

Anatolia

Serdar Kaya

Anatolia is the peninsula forming the westernmost extent of Asia. It is bounded by the Black Sea to the north, the Marmara Sea to the northwest, the Aegean Sea to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. Geographically, the upper Euphrates basin and the Anti-Taurus Mountains are often considered its eastern boundary markers; however, within modern Turkey, the term "Anatolia" frequently includes territory extending to the country's eastern border.

The name Anatolia derives from the Greek word *anatolē*, meaning east or sunrise. The peninsula is also historically known as Asia Minor.

Anatolia was home to some of the world's earliest complex societies. The monumental site of Göbeklitepe dates to the 10th millennium BCE, predating the advent of agriculture. Significant Neolithic agricultural settlements, such as Çatalhöyük, Çayönü, and Hacilar, emerged later, dating from approximately the 9th through 7th millennia BCE.

Recorded history in Anatolia begins in the Bronze Age, including written sources from Assyrian traders at Kültepe around the 20th century BCE and earlier indirect references from Akkadian accounts dating back to the 24th century BCE. From antiquity into the modern period, Anatolia witnessed the rise and fall of numerous empires, kingdoms, civilizations, and cultures. Hellenic, Hattian, Hittite, Assyrian, Urartian, Armenian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, Ottoman, and Turkish influences, among others, have left significant marks on the peninsula.

Anatolia's location has profoundly shaped its multi-civilizational history. As the westernmost protrusion of Asia, it serves as a natural land bridge toward Europe, historically providing one of the few major transit routes between the continents. Consequently, the territory frequently found itself between competing powers, resulting in dramatic shifts in its social, political, and cultural composition. Anatolia's history includes major migrations, significant military campaigns (such as those of Alexander the Great and the Crusaders), and periods of large-scale conflict and population displacement.

Despite these upheavals, Anatolia generally maintained a multiethnic and multireligious character until the early twentieth century. Beginning around 1913 and continuing through the early decades of the Republic, nationalist Ottoman and later Turkish governments implemented policies and oversaw events aimed at creating a more homogenous Turkish nation. This era included massacres, genocides (notably the Armenian Genocide), forced population exchanges, and pogroms, which destroyed or displaced substantial non-Muslim

and non-Turkish populations. Assimilation policies and discrimination against remaining minorities persisted in subsequent decades.

Today, the entirety of Anatolia lies within the Republic of Turkey. Defined broadly to include territory up to Turkey's eastern border, the region has a population well over 80 million (as of the mid-2020s). The vast majority of inhabitants identify as ethnically Turkish. Kurds constitute the largest minority group, estimated at approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population. Smaller minority populations also exist, including Albanians, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Bosnians, Circassians, Georgians, Greeks, Jews, Laz, Zazas, and others. While precise percentages vary and reliable estimates are challenging, these groups collectively represent a small but significant proportion of the total population.

Further Reading List

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Acknowledgement:

This text originates from an entry written circa 2010 for an encyclopedia project by M.E. Sharpe that was subsequently cancelled. This is an updated and self-published version from 2025.

Citation:

Kaya, Serdar. 2025. "Anatolia." In: cancelled encyclopedia project by M.E. Sharpe, circa 2010. (updated, self-published version) <https://www.serdarkaya.com/publications/other-anatolia.pdf>