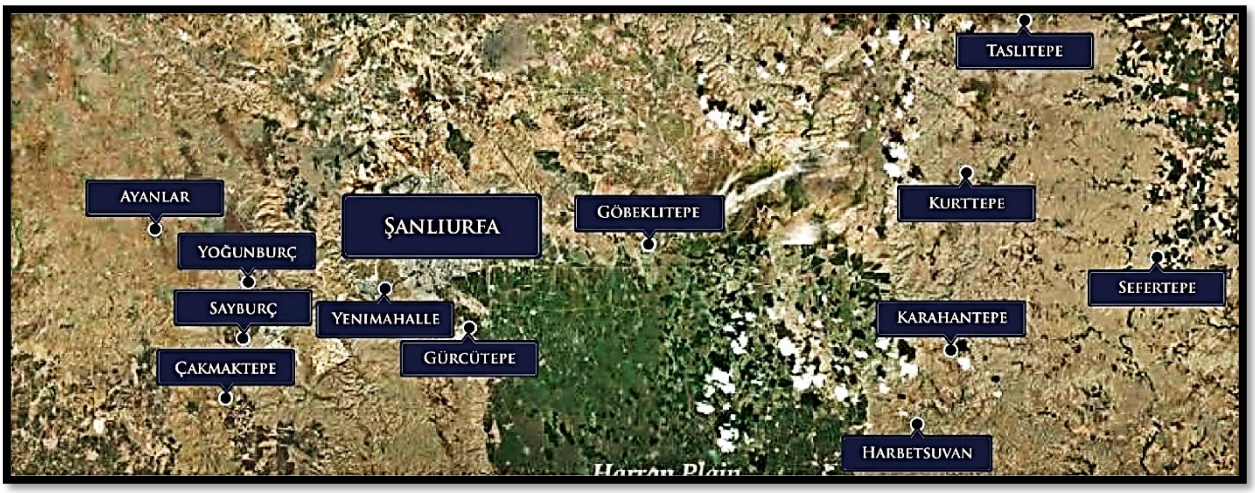
References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

From Urfa To Edessa To Şanlıurfa: Spanning 10,000 Years Of History

Dr. Micki Pistorius

Urfa Castle, Şanlıurfa, Turkey (Bernard Gagnon/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

During the Hellenistic Period from 312 BC to 63 BC, the Seleucid Empire was a major superpower and at its apex encompassed Anatolia, Persia, the Levant, (now modern Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, and parts of Turkmenistan) yet one would struggle to find the city of Edessa, founded by Seleucus I Nicator, one of the Diadochi of Alexander the Great, on a modern map. Even when Edessa became the capital of the Abgarid dynasty or the capital of the Roman province of Osroene, or the coveted prize in a tug-of-war between the Byzantines and the Parthians and the capital of the Outremer County of Edessa during the Crusades, its location remains elusive on a modern map. Just to confuse matters further, during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC) the city was named Antiochia on the Callirhoe and during Byzantine rule it was at some stage named Justinopolis. Where is Edessa? It is hidden in modern Şanlıurfa, on a plain in south-eastern Turkey about 80 kilometers (49 miles) east of the Euphrates River.



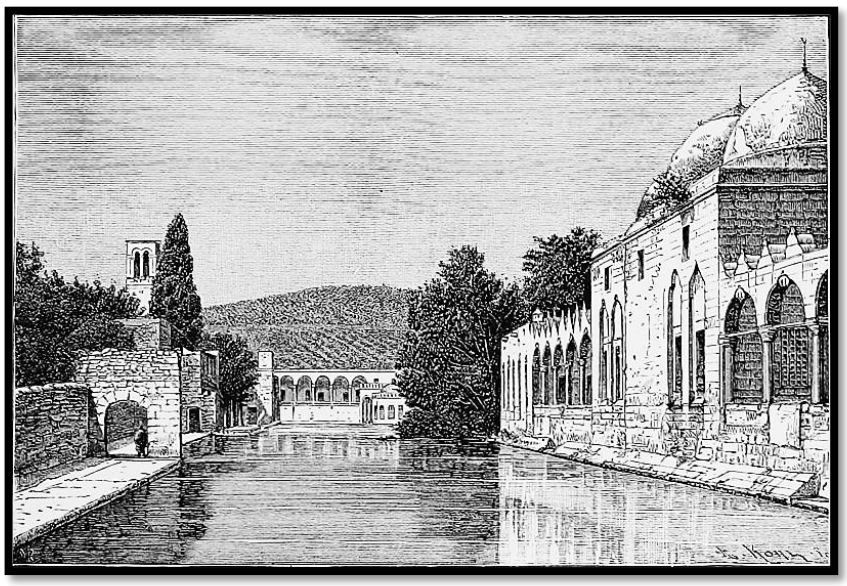
Map of the Taş Tepeler circle of Neolithic sites under excavation. (Deriv)

Steeped in layers of history, about 10,000 years ago, the region was part of a network of the first Neolithic human settlements where the agricultural revolution took place. Surrounding Şanlıurfa, then Urfa, lies what is believed to be 12 stone circle sites, collectively called Taş Tepeler, (Stone Hills) in an area covering 200 kilometers (124 miles). The most famous of these is Gōbekli Tepe, and the rest are Karahan Tepe, Harbetsuvan, Gürcü Tepe, Kurttepesi, Taşlı Tepe, Sefer Tepe, Ayanlar, Yoğunburç, Sayburç, Çakmak Tepe and Yenimahalle.

Bronze Age Urfa

During the Uruk period (ca. 4000 to 3100 BC - from the protohistoric Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age) regional settlements like Urfa and Harran expanded and developed into walled cities. At this time Urfa spanned 200 hectares. During the Bronze Age Urfa was an independent city state until its annexation into the Akkadian Empire, followed by the Neo-Sumerian Empire. After the fall of Ur it was again independent for a time until it fell to the Old Assyrian Empire and was abandoned in the Amorite expansion in 1800 BC.

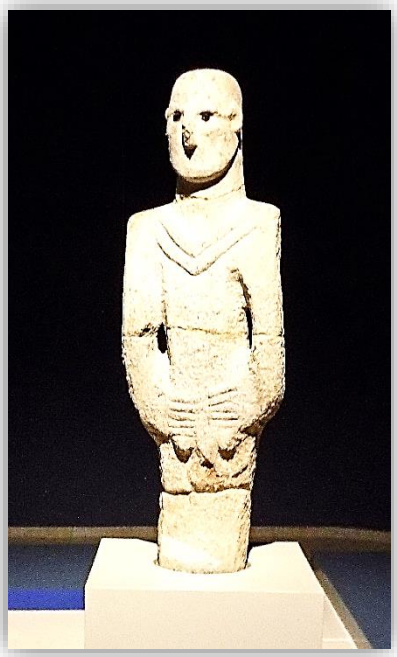
There is a tentative, but as yet unproven possibility that ancient Urfa may be the city of Urshu, an ally of Ebla by way of a royal marriage. The *Mari Texts* refer to a clash between Mari and an alliance of Urshu and Yamhad in the beginning of the 18th century BC, as well as a conflict between Urshu and Carchemish. Later during the early Hittite era King Hattusili I (1650–1620 BC) attacked Urshu in his second year, laying siege to the city for six months. Despite assistance from Yamhad and Carchemish, Urshu was eventually burnt to ashes and its riches were transferred to the Hittite capital of Hattusa.



Old drawing of Abraham's Fountain from “The universal geography : the earth and its inhabitants” (1876) (Public Domain)

Balıklıgöl, the Pool of Abraham

It is said the Neolithic settlement of Urfa, was situated at Balıklıgöl, a pool in the center of the town. The Urfa Man or Balıklıgöl statue, recognized as the oldest naturalistic life-sized sculpture of a human, was discovered here. It is nearly 1.90 meters tall, with deep set eyes set with segments of black obsidian and it has a V-shaped collar or necklace. The hands are clasped in front, covering the genitals. The statue is contemporaneous to the Taş Tepeler era. A statue of a goddess dating to the Neolithic period (8000 BC) was found at the site and this is tangible evidence that the pool was regarded as sacred.



Urfa man, also known as the "Balikligöl Statue", Pre-Pottery Neolithic
(Cobija / CC BY-SA 4.0)

Balıklıgöl is also called the Pool of Abraham, the site of the Jewish and Islamic traditions' legendary clash between Nimrod and Abraham. Both Nimrod and Abraham were descendants of Noah, but they were generations apart.

Genealogically, Nimrod was the grandson of Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah. He was also the father of Azurad, who was the wife of Eber and mother of Peleg, which makes him a distant relation of Abraham. Nimrod was a great warrior king of Mesopotamian Shinar which included cities of Babel, Erech, Akkad, and perhaps Calneh. An early Arabic work known as *Kitab al-Magall* or the *Book of Rolls* state that Nimrod built the towns of Raha (Edessa/Urfa) and Harran when Peleg (his grandson) was 50 years old. *The Syriac Cave of Treasures*, an apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical work that contains various narratives related to the Christian Bible, states Harran and Edessa was built by Nimrod when Reu (son of Peleg) was 50 years old. Harran and Edessa/Urfa are important cities to the family of Abraham.

Where Nimrod was a grandson of Noah's son Ham, Abraham's family were descendants of Noah's son Shem. Abraham's genealogy is a bit more complicated. Peleg, (Nimrod's grandson) was the father of Reu, who was the father of Serug, who lived in Ur Kesdim, and was the first of the patriarchal line to abandon monotheism and turn to idol worship, teaching sorcery to his son Nahor. Nahor was the father of Terah, who begat Abraham and his brothers Haran (not to be confused with the city of Harran) Nahor II and their sister Sarah. The Terah-family lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Terah eventually set out for Canaan with his son Abraham but stopped in the city of Harran along the way, where he died. Abraham went on to Canaan and became the patriarchal father of the Islamites and Israelites.

Abraham sacrificing his son, Ishmael. Abraham cast into fire by Nimrod.
From Zubdat-al Tawarikh, a 1583 Ottoman Turkish manuscript.
(Public Domain)

In both Jewish and Islamic traditions, a confrontation between Nimrod and Abraham took place. The Arabic *Kitab al-Magall (Book of Rolls)* describes how Nimrod was involved in fire worship and idolatry and he was instructed by the fourth son of Noah (perhaps Bouniter) in divination. According to Masudi, a 10th-century Muslim historian, Nimrod was the king who introduced astrology. Nimrod, like Serug, Abraham's great grandfather and grandfather Nahor, was involved in sorcery. They could have been contemporaries and since they were related, perhaps they knew each other well. They were certainly royalty.

The history of the stand-off between Nimrod and Abraham sprouted a few generations before Abraham's lifetime. Two hundred years after the Great Flood, Nimrod had vowed to build a tower (in Babylon) so high to reach above the waters in defiance of the god and to avenge his forefathers' death by flooding. Eber, Nimrod's son-in-law and ancestor of Abraham, refused to participate in the building of the tower. He was spared the punishment of speaking in a foreign language and retained the Hebrew language. According to Flavius Josephus, Nimrod was clearly a man who regarded himself as a god-king in defiance of the god. The collision between Nimrod and Abraham is therefore viewed by some as symbolic of Good versus Evil, or as a symbol of monotheism against polytheism.

An astrology omen had predicted the impending birth of Abraham, who would put an end to idolatry. Nimrod therefore ordered the killing of all newborn babies, but Abraham's mother had birthed him in secret. Abraham grew up to recognize only one god (Yahweh) and eventually confronted Nimrod about his idolatry, as predicted.

Balikligol, Halilurrahman Mosque Sanliurfa
(sercansamanci /Adobe Stock)

Nimrod decided it was time to put the young upstart in his place, and instructed his subjects to gather firewood for four years to build an enormous pyre. The Jewish traditions of *Genesis Rabbah* also supports this version of the legend. Nimrod had Abraham immolated on this pyre, but Abraham's God turned the fire into water and the burning coals into fish. The pool of sacred fish remains to this day and is called Balıklıgöl. How much of this legend is truth will never be known.

Much later during the Hellenistic period (323 BC and 31 AD), Edessa/ Şanlıurfa was one of the holy sites of the Syrian goddess Atargatis, who was also worshipped in Hierapolis and Ashkelon. There are sacred pools in Hierapolis – later referred to as the Pools of Cleopatra. While historian Lucian of Samosata (second century AD) does not explicitly mention Edessa as a holy site for Atargatis, it is a plausible speculation given the widespread presence of sacred pools throughout the region.

Roman copy of a bronze statue of Seleucus found in Herculaneum. Now located at the Naples National Archaeological Museum. (Public Domain)

Urfa Becomes Edessa

How much of the city survived after the Hittite siege is unknown, but Urfa lies in the region conquered by the Mitanni Kingdom in under the reign of King Parshatatar in the 15th century BC; by Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC) king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire; the Medes in the sixth century BC; the Persians in the fifth century BC. In 333 BC when Alexander the Great passed this way after his victory over Darius III of the Achaemenid Empire at the Battle of Issus, he named this town Edessa after the Macedonian city.

Seleucus led the Royal Hypaspistai during Alexander's Persian campaign. (Peltast/ Public Domain)

After the death of Alexander in 323 BC, a succession battle ensued between his half-brother, Philip Arrhidaeus and supporters of his unborn child with his wife Roxana. An agreement was reached during the Partition of Babylon in June 323 BC that they would be joint kings with Perdiccas serving as regent (*epimeletes*). The empire stretching from Greece to India was divided between the senior officers of the Macedonian army and some local governors and rulers, who acted as satrapies. At that stage Seleucus was Commander of the Companions, a cavalry unit, considered as *Hetairoi*, the elite guard of the king.

As expected, Alexander's successors, the Diadochi, each coveted independent rule and the Wars of the Diadochi (Successors) occurred between 322 and 281 BC. Where Seleucus had initially supported Perdiccas, he eventually led a mutiny and had Perdiccas assassinated. Seleucus was rewarded and appointed satrap of Babylon under the new regent Antipater, however Seleucus was forced to flee Babylon due to the advances of Antigones. He returned in 312 BC with the assistance of Ptolemy of Egypt. Thereafter there was no hold on the ambitions and expansions of Seleucus. He became basileus (king) of the mighty Seleucid Empire he had established which covered Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Iranian Plateau. Seleucus' descendants ruled the region after his death.

The Kingdom Of Osroene

By 134 BC the Kingdom of Osroene or the Kingdom of Edessa and was ruled by the Abgarid dynasty, of Nabataean Arab origin and their reign lasted until 242 AD. Although ruled by Arabs, the Edessans retained their fundamentally Aramean culture with Greek and Parthian influence.

Abgar V (r. 4 -50 AD), called Ukkāmā (meaning "the Black" in Aramaic), was the King of Osroene with his capital at Edessa. He ruled from 4 – 7 AD as a Roman client, interrupted for a short period when his son Manu IV ruled from 7 – 13 AD. Abgar ruled again from 13 – 50 AD from Edessa. Historian Moses of Chorene (ca. 410–490s AD) notes that Abgar V's chief wife was Queen Helena of Adiabene, who according to Josephus was also the sister-wife of King Monobaz I of Adiabene.

King Abgar And The Mandylion Image Of Edessa

King Abgar V was converted to Christianity by Addai/Thaddeus of Edessa, one of the 70 disciples of Jesus (he is sometimes identified as the Biblical disciple Jude). According to the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea, King Abgar had fallen ill and wrote to Jesus beseeching him to come and cure him. Jesus politely declined and the apostle Thomas had sent Addai/Thadeus to his hometown Edessa to heal the king and convert him to Christianity. Addai carried the correspondence from Jesus, which included the image of Jesus, referred to as the Image of Edessa or Mandylion.

Eusebius testifies to witnessing the correspondence between Abgar and Jesus Christ, but does not mention the image, as does Egeria, a pilgrim who recorded her visit to Edessa in 384 AD. However, the *Doctrine of Syriac (Malpānūṯā d-Addai Šlīḥā)* a Syriac Christian text, written in the late fourth or early fifth century AD, recites the legend of the Image of Edessa, mentioning the image of Christ as well as the legendary works of Addai and his disciple Mari. In 525 AD, according to historian Procopius of Caesarea a tributary of the Euphrates, the Daisan, flooded Edessa and during the reconstruction, a cloth bearing the facial features of a man was discovered hidden in the wall above one of the gates of Edessa. The Syriac *Chronicle of Edessa* written in 540-550 AD claim divine interventions during the Persian siege of 544 AD, but does not mention the Image. Writing in 593 AD, Evagrius Scholasticus reported that the relic, and specifically the Image effected a miraculous aid in the defence of Edessa against the Persians. The image was moved to Constantinople in the 10th century but disappeared when it was sacked during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and reappeared as a relic of King Louis IX of France's Sainte-Chapelle in Paris but it disappeared during the French Revolution.

Anatolia in the early first century AD with Osroene as a client state of the Parthian Empire
(Caliniuc / CC BY-SA 4.0)

In the first century AD, King Abgar VII of Osroene (109-116 AD) sought independence from both Rome and Parthia. At first he supported the Roman Emperor Trajan's military campaign against the Parthian king Osroes I in 114-116 AD, but then he turned upon the Romans and in 116 AD he supported the Parthian revolt against Trajan. His treacherous efforts were addressed by the Roman general Lusius Quietus who promptly captured and sacked Edessa, killing King Abgar VII. The Emperor Hadrian reinstated Osroene as a client kingdom of Rome in 118 AD, which it remained for a hundred years until 214 AD when the Roman Abgar IX Severus was deposed, and Osroene was incorporated as a Roman province and the Abgarid dynasts only ruled in name.

Second century AD mosaic from Edessa of Orpheus taming wild animals with inscriptions in the Aramaic language (Public Domain)

Edessa The Roman Province

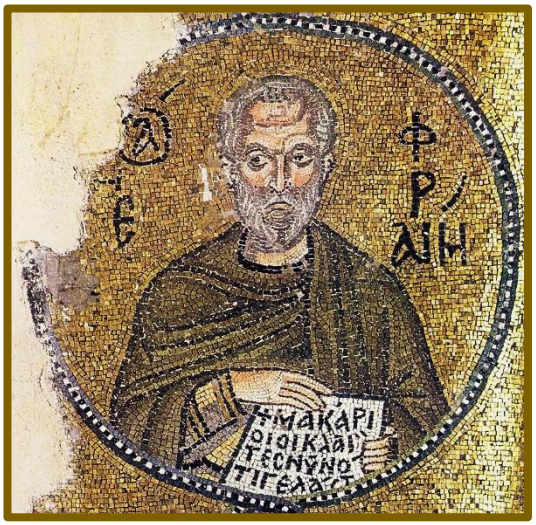
Edessa, was an important junction on the caravan trade route from China and India and the north-south route connecting Armenia and Antioch passed through the gates of its fortress. To the Romans its importance lay in its proximity to Parthia, thus a series of fortresses were constructed on the Roman-Parthian frontier borders and garrisons were embedded. The Sassanids defeated the Parthians and Ardashir I, founder of the new empire, took advantage of the turmoil in Rome that followed the Year of the Six Emperors, in 239–243, by attacking and seizing the area. It was recovered quickly by Timesitheus. In 260 AD the Persian shah Shapur I managed to capture the Roman emperor Valerian (r. 253–260), at the Battle of Edessa.

A fine cameo showing an equestrian single combat) between Shapur I and Valerian in which the latter is seized, according to Shapur's own statement, "with our own hand" (CC BY-SA 2.5)

During Emperor Diocletian's reign (284-305 AD) Osroene formed part of the Diocese of the East which incorporated the provinces of the western Middle East, between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. During the fourth to the sixth centuries provinces were chopped and changed under various Roman rulers' reigns. During early Christianity Saints Gûrja, Shâmôna, Habib, and others suffered martyrdom at Edessa under Diocletian. Diocletian's reign saw the last and most severe persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, which was in favor of Ephrem the Syrian, who escaped persecution.

Ephrem The Syrian And The School Of Edessa

One of Edessa's famous inhabitants was Ephrem the Syrian or Saint Ephrem (306 – 373 AD), although he was born in Nisibis. He was revered as one of the most notable hymnographers of Eastern Christianity and a great scholar of Syriac Christianity. He was the founder of the School of Nisibis, which was absorbed into the School of Edessa, a Christian theological school, founded by the Abgar dynasty. In 363 AD when Nisibis fell to the Persians, Ephrem fled to Edessa, where he took over directorship of the school and he even instructed church music to girls. In 380 AD Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica which recognized the catholic orthodoxy as the imperial Roman church, which formally heralded the end of the persecutions.



Ephrem the Syrian, mosaic in Nea Moni (Public Domain)

Cyrus II was archbishop of Edessa from 471 to 498 AD and successfully convinced Emperor Zeno to shut down the School of Edessa, since he opposed the Antiochene theological stance that emphasized the distinction between the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ. According to sixth century Bishop Simeon of Beth Arsham, the Theotokos was built on the site of the school in Edessa.

Edessa in the Byzantine-Sassanian Wars

The sixth century was characterized by the Byzantine-Sassanian wars. The first war 572 – 591 AD ended when Emperor Maurice supported the Sasanian king Khosrow II to regain his throne. However shortly after in 602 AD Maurice was murdered by his political rival Phocas. Upon the murder of Emperor Maurice, Narses, a Byzantine general of Armenian ancestry and governor of the Byzantine province of Mesopotamia, rebelled against Phocas and seized Edessa. Emperor Phocas instructed general Germanus to besiege Edessa, prompting Narses to request help from the Persian king Khosrow II, who was only too willing to help avenge Maurice's death used this opportunity as an excuse to attack the Byzantine Empire, trying to reconquer Armenia and Mesopotamia. Narses attempted to salvage the situation with a diplomatic mission but was burned alive in Constantinople by Phocas despite having been promised clemency.

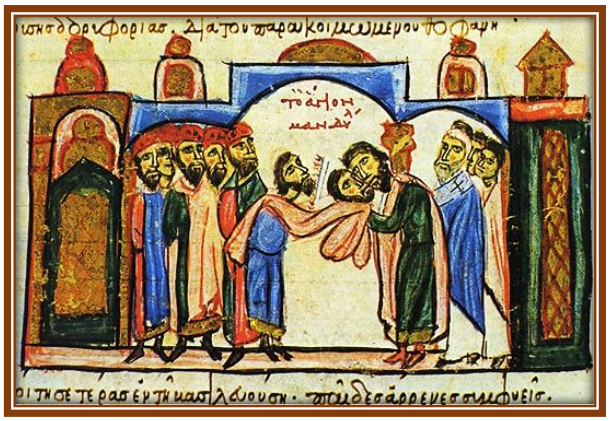
In 608 AD, general Heraclius the Elder, son-in-law of Phocas, rebelled against Phocas and a civil war ensued during which both Pochas and Heraclius died. However, the Persians took advantage of this situation and invaded the territory. In 610 AD they took Edessa. The war raged on with the Persians laying siege to Constantinople in 626, but they were defeated. In 627, the Byzantines invaded the heartland of Persia and a civil war broke out in Persia, during which the Persians killed their king, and sued for peace. During the peace treaty Byzantine regained their lost territories from the Persians. A new threat faced the Byzantine and Sassanian empires during the seventh century AD; the sudden emergence of the Islamic Rashidun Caliphate.

Urfa Castle with walls and dual columns
(Anadolu /CC BY-SA 3.0)

Edessa During the Muslim Conquests.

By 637 AD the Rashidun Muslims had conquered most of Syria. Antioch, one of the cities founded by Seleucus, fell after the Battle of the Iron Bridge in October 637 AD but Emperor Heraclius II had already left Antioch for Edessa before the Muslims arrived. He then arranged for the necessary defenses in Armenia and moved on to Constantinople. As he fled through the Cilician Gates, he bid farewell to Syria. Iyad ibn Ghanm, a companion to the prophet Muhammed, was the Arab general who in 640 BC conquered Edessa, Harran and Samosata, by siege and plunder of the countryside. Edessa surrendered after negotiations.

During the Golden Age of the third caliphate of the Abbasids (775–861 AD) trouble flared when the Byzantine emperor Nikephoros I (r. 802–811) ceased paying the tribute agreed to by his predecessors to the Caliphate, and he launched attacks on the Abbasid frontier regions. A massive counterattack was launched by the Abbasids, who raided the region at will. During this time the walls of Urfa Castle were fortified by the Abbasids in 814 AD.



The surrender of the Mandylion to the Byzantine parakoimomenos Theophanes by the Edessenes, from the Madrid Skylitzes. (Public Domain)

The Byzantine Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, appointed General John Kourkouas as commander-in-chief of the Byzantine armies along the eastern frontier, facing the Abbasid Caliphate. John Kourkouas was instrumental in regaining Byzantine territory for the first time in 200 years. Kourkouas assailed Edessa every year from 942 AD onward and devastated its countryside, much like Iyad ibn Ghanm had done 300 years before. Finally, its emir agreed to a peace, swearing not to raise arms against Byzantium and to hand over the Mandylion in exchange for the return of 200 prisoners. John Kouroukas agreed to the terms and he delivered the Mandylion to Constantinople on August 15, 944. In 1031 Edessa was given up to the Byzantines under George Maniakes by its Arab governor. It was retaken by the Arabs, and then successively held by the Greeks, the Armenians and the Seljuq dynasty (1087).

The seizure of Edessa by George Maniakis and the Arabic counterattack from the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (Public Domain)

The County of Edessa

By 1098 the County of Edessa was one of the four Outremer Crusader Estates and it aspired to control the Upper Euphrates valley. Baldwin of Boulogne, became the first Count of Edessa from 1098 to 1100. During the march to Jerusalem of the First Crusade, Thoros of Edessa invited Baldwin to join him in a rebellion against the ruling Seljuks, who had captured Edessa in 1087. Baldwin complied on condition that Thoros adopt him and make his heir. Thoros was eventually assassinated and Baldwin became the First Count of the County of Edessa. From Edessa Baldwin was in an excellent position to supply the main crusader army with food during the siege of Antioch, taking place at that time. He also defended Edessa against an attack from the Atabeg of Mosul, for three weeks, preventing him from reaching Antioch before the crusaders captured it.

Baldwin of Boulogne entering Edessa in February 1098 by Joseph-Nicolas Robert-Fleury (1840) (Public Domain)

The main crusader army captured Jerusalem on 15 July 1099 under Godfrey of Bouillon. A year later on 18 July 1100 he died suddenly. Baldwin I marched to Jerusalem and on 25 December 1100 was crowned King of Jerusalem. He left Edessa to his relative, Baldwin of Le Bourcq, who was Count of Edessa from 1100 to 1118. During the Battle of Harran on 7 May, 1104 between the Crusader states of Antioch and the County of Edessa, and the Seljuk Turks, Baldwin II was captured. During his captivity, Tancred, the Crusader ruler of the Principality of Antioch, and Tancred's cousin, Richard of Salerno, governed Edessa as Baldwin's regents. Baldwin's cousin, Joscelin of Courtenay, lord of Turbessel, paid his ransom in the summer of 1108. Tancred attempted to hold on to Edessa, and with the aid of Radwan of Aleppo, a Seljuk emir, they managed to beat Baldwin. However, Baldwin and Tancred were reconciled at an assembly of the crusader leaders near Tripoli in April 1109. Baldwin II followed Baldwin I as king of Jerusalem, and gave Edessa to his cousin, Joscelin of Courtenay who ruled the County of Edessa during its zenith, from 1118 to 1131. Joscelin was captured twice, but rescued in 1123 in a daring attempt by Armenian soldiers who disguised themselves as merchants. After returning to Edessa he was able to enlarge the territory of the county.

Battle of Edessa 1146 by Richard de Montbaston (Public Domain)

After the death of Joscelin I, his son Joscelin II inherited Edessa. At the time when his father was rescued from captivity, King Baldwin II of Jerusalem was still held captive. Joscelin II and Baldwin's daughter Joveta were exchanged for Baldwin's release in 1124, but they were both ransomed and released in 1125. By 1143 the County of Edessa had weakened considerably. The time was ripe for Zengi, the Atabeg of Mosul and Aleppo, to lay siege to Edessa from November 28 to December 24, 1144, whilst Joscelin II was absent. Edessa fell to Zengi, and a massacre ensued. One of Zengi's commanders, Zayn ad-Din Ali Kutchuk, was appointed governor, while Bishop Basil was retained as leader of the Christian population. In October 1146, Joscelin returned and managed retake Edessa for only a few days, before it was besieged again and Joscelin was forced to abandon it. The Christian population was massacred, enslaved or exiled. The fall of Edessa was a catalyst for the Second Crusade.

Edessa becomes Şanlıurfa

The Ayyubid Sultanate's leader Saladin acquired Edessa from the Zengids and in 1235 sultan Al-Kamil ordered the destruction of its citadel. In 1260 Edessa surrendered to the Ilkhanate tribe of the invading Mongols to avoid massacre. The Mamluk dynasty defeated the Mongols and by the end of the 13th century, they had conquered the previous Crusader states. The Safavids, an Iranian dynasty of Kurdish origin, ruled from 1501 to 1722, whereafter they were displaced by the Ottoman Empire. The successful Turkish War of Independence, (1923) led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk against the occupying Allies, led to the emergence of the Republic of Turkey in the Anatolian heartland. *Şanlı* means great, glorious, dignified in Turkish, and Urfa was officially renamed Şanlıurfa ("Urfa the Glorious") by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1984, in recognition of the local resistance in the Turkish War of Independence.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Taş Tepeler: Anatolia's Land Of Great Transformation

Jim Willis

A human head in an ancient wall at the Karahan Tepe site in Turkey. Source: Ancient Architects / YouTube screenshot

Taş Tepeler means "Stone Hills" and refers to an area covering some 200 kilometers (124 miles) in ancient Anatolia, now Turkey, in the vicinity of present day Şanlıurfa. The Turkish Tourist Board has started to refer to the entire area as the 'Land of Great Transformation'. It is an apt title. As far as anyone knows, this is where our civilization began. About 12,000 years ago, this land was home to a people who were in transition from hunter-gatherers to settled communities. It was the *Neolithic* (New Stone) *Age*, the anthropological parameters of which are now in complete flux.

Archaeological excavations at Göbekli Tepe (Rolfcosar / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Discovering Gōbekli Tepe

Up until 1994, when German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt discovered the site now called Göbekli Tepe, part of the *Taş Tepeler* complex, it was assumed that the geography and the order of events that preceded modern-day civilization were clear cut. First came the invention of agriculture, in areas such as Mesopotamia and Egypt. That led to the development of settled towns and villages, followed by the formation of organized religion. This was archaeological gospel according to all

the history books. It formed the bedrock of what was taught in educational institutions from elementary schools through university graduate programs.

Then came Schmidt's discovery, and everything changed. Göbekli Tepe was first thought to be a temple. That implies organized religion. But it was built before the invention of agriculture. It obviously required a rather large and settled workforce. But it was built, unquestionably, some 12,000 years ago. So how could agriculture, long thought to be some 6,000 to 8,000 years old, have come first in line? The new order now seemed to say religion led to settled communities, which led to agriculture. That is exactly the reverse of what had been taught for generations. Needless to say, shock waves reverberated throughout the whole field of ancient studies.

Human depictions and 3D sculptures are seen after they were unearthed in Karahan Tepe. (Anadolu Agency)

Taş Tepeler Beyond Gōbekli Tepe

For some time, it was fashionable to say that Göbekli Tepe was the first such project of its time, a unique, stand-alone series of connected structures that represented humankind's first venture in city, or at least temple, building. But in 1997, the discovery of Karakan Tepe, now being excavated by Necmi Karul, only 46 kilometers (28 miles) from Şanlıurfa, revealed a structure similar to Göbekli Tepe, but perhaps even older. What is more, unlike Göbekli Tepe, it appears to be both ceremonial and a settlement. Now there are 12 other sites in the vicinity that demand the attention of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Hence the name, *Taş Tepeler*, or "Stone Hills." They consist of Karahan Tepe, Harbetsuvan, Gürcütepe, Kurttepesi, Taşlıtepe, Sefertepe, Ayanlar, Yoğunburç, Sayburç, Çakmaktepe, Göbekli Tepe, and Yenimahalle. As far as anyone can guess at present, together they make up the very first example of settled life and social union that eventually formed what is now considered civilization. Here, 12,000 years ago, shelters become houses. Villages appeared. Human beings invented a specialized labor force. Beer was invented. And religion was born.

Archaeologists are busy unearthing the techniques required for building such complex structures. They are learning how the work proceeded. They have discovered when they were built. There is no end to speculation about what they were. They obviously know *where* the great transformation took place. But the big question still remains. *Why?*

Why Did They Settle At Stone Hills?

Why did hunter-gathers wake up one morning and decide to completely upend their way of life? How did they suddenly invent the methods needed to construct such massive, refined edifices, never before seen? What is the meaning of the highly sophisticated carvings of animals and intricately placed cosmological alignments? In short, what happened to completely transform the history of the entire human race? As of now, no one knows for sure. But that has not stopped people from speculating. There have been many theories advanced, sometimes very vociferously, by those competing for headlines.

The Karahan Tepe dig site. (Ancient Architects / YouTube screenshot)

These days, anyone with access to the Internet or a television has probably seen pictures of the famous T-shaped pillars, the circular rooms and magnificent stone, bas-relief animals carved in minute detail at the edifice of Göbekli Tepe, and more recently Karahan Tepe. What has now seen the light of day, however, is estimated to be only about five per cent of what remains below the surface. Over the last decade or so, the story has been recorded, filmed, and told in just about every language on earth. Until a pandemic closed down much of world travel, the Turkish tourist industry flourished.

A Medieval Cemetery?

If one zooms in on the most famous example of the Stone Hills, the one that has been most thoroughly excavated, what is Göbekli Tepe, or “Potbelly Hill.” How was it used? What was its function? Here are just a few of the theories relating to the discovery.

When the site was first surveyed by a team of archaeologists from Istanbul, it was assumed to be nothing more than a cemetery, perhaps dating back to the Middle Ages. This idea had to be updated in 1994. Klaus Schmidt discovered T-shaped limestone pillars, bearing artistic carvings of lions, bulls, spiders, scorpions, snakes, gazelles, and various enigmatic figures. He also

discovered stone tools and bones from both animals and humans. These were part of the evidence that revealed carbon dates from the late Paleolithic era, when the area was inhabited by hunter-gatherers. It soon became obvious that he was dealing with something far more significant than a simple cemetery.

Archaeologists have already found animal carvings at Karahan Tepe similar to the well-known Vulture Stone and others at Göbekli Tepe. (Sue Fleckney / CC BY-SA 2.0)

A First Temple

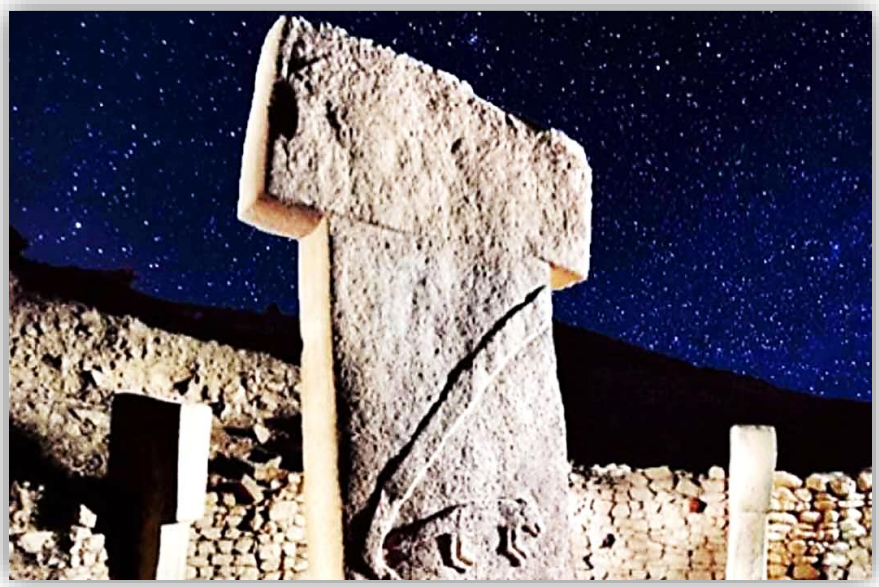
There is an old joke in archaeological circles that assumes any unrecognized, unknown, and mysterious artifact must have been used for 'ceremonial purposes'. Indeed, that seems to be the go-to, default position of so-called temples found around the world. But in this case, Göbekli Tepe seems to fit the bill. It was certainly the opinion held by Klaus Schmidt. *"This is the first human-built holy place,"* he once said. Its proximity to biblical sites, including the mythical Garden of Eden and Mount Ararat, places it firmly in religious tradition. Predating the pyramids by a good 6,000 years, it stands solidly in a spiritual tradition that spans three great world religions. Nearby Şanlıurfa, with its tales of the patriarch Abraham, lends a heavily accented voice to this belief. Although separated from those traditions by thousands of years, mysterious Göbekli Tepe nevertheless seems to stand on holy ground. The animals pictured in exquisite bas-relief seem to be religious icons. If Schmidt was right, this might very well be the first example of a long line of cathedrals built on a scenic, sacred hill.

The fact that Schmidt initially found no cooking hearths, no trash pits, and no signs of houses of any kind, seemed to confirm his analysis. But he did find indications of wild sheep, along with wild grains. The implications seemed to be that a temple of this sort brought people here, who then began the practice of agriculture.

Religion, in other words, sparked the invention of agriculture, which then led to the birth of cities and, eventually, a settled civilization on the road to the complex societies of modern day. It does not seem probable that bands of subsistence hunter-gatherers could have developed the kind of social infrastructures needed to carry out this kind of advanced building without a powerful motivation.

Religion would have fit this requirement. In the words of Stanford University archaeologist Ian Hodder, who excavated Çatalhöyük, a prehistoric settlement 300 miles (482 kilometers) from Göbekli Tepe. *"You can make a good case this area is the real origin of complex Neolithic societies."*

Another initial clue was that Göbekli Tepe's builders seem to have deliberately buried the complex only a few generations after the original project was completed. Although some consider this to be simply an indication that new construction covered older building, a common practice in years to follow, it could just as well imply that the structure had somehow gone out of date, so to speak, or lost its original holiness.



Pillar in Gobekli Tepe (Deriv.) (sebnemsanders) with a starry night sky. (CC0)

The World's First Observatory

As archaeological work on the project continued, it soon became obvious that Göbekli Tepe demonstrates uncanny astronomical alignments. Some suggest it is aligned with the night sky, in particular the star Sirius. Local people revered that star system thousands of years later. Others see a connection based on the fact that Göbekli Tepe's initial construction coincides with a comet that hit the earth shortly before construction began, ending the Younger Dryas Ice Age. The temple could have been built as a tribute to this event – the sacred offering of a culture who experienced what seemed to be a sign from the gods. If this is the case, it would be a powerful religious symbol, built by those who intended to warn future generations that what happened before might happen again. Allusions to Atlantis, which Plato placed at this precise time in history, have been convincingly argued.

This theory suggests an answer to a nagging question: How did primitive hunter-gatherers in Anatolia suddenly develop the ability to undertake such a massive project? Perhaps they did not *invent* the techniques. Perhaps they *inherited* them from a previous advanced civilization that flourished before the Younger Dryas comet obliterated its existence. If this is true, Göbekli Tepe can be seen as either the *last* temple of that civilization's religion, or the *first* temple of a new civilization's *adoption* of that religion. When the new religion lost its power to influence generations long separated from their past, it was buried, either because the religion no longer "worked," or because it was to serve as a kind of time capsule for the future, when the Younger Dryas comet might return.

In 2017, evidence for this view was presented by a group of chemical engineers who claimed to connect the various animal effigies of Pillar 43 with the night sky that would have been visible almost 13,000 years ago. This date coincided with ice core samples taken from the Greenland ice cap, which prove that a segmented comet indeed struck the earth with devastating results just before the building of Göbekli Tepe.

The theory is challenged by those who are presently working at the site. They claim that Göbekli Tepe was not always open to the skies. It was once roofed. That would eliminate any possibility of it serving as an observatory. The argument, now very heated, continues.

A Neolithic pole from Göbekli Tepe, with portions of humanoid figures. Layer II, 8800–8000 BC - Şanlıurfa (Urfa) Museum (Cobija / CC BY-SA 4.0)

A Gathering Site

If Göbekli Tepe was not primarily a temple or an observatory, might it have served as a seasonal gathering place, similar to Stonehenge, in England? It stands right at the northern apex of the Fertile Crescent, which stretches from Mesopotamia in the east to Egypt in the west. This is the wide swath of geography which has long been associated with the Agricultural Revolution – with

farming and animal husbandry. Was Göbekli Tepe where people gathered, perhaps every season, to compare notes, trade ideas, find mates for new generations of young people, and integrate their developing cultures?

Although a few decades ago it did not seem as though a significant population lived here for any long periods of time, a small but powerful religious elite might have maintained the site, readying it every year for the pilgrims who could have journeyed to the meeting place.

While searching for evidence of this religious elite, archaeologists may have discovered, in the surrounding area, sites that were even older, but showed evidence of both ceremonial *and* settled functions. Hence, the newly discovered *Taş Tepeler*, the "Stone Hill" sites. In other words, Göbekli Tepe might only be understood when the other surrounding areas are sufficiently excavated. It might prove to be part of a whole, interlocking complex, demonstrating a highly evolved social significance.

The Enigma Remains Unsolved

Thus, the questions continue: was Göbekli Tepe deliberately buried? What was its function? How does it fit into the complex arena of the *Taş Tepeler*? What happened here, around 12,000 years ago. And why?

To date, there are simply no definitive answers to these questions. But consider just one aspect of the trajectory of the timeline now put forth: First a temple complex of some kind, beginning about 12,000 years ago, then the invention of agriculture, then, probably in conjunction with that process, settled communities. It sounds like a neat and clean progression of cause and effect.

But history develops that conveniently only in textbooks. The reality is that it is usually a lot messier than the books imply. It unfolds in fits and starts, with man. Take, for instance, the whole concept of the agricultural "revolution." It seems fine to say that large numbers of construction workers needed a lot of food, so agriculture was "invented" to supply their needs. But anyone who has ever planted a garden knows it does not work like that. To develop and refine planting areas, to separate and nurture seed, and to discover what grows best in a particular area, takes generations, not months. Temperatures in this part of the world range from below freezing to upwards of a hundred degrees Fahrenheit (more than 37 degrees centigrade). Snow is usual in the winter. Droughts are common. And the weather may have been cooler and dryer, thus less conducive to agriculture 12,000 years ago. The Ice Age was just ending, after all.

All this is to say that what is commonly tossed off as the "invention" of agriculture might have consumed hundreds of years, at the very least. Meanwhile generations of workers needed food. How did they obtain it? Hunting and gathering works fine for small groups. But a sizable population can outstrip their resources in a matter of weeks or months. It must have been difficult and discouraging. What kept calling them back to the gigantic task they had begun?

The same kinds of arguments can be leveled at theories about religion. What kind of spiritual vision would have suddenly transformed hundreds, if not thousands, of isolated hunter-gatherers to coalesce in one spot in order to build a temple? And even if such a vision were experienced by a great many people over a very large area, what kind of conception of gods or a god would have prompted such an endeavor? A huge stone temple would be quite a foreign concept to people who would have surely envisioned a deity more suited to open plains and far-seeing vistas.

As for the theory that Göbekli Tepe is an observatory from which to view the heavens, there are easier ways to build site lines situated for such a purpose. And although there are many such site lines that have been proposed, there are many structures that lay completely outside such seemingly perfectly situated observation points.

Meanwhile, what about the other structures of the *Taş Tepeler* that have yet to be excavated? What secrets remain still hidden from sight? In short, the whole field of study in this area is in its infancy. Theories have, and will no doubt continue to be, proposed and argued for years. Perhaps the best course of action at this point is to simply stand in awe, and wonder. Something happened 12,000 years ago that changed the course of human history. That much is obvious. It is a great mystery. But such mysteries are what drive the whole field of archaeology. No one knows what will be unearthed when the next spade is plunged into the ground. Meanwhile, all one can do is wait.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

The Royal Lineage Of Jesus, Descendant Of Kings of Edessa

Ralph Ellis

Ecce homo, Behold The Man by Antonio Ciseri (1880) (Public Domain)

The simplistic story of the life of Jesus, as it is presented in the New Testament accounts, is well known. He was supposedly a poor carpenter born in a stable, a disadvantaged child who rose to become a great leader and teacher. However, there is more than enough evidence within the Gospels and Talmud to demonstrate that Jesus' family were actually wealthy, educated and influential characters within Judaean society. But since these texts have obviously been manipulated and amended, one must look beyond this deliberate obfuscation to uncover the truth.

Revisiting Historical Jesus

The first thing to note is that Jesus himself was not a carpenter but a *tekton* or an 'architect'. In fact, in the Greek an *archo-tekton* can refer to a Master Mason, and so Jesus' trade probably refers more to the speculative side of the Masonic Craft than the construction profession. Which is why the 'Raising of Lazarus' is exactly the same as a Masonic Third Degree initiation. So, Jesus was a Mason, from a Judaean Lodge.

The romanticized woodcut engraving of Flavius Josephus appearing in William Whiston's translation of his works. (Public Domain)

Reading further, one finds that Jesus was visited by the three of the Persian Magi priesthood; he received a good education in Egypt, at a time when the majority of the population were illiterate; his friends, Zacharias and Nicodemus, were very rich; while another supporter, Joanna, was the wife of Herod's vizier or prime minister. By carefully reading the accounts of Josephus Flavius and aligning the biblical Jesus with his Jesus of Gamala, one can conclude that Jesus was governor of Tiberias, owned a castle in that region, and controlled a private militia some 600 strong.

More perhaps important than all of this, it is said that Jesus' birth was deemed by King Herod to be a threat to his royal lineage, forcing him to apparently kill all the male infants in the region in order to eradicate this threat to his monarchy – and this was a real event or a wild rumor that clearly demonstrates that Jesus was a prince of some influence within Judaean society. King Herod would not have been fearful of a poor carpenter, but he would have been fearful of a well-connected prince who was a pretender to the throne of Judaea. In fact, the mocking claim of Jesus to be the 'King of the Jews' was no mockery at all, for he was indeed a legitimate pretender to many of the thrones of the Middle East. Undoubtedly, Jesus' parents' ultimate goal was to see him seated upon one of those thrones, which is why the Herodian tetrarchs of Judaea feared his presence in that region.

The massacre of innocents by Niccolò Bambini. Basilica Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Jesus An Egyptian or Persian Prince

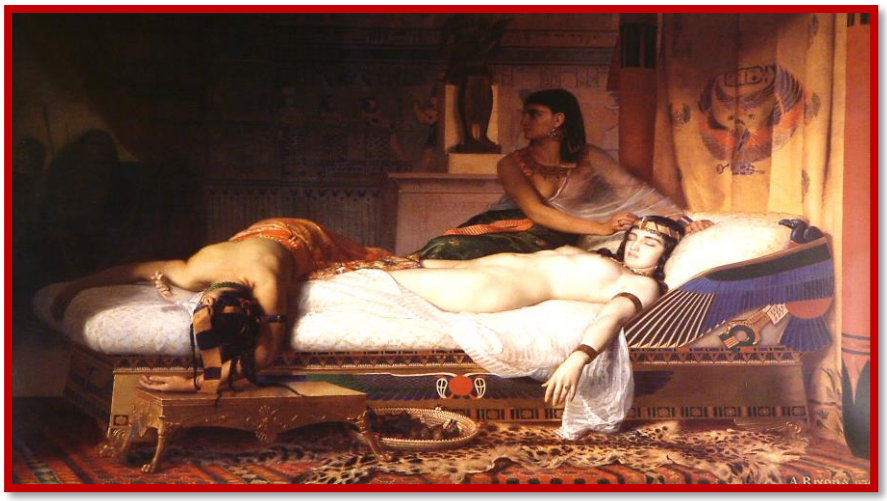
The problem with this alternative interpretation of the New Testament, is that the various texts that detail the circumstances of Jesus' birth and education would seem to be incompatible. According to these, one appears to be looking into the historical record for an exiled prince who was of both Egyptian (his education) and Persian (the Magi) descent. In addition, one needs to discover a prince who was influential enough to make his mark on the history of Judaea, but obscure enough to be easily lost to most of real recorded history. The question is, therefore, whether any prince within the historical record would fit all of these widely differing requirements.

Descendants of Cleopatra and Caesar

Strange as it may seem, there was such a royal family. They were indeed influential kings and queens, and yet it is known that they were exiled from their homeland and settled in an area called Bethanya [Bethany], in eastern Syrio-Judaea, in about 4 AD. They brought with them into exile 500 cavalry and 100 relations and retinue, a history which tallies with Josephus' accounts of the 'biblical family' (of Jesus of Gamala) maintaining their own military forces. In Syrio-Judaea, this exiled royal family raised a new generation and founded a small kingdom that competed strongly with the traditional Judaean authorities in Jerusalem.

Cleopatra and Caesar by Jean-Leon-Gerome (1866)
(Public Domain)

Moreover, members of this exiled royal family were not only directly related to Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt, but also to Emperor Julius Caesar of Rome, and to King Phraates IV of Parthia (or Persia). In other words, this family was hugely influential, relatively unknown, suddenly impoverished and, in addition, uniquely related to all three of the major empires of this era. With its enfeebled exiled circumstances this family was essentially powerless, but never without influence; they were also impoverished, for a royal family with such an illustrious pedigree, but never without wealthy, well-placed backers and supporters.



The death of Cleopatra by Jean-Andre Rixens, Musee des Augustins, Toulouse, France. (1874) Musee des Augustines
(Public Domain)

Here is a previously influential royal family living in obscure exile in biblical Bethany, somewhere in eastern Syrio-Judaea and yet this is a family that appears to meet all of the diverse requirements. This was a family that would have been visited by the Parthian Magi, and likely to have educated its sons in Egypt. This was indeed a family that could have made Herod (the tetrarch) fear for his position, sufficient for him to want to eliminate all the male (royal) children of Syrio-Judaea.

Cleopatra VII

So, who were this family, whose history parallels the biblical story so closely? Well, just before the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, it was strongly rumored that Queen Cleopatra (who was living in Caesar's palace in Rome) was pregnant, and therefore may have been about to produce an heir to the Roman empire. Cicero says of this: "*I am grieved to hear of Tertia's loss of an expected child ... (but) I should be glad of such a loss in the case of the queen (Cleopatra) and that [expected] heir of the breed of Caesar*."

However, the panic soon subsided and the rumors diminished. But why? Had Cleopatra really had a miscarriage, as Cicero desired? While this is possible, one should consider that Cleopatra gave birth to a daughter, who would have had no claim to the patrilineal Roman empire and was therefore a great disappointment to Cleopatra. Nothing is heard of this child until after Cleopatra's death in 30 BC. Then, in about 25 BC, Augustus (Octavian) the new emperor of Rome was engaged in securing diplomatic relations with his bordering nations. To his old childhood friend Jubba II, he gave the territories of Mauritania (North Africa), and as a royal wife he gave him Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony. Thus, Jubba II was quite honored, as his bride was a royal princess of illustrious pedigree and regarded by Egyptians as an incarnation of Isis.

Ancient Roman sculpture of Cleopatra Selene or her mother, Cleopatra VII of Ptolemaic Egypt, from the Archaeological Museum of Cherchel, Algeria. (Hichem algerino /CC BY-SA 4.0)

His southern borders secure, Augustus now turned his attention to Parthia (Persia) in the east. The king of this vast and powerful nation was Phraates IV, and since there had been various hostilities between Phraates and Rome over the years - battles and wars that Rome had lost - this influential leader was going to need a very special present indeed to demonstrate Rome's peaceful intent. Accordingly, Augustus gave Phraates IV a courtesan or prostitute called Thea Musa Ourania.

Queen Ourania of Parthia

One might suspect that such a sleight to Phraates' IV honor and status would have instantly precipitated another war between Parthia and Rome. But no, Phraates IV was so impressed with his courtesan that he made Thea Musa his chief wife, and nominated their son as heir to the kingdom. So how can this be so? Perhaps Thea Musa was not a courtesan, but a hostage, as the Parthians referred to all hostages in similar derogatory terms. In fact, all the evidence points towards Thea Musa being the long-lost daughter of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar.

Busts of Queen Cleopatra of Egypt and a Greek bust found in Susa, which was initially thought be that of Queen Thea Musa, National Museum of Iran. (درفش کاویانی -/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Moving on by 20 or so years, a great intrigue was about to descend upon the Parthian royal court. Queen Thea Musa desired the throne for her son, and so she had Phraates IV poisoned. Then, in an act that came straight from the Egyptian Ptolemaic royal line, and partly because a queen needed a male consort to rule, Queen Thea Musa married her son, Phraataces / Phraates V. Unimpressed by this Egyptian-style marriage, the Parthian nobles rebelled, and so Queen Thea Musa and King Phraataces / Phraates V and their assorted courtiers and 500 cavalry, were exiled to Syria in 4 AD. The place they settled in was somewhere in the east of Syrio-Judaea, in a location called Bethnaya, (probably biblical Bethany). The new city state that they built in this area was later called the Kingdom of Ourania, after Queen Thea Musa Ourania, and that is still this region's name to this day (the Huran, north-east of Amman in Jordan). Interestingly, in English this name translates as the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. This royal family later took over much of northern Syria, including Edessa and Palmyra.

Coin of Phraates V, showing his mother, Musa, on the reverse. Minted at Seleucia (cngcoins / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Here is a royal prince who was of the Egyptian and Parthian (Persian) royal lines, and who was to be found in exile and relative poverty in Judaeo-Syria in about 4 AD, as well as a family who can fulfil each and every one of the requirements. So, any son born of this family, in their new exile in the Kingdom of Ourania, would have had an identical history to the biblical Jesus. But Queen Thea Musa was an Egypto-Persian queen, and her son, Phraataces, was an Egypto-Persian prince or king. So how could any son, born of this family, have been regarded as a Jew who was a threat to the rule of the Herodian tetrarchs? Well, as Strabo says of Israel: "*This region lies towards the north; and it is inhabited ... by mixed stocks of people from Egyptian and Arabian and Phoenician tribes ... But though the inhabitants are mixed up thus, the most prevalent of the accredited reports in regard to the Temple at Jerusalem, represents the ancestors of the present Judaeans as Egyptians*".

Jesus The Royal Prince Of The Jews And Threat To Rome

In addition, the *Talmud* records that a later queen from this dynasty, Queen Helena, went through the seven-year initiation to become a Nazarene Jew. Thus, an Egypto-Persian prince born in exile in the new micro Kingdom of Ourania could well have been regarded as a Jew and therefore a threat to the rule of the Judaean monarchs. Not only that, but he could also have been a threat to the rule of the Roman emperors and the Parthian kings, because it was possible that this new prince (Jesus, with his sister-wife Mary Magdalene / Magd-Helene) could have united the entire Roman and Parthian empires into one single, united kingdom. This was the source of Jesus' influence and power, and the reason why people flocked to hear him speak – for he was a prince of the entire known world.

Jesus, crowned with thorns in a Tyrian purple robe as the King of the Jews, by Dirk van Baburen, (1623).(Public Domain)

Unfortunately, this was to be a dream that was to be unfulfilled. Roman opposition to Jesus as the King of the Jews and the Roman empire was absolute, and the royal prince was unable to raise enough support to sit on a united throne. However, through the egocentric and vainglorious, but dogged and diligent, industry of Saul-Josephus, the family of Jesus did eventually conquer all of the Roman Empire and much of the Parthian Empire too. Thus, Jesus' campaign was ultimately successful and he did indeed sit upon the throne of Rome as a god incarnate, just as previous Roman emperors had done. But this conquest was an empty victory for it was in name only, as a figurehead under the duplicitous banner of Christianity. Thus, despite Jesus' nominative and iconic world domination over two millennia, the ultimate question remains unanswered – could one yet discover a real family behind the victorious icon?

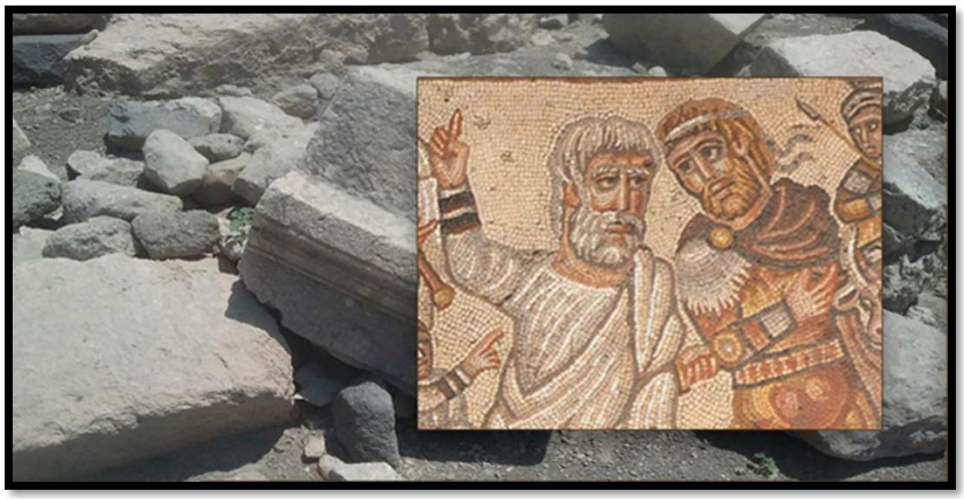
References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Roman Triumphal arch panel copy from Beth Hatefutsoth, showing spoils of Jerusalem temple. (Steerpike/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Politics Behind The Jewish-Roman War: Vespasian Versus Izates Manu

Ralph Ellis

A few years ago, the world of biblical archaeology was treated to a spectacular mosaic find from the ancient Huqoq synagogue, an archaeological site just north of Tiberias. The image depicts a complex scene with a king and his army meeting with a group of people in white robes. Considering that most of the Huqoq mosaics depict scenes from the Tanakh, one might presume that the white robed characters represent the Jerusalem rabbis.



Architectural elements and ruins at the archaeological site of Huqoq, Israel (CC BY-SA 3.0). Inset, decorated mosaic floor uncovered in the buried ruins of a synagogue at Huqoq. (National Geographic)

Huqoq Mosaic: Who Is The King?

However, while most of the other mosaics were easily explainable in biblical terms, this particular mosaic remained a bit of a mystery. Who was this king, who met with the high priest of Jerusalem? The king is dressed in Roman-style armor and wears a diadema headband, denoting his royal status; and he is accompanied by soldiers, war elephants, and a calf. The bottom register of this mosaic shows that the army of this king had been defeated. So, who could this defeated king be? Professor Jodi Magness, the chief archaeologist at Huqoq, initially suggested it was Antiochus IV, who fought a battle with rebel Jewish forces in 167 BC, as detailed in the *Book of Maccabees*. The forces of Antiochus were indeed defeated. But for the 2016 *National Geographic* article, Professor Magness amended this identification to Alexander the Great, who did indeed meet with the Jerusalem priesthood on his way to Egypt, in 332 BC. But this was an odd identification, as Alexander the Great was never defeated by rebel Jews, as this mosaic strongly implies.

In addition, it is abundantly clear that both of these identifications are incorrect, because the king on the right wears a beard, leggings, and a Jewish payot or side-lock of hair. In great contrast, Alexander and Antiochus were always depicted as clean shaven, bare legged, and most certainly would not have worn a payot. Wearing leggings was a Parthian or Edessan custom, while Greeks and Romans were traditionally bare legged.

*Father Abraham slaying his son Isaac, clearly wearing a payot (c 320 AD) (*Public Domain*)*

Having excluded Alexander and Antiochus IV from this investigation, who can this monarch be? Could it be a fictional story? While this is possible, the other biblio-historical mosaics in this ancient synagogue would suggest not. The many mosaics at Huqoq seem to be instructional illustrations for the congregation, rather like the 'stations of the cross' illustrations depicted in many Christian churches. So what kind of biblical or historical lesson could a Jewish congregation learn from the Huqoq elephant mosaic?

Offering the Calf

The answer is to be found in the Talmud, where a character called bar Kamza presents a blemished calf from Emperor Nero to the Jerusalem priesthood, hoping it would be rejected in order to provoke the Jewish Revolt.

An extract from the Talmud reads: *The destruction of Jerusalem came through a Kamza and a Bar Kamza in this way …. (Johannan) went and said to the Emperor, The Jews are rebelling against you. (Nero) said, How can I tell? He said to him: 'Send them an offering and see whether they will offer it [on the altar].' So (Johannan) sent (bar Kamza) with a fine calf (as an offering). While on the way (bar Kamza) made a blemish on its upper lip, or as some say on the white of its eye. The Rabbis were inclined to offer it in order not to offend the Government. But Rabbi Zechariah Abkulas said to them: 'People will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar.' They then proposed to kill bar Kamza so that he should not go and inform against them, but Rabbi Zechariah said to them: 'Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?' Rabbi Johannan thereupon remarked: 'Through the scrupulousness of Rabbi Zechariah our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt and we ourselves exiled from our land'*.

Is this not the scene in the Huqoq elephant mosaic? Here is a monarch, and bar Kamza will be shown later to be a monarch, offering a calf to what appears to be the Jerusalem high priest. It has been claimed that this animal is a bull, but it is clearly a happy little calf - the sacrificial calf that bar Kamza gave to the Jerusalem priesthood. The goal of this calf offering was politically duplicitous. Both Johannan ben Zakkai and bar Kamza were deliberately creating tensions with Rome, by asking Nero to give a gentile calf-offering to the Jerusalem priesthood, which they knew would be refused and therefore cause offence to Rome. Thus, they hoped to spark a tax-revolt against Rome, which was eventually inflamed into the great Jewish Revolt of 66-70 AD and so, one can accurately date the events in this mosaic to about 65 or 66 AD.

*Another Huqoq mosaic inscription and face. (*CC BY-SA 3.0*)*

Queen Helena And Bar Kamza

However, the stories in the Talmud can be deliberately confusing at times, so the question then becomes: who were these Talmudic characters? Johannan was the rabbi who led the tattered remnants of Judaism after the Jewish Revolt had failed. He became the *de facto* high priest of Judea in the early 70s AD, and made many contributions to the Talmud. But who was the more enigmatic bar Kamza, the son of Kamza? In the Talmud, bar Kamza is blamed for starting the *Jewish Revolt*. Yet in Josephus Flavius' Jewish War, it was King (Izates) Monobazus and Kenadaeus of Adiabene who started the Jewish Revolt, when they defeated the Roman legion commanded

by the Syrian governor, Cestius. However, Syriac history indicates that the enigmatic and ahistorical Adiabene monarchy were actually the kings of Edessa, because they were both ruled by the same queen.

Sarcophagus of Helen, Queen of Adiabene (CC BY-SA 3.0)

This pivotal queen was the famous and wealthy Queen Helena, who saved Jerusalem from famine in 47 AD. And Queen Helena was also highly influential in Judea, owning the largest tomb in Jerusalem; donating the solid gold menorah to the Temple; while her large palace is currently under excavation at the foot of the Temple Mount.

Furthermore, the *Talmud* indicates that this same Queen Helena of Edessa became a Nazarite Jew in the 40s AD, and so one of her sons might indeed have worn the long hair and Jewish payot of a Nazirite - who grew their hair long like Samson. Ergo, since the date of the events in this mosaic is 66 AD, and this monarch started the Jewish Revolt, one can safely assume that bar Kamza was actually the son of Queen Helena - who was King Izates Manu VI of Edessa, a city and principality that resides in northern Syria (now Sanliurfa in modern Anatolia). Prince Izates Manu VI and his mother, Helena, had taken up residency in Jerusalem in the 40s and 50s AD; while his father, King Abgarus V, remained in Edessa. According to the *Doctrine of Addai* and *Persian Wars*, King Abgarus had travel restrictions placed upon him by the Romans, and was not allowed to travel outside of Edessa and Harran.

An encaustic painting entitled Abgar of Edessa receiving the Mandylion from Thaddeus. (Public Domain)

The Jewish Revolt

This is an important detail, because the leader of the Jewish Revolt has never been previously identified, but it is now clear that he was the king of Edessa in 66 AD - King Izates Manu VI. This is why Josephus Flavius stated that the Jews hoped that: '*all of their nation who lived beyond the Euphrates would join in the Revolt*' against Rome. What did Josephus mean by this? It has often been assumed that he was referring to the many Jews who lived in Babylon,(in Iraq), and had done so since the Babylonian exile some 600 years previously. But Moses of Chorene strongly suggests that King Izates Manu was looking for support from his native home city of Edessa, which did indeed reside 'beyond the Euphrates'. The reason this important detail has gone unrecognized previously, is that Josephus Flavius was later instructed by Emperor Vespasian to delete the Edessan monarchy from history. And he did - which is why none of the kings of Edessa, nor the city itself, appear in the works of Josephus. Were it not for the Syriac historians, one would have little or no knowledge of this powerful and influential Jewish-Nazarite monarchy that lay just across the Euphrates. At last one can declare that the Jewish Revolt was precipitated and prosecuted by the king and the princes of Edessa.

This is why the king in the Huqoq mosaic wears Roman armor, a royal diadema headband, long ginger hair, a trimmed beard, a straight nose, a purple cloak, leggings, and the Jewish payot - because this was standard Edessan royal attire. So, the two characters depicted in this mosaic are actually King Izates Manu VI of Edessa and Rabbi Zechariah Abkulas (or perhaps High Priest Phannius). It depicts a famous scene from the *Talmud*, where bar Kamza (King Manu VI) gives a blemished calf from Emperor Nero to the Jerusalem priesthood, hoping it would be rejected in order to provoke the Jewish Revolt.

Quest For The Purple

But this explanation also reveals a hidden Jewish history, a possibility that has never been explored previously. The king in this mosaic wears a purple cloak, which was the sole prerogative of the emperor of Rome, and this strongly suggests that King Izates Manu had designs to become the next emperor. This suggestion is not as unlikely as it may at first seem. After the Pisonian plot to murder Nero in 65 AD, this openly despised emperor was a dead man walking and everyone knew it. Without an obvious dynastic successor to Nero, the Throne of Rome would soon be open anyone with a large treasury and a loyal army. Thus, there was much jostling for position, that ended up with the suicide of Nero in 68 AD and the tumultuous Year of Four Emperors.

Nero at Baiae by Jan Stykia (1900)
*(*Public Domain*)*

If the truth were known, there was a fifth contestant for the Throne of Rome - King Izates Manu VI of Edessa, who controlled much of Syria following the defeat of Cestius; and was about to consolidate the whole of the Levant, including Judea, under his control. However, Rome had sent commander Vespasian to the Levant, and so King Izates Manu got ensnared in a three-way dispute with Jewish forces loyal to Rome and the Roman legions under Vespasian. So while the Jewish Revolt is normally regarded as a simplistic taxation revolt against Rome, it is highly likely to have been a bold bid by the Edessan monarchy for the Throne of Rome.

*Roman Emperor Nero sends Vespasian with an army to put down the Jewish revolt, 66 AD. National Library of Wales. (*CC0*)*

Izates Manu Versus Vespasian

The two contestants for the Throne were commander Vespasian and King Izates Manu VI, and after the dust had settled in Judea, it was Vespasian who sailed to Rome as the next emperor. However had King Izates Manu of Edessa won this Jewish Revolt, the next emperor of Rome would have been a Nazarite Jew. While many historians may dismiss this possibility as improbable, much the same did indeed happen a century and a half later, when Elagabalus became Emperor of Rome. Elagabalus was also from Syria and he venerated the Elagabal-omphalos stone, just as the kings of Edessa had done. The Elagabal stone was reputed to have been Jacob's massebah-stone, which is sometimes translated as a pillar or pillow in the English. It is also called a bethel or House of God, which is what the Edessan monarchy claimed to possess, but the bethel 'stone' was actually an Ark of the Covenant-style box that contained the sacred Elagabal stone. This stone eventually went to Rome with Elagabalus, but went missing after the emperor's sudden but not too unexpected demise.

*Coin of Emperor Elagabalus showing the sacred Elagabal-omphalos stone in a chariot. (*Classical Numismatic Group / CC BY-SA 3.0*)*

Following the failure of the Jewish Revolt and the elevation of Vespasian to the Throne of Rome, this entire history was deemed to be politically 'inconvenient'. Vespasian did not want other minor princelings in the empire deciding to revolt against Rome, and so all references to Edessa and to kings Abgarus and Izates Manu were erased from history, which is why Josephus Flavius never openly mentions them. Likewise, the *Talmud* only mentions them in code, which is why the name bar Kamza (meaning locust) has been used. The only other cryptic reference to the Edessan monarchy is in *Acts of the Apostles*, where a 'prophet' called Agabus gives famine relief to Jerusalem in 47 AD (Acts 11:28) - the very same famine relief that Queen Helena of Edessa sent. Ergo, this biblical Agabus (meaning locust) is actually King Abgarus of Edessa, who was married to Queen Helena.

*Triumph of Titus and Vespasian by Giulio Romano (1537) Louvre Museum (*Public Domain*)*

Huqoq Mosaic: Pivotal Point In Jewish History

In short, the depiction on this mosaic is a lot more complex than the archaeologists at Huqoq have suggested. Here is a very early depiction of King Izates Manu VI of Edessa, the Nazarite Jew who wanted to take over Judeo-Israel as a stepping-stone to taking over the entire Roman Empire. But he lost this battle to Vespasian, was crucified, was reprieved (by Josephus Flavius himself), and then sent into exile.

So, it is not surprising that this ‘Bar Kamza’ mosaic was portrayed in the Huqoq synagogue, alongside all the other momentous events from Judaic history, because the event it portrays is absolutely pivotal within Jewish history. This was the very religio-political spark that ignited the Jewish Revolt - that resulted in the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of the Jewish Diaspora across the Roman Empire. The outcome of the event portrayed in this mosaic was not resolved until 1947, with the establishment of modern Israel. In other words, this mosaic portrays a Grand Central Station of Jewish history, and yet nobody appears to realize it!

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Anatolia's Mighty Phrygia, The Kingdom Of Myth And Midas

Dr. Micki Pistorius

Horseman and griffin, Phrygia, 600–550 BC. (Sailko / CC BY-SA 3.0)

In the western-central arid heartland of ancient Anatolia, the river Sangarios snaked through the ancient Iron Age Kingdom of Phrygia, once a rival to Assyria in the south-east and Urartu in the north-east for domination of the region. The name 'Phrygia' is usually associated with Alexander the Great cutting the famous Gordion Knot, as well as King Midas, the tragic greedy king, who touched his daughter and turned her into gold and in Homer's Iliad, Hecuba, queen of Troy's King Priam, was a princess of Phrygia. Yet the mythical history of this once mighty state reaches further back to the pre-Deluge. In the eastern region of Phrygia, at Iconium, once resided an ancient King Annacus, who lived to be 300 years old and at the end of his reign, 'a great flood drowned the land'. But from the dredges arose another great king, Mannis, whose energetic exploits were so great that the term "manic" derives from his name. Not much is known about the interregnum between King Mannis and the legendary King Gordias, founder of Gordion and a dynasty of Phrygian kings.

Sketch of Phrygians by unknown artist. (Public Domain)

King Gordias And The Gordion Knot

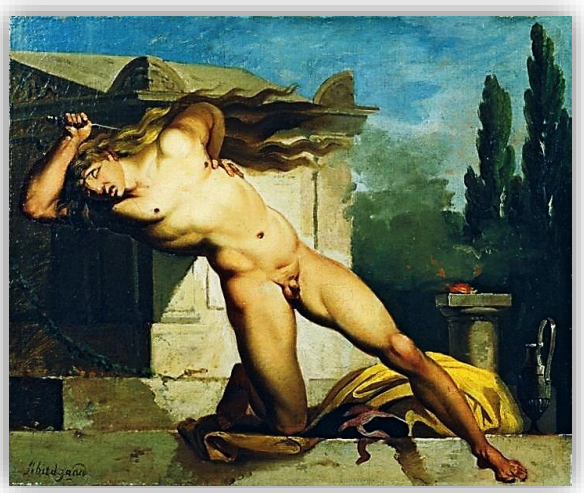
Somewhere between 1200 to 800 BC, at the collapse of the Bronze Age and the entry of the Iron Age, the Macedonian tribe of Bryges migrated to Anatolia. The last of the Bryges royal line was the impoverished Gordias, who by the second millenium BC, travelled to Telmissus on his ox-cart, there to consult the sanctuary of Sabazios, the Thracian sky-god, a nomadic horseman god, who wielded his staff of power. On his way, an eagle came to land on the pole of his cart and Gordias interpreted the omen that he would one day reclaim his rightful inheritance and become a king. At the gates of the sanctuary, he met a sibyl priestess who advised him on a suitable sacrifice and he asked her to marry him. Meanwhile the Phrygians, who were out of a king, were gathered inside the temple asking the oracle for a solution to their conundrum. As fortune would have it, they were informed the first man to drive up to the temple in an ox-wagon would become their king, just as Gordias and his prophetess were approaching on the ox-wagon. King Gordias founded the city of Gordion on the banks of the Sangarios river as his new capital and tied his ox-wagon to a pole in a temple on the acropolis, with the now-famous Gordion Knot.

Alexander the Great Cutting the Gordian Knot by Jean-François Godefroy (1767) (Public Domain)

Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus described the knot as comprising "*several knots all so tightly entangled that it was impossible to see how they were fastened*". The sky god Sabazios was considered a hybrid of Zeus and Dionysos and some historians such as Robert Graves suggested the knot may have been represented the ineffable name of Dionysus, knotted like a cypher, guarded by priests and priestesses and revealed only to the kings of Phrygia. Alexander the Great must have considered himself a descendant of this royal bloodline, since King Gordias originated from Macedonia. By the time Alexander arrived, Phrygia was a satrapy of the Persian empire, but the ox-wagon with the knot was still standing in Gordion and the oracle stated who-ever could undo the knot would become the ruler of all of Asia. The legend that Alexander had sliced the knot in two with his sword, was disputed by Plutarch who reported that Alexander had pulled the linchpin from the yoke, which revealed the ends of the knot and enabled him to untie it. Alexander fulfilled the prophesy and conquered Asia.

King Gordias' family was not without tragedy. He had a son called Adrastus, who had accidently killed his brother and was exiled by his father. According to Herodotus, Adrastus obtained catharsis from King Croesus of Lydia, (just south-west of Phrygia) who accepted him as a hostage

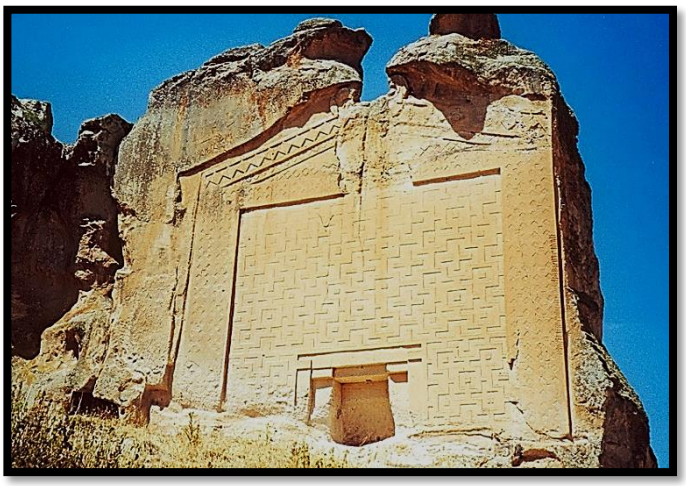
prince. At some time, the Mysians (just north -west of Phrygia) appealed to King Croesus to send someone to rid them of an enormous boar. Reluctantly King Croesus allowed his son Prince Atys to go and fight the boar, but only on condition that Prince Adrastus would accompany him, to guard him. The hunting party encircled the boar and hurled their spears at it. Tragically, Adrastus' spear struck and killed his friend, Prince Atys, whereupon Adrastus was so distraught at having killed two princes accidently in his lifetime, that he committed suicide. But King Gordias' legendary dynasty of Phrygian kings still managed to survive.



Adrastos slays himself on Atys' tomb by Nicolai Abidlgaard (1776) (Public Domain)

The Curse Of King Midas

Sabazios, the deity whom King Gordias had imported to Phrygia, came into conflict with the much older goddess of the region, Cybele. According to legend in order to appease Cybele, King Gordias agreed to adopt Midas, with Cybele as his mother. Other histories refer to Midas as already born to Gordias and the priestess from Telmissus, while Herodotus has Midas as the son of Gordias who immigrated with him from Bryges. Whatever the case of his parentage, Midas became King of Phrygia and according to Ovid in *Metamorphoses XI*, one night in a drunken walk-about, the satyr Silenus had wandered off and found himself in Phrygia, where he was brought before the king. Midas entertained and hosted him for ten days, before returning him to Dionysus in Lydia. So pleased was Dionysus with the return of Silenus, that he offered Midas any reward he wished for. Midas requested everything he touched should be turned into gold. When his food turned into inedible gold, Midas' joy turned into despair, but when he tried to comfort his daughter and she turned into gold, his wish became a tragedy. Midas prayed to Dionysus to relieve him of the curse and Dionysus instructed him to wash himself and all the gold objects in the river Pactolus, which explains the rich gold deposit in the river.



The Midas Monument, a Phrygian rock-cut tomb dedicated to Midas (700 BC). (Public Domain)

Historical King Midas

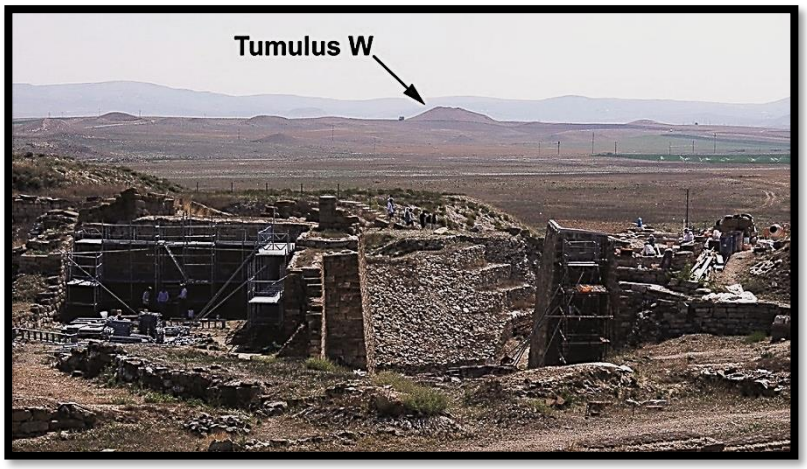
Aside from the legendary King Midas with the golden touch, there existed a historical eight-century BC King Midas, who was married to Princess Damodice, daughter of Agamemnon of Cyme, a city on the west coast of Anatolia, at the Aegean Sea. King Midas probably cemented trade relations with the Greek King Agamemnon of Cyme by marrying his daughter. Julius Pollux, a second-century Greek scholar and rhetorician from Naucratis, Egypt, credited Damodice with inventing coins, although he lived several centuries after her. During the reign of Assyrian King Sargon II, clay tablets record Mita, king of the Mushki, as an ally of Sargon by 709 BC, but thereafter attacking Assyria's eastern Anatolian provinces. Assyrians considered Midas as Mita the king of the Mushki because he had subjected the eastern Anatolian people of that name and incorporated them into his army. The historical King Midas came to a sad end when he committed suicide when his ancestral Gordion was sacked by the Cimmerians.

Aerial overview of the Citadel Mound of Gordion (Gordion Archive, Penn Museum / CC BY-SA 4.0)

The Ancient City Of Gordion

If legendary King Gordias was the founder of Gordion, he chose the location very well. Today only the ruins of the ancient city of Gordion (at modern Yassıhüyük, about 70–80 kilometers /43–50 miles south-west of Ankara, the modern capital of Turkey) remain, but it is clear that the city was once a prosperous trade centre. It lies at confluence of the Sangarius (now Sakarya) and Porsuk rivers, where the trade route between Lydia and Assyria/Babylonia crossed. The land here was fertile and the city had been occupied since the Early Bronze Age (c. 2300 BC) continuously until the fourth century AD, whereafter it lay abandoned until new settlements dating to the 13th and 14th centuries AD were established.

Gordion was dominated by the citadel mount, providing a clear view of the surrounding landscape. During the tenth to ninth centuries BC, massive fortification walls and a 10-meter East Gate were constructed around the citadel. Behind the safety of the walls, stood several megaron-plan buildings with beautiful mosaic flooring, which served as administrative buildings and a large assembly hall. The large Terrace Building Complex had eight interconnected rooms and were used for domestic purposes such as grinding, cooking, and weaving and storage, in service of the royal elite, however at some stage, this massive building burnt down.

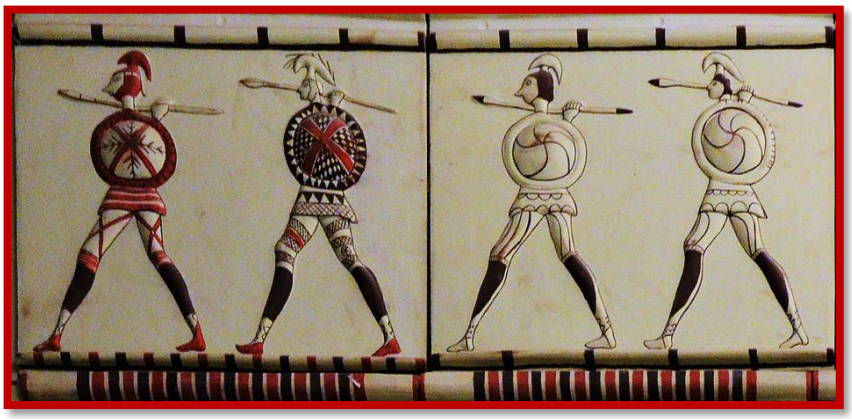


View through the Early Phrygian East Citadel Gate at Gordion looking towards Tumulus W (c. 850 BC) (Gordion Archive, Penn Museum/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

After the fire, the citadel was rebuilt, and it was expanded with the Kus Tepe fort in the north and the Küçük Höyük fort in the south. The whole new complex was encircled by a strong defensive wall, which included the lower town. Below the new wall sprawled the old town, protected by another wall and a ditch. By this time the Kingdom of Phrygia had expanded to such an extent, it controlled much of Asia Minor west of the river Halys, with Gordion as its capital.

King Midas' reign ended in 675 BC, when Gordion was sacked by the Cimmerians, an Indo-European tribe migrating from the Pontic-Caspian steppe. The invading Cimmerians had formed an alliance with the Urartian King Rusa II, and destroyed the kingdom of Phrygia. After King Midas' suicide the victors partially subdued the Phrygians, according to an Assyrian oracular text dated 670s BC. The Cimmerians had left no written record. The bloodline of the Gordions ended with

King Midas and Phrygia was never again a kingdom, as it was dissected by various conquering empires.



Phrygian soldiers. Detail from a reconstruction of a Phrygian building at Pararli, Turkey (seventh–sixth centuries BC) (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Phrygia Under Foreign Rule

By the sixth century BC, the Kingdom of Lydia had become the dominant power in the region, but this was ended by 546 BC with the rising of Cyrus the Great's expansion of the Achaemenid empire into the region. There are clear indications at Küçük Höyük fort at Gordion of an Achaemenid siege in 546 BC, attested by the ruins of the siege ramp. After its capture, the capital of the Hellspontine Phrygia was moved from Gordion to Daskyleion, on the Sea of Marmara. Gordion however did not deteriorate during this time and a structure built in 500 BC displays beautiful frescoes of women in a procession.

By the fourth century a new threat emerged from the west. King Ageselaus II ascended the Spartan throne in 400 BC. By then Sparta was acknowledged as overlord of the Greek city states in Asia Minor and in 401 BC, the year just before Ageselaus became king, Sparta had supported Cyrus the Younger against his brother Artaxerxes II of Persia. This is the time when Ageselaus' friend Xenophon led the famous 10,000 Spartans back home, after Cyrus' defeat by Artaxerxes. In his youth Ageselaus, was the lover of the Spartan general Lysander, who had led the Spartan fleet, sponsored by the Persians, against Athens, which ended the Peloponnesian War. After Ageselaus became king, Lysander served him and in 397 BC, they led an expedition into Asia Minor and landed in Ephesus, where they met up with the survivors of Xenophon's 10,000, who recognized Lysander as their old commander, which angered Ageselaus, who sacked Lysander.

Meeting between Spartan king Ageselaus (left) and Pharnabazus II (right) in 395 BC, when Ageselaus agreed to remove himself from Hellespontine Phrygia. Edmund Oliver (1882) (Public Domain)

Without Lysander, Ageselaus' Phrygian campaign in 394 BC failed, as he lacked the siege equipment required to take the fortresses of Leonton Kephalai,

Gordion, and Miletou Teichos. Satrap Pharnabazus II of Hellespontine Phrygia, easily convinced Ageselaus to leave.

In 333 BC the Macedonian armies of Alexander the Great marched through Anatolia, replacing Phrygian material culture with Greek and Alexander confirming his intended sovereignty over Asia by undoing the Gordion knot. Alexander's successors, the Diadochi were involved in several wars after his death. In 301 BC the Battle of Ipsus in Phrygia, was fought on elephants between the aging Antigonus I Monophthalmus, ruler of Phrygia, and his son Demetrius I of Macedon against the coalition of Cassander, ruler of Macedon; Lysimachus, ruler of Thrace; and Seleucus I Nicator, ruler of Babylonia and Persia. The battle ended with the death of Antigonus.

The Battle of Ipsus by James D. McCabe (1877) (Public Domain)

By the middle of the third century BC Bythinia was a Roman province on the Black Sea, that bordered Mysia to the south-west, Paphlagonia to the north-east along the Pontic coast, and Phrygia to the south-east. Its King, Nicomedes I hired Gauls from Thrace as mercenaries, who turned rogue and sacked cities including Gordion. By 269 BC the army of Antiochus I Soter (son of Seleucus I Nicator) faced the rogue Gauls on the plain of Sardis in the Battle of Elephants, and in the aftermath of the battle they settled in northern Phrygia, a region that eventually came to be known as Galatia. By now Gordion was completely destroyed.

By 188 BC Phrygia was under the rule of the Attalid Dynasty of Pergamon and by 133 BC it passed to Rome, when it was divided into several provinces. After defeating the Byzantine Empire in the Middle Ages, the Turks dominated the region and signs of occupation exist at Gordion. The conquest by the Ottoman empire in the 15th century AD did not have much impact on the ruins of Gordion. Yet in 1921 Gordion once more became a battlefield in the Greco-Turkish war during the Battle of Sakarya, when the old citadel and some of the tumuli were used as defensive points for the soldiers.

Man in Phrygian costume, Hellenistic period third–first century BC), Cyprus (CC BY-SA 3.0)

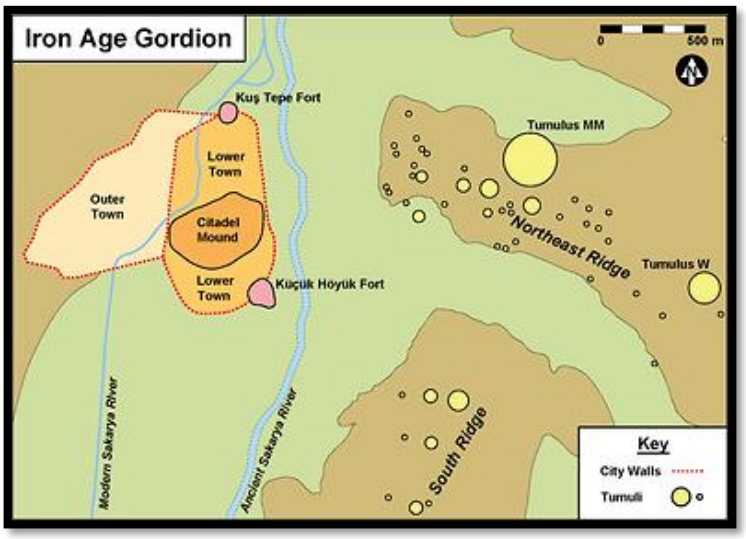
The Tumuli Of Gordion

Gordion is known for its tumuli – almost a hundred were discovered in the north-east ridge and the south ridge, dating to between the ninth to the sixth century BC. The so-called the "Tomb of Midas" discovered in 1957, revealed a wooden structure enclosed inside a vast tumulus, containing grave goods, bronze and pottery vessels, inlaid furniture, food offerings and the body of a 60-year old man, lying on a purple and golden cloth, clearly indicating royalty. Although called the Midas Tomb, it was built in 740 BC before the date of Midas' death, therefore it is suggested that the body would rather have belonged to the generation of Midas' father.

Reconstruction of the Tumulus MM burial, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, Turkey. (Public Domain)

Archaeology Of Gordion

At the turn of the 20th century the brothers Gustav and Alfred Kōrte excavated the site, followed by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Professor Rodney Young of the University of Pennsylvania speculated that the eastern wing of the Citadel Mount was burnt around 800 BC, and could therefore not have been burnt during the destruction by the Cimmerian attack. Radiocarbon dating and dendrochronological analysis undertaken in 2000, confirmed his initial hypotheses. After the fire, the inhabitants covered the ruins with five layers of clay – thereby preserving artifacts of the Early Phrygian Period, and rebuilt the Citadel, heralding the Middle Phrygian Period. Extensive archaeological excavations centered around the Terrace Building complex, which was destroyed during the fire.



Overview of the main settlement and cemetery areas at Iron Age Gordion (after Rose and Darbyshire 2011 fig. 0.1, Rose 2017 fig. 9) (Gordionproject / CC BY-SA 4.0)

Since 2013 the Gordion Project, headed by Professor Charles Brian Rose, has focussed on the southern fortifications and the approach to the Citadel. The southern gate was constructed in the ninth century BC, with bastions added in the eight and sixth centuries BC, as well as a 65-meter (213 feet) causeway. A sculpture of a lion was discovered at this gate. The south bastion of the East Gate suffered damage during the 1990 earthquake and is being restored.

Approach road to the South Gate at Gordion. (Gordion Archive, Penn Museum/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

The Phrygian Cap, Symbol of Freedom

The Phrygians did not only leave a legacy of rich mythology and valuable archaeology, but also a lasting symbol of freedom – the Phrygian cap - a soft leather or woollen, usually red, conical cap with the apex bent over. By the fourth century BC, Attis the consort of Cybele was depicted wearing this Phrygian cap, as was King Midas. Since the Greeks viewed all nations to their East collectively as "barbarians" even Trojans, Thracians, Amazons and Scythians were all depicted wearing the Phrygian cap, and trousers. In Mithraism, the Roman mystery cult with origins in the East, Mithras was also identified with the Phrygian cap, which interestingly also features in depictions of nativity scenes on the heads of the Three Wise Men of the East.

Roman Imperial Attis, the consort of Phrygian goddess Cybele wearing a Phrygian cap and performing a cult dance (Public Domain)

Although this item of clothing was originally endowed with religious symbolism by the Phrygians, its freedom connotation evolved later. In Republican Rome, the Roman *pileum* was a brimless felt hat, used in a manumission ceremony of a slave. The praetor or master would first tap the slave with a rod called *vindicta* and then place the pileum on his shaven head. In such a way both the *vindicta* and the pileum became symbols of freedom.

Bust of French Marianne, wearing the Phrygian cap. Luxembourg Palace, seat of the French Senate. (CC BY-SA 2.5) and American Columbia in a World War I patriotic poster (Public Domain)

By the 18th century the Roman pileum freedom cap was confused with the Phrygian cap in English and French prints, but the symbolism of liberty had by then been so firmly embedded that the red cap became characteristic of the French Revolution. Marianne, wearing the red cap, became a personification of liberty, equality, fraternity and reason, embodied as the Goddess of Liberty. Even in America the cap featured as a symbol of republicanism and anti-monarchial sentiment in the figure of Columbia, the female personification of the Americas.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

ANKARA - HATTUSA - CAPPADOCIA

The Royal Bloodline Of The Hittite Empire

Dr. Micki Pistorius

The lion gate of The Hattusa (nejdetduzen /Adobe Stock)

Tainted by regicide, usurped, regained, inspired by gods and goddesses and even cursed, the royal bloodline of the Bronze Age Hittites flowed through the plains of Anatolia, as the kings expanded and contracted the borders of their mighty empire. By 2200 BC Indo-European tribes moved into Anatolia (Turkey) by crossing the Caucasus Mountains and by way of the Black Sea. The land was inhabited by the Hatti and the newcomers – later called the Hittites – adopted many place names of the Hatti language and incorporated Hatti gods into their religion. Besides names and gods, the Hittites also seized the city states and kingdoms of the Hatti. By 1950 BC Assyrians had also established trade colonies (kārum) in the region.

The regions of the Hittite Empire. Halpa is Aleppo. (CC BY-SA 3.0)

It is from the written sources, that archaeologists have pieced together the history of the Hittites. The heart of the Assyrian trade colonies was Neša / Kanesh / Kűltepe, situated in central Anatolia, where the story of the bloodline begins.

Laying the Groundwork: Conquering The Hatti's (18th or 17th Century BC)

The Bronze Age King Pithana of Kussara conquered the city Neša (Kűltepe, close to modern Kayseri) and this city became the initial seat of what later developed into the Hittite empire. Kussara faded into history and its archaeological remains are yet to be confirmed to be close to modern Divrigi. A document discovered in Hattusa (Bogazkōy) details the wars and victories of Anitta, son of Pithana, King of Kussara. King Pithana is said to have conquered the city of Neša (Kűltepe) in a night, captured its king and the document takes pains to mention that the civilians were unharmed. After King Pithana's demise, the city Neša revolted against the Hittite overlords. (This was known as a city of revolt, as during the reign of the great Akkadian Naram-Sin (circa 2254–2218 BC) King Zipani of Neša, then called Kaneš, conspired with 17 local city-kings to rise in revolt.)

Bronze dagger of King Anitta found at Kűltepe (Klaus-Peter Simon /CC BY-SA 3.0)

King Anitta, (ca. 1740-1725 BC middle chronology) son and heir of Pithana, supressed the revolt and made Kaneš / Neša his capital. King Anitta expanded his territory westwards and invaded Zalpuwa (also as yet undiscovered) captured its king Huzziya, and recovered the Šiuš idol (called Siusummi in the *Anitta Text*) that was stolen by the king of Zalpuwa, Uhna from Neša. In the text King Anitta boasts he brought two lions, 70 wild boars, 120 bears, leopards, deer and ibex to Neša.

King Anitta had established the first Hittite Kingdom, stretching from the Black Sea to the southern parts of central Anatolia. In the process he had also defeated the Hatti King Piyusti of the city of Hattusa, which had been the established capital of the Hatti since 2500 BC. Hattusa's defences were weakened by famine when King Anitta seized it. He raised it to the ground, sowed weeds over the site and cursed it, forbidding his descendants to settle there. However, in the 17th century BC, King Anitta's descendants moved their capital to the cursed Hattusa, rebuilt it and thus founded the bloodline of Hittite kings in Hattusa.

Reconstruction of the fortified walls of Hattusa with the ruins in the foreground. (Wirestock / Adobe Stock)

Old Hittite Kingdom (1700 – 1500 BC)

The beginning of the era of the Old Kingdom is shrouded in the mists of antiquity as there may have been a King PU-Sarruma or Hišmi-Šarruma, whose sons turned against him, so he named his son-in-law Labarna, as his successor. Labarna I is traditionally considered the first true king of the Hittites, and founder of the Old Kingdom – Labarna could also be a title conferred upon kings, but the *Telipinu Proclamation* composed much later during the reign of King Telipinu, (circa 1550 BC) mentions Labarna as a king and ancestor. Labarna expanded his realm and installed his sons as governors in several cities including Tuwanuwa, Hupisna, Landa, and Lusna (all as yet not archaeologically confirmed).

Ḫattušili I, (ca. 1650–1620 BC) a possible grandson of Labarna, is believed to be the first Hittite king who defied his ancestor Anitta's curse and ruled from Hattusa, thus calling himself Ḫattušili. His defiance of the curse was a strategic move, to avoid Hurrian advances and to establish himself as an independent ruler. Hattusa was situated in a region with abundant sources of water, dense forests and fertile land. It would have been a shame not to take advantage of such a location. He built his royal citadel on the outcrop of a rock towering above the city.

Ruins of the palace of Ḫattušili I at Büyükkaya site in Hattusa (Ingeborg Simon / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Since his ancestor King Anitta's eradication of the Assyrian *kārum*, the Anatolian trade routes had been disrupted. The mineral rich regions – copper, silver and lead– lay to the north and east in Anatolia. Access to tin could be secured by controlling the north-western trade route coming in from the Balkans in Central Europe, through the Dardanelles, situated in Wilusa. Control of the southern shores of the Sea of Marmara was a point of contention between the Ahhiyawa, the Arzawa and the Hittites. So Ḫattušili figured if he could establish a route from Hattusa through the Cilician Gates pass of the Taurus Mountain and from there to the Mediterranean, he could capitalize on the south-eastern trade route. However, the Kingdom of

Yamhad, with their centre in Halab / Halpa (Aleppo) stood in the way of his ambitious plans. Yamhad was the gateway of trade between the east and the western route to the Mediterranean.

Ḫattušili mobilized and successfully moved his troops through the Cilician Gates, all the way south and secured the city state of Alalakh, a vassal of Yamhad (in the Amuq River valley, Syria). It is speculated that Ḫattušili for some reason, despite his success at Alalakh, decided to try and secure the Balkan trade route. This meant he had to turn west to Arzawa, to capture Wilusa, which he did, before returning to Alalakh. Archaeological records state the destruction of Alalakh by Ḫattušili can be firmly located as a "fire and conflagration" around 1650 BC. Upon his deathbed, Ḫattušili I proclaimed his grandson Mursili I as his successor, since his own son and his mother (Ḫattušili I's queen) had been conspiring to take the crown.

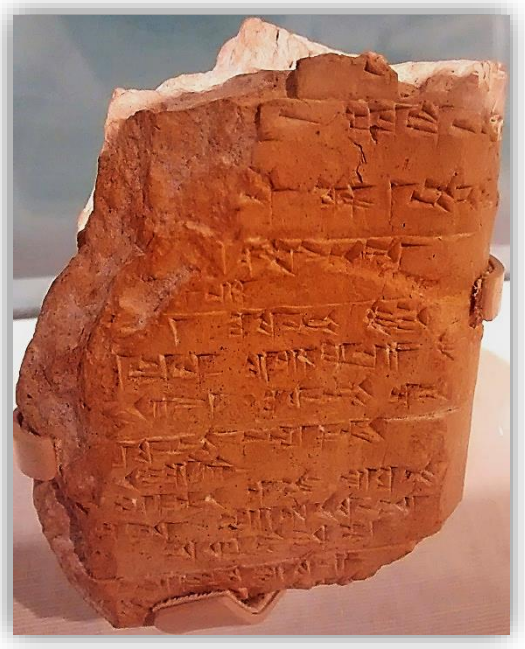
Mursili I (1620 – 1590 BC) did not give up on his grandfather's ambition to secure the tin trade and turned upon Halab (Aleppo) capital of the Kingdom of Yamhad, who was in alliance with Babylon, both Amorite states, at that stage. Mursili I formed an alliance with the state of Hana, to encircle Halab and disrupt the trade route. The strategy was successful and thus the south-eastern trade route fell into the Hittite hands. Spurred on by Hana, Mursili I turned his troops on Babylon, where he brought the dynasty of Hammurabi to an end (circa 1531 /1595 BC). Mursili I returned to his capital at Hattusa, welcomed by his wife, Kali, his sister Ḫarapšili, and his brother-in-law Hantili I, who was also his cupbearer. Scarcely had he settled into the safety of his own palace when he was assassinated by Hantili I and Hantili's son-in-law, Zidanta I.

Relief of Hittite women, possibly Ḫarapšili.
Museum Anatolian Civilizations
(Nevit Dilmen/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Ḫattušili I and his grandson Mursili I had established the Hittites as a world superpower, yet palace revolts and succession rivalries often weaken a state, as was the case of the Hittites after Mursili's reign. Hantili I ruled for 30 years, but the reign had been cursed by royal bloodshed and the kingdom disintegrated piece by piece. The Hurrians encroached upon Hittite territory through north Syria, and Arzawa to the west broke away to independence. Hantili mobilized to the city of Carchemish to conduct a military campaign against the advancing Hurrians. On his return journey to Hattusa, he regretted killing the king and cursed his son-in-law Zidanta for persuading him to commit regicide. He appointed Pišeni as his heir, but at the end of Hantili's life, Zidanta killed Pišeni, and became king. He reigned for ten years, but his fate was sealed when his own son Ammuna, killed him, to become king. Not

only did Ammuna continue the pattern of regicide, now tainting the Hittite royal bloodline, he also lost territory. His successor was his son Huzziya I, who also had rivals killed and only ruled for five years. Huzziya had a sister, Isparaya, who was married to Telipinu.

Telipinu deposed Huzziya and sent him into exile and took the throne. Some believe Telipinu was a rightful son of Ammuna. Arzawa in the West, Mitanni in the East, Kaşka in the North, and Kizzuwatna in the South had now all been lost from the former mighty Hittite empire. Telipinu uncovered a plot to assassinate him, but in an attempt to end the cycle of assassination that had plagued the royal Hittite bloodline, he banished the assassins and did not execute them. He composed the *Edict of Telipinu*, specifying successorship, in an attempt to stop the murders. "*Let a prince – a son of the first rank only be installed as king! If a prince of the first rank does not exist, (then) let he who is a son of second rank become king. But if there is no prince, no male issue, (then) let them take an antiyant-husband for she who is a first rank daughter, and let him become king*".



Hittite Cuneiform Tablet: Legal Deposition. Oriental Institute (CC0)

However, Telipinu had banished his own daughter Princess Harapšeki's and her husband, Alluwamna to Malitashkur, so upon his death, Tahurwaili, his first cousin came to power. Not much is known about Tahurwaili's reign but he was succeeded by Alluwamna. Telipinu's demise heralded the beginning of the Middle Kingdom period of the Hittites.

The Middle Kingdom Hundred Years Of Mediocrity

This period is considered the 'Dark Ages' of the Hittite rule, with one mediocre ruler following another. The contracted kingdom did not expand and the bloodline was usurped by imposters.

Alluwamna, Princess Harapšeki's husband and Telipinu's banished son-in-law eventually came into power as the first of the Middle Kingdom rulers. Not much is known of his reign, except that it was passed on to his son Hantili II. Tahurwaili, a cousin of Telipinu ruled either just after Telipinu or after Hantilli II. Zidanta II (c. 1450), either Hantili II's cousin or son succeeded him, followed by Huzziya II. He was killed by Muwatalli I, the chief of the royal bodyguard or Huzziya's younger brother, who usurped the crown. Muwatalli I himself was killed by Himuili, the Chief of the Palace

Servants, and Kantuzili, the Overseer of the Gold Chariot Fighters, which ends the mediocre Middle Kingdom.

Tudhaliya relief Yazılıkaya. (trofotodesign /Adobe Stock)

The New Kingdom 1400 – 1180 BC

The royal bloodline was restored when Tudhaliya I, the grandson of the Middle Kingdom ruler Huzziya II took the throne. Their territory had contracted and the Hittite kings had to contend with a new major global power Egypt, moving in to Syria. Around 1440 BC King Thutmose III of Egypt conquered Aleppo. Scarcely after the demise of Thutmose, the Hittites instigated a revolt in Aleppo in 1436 BC. Tudhaliya re-established an old alliance with the Kizzuwadna, and managed to defeat not only Aleppo but also the Mitanni. The flickering flame of the conquering Old Kingdom Hittites had been momentarily ignited and the south-eastern trade route was back in Hittite hands.

Spurred by his success Tudhaliya turned to the west, like his ancestor Ḫattušili I and battled an old enemy, the Arzawa. By now city states to the north-west banded together to form an alliance called Assuwa. This alliance was defeated, but one of the constituents, Ahhiyawa, under King Attarsiyas scored victories against the Hittite vassal of Madduwattas. Tudhaliya consequently lost control of the north-western trade route. In the north Tudhaliya faced hostility from the Kaşkas (Gasga) people on the southern shore of the Black Sea and to the north-east he had to deal with Azzi, Hayasa and Isuwa. Isuwa was rich in copper mines. Tudhaliya was surrounded by enemies enclosing on Hattusa, which was eventually raised and burnt to the ground. The flame of the Old Kingdom conquerors was all but extinguished, perhaps due to the curse of King Anitta. So great was the defeat that the old enemy, the king of Arzawa did not even deem to attack Hattusa on his way east in an attempt to seize the south-eastern trade route.

The royal bloodline did not perish, and a glowing ember would soon ignite to become one of the greatest Hittite emperors. King Tudhaliya's daughter Princess Ašmu-nikal's husband Arnuwanda became a king by marriage. Arnuwanda was a very religious man, but he had no military ambitions. Arnuwanda had fled to Samuha, a longstanding religious centre of the Hittites on the northern bank of Kizil Irma, while the Kaşkas were plundering Hattusa.

Prayers of Arnuwanda and Asmu-Nikkal, 14th century BC, from Hattusa, Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

(There is reference to a Hattusili II in this time, whose existence as a Hittite king is disputed) King Arnuwanda I and his wife of the royal bloodline, Queen Ašmu-nikal had a son, Tudhaliya II. There is some confusion that Tudhaliya II had a son Tudhaliya III, or that Tudhaliya II was also referred to as Tudhaliya III. Be that as it may, Tudhaliya II was married to Queen Daduhepa and they had a son Suppiluliuma I.

Suppiluliuma I was to became the Hittite king that would restore the lost honor of the Hittites. As a general to his father, from the temporary seat of the city of Samuha, Suppiluliuma I launched attacks on the Azzi-Hayasa and the Kaşkas and was so successful that he reclaimed Hattusa. The Hittites were back in power in their home city. Some say he assassinated Tudhaliya II (and III), but Suppiluliuma I became the Hittite king. He retook Arzawan territory as far as Hapalla, reinstated the alliance with the Kizzuwanda and conquered the Mitanni kingdom, which he reduced to a vassal state under his son-in-law Shattiwazza. He also took Aleppo and Carchemish. The Hittites were back in business and controlled the Euphrates trade route.

Suppiluliuma I did not fall in the trap like his ancestor Mursili, who had attacked Babylon. Instead he banished his wife Queen Henti, sister to the Hayasan king Hukkana, to Ahhiyawa and married the Babylonian princess Malnigal, daughter of King Burna-Buriash II. Malnigal took on the Hittite title of Tawananna. The Tawananna acted as regent ruler when the king was away fighting in battle and was the High Priestess while the king was High Priest. The current wife of the king could not become Tawananna, whilst the existing one (probably the king's mother or sister) was still alive, often resulting in bitter rivalries between the royal women.

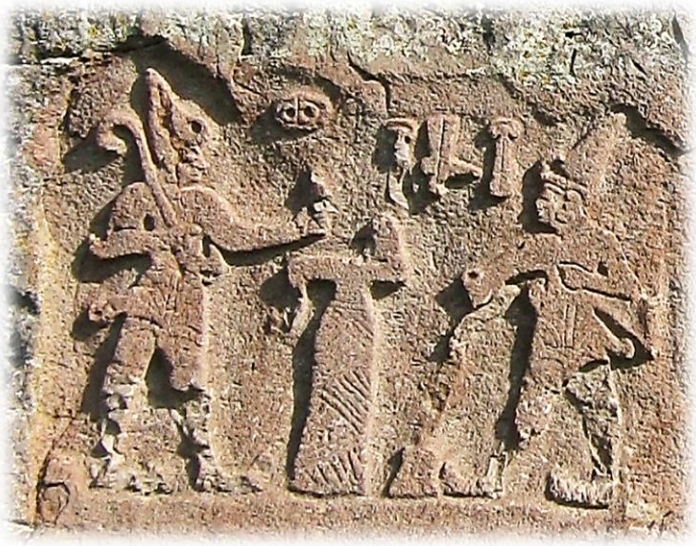
The Hittite Empire at its greatest extent under Suppiluliuma I (c. 1350–1322 BC) (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Another alliance by marriage was on the cards, when the widow of Egyptian Tutankhamun, Dakhamunzu, implored him to send one of his sons to her as a husband. Suppiluliuma complied and sent his younger son, Prince Zannanza, who was assassinated by Pharaoh Ay on the way. Suppiluliuma retaliated by unleashing his armies against Egypt's vassal states in Canaan and Northern Syria, capturing much territory. Unfortunately, the Egyptian prisoners carried a plague which would eventually ravage the Hittite heartland and lead to the deaths of both Suppiluliuma I and his successor, Arnuwanda II in 1334 BC.

The Hittite reign fell unto the shoulders of another of Suppiluliuma's sons; Mursili II, son of Queen Henti. Scarcely had he taken over the reins, when the Kaşkas in the north, King Uhhaziti of the Arzawa kingdom in south-west and the Hayasa-Azzi confederation in the north-east revolted. They however made a grave mistake in underestimating Mursili II. Like his ancestor and namesake, he suppressed the uprisings, launched a full-scale attack on Arzawa and expanded his father's empire, right up to Wilusa. He built a line of fortresses in the north which contained border raids from the Kaşkas and regained Mitanni from the Assyrians.

Hittite empire during the reign of Mursili II. (Public Domain)

The border fortresses in the north crumbled after the death of Mursili II and his son and successor Muwatalli suffered another humiliating defeat when Hattusa was lost to the Kaşkas once again. Muwatalli fled south and established his court at Tarhuntassa (no archaeological discovery as yet of the site). Having lost Hattusa, Muwatalli managed to keep control of the west and the vassal states pledged their support. Support much needed for from the south Egypt impinged on his territory.



Relief of Hattusili III at Firaktin (Krähenstein/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Muwatalli was most famous as the opponent of Rameses II in the Battle of Kadesh on the river Orontes in 1286 BC. Despite the boasting of Rameses II, the victory belonged to the Hittites who remained in control, but since Muwatalli's attention was so focussed on Kadesh, Assyria took advantage and regained Mitanni as a vassal.

Upon Muwatalli's death in 1272 BC, a succession rivalry and palace revolt ensued between Muwatalli's son Mursili III (Urhi-Teshub) and his uncle Hattusili III. Mursuli III was the son of Muwatalli's concubine, not his queen. During his short reign Mursili III managed to revert the Hittite capital from Tarhuntassa back to Hattusa, while his rival Hattusili III occupied Hakpissa. Hattusili III had fought alongside his brother Muwatalli at Kadesh and his valor earned him the alliance of many, even the Kaşkas, in a revolt against Mursili III. He defeated Mursili III, who fled to Egypt. Diplomatic ties between Egypt and the Hittites soured when Ramesses denied any knowledge of Mursili in his country. Ramesses and Hattusili III finally signed a peace treaty of Kadesh, 16 years after the battle.

Hittite version of Treaty of Kadesh, discovered at Hattusa. Museum of the Ancient Orient (CC BY-SA 3.0)

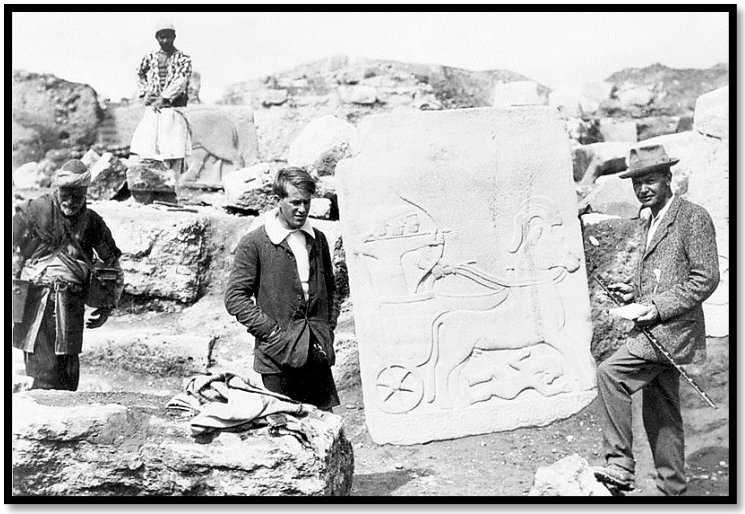
Upon returning from the Battle of Kadesh, Hattusili travelled via Lawazantiya (in Cilicia), the cultic city of the goddess Šauška, where he met the priestess Puduhepa, daughter of Bentepsharri, the head priest of the tutelary divinity. Šauška can be identified with the Mesopotamian Ishtar. The goddess Šauška instructed him to take Puduhepa as his wife. When Hattusili ascended the throne around 1286 BC, Puduḫepa became Tawananna, or queen and moved into Hattusa. She has been referred to as "one of the most influential women known from the Ancient Near East", as she co-ruled with Hattusili.

Hittite relief from Firaktin .The figure on the right is Queen Puduḫepa (Klaus-Peter Simon / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Puduhepa, retained her status as Tawananna, as the mother of her son and heir to the throne Tudhaliya IV.

Perhaps because Hattusili III had been forced to live in Hakpissa, he must have looked on with envy when his nephew Mursuli III regained ancestral Hattusa as the capital. When Hattusili ousted Mursili, he moved into Hattusa with his queen, Puduhepa and vowed to restore it to its former glory. He died before he could complete it. His son Tudhaliya IV and Puduhepa carried on the restoration. They renovated the acropolis and expanded the city's size. A great new temple complex was built in the Upper City – Hattusa had 31 temples within its walls. Massive fortification walls were built, punctuated by towers.

Puduhepa had to oversee the restoration, while her son Tudhaliya IV went off to war. The Assyrians had grasped the copper mines from Isuwa in the East, but Tudhaliya IV managed to hold on to Carchemish further south, thereby securing the ports on the Syrian coast, from where he launched an attack on Cyprus, with its rich copper mines. In the north-west Ahhiyawa was gaining strength in its revolt against the Hittites. Severe drought scourged the land and Tudhaliya built 13 dams, but harvests were failing. Tudhaliya appealed to Egypt and Ugarit for grain.



Early Hittite artifact found by T. E. Lawrence and Leonard Woolley (right) in Carchemish. (Public Domain)

The power struggle between the Assyrians and the Hittites over Mitanni culminated in the Battle of Nihriya, c. 1230 BC, when King Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria defeated Tudhaliya. From there-on it was downhill again for the Hittite empire.

Tudhaliya was succeeded by Kurunta, his cousin and another son of Muwatalli II. There were no initial hostilities between the two cousins, as both were raised by Hattusili III. Kurunta also supported his uncle Hattusili III in the succession rivalry against his brother Mursili III. So it was natural for him to assume the title Great King when the time came, as he was already vassal king of Tarhuntassa. Tudhaliya IV's son and successor, Arnuwanda III in Hattusa, was not so happy, but he did not reign long enough to make any difference.

Another star was on the rise. As his ancestor and namesake, Suppiluliuma II, the younger son of Tudḫaliya IV, became the last known king of the New Kingdom of the Hittite Empire. He launched attacks against Kurunta, the vassal Tarhuntassa, and against Alasiya in Cyprus - known as the first naval battle in history. Supplilulіuma II not only sought access to the copper mines of Cyprus, he also had to battle the pirates who disrupted the ships brining the grain supplies from Egypt.

Relief of Suppiluliuma II, king of the Hittites (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Suppiluliuma II scored another victory when he wrenched the Isuwa copper mines from the Assyrians, but this was in vain. He was the last Hittite king to occupy and abandon Hattusa, for from the north-west came an invading scourge which swept like a tsunami over Anatolia. The Sea Peoples had landed, Arzawa and the north-west trade route fell. Like locusts, they swept everything in their way and left Hattusa in ashes in their wake, an easy take at last for the Kaşkas people. Suppiluliuma II simply vanished. Through the Cilician Gates the invaders poured and destroyed as they went. The copper mines of Cyprus fell, and they ravaged northern Syria. The continued down the Levant, until they were finally stopped by Ramesses III of Egypt, but it was too late for the Hittite empire.

Did King Anitta's curse finally come true? Archaeological evidence indicates that Hattusa was already abandoned when it was set on fire. Its inhabitants had fled, taking their valuables and records with them. Where did they go? Archaeological evidence shows at Carchemish on the Euphrates a branch of the Hittite royal family survived for several centuries, after the fall of Hattusa. Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of baked tablets from the ruins of Hattusa, at Kadesh and even in Egypt, recording the history of the Hittites, reviving them literally from the ashes of history. These tablets were correspondence between Bronze Age kings, vassal states, prayers, ritual texts, edicts, mythological texts and even a son (Tudhaliya IV) writing to his mother (Puduhepa). Many were written in Akkadian, the diplomatic language of the time, but they were also written in Nesite – the language of the Hittites, recognised in 1902 by a Norwegian scholar J.A Knudtzon as an Indo-European language, and confirmed by Bedrich Hzozny in 1915. On seals and monumental rock inscriptions, the Hittites used a hieroglyphic script in Luwian language. The Hittites may have risen and ruled Anatolia only for a thousand years, but their legacy, baked in clay and carved in rock stands for 4,000 years.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

CAPPADOCIA

Cappadocia, Enchanted Land of Khepat, Ancient Anatolia's Mother Goddess

Dr. Micki Pistorius

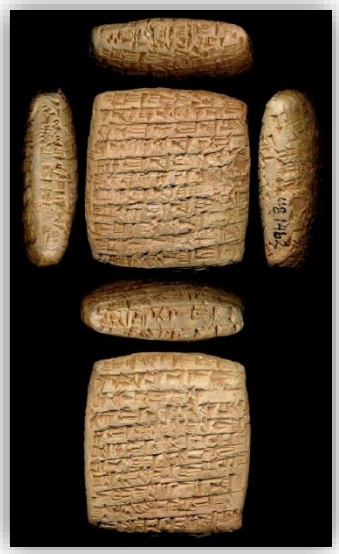
Enchanted landscape of Fairy Chimneys forms of sandstone in the canyon near Cavusin village, Cappadocia (Andrew Mayovskyy / Adobe Stock)

Cappadocia in central Anatolia/Turkey presents an ancient scenery mesmerizing the mind and captivating the imagination, where Khepat, the Mother Goddess, carved a fairy tale landscape against the backdrop of Mount Erciyes, called 'Harkasos' during the Hittite era, meaning Gods of Mountains. The etymological root of the name Cappadocia derives from 'Khepatukh', (Khepat meaning Mother Goddess and Ukh meaning land) which translates into 'The Land of Khepat the Mother Goddess'. Millions of years ago Mount Erciyes, Mount Hasan and Mount Gōllűdağ spewed volcanic lava and ash, which hardened with the rainwater to form layers of porous tuff in hues of red and yellow. Enlisting the four elements earth, wind, water and fire, Khepat began sculpting the landscape. The volcanic fire vomited the tuff creating earth, the water hardened it and the rain and wind eroded it creating the fairy chimneys, cones, caves and valleys of her bewitching Cappadocia.

A mother goddess statuette from Canhasan, an archaeological site in Turkey. This figurine, along with other mother goddess figurines found in Canhasan, is thought to be evidence of a continual matriarchal society in central Anatolia during the Chalcolithic Age. (Noumenon / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Human Settlements and Wars

Then the humans came to settle in the land Khepat had created. The caves had been inhabited since the Holocene epoch, as is evident by the excavations of Civilek cave and a skull found in Aşikli Hōyűk even bears traces of primitive brain surgery. Kōşk Hōyűk was a Neolithic settlement practising matriarchal order, perhaps still honouring Khepat, the Mother Goddess.



Around 20,000 clay tablets were found at the site of Kültepe/ Kanesh. Walters Art Museum (Public Domain)

During the Bronze Age around 3000 BC the Akkadians penetrated Anatolia to establish trade relations and colonies or *kārum.* Various tribes of the region united under King Zipani of Kanesh/ Kültepe in a revolt against the Akkadian King Naram-sin (r. circa 2254-2218 BC). The Akkadians evolved into the Assyrians. They introduced writing in the region, as cuneiform tablets indicate their record keeping of trade transactions. The Hittites moved into the region around 2000 BC from the north, and captured large parts of central Anatolia, including the Assyrian *kārum* of Kanesh/ Kültepe. The treaty of Kadesh between the Hittite King Hattushili III and Rameses II of Egypt in 1286 BC brought peace for a short while, until the Phrygians moved in from the north-west and wrestled the region from the Hittites around 1200 BC. During the Iron Age, the Tabal Kingdom, a Neo-Hittite state, ruled Cappadocia until its collapse.

By the sixth century BC the Persians reigned in Cappadocia. Their fire worship resonated with the ancient volcanic activity and it was the Persians who introduced the famous Cappadocian horses to the region. The Persian name for Cappadocia, Katpatuka means 'Land of the Fine Horses'. They established the King's Route, a trade route linking their capital Susa to the Aegean Sea. The Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC, who appointed satraps to rule Cappadocia. The Persian Ariathares united the peoples of Cappadocia and established Kayseri as the capital.

Kayseri city walls built by the Romans (Boubacar Amadou Cisse / CC BY-SA 4.0)

In 66 BC marching Roman legions' footfall thundered across the land and by 17 AD, Tiberius declared Cappadocia an official Roman State and his troops built walls around Kayseri - first called Eusebia, then Caesarea by the Romans - to protect it against attacks from the Sassanids. Kayseri/ Caesarea was situated at the junction of five roads and thus considered a strategic location in the

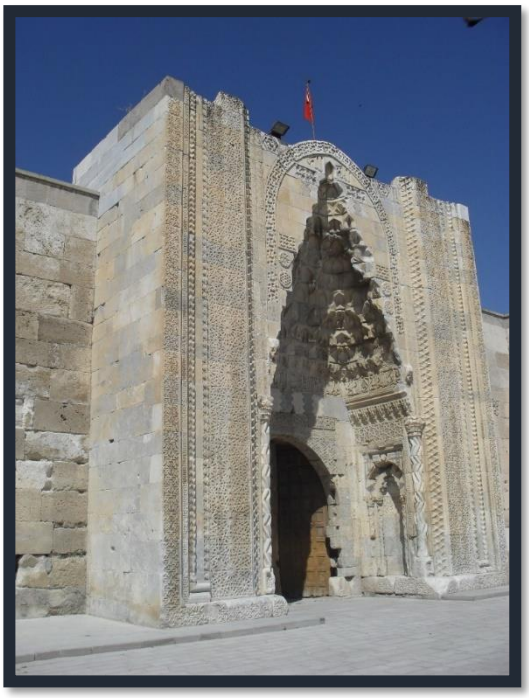
Roman road system. The Roman army established an imperial munitions factory here, to serve the whole region.

Cappadocia was incorporated into the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire by the fourth century AD. Fleeing Christians flocked to the area and found sanctuary against persecution, establishing many of their churches in the rock formation structures. They also hid in the many subterranean cities in the area. Saint Basil the Great, or Basileos, (fourth century AD) was a famous bishop who took leadership in abolishing paganism and the pantheons of the ancient Hurrians, Hatti and Hittites; the Persian Zoroastrianism and Roman Mithras sects in favour of Christianity. Khepat, the Hurrian Mother Goddess had to step aside for Mother Mary.

Walls of the Seljuk era Sahabiye Medresesi, built in 1267 by the Seljuk vizier Sahip Ata Fahreddin Ali in Kayseri (CC BY-SA 3.0)

It has been claimed there are more than 1,000 churches in Cappadocia. During the iconoclastic era, in 726 AD when the Byzantine Empire ordered a decree against the depiction of God, many frescoes and mosaics of God, Jesus and the apostles in these churches were destroyed and painted over with the red madder of Cappadocia. The iconoclastic era ended in 843 AD and the paintings were restored.

By 1082, ten years after the War of Malazgirt in 1071, the Seljuks took Kayseri and ruled until the invasion of the Mongols in the 14th century. The Seljuks built mosques and the famous 20 caravanserais on the route between Konya and Kayseri. Peace reigned between the Christians and the Muslims during the Ottoman era in the 16th century, but it did not last.



Entrance to the Seljuk Sultan Han caravanserai, along the Uzun Yolu trade route leading from Konya to Aksaray (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

The Rock Churches of Gōreme Valley

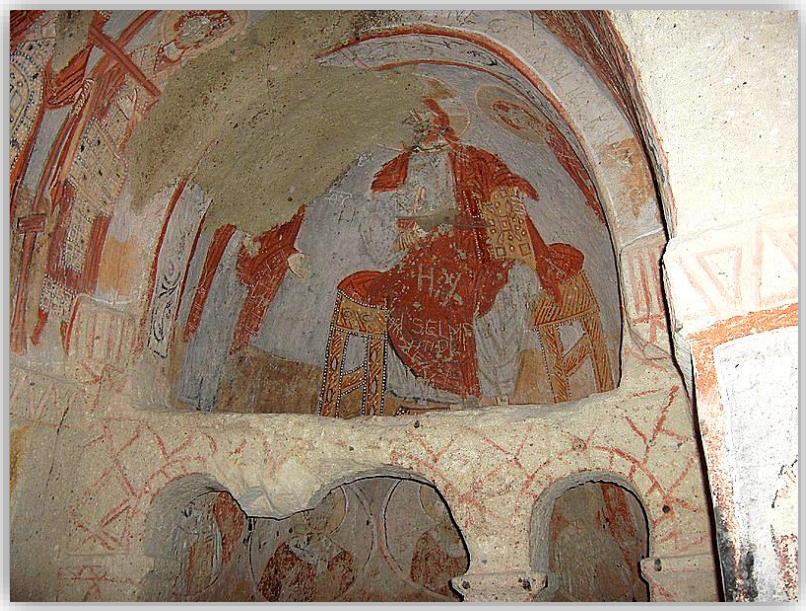
Long before Saint Basileos, Christianity entered Cappadocia in the first century AD via the evangelism of the disciple, Saint Thomas and later Saint Paul and their followers who worshipped in the churches they had carved in the porous rock formations. In pre-Christian Roman times, Göreme Valley was a burial location with rock-carved tombs and there was an ancient Hittite settlement. First century-Christians extended and transformed the existing carved structures into churches and fourth century-monks lived there and used the cells above the churches as accommodation. The settlements of the monks attracted pilgrims and converted Christians and the region became densely populated from the ninth century. The Christian settlements were abandoned around 1100 AD when Seljuk Turks occupied the region, until they were rediscovered in the early 20th century by the French priest Guillaume de Jerphanion. The rock churches have been restored and preserved and form part of the Gōreme Open Air Museum.

One of the Gōreme churches (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Saint Basileos of course has his rock church, with several graves discovered in front of it. Many of the churches have grave pits inside where the skeleton remains of hermits were excavated. Like many of the others, Saint Basileos church dates from the 11th century and it has three abscissas. Saint Theodore on his horse is depicted on the southern wall, Saint George fighting the dragon on the northern wall and Jesus with Mary and the child on the middle. Saint George or Jorgos who was believed to have saved the city of Sila in Libya from a dragon, was a Cappadocian by birth.

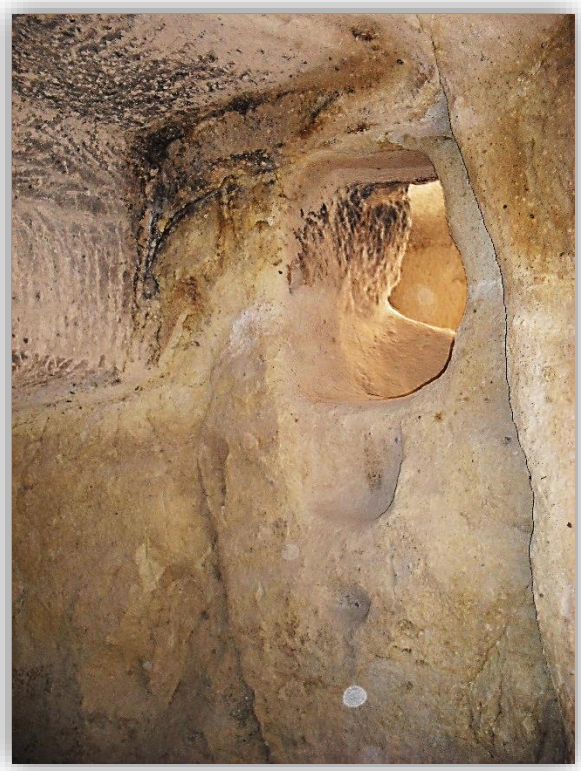
Exterior of the Kizlar Manastiri or Girls' Monastery
(Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Kizlar Manastiri or Girls' Monastery, a free-standing monastery for nuns, comprises of six floors, including a dining room and four churches, connected via tunnels carved in the rock. Azize Barbara Kilisesi or the Church of Saint Barbara honours a third century woman who lived in Izmit and converted to Christianity. However, she was burnt alive by her father when she refused to renounce her faith. Like many others the church has a cross-shape, two columns and three abscissas.



Fresco of Christ Pantocrator in Azize Barbara Kilisesi (JoJan/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

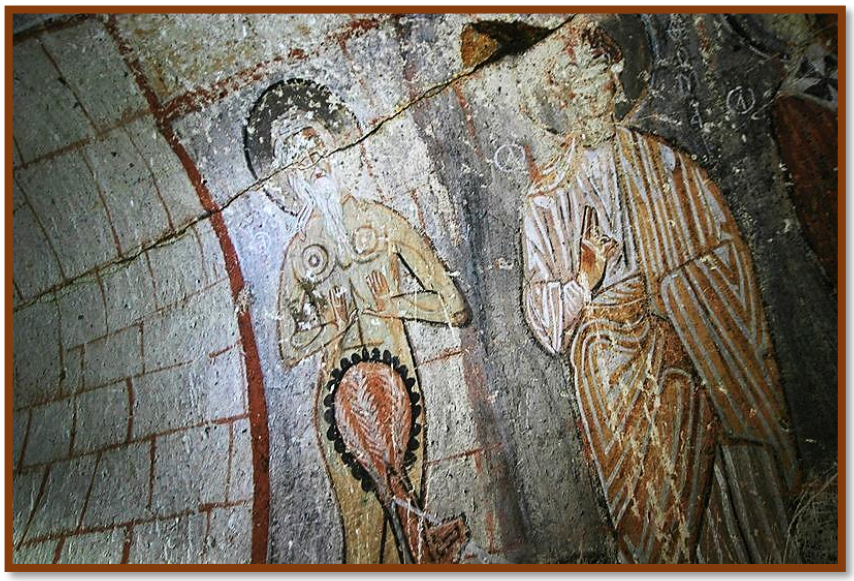
This church is an example of the iconoclastic decree, as it is decorated in red madder geometric figures such as palm trees and a rooster symbolizing Jesus, while the grasshopper represents the converted. The vaults are painted to resemble bricks.



Steps carved in the rock passing through a hole into a room above, in one of the churches. (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Besides the iconoclastic images, one can also find a likeness of Saint Barbara, Saint George and Saint Theodore on horseback and a slain dragon representing evil at the feet of the horses. One of the other little churches dedicated to a woman is the Azize Katerina Sapeli or Church of Saint Catherine, which was built by a Christian woman named Anna. Besides Saint Catherine and Empress Helena the church also features some saints dressed in soldiers' uniforms.

The Yilanli Kilise or Snake Church has an unusual name. None of the original names of the churches are known, so they were named by the people who discovered them, mostly according to the themes of the paintings inside. As in the Churches of Saint Barbara and Saint Basileos, the scene of the slain dragon at the feet of the horses is replicated in this church, but the people did not know the legend of the dragon and therefore they interpreted the dragon as a snake. This particular church does not have a cross-plan, but it is actually a hole dug into rock transversally, with a burial chamber opposite the entrance. Several religious figures feature in this church, namely Saint George and Saint Theodore on their horses, Saint Onesimus, and an impressive depiction of Empress Helene and her son Constantine the Great, flanking the Cross of Jesus – resonating with the legend that Empress Helene found the Cross during her visit to Jerusalem and brought it to Constantinople. Constatine the Great declared Christianity legal and abolished the persecution of Christians, so he was a popular figure.



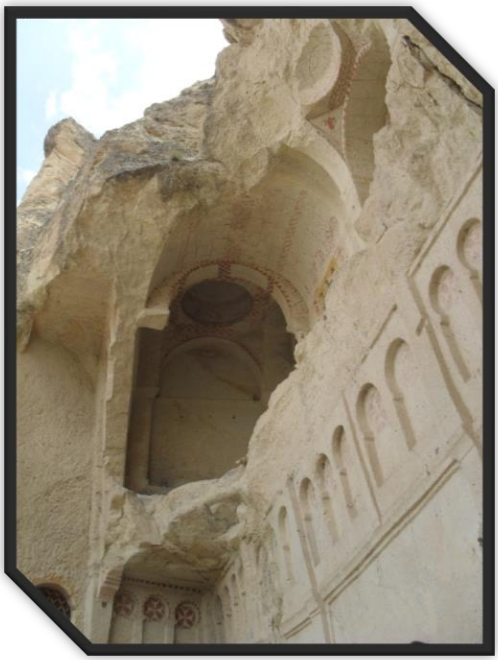
Fresco of naked Saint Onuphrius (on left) (Brocken Inaglory/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Unusual imagery of this church is an illustration of Jesus with the builder of the church (dating to the 11th century) as well as Saint Thomas together with Saint Basileos and then a naked bearded Saint Onophrius, who lived as a hermit in the Egyptian desert for 60 years.

Interior of Elmalı Kilise (RE Hawkins/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Two more churches with unusual names are the Elmali or Apple Church and the Church of Sandals. The Elmali Church dates back to the 11th or 12th century and has a cross-shaped plan and the best-preserved paintings, decorating nine domes. Archangel Michael holding a round object adorns the dome before the abscissas. It was believed this round object was an apple, giving the church is modern name. Angel Michael was actually holding the earth in his hand. Besides the Archangel Michael there are also paintings of the hospitality of Abraham; the martyrdom of three men, many saints and the life of Jesus from his birth to his ascension.

The Church of Sandals or Carikli Kilise is located on top of the hill. It has a dining room below the church, accessible by an iron flight of stairs. The church was named so because all the saints in the paintings wear sandals, or due to the footprints embedded in its floor. Unlike the other churches that were built mostly in the 11th century, this one was built in the 12 or 13th century.



Exterior of the Dark Church or Karanklik Kilise
(Image: © Micki Pistorius)

The Dark Church or Karanklik Kilise was originally planned as a double storey monastery and it comprises a set of rooms around a courtyard. This church as four columns, six domes and three abscissas and was built during the 12th or 13th century. It is accessed by a curved flight of stairs and it has a burial chamber. The artwork in this church has been restored and is preserved. It features the Pantocrator Jesus, the charging of the Apostles, the Nativity with Mary wearing a head scarf, the Anastasias scene with Jesus descending to the Underworld to save Adam and Eve and even a chained Hades lying at the feet of Jesus.

Interior of Karanlık Kilise (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Crucifixion scene features Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas and Lonikinos the soldier who speared Jesus, as well as Esopos, the soldier who gave Jesus the sponge with vinegar, and the commander who converted to Christianity. Both Mary and the apostle Johannes feature in the scene and it is believed Mary travelled to Ephesus in his company where there is still a house said to have been occupied by her.

Fairy Chimney house in Gōreme (Image © Micki Pistorius)

There are more than 30 rock churches in the Gōreme Valley such as Tokali Kilise (Church of the Buckle); Meryemana Kilisi (Church of Mary); El Nazar Church and Sakli Kilise (Hidden Church). Even in the village of Gōreme, people still inhabit the Fairy Chimney houses, evoking a time-frozen glimpse into an era when folklore tells that fairies lived in these houses, built by Khepat.

Cavusin Evacuation Of Orthodox Greeks

About two kilometers (1.24 miles) from Gōreme on the road to Avanos, lies the sleepy village of Cavusin, one of the oldest settlements in the region and a prime example of carved-rock formation homes. Dwellings were originally burrowed out of the soft volcanic tuff in the massive rock formation and inhabited by people.

Rock formation dwellings of Cavusin Village
(Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Interior of one of the homes of Cavusin carved from the soft rock
(Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Cavusin has been struck by natural and human disaster. In 1923 according to the Treaty of Laussane, Orthodox Greeks in Turkey were repatriated to Greece, and Muslim Turks in Greece were repatriated to Turkey. Cavusin was one of the villages affected. The repatriated Turks settled into the rock homes vacated by the Greeks, but there were less Turks than homes, so many of the abandoned homes fell to ruins. Then in the 1950's a natural disaster struck in the form of a landfall and many homes were destroyed. The Turkish government funded the building of "new Cavusin". However due to the quaintness and attraction of visitors, several of the old cave homes are for sale. It is quite interesting how carving and natural erosion has created the interior space of these ancient homes and how comfortable they are furnished, even with satellite dishes.

Interior of the Church of Saint John the Baptist
(Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Was it not for the Church of Saint John the Baptist, secluded on the mountain above Cavusin, this little village would have been forgotten in the sands of history. A steep, narrow path leads up the mountain to the fifth century-Church of Saint John the Baptist, believed to be the second oldest church in Cappadocia. From the top of the mountain the panoramic view of the Red and Rose valley is breath-taking, and there are some ancient graves carved in the rock on top of the mountain.

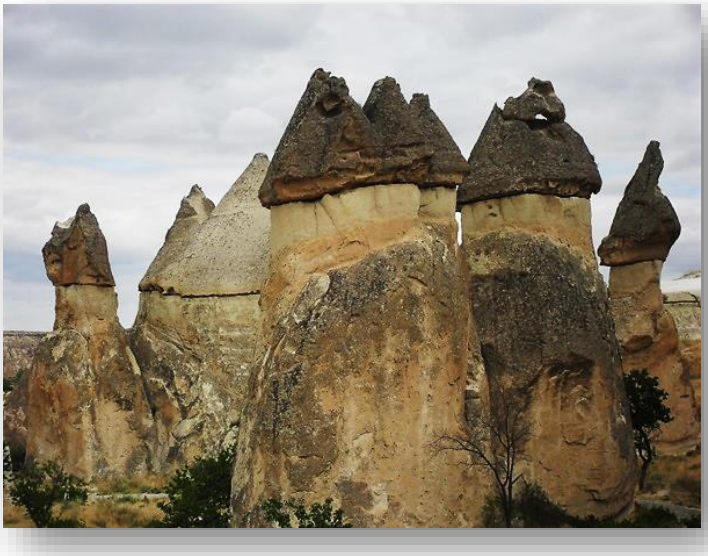
The graves cut from rock on the mountain of the Church of St John the Baptist (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

The Church of Saint John the Baptist is reached by crossing a rickety wooden bridge, requiring a massive leap of faith. The original church comprised just one room but over the centuries more rooms were carved. The frescos have faded, yet a haunted atmosphere prevails, especially around the fresco of the Murder of St John featuring Salome, and Abraham with the knife in his hand, ready to sacrifice his son. This is the only church in Cappadocia to feature this scene. There is a legend that the hand of Saint Hieron, who was killed by Emperor Diokletian, was kept as a relic in this remote church.

Pigeon lofts carved in the cliffs viewed from Cavusin (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Ancient Pigeon Lofts: Symbols Of God's Love

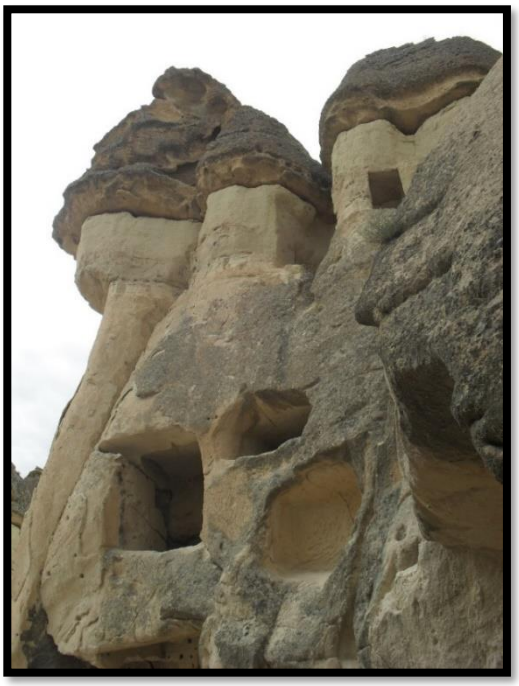
To the Christians a dove or pigeon was a symbol of God's love and Jesus and pigeon lofts were carved all over the rock formations in Cappadocia. Taking a more practical approach, pigeons were not only a source of food, but their droppings were also collected as fertilizer, especially by the monks of Gōreme. After the Christians had abandoned their churches, many of them like the Church of St John the Baptist, were turned into pigeon lofts, which actually preserved the fresco's. Since pigeon droppings contain a high content of nitrogen, it was even used in the production of explosives.



Fairy Chimneys in Paşabağ Cappadocia, featuring a three-capped chimney (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Paşabağ Where Monks Retreated

The view from Cavusin mountain reveals a valley of Fairy Chimneys and beyond Cavusin lies Paşabağ, an enchanted alien landscape dotted with these phallic formations, where monks retreated to. As the wind and the rain eroded the porous volcanic tuff, the upper layers of these formations consist of more resilient basalt, which is harder and takes longer to erode, thus the neck of the chimney becomes thinner, leaving the cap on the chimney. There are several churches in this region, but legend tells that Saint Simeon inhabited one of these three-capped chimney structures. There is a cell for a monk and a prayer room and under the formation is a burial chapel. Apparently, Saint Simeon retreated to live in one of these fairy chimneys in an effort to escape from those who expected him to perform miracles. The hermit monks following his example would only descend from their Fairy Chimney hideouts to accept food from those who brought it. When the Greeks were evicted from the area, they left behind a vineyard and Paşabağ can also mean Pasha's Vineyard.



Capped Chimney Dwellings of Paşabağ (Image: © Micki Pistorius)

Cappadocia, Land of the Mother Goddess Khepat, became a region torn apart by war, persecution, martyrs, hermits and monks and so her magical female energy was abandoned, eroded and finally evaporated into history.

References used in this article are available on [Ancient Origins Premium]

Who Built This City? Underground Derinkuyu.

Jim Willis

Could the underground cities in Cappadocia, Turkey date back to 12,800 years ago? In 1963, so the story goes, a man living in Cappadocia excavated some large stones from his basement while renovating his house. Behind them he found an ancient tunnel that led to more tunnels, and then more tunnels, and more after that.

Top Image: Colorful hot air balloons flying over Red valley in Cappadocia, Anatolia, Turkey (Svetlana Nikolaeva/ Adobe Stock)

When he reported his find and the experts descended, what they discovered was a complex underground city that once was home to some 20,000 people, their livestock, wine and oil presses, storage cellars, and chapels. A large 180-foot (54 meters) ventilation shaft insured fresh air. The tunnels were closed off and forgotten until 1963, when Derinkuyu was re-discovered. The site was finally opened to tourists in 1969, but there remain at least 36 underground cities in Cappadocia. Derinkuyu is the deepest, but Kaymakli spreads out the furthest. They are all engulfed in mystery.

Who built them? And why? And when?

Derinkuyu underground city in Cappadocia, Turkey (ninelutsk/Adobe Stock)

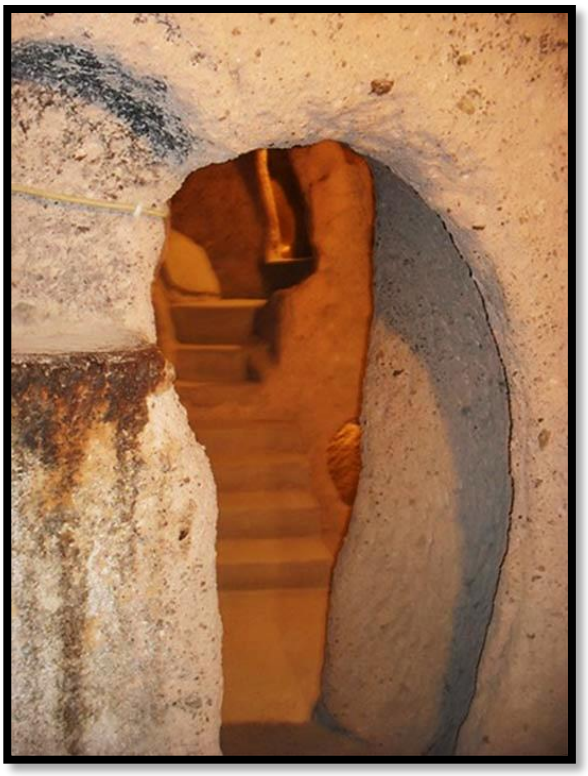
Subterranean Civilizations

It seems as though Cappadocia, in central Turkey, was home to an entire underground civilization. A few years ago, the Hurriyet Daily News announced the "biggest archeological finding of 2014" when another ancient city near Kayseri was discovered beneath the *Nevşehir* fortress, expanding out into the surrounding countryside. At least 3.5 miles (seven kilometers) of tunnels and chambers hide churches, escape galleries, and dwelling places that were constructed at least 5,000 years ago and perhaps much longer.

Nevşehir province was already famous as the home of Derinkuyu. Now it appears that the whole area may have been home to a thriving underground community, much of which is still to be discovered. Archaeologists are calling it the largest underground civilization in the world. To think that it was first built at least during the time of the traditional dates given for construction of the Giza pyramids, and possibly much earlier, is almost mind boggling. How did they ever do it? More than 200 underground villages contain secret passages, rooms, ancient temples, and storage facilities. There were full-blown kitchens and wineries, along with presses for producing lamp oil for lighting. Grindstones and ceramics from the Byzantine era through the Ottoman conquest indicate a long-standing culture. The presence of livestock speaks of occupation that lasted for many generations.

Interior of underground city in Cappadocia, Turkey (byheaven/ Adobe Stock)

People lived their lives and died in these caverns. No one knows why. But that may not even be the most intriguing question.



Stairway linking levels in Kaymakli Underground City
(Image: Courtesy Micki Pistorius)

Who Built This City?

Speculation about the area has become quite popular. Erich Von Däniken, for instance, was quick to claim that the underground complex of Derinkuyu was built in ancient times as a refuge from fallout that originated in a war between two alien factions who were engaged in what amounted to nuclear warfare in the skies over planet Earth. Similar claims followed.Traditional archaeologists had their doubts. They claimed it was built by Indo-European Phrygians about 2,800 years ago, who later died out during the Roman era. The fact that separate levels of occupation could be closed off from one another by using movable rolling stone doors offers a hint that at some point the caves were used for defensive purposes.

Why Were They Built?

Those who are enchanted by the mystery remain unimpressed by all the prevailing theories about when and why these cities were constructed. Their arguments run along these lines:

It takes a long time to excavate what amounts to a six-story complex, even in soft limestone, and there is no evidence yet found, that reveals where the builders piled the refuse they dug out. If they were trying to establish a refuge because of an imminent threat from either Muslims or ancient aliens, they simply did not have the time to prepare such a place and hide the detritus left from digging.

Few prehistoric artifacts have been found in the caves. Most of the evidence gathered so far is all post-Phrygian, meaning not more than 2,800 years old. But this argument is countered by those who claim that is to be expected, since recent civilizations would have extended the original construction, clearing away any surviving ancient artifacts.

Why would a civilization seek to hide from enemies underground in the first place? Surely 20,000 people would have left evidence of coming and going, and air shafts and chimney holes would have made it easy for an enemy to simply block the exits and wait for the inhabitants to stick their heads up to see what was going on. As for ancient aliens, any ancient-alien theory is bound to be ridiculed by scoffers, but where is the evidence to suggest intergalactic warfare was carried out on the surface?

In other words, when it comes to deciphering the mysterious caverns and tunnels of Derinkuyu and the underground cities of Cappadocia, the answers are still up for grabs.

- Why were they built? No one knows for sure.
- When were they built? No one knows for sure.
- Who built them? No one knows for sure.
- What happened to the inhabitants? No one knows for sure.

When Were They Built?

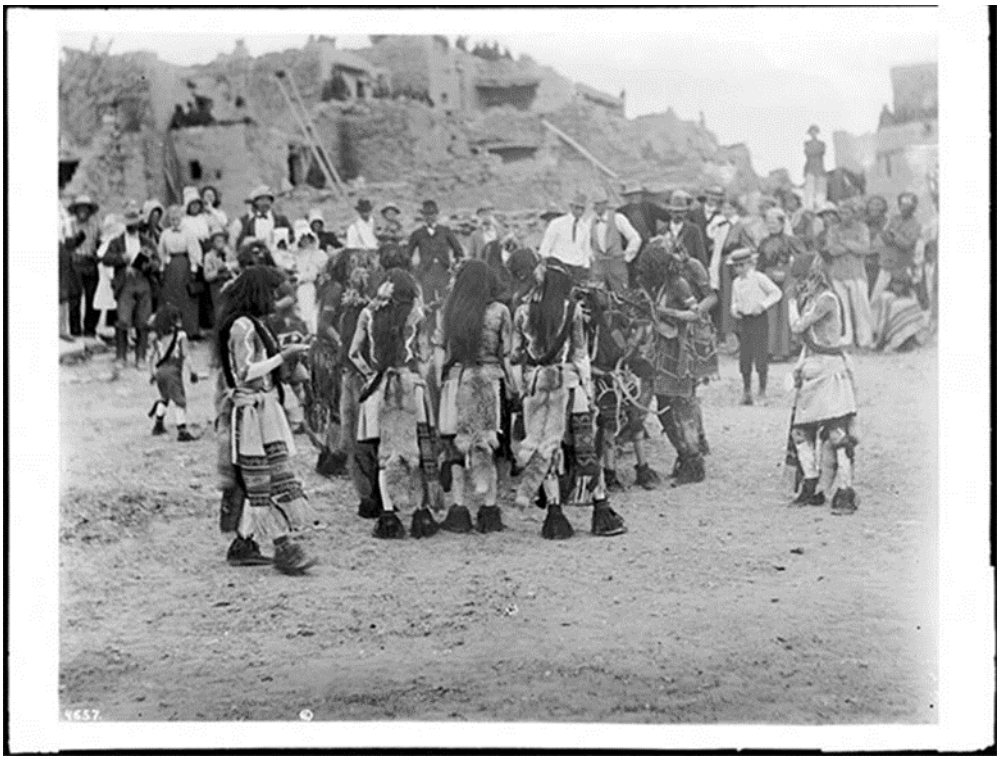
Only one thing is known for sure. They are there. Someone built them a long time ago, perhaps further back in time than modern archaeologists are willing to admit. The original builders must have had a compelling reason to pull off such an audacious feat, but then they became lost to history, their presence completely forgotten. And no one knows why.

Or do they? Does the answer lie deeper in history than most researchers are willing to dig? Does the reason to go underground become apparent if one is willing to place the original construction of the labyrinth back to a time shortly after the Younger Dryas Ice Age? To find out, one needs to travel to Göbekli Tepe, only 600 kilometers (370 miles) to the east, dated unequivocally to that time.

Gobekli Tepe Turkish for "Potbelly Hill", is an archaeological site in the Southeastern Anatolia (mehmet/ Adobe Stock)

The National Climatic Data Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that an unprecedented event happened 12,800 years ago. They call it the Younger Dryas Event. "*The Younger Dryas is one of the most well-known examples of abrupt (climate) change. About 14,500 years ago, the Earth's climate began to shift from a cold glacial world to a warmer interglacial state. Partway through this transition, (12,800 years ago) temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere suddenly returned to near-glacial conditions. This near-glacial period is called the Younger Dryas, named after a flower (Dryas Octopetala) that grows in cold conditions and became common in Europe during this time. The end of the Younger Dryas, about 11,500 years ago, was particularly abrupt. In Greenland, temperatures rose 10° C (18° F) in a decade.*"

It now appears that the Younger Dryas was brought about when a fiery comet broke apart above the skies of earth, many of the segments exploding within the atmosphere of the planet. The effect was thousands of times more devastating than any nuclear blast the earth has ever witnessed. The heat alone would have melted vast amounts of ice, but the worst was yet to come. Almost unimaginable amounts of dust and soot would have been thrown into the upper atmosphere, blotting out the sun for months, if not years. Temperatures dropped almost overnight, plunging the earth into what amounts to another Ice Age—the Younger Dryas—that lasted for some 1,500 years. And this event might have been repeated every year for the next 20 years, every time the earth passed through the debris field of what is now call the Taurid meteor stream.



Throwing of snakes into the sacred meal at Hopi Snake Dance Ceremony at pueblo of Oraibi, Arizona, (1898) (Public Domain)

The Ant People and Göbekli Tepe

The Maya of Guatemala describe it as "black rain and mist, and indescribably cold." Hopi mythology recalls a world that was destroyed by ice - perhaps the ice sheets of the Younger Dryas. They were saved, according to their oral history, by the 'Ant People', who protected them by teaching them to live underground until the crisis passed. The deadly aftereffects ravaged the earth for more than a millennium, certainly long enough to obliterate any evidence of an Ice Age civilization that once existed. But the stories tell of humans who lived through it, managed to survive, and recorded their tales in what has until recently, been written off as myth and legend.

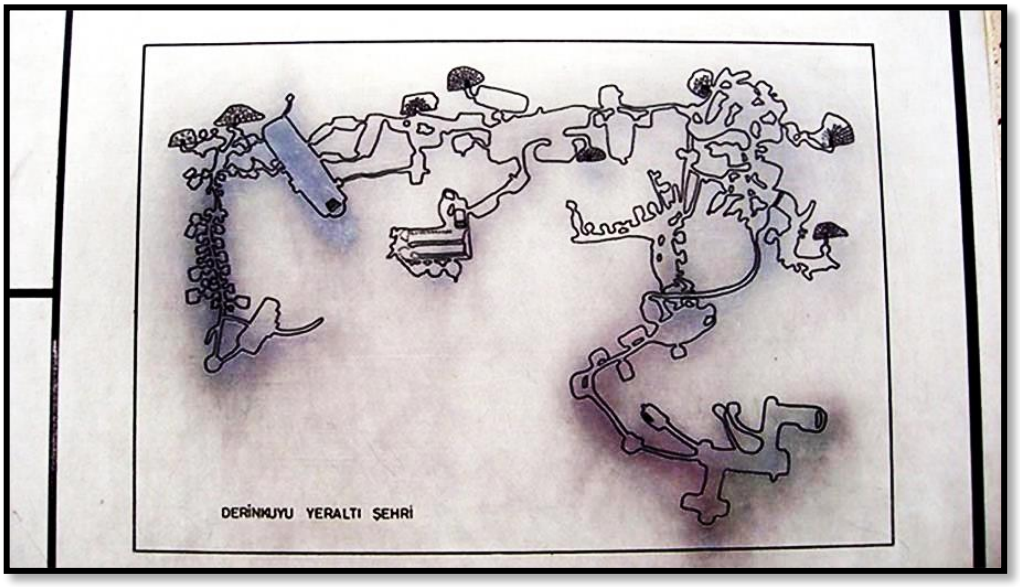
Gobekli Tepe (Pot-belly Hill) is an archaeological site (cornfield/ Adobe Stock)

The effects of such a catastrophe seem to be enshrined on the pillars at the complex of Göbekli Tepe. Whoever built the monuments there had an incredible grasp of the heavens and might have carefully recorded the fact that they expected the crises to occur again. Martin Sweatman and Dimitrios Tsikritsis, writing for the journal *Mediterranean Archeology and Archaeometry,* claim that some of the carvings "*commemorate the devastation wrought by a comet impact, airburst, or destructive meteor shower*."

Would that have been sufficient reason for people who lived only a few hundred miles away, and could very well have been part of the Göbekli Tepe culture, to decide to live underground where they would have at least a modicum of protection should the devastation reoccur? They didn't have to rush. Whatever was going to happen probably was not prophesied during the next month, or even the next year, as would have been the case if the purpose was to hide from an invading army. They would have had time.

A Comet Wouldn’t Care

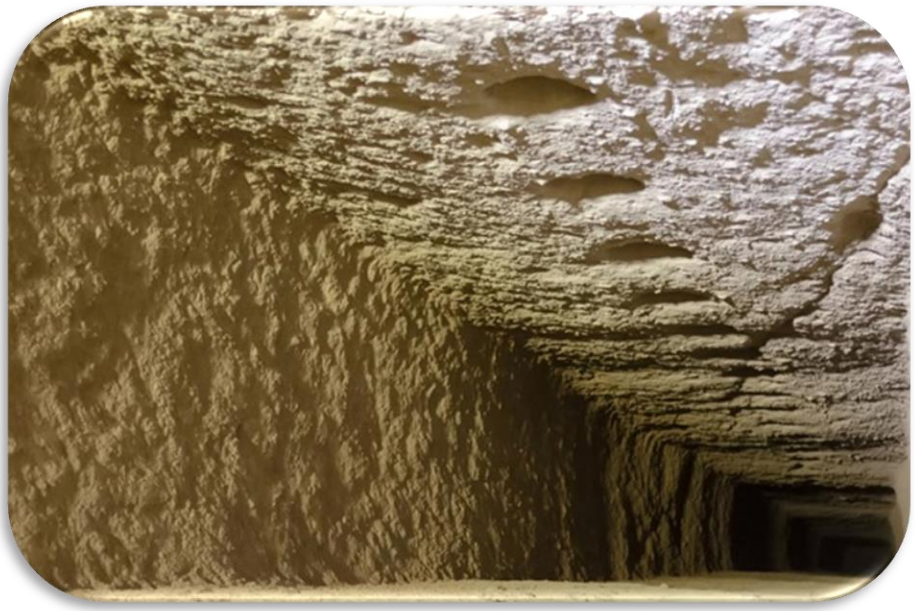
And there was no need to worry about a comet seeing where one exited one’s underground home. There would have been no need for concealment of smoke from cooking fires. Besides, the use of wineries implies the growing of grapes, something that can only be done on the surface. And although the underground complexes employed deep wells to provide water, there is no evidence of human waste removal systems. That, too, implies the need for surface disposal. Given the need to hunt and gather food, as well as renew the wood supply for fires, an enemy would quickly exploit such activity. A comet wouldn't care. Also, during an Ice Age, it's warmer beneath the surface than above it.



Map of Underground City of Derinkuyu (CC BY-SA 2.0)

This all points to the fact that even though there is a lack of Paleolithic artifacts in the caves, leading to the currently accepted late date of construction, common sense seems to indicate a much earlier date that conforms with known geology and weather information.

In other words, if Göbekli Tepe is, indeed, both a religious site and an astronomical observatory that hints at a recurrence of what must have been interpreted as a judgment from the heavens, it stands to reason that the people in the surrounding areas would want to fashion a way of life that would protect them from another such catastrophe. After all, the use of underground fallout shelters during times of war is well documented, and even today underground storage facilities are used by various government agencies.



Stone ventilation shaft through the underground city Dirinkuyu in Cappadocia, Turkey(Tatiana Nikitina/Adobe Stock)

This means, of course, that one has to move the dates for the beginning of the construction of Derinkuyu back to coincide with the construction of Göbekli Tepe. Because of the lack of artifacts from this time period, conservative archaeologists are unwilling to do so, even though there is ample evidence that the earliest construction, nearest the surface, was done with stone tools and implements which were known to be in use at that time.

When certain depictions on the stones of Göbekli Tepe were hypothesized to represent star alignments, Sweatman and Tsikritsis determined the eras when the stars overhead would have aligned with the patterns etched in stone below. They came up with the years 2000 AD, 4350 BC, 10,950 BC, and 18,000 BC—plus or minus 250 years. The third possibility, 10,950 BC, or 12,950 years ago—plus or minus 250 years—is pretty close to the Younger Dryas target date. That certainly seems more than coincidental.

All this is, of course, highly controversial. But it can lead to real breakthroughs if specialists can keep an open mind and not circle their wagons around one, specific ideology. It is too soon in the process for that. There is a lot of data yet hidden beneath the rugged surface of Cappadocia.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

Turkey's Catalhöyük: A Victim of Climate Change

Jim Willis

These days, the dusty, sunbaked ruins of Çatalhöyük in central Turkey do not receive a lot of attention, except from tourists and archaeologists, but around 9,000 to 7,000 years ago it was a busy, bustling, Neolithic metropolis, boasting a farming civilization that was both unique and important in its day.

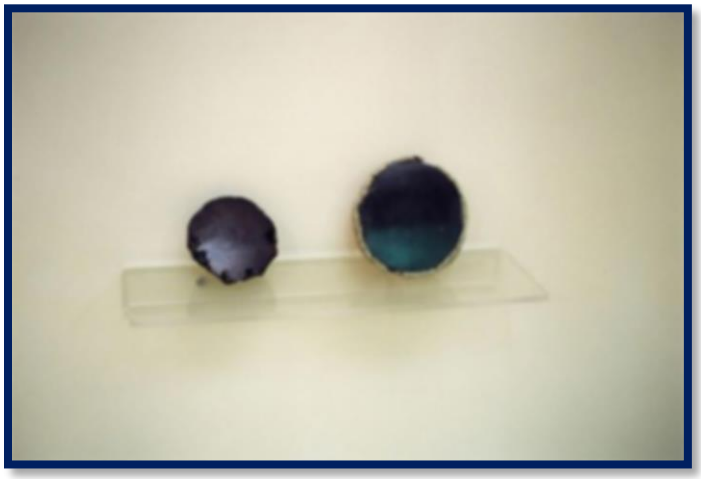
Top Image: Çatalhöyük after the first excavations. (Omar hoftun/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

However, having scarcely recovered from the end of the Younger Dryas Ice Age, the world was again hit with a climate catastrophe round about this time. The weather changed abruptly, leading to cooler, dryer summers for much of the Northern Hemisphere. Exactly what happened is anyone's guess, but the trigger is called the 8.2-Kiloyear Event, named after the fact that it happened 8,200 years ago.

Model of the Neolithic settlement at Catalhöyük (7300 BC) Museum for Prehistory in Thuringia
(Wolfgang Sauber / CC BY-SA 4.0)

The 8.2-Kiloyear Event

One plausible explanation is that a huge melt water pulse occurred when the Laurentide Ice Sheet in North America, having already played a huge part in terms of changing global weather patterns at the end of the Younger Dryas, finally collapsed. Two immense glacial lakes, now called Ojibwa and Agassiz, located along the Canadian/North American border, suddenly drained into the North Atlantic. This released the equivalent of almost 50 Amazon Rivers' worth of fresh water and disrupted the natural flow of the currents which bring warm equatorial water north, where it cools and then flows south again in a never ending circle that is recognized as an important regulator of current climate conditions. With that much cold glacial melt water suddenly dumped into the system, all kinds of terrible things happened. The result was what is today called climate change. The impact of such a sudden cooling of the earth's atmosphere might not have occurred as rapidly as it did a few thousand years earlier at the beginning of the Younger Dryas, but it would have had a devastating effect on the relatively new agricultural civilization that had begun to flourish in Anatolia, having spread out from Göbekli Tepe and then to Sumer, Egypt, and beyond.



Obsidian mirrors. Çatalhöyük, 6000-5500 BC.
Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara. (Zde/ CC BY-SA 4.0)

Probably 10,000 or more people lived at Catalhöyük in southern Anatolia, and most of them seemed to have been obsessed with plaster. They used it to line the walls of their houses and to create works of art. They even coated the skulls of some of their dead with it. Above all, they used it to glaze their pottery, and that is why archaeologists today can learn a lot about how the early inhabitants of Çatalhöyük reacted to the climate change.

Detail of the mural showing the hind part of the aurochs, a deer and hunters (Omar hoftun / CC BY-SA 3.0)

Dietary Stress

Aurochs heads (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The journal *Science*, report that a team of researchers led by biochemists Mélanie Roffet-Salque and Richard Evershed of the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom, and archaeologist Arkadiusz Marciniak at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, decided to examine potsherds from Çatalhöyük to determine the content of animal fat that had soaked into the pots made by the ancient potters. Their thinking was that dramatic climate change might show up in the amounts and kinds of feed the animals had been eating before their butchered meat was stored in clay pots. In other words, they were looking for evidence of dietary stress.

Using a technique called gas chromatography–mass spectrometry, they determined that the ratio of the isotope deuterium, or heavy hydrogen, rose by about nine percent in relation to other hydrogen isotopes from the samples. This amount differed from both earlier and later samples. Lower precipitation results in higher ratios of heavy hydrogen. So, the drought was real, long lasting, and had a profound effect on the ancient civilization. The studies showed that livestock had been severely affected by the drought. They also found evidence from butchered bones which indicated that fewer cattle were being raised at the same time the goat herds were growing in numbers. Cattle require more grain than goats, so goats can survive drought more economically. The people were also butchering earlier and more cleanly, indicating that meat was at a premium.

On-site restoration of a typical interior of a Catalhöyük home, kept scrupulously clean. (Elelicht/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

At the same time, archaeologists discovered that the site's large, communal, city-like dwellings began to make way for smaller, individual family homes. This seems to point to a shift toward an independent lifestyle featuring self-sufficiency. Although Çatalhöyük architecture could very well have been gradually changing even before the swift, climatic event, and the switch from cattle to goats may have already begun before the drought, it is still worth examining to learn how even minor climate changes can have an effect on human civilizations.

Cults and Religion

In his book, *Göbekli Tepe: Genesis of the Gods*, Andrew Collins points out that: "*BC Dietrich, (Ph.D) author of The Origins of Greek Religion, [suggested] that the ritual activities practiced in Çatalhöyük's cult shrines had formerly been celebrated in primordial cave settings*." This may shed some light on a unique structural component of Çatalhöyük architecture. There are no doors and windows found in the city. The west wall of one house becomes the east wall of its neighbor's. Apparently, the inhabitants came and went by means of ladders through the roof, so

the interior of the dwellings, which seem to have been kept scrupulously clean, must have appeared cave-like. Unlike the underground cities of Cappadocia, Çatalhöyük was built above ground. But the effect on those who lived there must have been eerily similar to living in a cave. Perhaps this hints to the lingering remnant of a religion that traces its roots back all the way to the great painted caves of western Europe some 35,000 to 40,000 years ago.

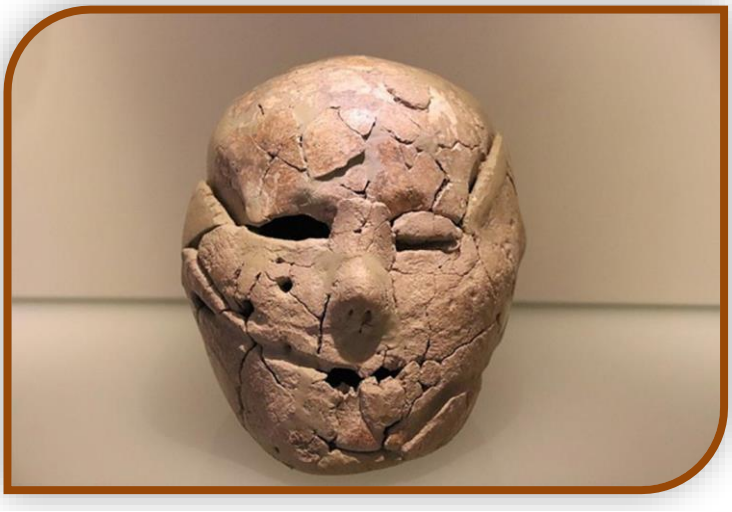
Bull's head in the reconstruction of the shrine in Çatalhöyük. (6000-5500 BC)
Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara.
(Zde/CC BY-SA 4.0)

Strangely enough, however, that spirituality, as well as the cult-like religion of Çatalhöyük, was connected to the stars. '*As above, so below*', could very well have been a central doctrine of the religion. A world existed above, in the skies, and another below, on the earth. This is a central tenant of classic Shamanism and is expressed even today when Christians pray: "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*." What were the ancients thinking when they went deep into the earth in order to paint pictures of the heavens on walls and ceilings?

There are no buildings identified as religious temples in the town, but it has nevertheless been called the 'first religious created city' by more than a few researchers. Morgan Freeman visited it in the 2016 *National Geographic Channel*'s tv series called *The Story of God*, which highlighted a search for the world's first religion. He found symbols portraying fertility, life and death by means of naturalistic human and animal forms and funereal practices. It appears as if an important spiritual cult existed there for a very long time.

Pillar 43 Göbekli Tepe's Vulture stone (Public Domain)

Excarnation



Plastered Skull, (c. 9000 BC) Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (CCO)

The many painted vultures of Çatalhöyük indicate the presence of a kind of bird cult and the practice of a world-wide funeral practice called Excarnation. From Hawk and Eagle stone effigies in North America to Göbekli Tepe's Vulture Stone, the image of birds escorting human beings up into the afterlife appears universal. Such an escort is called a psychopomp and is sometimes portrayed as a swan or stork. This is the basis of the operatic 'swan song', sung before the hero makes his or her way to Valhalla. It is repeated by modern parents as well, when their answer to a child's question, "*Where did I come from*?", is often, "*The stork brought you*."

The constellation Cygnus the Swan, easily recognized by its prominent asterism, the Northern Cross, is reproduced time and again by cultures around the world, signifying a bird cult associated with the path of the soul from earth into the heavens. The road to the stars leads through the great northern rift in the Milky Way. Quoting Andrew Collins again, when he described Göbekli Tepe's Vulture Stone or Pillar 43: "*This identification with Cygnus, first noted by Professor Vachagan Vahradyn of the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University, is remarkable and unlikely to be a coincidence.*"

People, including children, were buried under the floors of houses. (Dr._Colleen_Morgan/CC BY-SA 2.0)

Cult of Skulls

There is more evidence of a religious nature found at Çatalhöyük, illustrated by what has been called a 'cult of skulls'. Plastered skulls have been found, similar to those found further south in places such as Jericho. The skull of an adult male, buried in the arms of an adult female, raises all sorts of questions. Originally archaeologists thought this represented the veneration of ancestors, the skeletons of whom were often found buried beneath sleeping platforms, signifying possible ancestor worship. But many of the skulls were later proved to be those of children.

When added together, all this evidence indicates that Çatalhöyük is a city that seems to be founded for various religious reasons—reasons that probably held the society together until its sinews began to stretch and collapse over time. Was this collapse the reason nearby Göbekli Tepe was deliberately buried? Did the Anatolian religion that grew out of the ashes of a catastrophic global event no longer adequately serve its people? If so, it might well have been the first time a religion died from lack of relevance in a changing world. This is speculation, of course, but speculation that grows out of artifacts and evidence.

Seated goddess flanked by two felines, lionesses. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. (Nevit Dilmen/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Feminine Cult

Certainly, the carefully carved and beautifully finished female figurines discovered at Çatalhöyük are considered by many experts to be representations of goddesses. Others are doubtful, rightly claiming that archaeologists often jump to a religious explanation for almost everything. But a goddess cult associated with the supposed 'miracle' of birth is certainly a possibility. Twenty five percent of the rooms uncovered feature an altar dedicated to a feminine deity. The absence of class structures, seen by the lack of elite homes for a ruling class, is also common to a balance of masculine/feminine rule in society. Pictures of men featuring erect phalluses are reminiscent of the great painted caves of western Europe, many of which are decorated with red ochre, symbolizing that channel through which every human being enter into life from the womb of Mother Earth.

Mounted bull heads from Catalhöyük. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara (CC BY-SA 2.5)

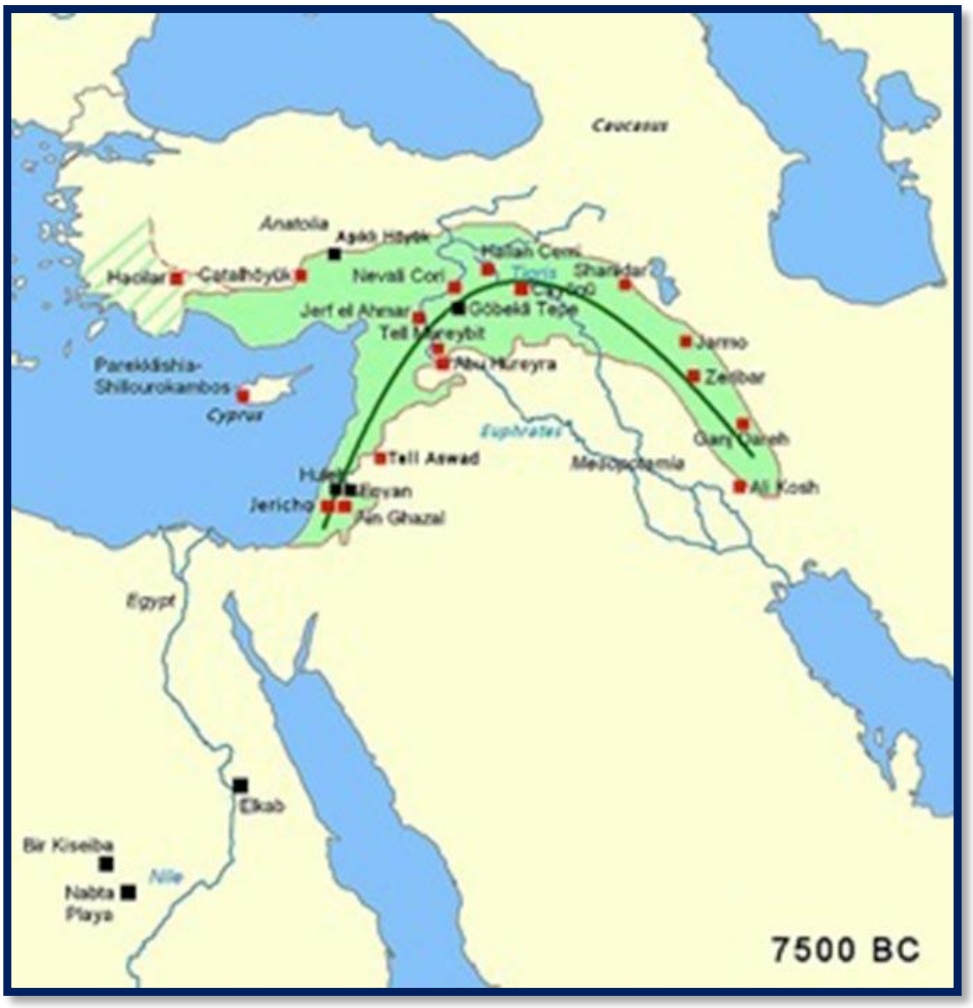
No Social Elite

A city as big as Çatalhöyük might be expected to produce archaeological evidence of specialization. Evidence of a social elite and large communal areas is also the rule in big cities. Instead, what seems to be a fairly even distribution of labor and resources is the case at Catalhöyük, especially in the early days of settlement.

Mounted heads of cattle and other animals adorn the walls of the dwellings of Çatalhöyük, and a painting of the village, including a view of the Hasan Dag mountain peaks in the background, is sometimes cited as being the world's oldest map. Other times it is called the world's oldest landscape painting.

Musicians might be intrigued by another interesting archaeological discovery at Çatalhöyük. One of the frescoes displays the oldest known representation of a drum, surrounded by more than 30 figures who appear to be dancing, many of whom are playing similar percussion instruments. They are pictured circling, some say baiting, a large bull, so the message seems to be that this was worship, rather than party time. Two of the characters hold what looks like single-string bows, similar to those found in parts of Africa. They are not weapons. They resemble a 15,000-year-old cave painting in France which displays a bow being played as a musical instrument.

Neolithic hunters attacking an aurochs, some of them black, some white. Museum of Anatolian Civilizations (Omar Hoftun / CC BY-SA 3.0)



Area of the fertile crescent, circa 7500 BC, with main sites. Çatalhöyük was one of the foremost sites of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. (GFDL/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

But the most important aspect is this: The skin color of some of the figures is black, while others are white. Some of those who have black skin appear to be wearing leopard pelts. Africa is a long way from Çatalhöyük. What could this possibly mean? Obviously, there is a lot of information still to be gleaned from excavations at Çatalhöyük. Like all good mystery stories, it raises more questions than answers:

- It seems that it was a flourishing civilization. Until it wasn't.
- The lack of class-related structures might suggest a utopian society with no rulers. But maybe not.
- Evidence of infighting seems to begin after a sufficient time passed for the inhabitants to begin accumulating possessions, perhaps indicating a societal evolution toward upper and lower classes that resulted in class warfare. But that may be reading current ideas into ancient evidence.

A Lesson in Climate Change

The one lesson to be learnt with a degree of confidence is that climate change played an important role in Çatalhöyük history. There is a good chance that what happened half a world away, the final melting of the glacial ice sheets in North America, affected daily life in the average citizen's life in Turkey.

Today glaciers in Greenland, Alaska, the Arctic region and Antarctica, are melting. There may be conflicting views as to the cause of the phenomenon, but people from Miami to Mumbai and other low-lying cities are already feeling the results. No-one can predict what is going to happen when the world's coastal cities drown. But it is happening, and a climate change of this magnitude calls for immediate action. The effects will be catastrophic if one does not prepare in advance. First, however, one has to admit that change is coming. That is why Çatalhöyük is so important. The evidence of the ancient lost ancestors' coping strategies may yet teach a lesson to modern man.

References used in this article are available on Ancient Origins Premium

ISTANBUL

Istanbul's Bosporus Strait, Fragile Hinge Between East And West

Dr. Micki Pistorius

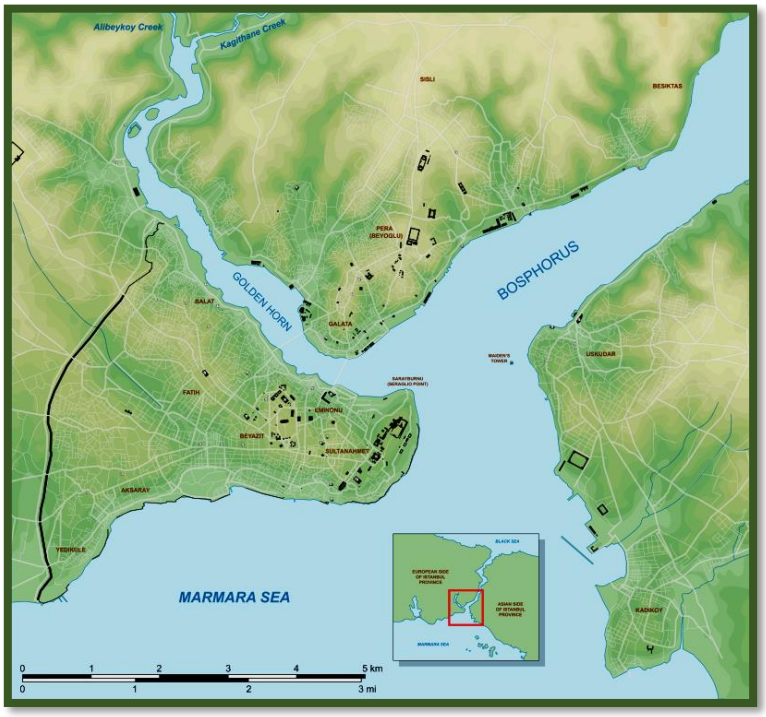
Market in Constantinople by Alberto Pasini (1868) (Public Domain)

The continents of Europe and Asia shake hands across Istanbul's Bosporus Strait, connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara which in turn connects to the Mediterranean Sea through the Dardanelles Strait, and from there ships voyage to the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal and the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar. Over millennia, the economic and military significance of the Bosporus has never been underestimated by empires, and in their zeal for control over this 32-kilometer-long maritime waterway, cross-pollination of cultures, ideas, religion, trade and knowledge flow back and forth like the tides on its shores. The Bosporus Strait has witnessed epic maritime history, from ancient boat-bridges, fleets destroyed by Greek fire, the siege of Constantinople, traders from all over the world filling its harbours and markets with spices, silks, slaves and exotic merchandise, up to steamships, ferries, modern tankers, cruise ships and occasional warships negotiating its perilous currents.

Russian fleet under the command of Admiral Fyodor Ushakov, sailing through the Bosporus by Mikhail Matveevich Ivanov (19th century) (Public Domain)

Yet there was time when the Black Sea was not a sea, but a fresh-water lake. In 1997 William Ryan and Walter

Pitman proposed a theory called the Black Sea Deluge Hypothesis, of which the central tenet is that by the end of the last Ice Age, as the ocean rose 73 meters (238 feet) due to massive ice sheets melting, the landlocked Bosporus was “suddenly” flooded by the seawater, increasing its capacity with 50 percent water, driving people living on the shores from their villages, leaving their footprints and even their sandals behind. In 2011 during the construction of the Marmaray Undersea Tunnel under the Bosporus, archaeologists discovered around 1,500 footprints in the mud, dating to 6500 - 6000 BC. The first human settlement on the Asian side at Fikir Tepe, delivered artifacts dating from 5500 to 3500 BC. On the European side, at the peninsula of Sarayburnu (Seraglio Point), they uncovered a Thracian settlement dating much later to the early first millennium BC. Besides the artifacts from the Neolithic Age, archaeologists also discovered 37 shipwrecks, wooden tombs containing human remains, leather and wooden sandals, wooden cups, amphorae containing fruit and nuts, and tens of thousands of other relics from the Byzantine and Ottoman eras – millennia of history sealed in the mud of the Bosporus.



Map of Istanbul's Historic Peninsula encaptured by the Theodosian Walls, showing the location of the Golden Horn and Sarayburnu (Seraglio Point) in relation to Bosporus Strait and the Sea of Marmara (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Early Greek Settlements

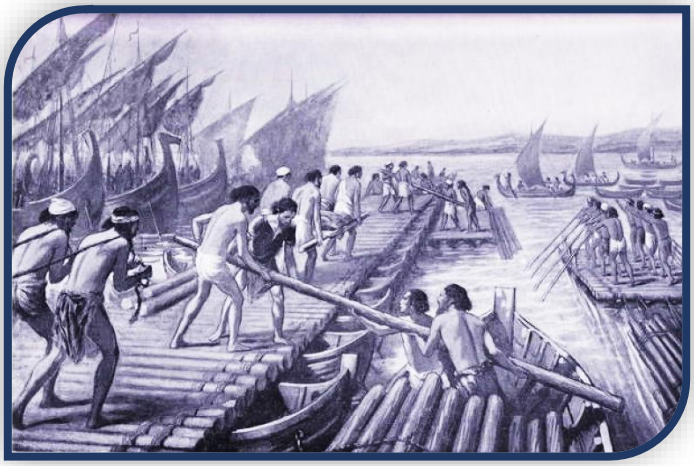
The etymology of the name 'Bosporus' springs from the Greek words *boûs* and *poros* meaning 'cattle-passage', referring to the Greek mythological tale of Io, a princess from the Argolis, daughter of Inachus, first king of Argos and the Oceanid nymph Melia. Io was a priestess of Hera, wife of Zeus, until Zeus fell in love with Io and turned her into a white heifer, to hide her from Hera. The ruse was unsuccessful and Hera sent a gadfly to sting Io, having her wander all over Europe, until she could cross the Propontis (or Sea of Marmara) to the Black Sea, giving rise to the name of "cattle crossing" or 'Bosporus'.

*Hera discovering Zeus with Io by Pieter Lastman (1618) (*Public Domain*)*

By the mid seventh century BC, colonists from Megara in Greece, had settled on both coasts of the Bosporus. The settlers established Chalcedon – referred to as the "City of the Blind" on the Asian coast. Mythology tells that Io, impregnated by Zeus, gave birth to the nymph Ceroessa, who was in turn impregnated by Poseidon, and gave birth to Byzas, the first king of Byzantion, on the western coast. Byzas was also the son of mortal King Nisos of Megara. From the beginning Byzantion on the European coast had an advantage over Chalcedon on the Asian coast, as Byzantion had a stronger command over the entrance to the Propontis and the Black Sea, as it was located at the horn formed by the estuary of the Golden Horn – the Chalcedonians were regarded as "blind" for not seeing the advantage.

The Persian and Greek Crossings

By the sixth century BC the whole of Anatolia, Thrace–Macedonia, Paeonia, the Caucasus, and almost all of the Black Sea's coastal regions, were ruled by the Persian King Darius I the Great (r. 522 BC – 486 BC) of the Achaemenid Empire. By 513 BC in an attempt to subdue the Scythian revolt north of the Black Sea, Darius crossed the Bosporus, by building a temporary bridge made by tying Achaemenid boats to each other and marching his armies over. He was copied by his successor Xerxes who constructed a similar boat-bridge in 480 BC over the Dardanelles to invade Greece. During the reign of the Achaemenid Empire the Persian satrap Otanes had suzerainty over Chalcedon on the Asian coast.



*Construction of Xerxes' bridge of boats by Phoenician sailors by A. C. Weatherstone (1915) (*Public Domain)

In 334 BC, Macedonian Alexander the Great crossed the Bosporus by a boat-bridge to invade and conquer Persia. Thus, the waterway had hosted military and cultural cross-pollination from East to West and West to East within a span of two centuries. Then ensued the wars of the Diadochi – Alexander's generals - and by the fourth century BC, Bithynia encompassing Chalcedon and bordering the Sea of Marmara, the Bosporus, and the Black Sea was an independent kingdom ruled by the first basileus, Zipoetes I.

Across the Bosporus, during the fourth century BC, Byzantion, formed part of the Second Athenian Legue, until it gained independence in 355 BC and it became part of the Roman Empire in 73 BC, henceforth referred to as Byzantium. A year before that in 74 BC, King Nicomedes willed Bithynia to the Romans upon his death. It was to Bithynia that Julius Ceasar had fled as a young man to evade the wrath of Sulla. So, by the first century BC, both shores of the Bosporus belonged to the Romans and thus it remained for almost 1,500 years.

The Romans And The Religious Crossing Of The Bosporus

The strategic significance of the Bosporus strait was one of the reasons taken into consideration by the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, in 330 AD to develop Byzantium into the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire and it became Constantinople. The expressions "swim the Bosporus" and "cross the Bosporus" is still used to indicate religious conversion to the Eastern Orthodox Church. Constantine fortified Constantinople with the first set of walls, including the sea walls, protecting the city from an invasion from the Propontis via the Golden Horn. During the fourth century AD, Constantinople was expanded by Theodosius the Great, whose projects included strengthening the landside fortified walls built by his predecessor Constantine. Crossing the Bosporus was literally attempted in the sixth century AD, when Justinian the Great built a bridge crossing the Golden Horn, leading from the Theodosian Land Walls. (It was only recently when two suspension bridges - the 15th July Martyrs Bridge in 1973, and the Fatih Sultan Mehmet II Bridge in 1988 were constructed. The latest bridge, the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge is a hybrid cable-stayed suspension bridge, completed in 2016.)

*The Bosphorus, with the castles Rumeli hisarı and Anadolu hisarı, respectively by Thomas Allom (19th century) (*Public Domain*)*

The Ottomans Crossing The Bosporus

The Walls of Constantinople withstood many onslaughts, as for centuries the Byzantine Empire was coveted by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans constructed fortresses on the Asian shores in preparation of an invasion. Anadolu Hisarı was commissioned in 1393 by Sultan Bayezid I and constructed on the narrowest point of the Bosporus, but the intended conquest of Constantinople failed.

*A view of the Anadolu Hisari fortress on the Asian coast line of the Bosporus (*İhsan Deniz Kılıçoğlu*/* CC BY-SA 3.0*) and Rumeli Hisari on the European coast line (*CC BY-SA 2.0*)*

In 1451 Sultan Bayezid's great-grandson, Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror, was more daring and commissioned Rumeli Hisarı or Boğazkesen Castle on the European side, facilitating the siege of Constantinople. The two fortresses worked in tandem during the final siege in 1453 to throttle all naval traffic and prevent Christian relief ships from entering the Bosphorus from the Black Sea.

Yet for 700 years Constantinople had implemented a simple but brilliant strategy to defend itself from a possible naval attack along the shores of the Golden Horn, being a defensive chain, extending from the Tower of Eugenius on the city's outer walls to the Megálos Pýrgos, or Justinian's Great Tower on the opposite (Galatian/Genoese) side. During Sultan Mehmet's assault Emperor Constantine XI ordered the defensive chain to be raised, which effectively prevented Mehmet's fleet, under command of Baltoghlu, to enter the Golden Horn, despite a handful of Genoese relief-ships slipping through the Ottoman blockade. Frustrated and after flogging his admiral, an undeterred Mehmet followed the example of the 10th-century Kievan Rus and had his ships transported over land, around the back of the neutral Genoese trading colony and released them into the Golden Horn, the following day. An attempt by the Byzantine forces to set fire to these ships were foiled and Mehmet had the captured Byzantine soldiers impaled on the sea walls. The Byzantines retaliated by executing 260 Ottoman prisoners of war in sight of the Ottoman armies.

*Part of the chain that closed off the entrance to the Golden Horn in 1453, now on display in the İstanbul Archaeology Museums (*Cobija */*CC BY-SA 4.0*)*

Eventually on May 29, 1453, Constantinople fell to the armies of Sultan Mehmet II and the unrelenting bombardment of the walls. The Venetian Nicolò Barbaro claimed that "*blood flowed in the city like rainwater in the gutters after a sudden storm and bodies of Turks and Christians floated in the sea like melons along a canal*".

The Yali Palaces

In the ensuing centuries of the Ottoman rule, the sultans and elite built 620 waterfront homes called *yalı* along the Bosporus Strait's European and Asian shorelines. Ottoman palaces such as the Topkapı Palace, Dolmabahçe Palace, Çırağan Palace, Beylerbeyi Palace, Adile Sultan Palace and the Küçüksu Pavilion, still display their opulent facades for passengers on ferries, yachts, speedboats and cruise-liners to observe in awe.

The Ottoman Empire's 31st Sultan, Abdülmecid I, found his predecessors' Topkapi Place too small for his needs and too medieval for his taste and commissioned the Dolmabahçe Palace. The palace was home to six sultans from 1856, when Abdülmecid occupied it, up until the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first President of the Republic of Turkiye, used the palace as a presidential residence and this is also where he passed away on November 10, 1938.

The exterior of the palace, in particular the view from the Bosporus, shows a classical European two-wing arrangement, however its interior is arranged according to Turkish tradition separating state rooms and the private residence of the sultan and the harem.

*A view of the Dolmabahçe palace from the Bosporus strait (*Alexxx1979 /CC BY-SA 4.0*)*

While Iznik tiles formed the main choice of décor for the Topkapi Place, Dolmabahçe Palace is decorated in gold – 14 tonnes of gold alone were used just for the ceilings. The Bohemian crystal chandelier in the ceremonial hall, dazzles all who gaze upon it. The chandeliers in the crystal stairwell are all Baccarat.

The Ceremonial Hall, with the chandelier once thought to have been a gift by Queen Victoria (Antonio Cristofaro*/* CC BY-SA 3.0*) and the Baccarat chandelier in the stairwell (* Antonio Cristofaro */* CC BY-SA 3.0*)*

In the same period as the construction of the Dolmabache Palace, in 1861, on the Asian shore, the Beylerbeyi Palace was commissioned by Sultan Abdülaziz. It was used as a summer palace by the sultans. It was also the last residence where Sultan Abdulhamid II was under house arrest before his death in 1918.

*The Küçüksu Pavilion seen from the Bosporus(Alexxx Malev /*CC BY-SA 3.0)

The palace has two bathing pavilions, one for women and one for men. Few people know a tunnel – built earlier in 1829 – runs under the Beylerbeyi Palace terrace garden and it was actually open for public use to relieve the traffic in 2016, but it has since been closed to preserve it. At about the same time in 1857, also on the Asian shore, the Küçüksu Pavilion was commissioned by Sultan Abd-ul-Mejid I and used as a hunting lodge.

The Golden Horn

For seven-and-a-half kilometers (4.66 miles) along the coastline of Old Constantinople, a natural estuary flows from the Alibey and Kağıthane Rivers down to the confluence of the Bosporus Strait and the Sea of Marmara (Propontis). It is no more than 750 meters wide (2,460 feet) and it is called the Golden Horn, ending at the promontory of Sarayburnu, (Seraglio Point), pointing its nose to the Asian shores. The 'Horn' is obvious and the 'Gold' may refer to the golden haze reflecting on the water as the sun sets.

*The sun basking the Golden Horn in golden hue (1872) (*CCO*)*

Just north of Sarayburnu (Seraglio Point) lay two ancient harbours, Prosphorion and Neorion, (now modern Eminönü) which serviced the settlements along the European coast and it is from this spot where the city of Byzantion grew. The name 'Prosphorion' could refer to the ox-market (Greek: *βόσπορος*), or even the legend of Io crossing the Bosporus.

In later centuries the Venetians, Amalfitans, Pisans, Genoese and Jewish merchants settled in the commercial area around the two ports and built their warehouses here. The hustle and bustle of merchants, traders and sailors still prevail as Eminönü square is now the docking port for the ferries, overlooked by the magnificent Yeni Cami (New Mosque), commissioned in the late 16th century by the Valide Sultan the wife of Sultan Murad III and Queen Mother of Sultan Mehmed III. Aromas of the Mısır Çarşısı (Spice Market) still waft over to the Eminönü warf, within walking distance. Just short of one kilometer from Eminönü is the Sirkeci Railway Station, built in 1890 and famous as the end of the line for the Orient Express, running from Paris to Istanbul from between 1883 to 2009.

*Galata Tower (Christea Turris) was built in 1348 at the northern apex of the Genoese citadel. (*A.Savin /Public Domain)

On the opposite shore of the Golden Horn, lies Galata. It is believed during the Hellenistic Period – after the death of Alexander the Great and before the Roman Empire – some Gauls encamped here, before they later migrated towards Anatolia. During the early Byzantine period, it was considered a 13th region of Constantinople. Emperor Justinian had built a tower here, Megalos Pyrgos, which was the anchor point of the chain stretching over the Golden Horn to protect the city from naval attacks. By the 11th century Jews and Genoese settle here, but their settlement, including the tower, was destroyed during the Fourth Crusade. The famous Galata Tower of today was built in 1348 as the *Christea Turris* (Tower of Christ) during an expansion of the Genoese colony in Constantinople. The Genoese colony remained neutral during the Ottoman siege of Constantinople in 1453.

Spanning the Golden Horn is the Galata Bridge. In 1845 the first Galata Bridge at the mouth of the waterway was constructed out of wood at the request of the Valide Sultan, the Queen Mother of Sultan Abdülmecid. In 1863 this bridge was replaced by a second wooden bridge, built on the orders of Sultan Abdülaziz, to be updated in 1872. The fourth bridge in 1912 was a floating bridge, damaged in a fire in 1992, to make way for the fifth and current Galata Bridge completed in 1994. It has two vehicular lanes and one walkway in each direction and tram tracks running down the middle. Below the traffic surface, is a layer with restaurants, built in 2003.

Postcard, "Constantinople - Quay of Galata" (c 1914) (Public Domain)

The Galata Bridge is animated by fisherman casting their lines into the Bosporus, gazing at the distant horizons, mesmerized by the memories of their ancestors who had left their footprints here, who similarly sought to make an honest, decent, simple living on these shores, millennia ago, despite the kings, sultans, emperors and current presidents who still vie for dominance of the Black Sea and the Bosporus Strait.

References used in this article are available on [Ancient Origins Premium]

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Marion Dolan

Dr. Marion Dolan received her BS, MFA and PhD from the University of Pittsburgh, majoring in medieval manuscripts, minoring in medieval architecture and history of astronomy. Dr. Marion Dolan is retired from the University of Pittsburgh where she was an adjunct professor in the history of art and architecture and lectured for the Osher Lifelong Learning program at Carnegie-Mellon University for many years. She published a book on astronomical art, *Astronomical Knowledge Transmission Through Illustrated Aratea Manuscripts.* She has also written two historical novels, one on the life of Emperor Frederick II and one on the British Raj in India. Her most recent publication is *Decoding Astronomy in art and Architecture* (Springer Praxis Books), October 2021. Now an independent scholar, she continues her research on the transmission of astronomical knowledge and teaches art history at the NSU Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, where she also serves as a docent.

Ralph Ellis

Ralph Ellis was trained in surveying and computer science. He has been touring the Mediterranean and researching Egyptian and biblical history for over 30 years, and his comparisons between the two have greatly assisted our understanding of biblical history. In addition, Ralph has also sought to understand the design of the megalithic monuments from a purely scientific and engineering viewpoint. Nevertheless, his lateral analysis of the likely possibilities for the design of these great monuments is still very novel and highly provocative.

Ralph Ellis is author of Thoth, Architect of the Universe, which has found verifiable proof that the great henges and pyramids were complex monuments, built by a technical civilization. The designer has specifically designed these monuments to mimic both the layout of the Earth and its motions in space. The author has been diligent in ensuring that each and every claim that is made in this respect is verifiable using everyday science, these designs are real artifacts - they are not based on speculation.

Wu Mingren

Wu Mingren ('Dhwty') has a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient History and Archaeology. Although his primary interest is in the ancient civilizations of the Near East, he is also interested in other geographical regions, as well as other time periods. He has been an active participant in archaeological fieldwork, and has been on excavations around the world, including the UK, Egypt, and Italy.

His interests range from 'conventional' to 'radical' interpretations of the archaeological/textual/pictorial data set. He believes that intellectual engagement by advocates from both ends of the spectrum would serve to enhance our understanding of the past. In addition, such discussions would serve to bring archaeology to a wider audience as well as to stimulate their interest, curiosity, and critical thinking of such issues.

Dr. Micki Pistorius

Dr. Micki Pistorius is a South African psychologist, author and journalist. Her passion for history, archaeology and human origins manifested at the age of sixteen when she selected these subjects at school. After completing her BA degree, she worked as a journalist in printed and television media for 8 years. Then she completed her doctorate's degree in psychology and was immediately appointed as psychological profiler and she founded and headed the Investigative Psychology Unit of the South African Police Service for 6 years. After resigning from the SAPS, she returned to journalism and worked for a television production company, writing scripts and producing documentaries for a few years. She continued training and presenting lectures on international podia and at several universities. Micki never gave up on her calling as a writer and authored 7 books, and her autobiography, *Catch me a Killer* became a best seller. By 2010 her passion for ancient antiquity inspired her to enroll for an Honours degree in Biblical Archaeology. In her free time, she explores archaeological sites all over the world.

Jim Willis

Theologian, historian, and musician, Jim Willis earned his Bachelor's degree from the Eastman School of Music, and his Master's degree from Andover Newton Theological School. An ordained minister for over 40 years, he served as an adjunct college professor and guest lecturer in comparative religion, cross-cultural studies, and contemporary spirituality. His background led to his writing more than 20 books on religion, the apocalypse, spirituality, and arcane or buried cultures, specializing in research bridging lost civilizations, suppressed history, and the study of earth energy, dowsing, and out-of-body experiences.

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