

Istanbul: A Primate City Throughout History

25.1 Introduction

Meryem lives in Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey. It is early morning. She is riding a ferryboat to get to work. The ferry carries passengers across the Bosphorus Strait. This narrow waterway connects the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

Looking ahead to the west, Meryem sees the domes and spires of Istanbul's ancient mosques. The city's business district rises up among these old landmarks. Behind her, to the east, the sun is rising over the high-rise apartment building where she lives.

Every day, thousands of Turks like Meryem commute back and forth across the Bosphorus Strait. In the morning, they leave their homes in Asia to travel to jobs in Europe. At night, they return to Asia. And yet they haven't left Istanbul. That's because the city spans two continents. The eastern part of Istanbul lies in Asia. The western part is in Europe.

Istanbul's unique location has helped to make its population more than twice the size of the next largest city in Turkey. Many other countries also have a dominant city that is by far the largest and most important one. Geographers have a name for such an **urban** area. They call it a **primate city**. The word *primate* means "highest ranking."

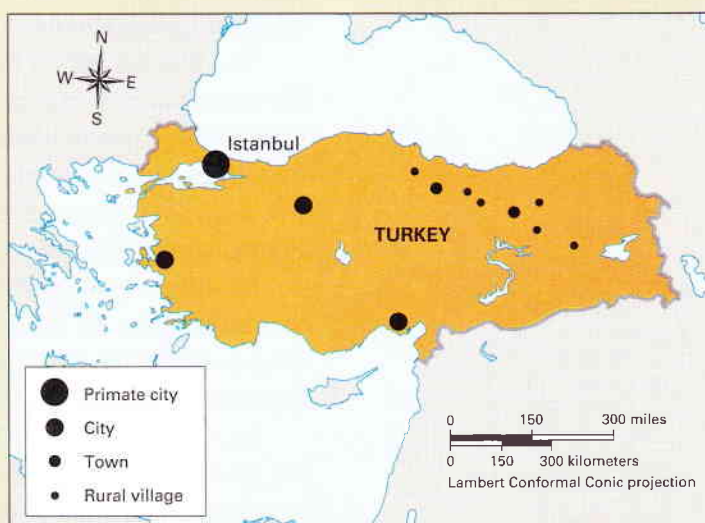
In this chapter, you will read about the traits of primate cities. You will also discover how geography, history, and culture have come together to make Istanbul a primate city.

Essential Question

Where are primate cities located, and why are they important?

This map shows where some of Turkey's cities, towns, and villages are located. The size of each dot represents the number of people living there. Istanbul is Turkey's primate city. Compare its location and size with other cities and towns. Keep this map in mind as you try to answer the Essential Question.

Graphic Organizer





The Site of Constantinople

This illustration, made in the 1400s, shows the site of Constantinople. The city is located on the tip of a peninsula. This location made it easy to wall off the city for protection from invasion by land. In times of danger, the city also put a chain across the Bosphorus Strait. The chain helped protect against invasion by sea.



25.2 The Geographic Setting

The city now known as Istanbul was founded more than 2,500 years ago. Since then, it has had three names. The ancient Greeks who first settled there called it Byzantium. Later, the Romans changed its name to Constantinople. Later still, the Turks renamed it Istanbul. Under each name, the city has thrived as a center of trade, government, and culture. For much of that time, it was also a primate city.

Istanbul's Favorable Site and Situation The city has survived for so long because of its location. Geographers describe a place's location in two ways. First, they look at its **site**. This is the natural setting of a place. Second, they look at its **situation**. This is the position of a place in relation to its surrounding area.

The site of this city was well chosen. The city was built at the tip of a **peninsula** with a good natural harbor. The peninsula is protected from an overland attack by water on three sides. The peninsula is flat, fertile, and well watered.

The city's situation was equally well chosen. The city was built on the Bosphorus Strait. This narrow waterway links the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. It is part of a waterway that flows from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The Bosphorus Strait also marks the dividing line between Europe and Asia. In ancient times, trade routes from three continents met at this point. Trade goods from as far away as China, Russia, and East Africa all flowed through this city.

The Capital of Three Empires The Greeks were the first to appreciate the city's location. But they were not the last. Over time, the city would serve as the capital of three great empires.

Byzantium became part of the Roman Empire in 196 C.E. Almost four centuries later, a Roman emperor named Constantine moved his government there. In 330 C.E., he made Byzantium the new **capital city** of the Roman Empire. A capital city is the center of government for a state, country, or empire. The new capital was renamed Constantinople after the emperor.

The western part of the Roman Empire fell in the late 400s. However, the eastern part survived and became the Byzantine Empire. That empire grew to include much of Southwest Asia and parts of Eastern Europe. It lasted for the next 1,000 years. Constantinople was its capital. During this time, the city's wealth attracted attackers. But the strong city walls kept them back.

By 1300, a group of Turks called Ottomans began to conquer Southwest Asia. In 1453, they took over Constantinople as well. They renamed the city Istanbul and made it the capital of the growing Ottoman Empire.

In 1922, the Ottoman Empire fell apart. Istanbul became part of the modern country of Turkey. But it did not become Turkey's capital city. That honor went to the much smaller city of Ankara. Even so, Istanbul remains one of the world's great primate cities.

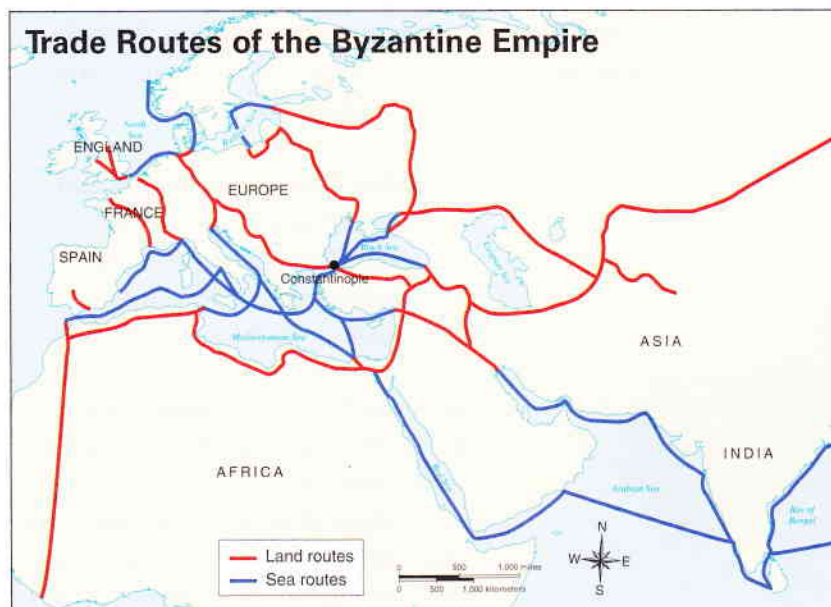
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capital city a city that is the governmental center of a country or region. Sometimes a capital city is also a primate city.

primate city the largest and most important city in a country. A primate city has at least twice the population of the next largest city. It is a center of economic power and national culture.

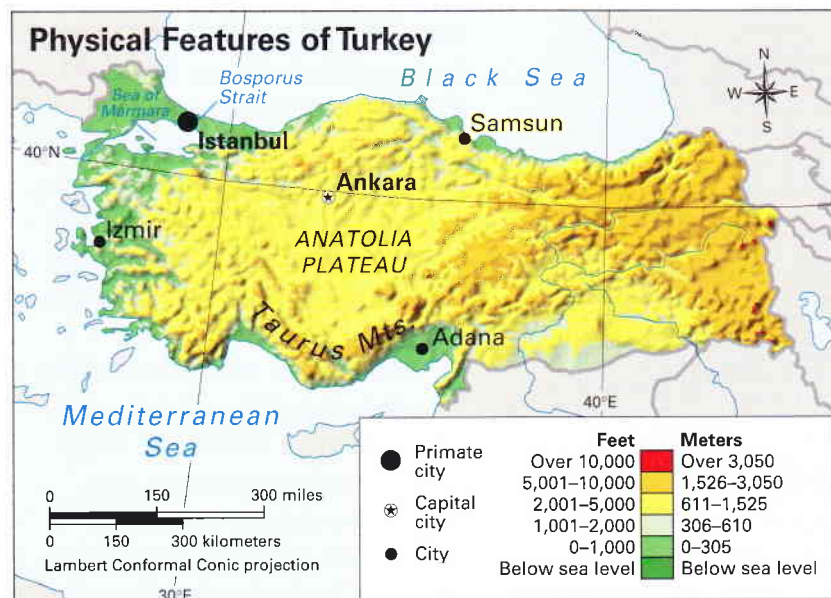
site the specific place where something is located, including its physical setting

situation the way a place is positioned in relation to its wider surroundings



The Situation of Constantinople

Constantinople was situated between Asia and Europe. Trade goods came from Asia by land and by sea. Other goods came from Africa and Europe. By 1000 B.C.E., trade had helped Constantinople become one of the world's largest cities.



Istanbul's Site and Situation

Istanbul has outgrown its original site on a peninsula. Its situation, however, remains the same. The city has access by water to two seas. It is surrounded by fertile farmland. All of these factors have contributed to its becoming a primate city.

25.3 A Country's Largest City by Far

Mustafa moved to Istanbul to make money so that he could marry his girlfriend. He is a barber and works in the heart of the city. Before coming to Istanbul, he lived in a small town where he knew everyone. In Istanbul, he walks among crowds of strangers. His story is that of countless people living in this busy primate city.

The Urban Hierarchy

This diagram shows the ranking of urban places in terms of size and importance. Primate cities stand at the top of the urban hierarchy. A primate city has at least twice as many people as any other city in that country. People are drawn to a primate city because it has more opportunities than smaller areas.

At the Top of the Urban Hierarchy Primate cities stand at the top of the **urban hierarchy**. A hierarchy is a ranking system. An urban hierarchy ranks cities based on their size and the services they offer. A primate city is by far a country's highest-ranking city in terms of size. It has at least twice as many people as the next largest city in the country. It also ranks first in terms of just about anything else that might attract people, from schools and jobs to shopping and sports.

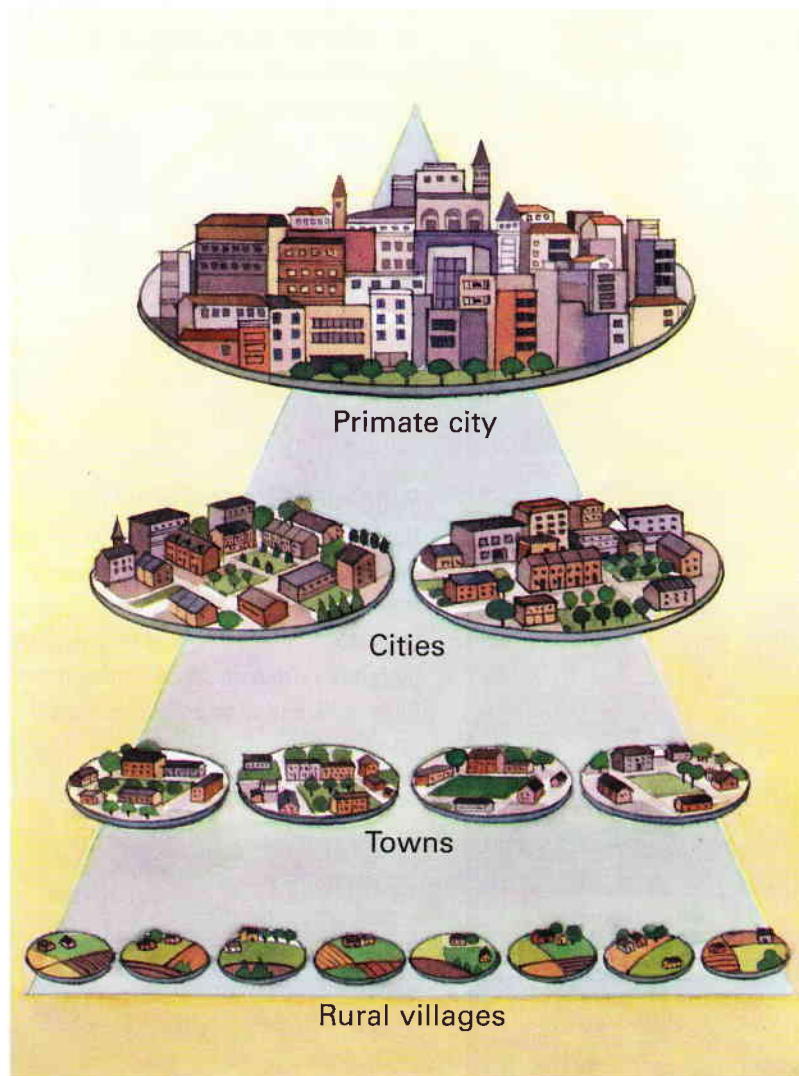
Istanbul is Turkey's largest city by a wide margin. In 2000, about 9.5 million people lived there. The capital city of Ankara, Turkey's second-largest urban area, had only 3 million people. Istanbul is so big that one out of every six Turks lives there.

Drawing Migrants from Rural Villages

Primate cities act like magnets. They attract people from surrounding towns and villages. Each year, more than 400,000 people move to Istanbul. Many are like Mustafa. They leave **rural** villages and come to the big city looking for work, education, and excitement.

This rural-to-urban migration can cause problems. Some primate cities are growing too fast to meet people's needs. Many of Istanbul's new arrivals, for example, can't find housing they can afford. Instead they build temporary shelters on open land around the city. Turks call these shantytowns *gecekondus*. This is Turkish for "built overnight." Such neighborhoods may lack such basic services as running water, electricity, and garbage collection.

Istanbul also suffers from traffic jams and air pollution. Sewage has dirtied the city's waterways. Many homes have bad plumbing. Still, people keep moving to Istanbul. For all of its problems, it remains at the top of Turkey's urban hierarchy.





25.4 A Center of Economic Power

Large ships rest in Istanbul's harbor. They hold huge containers that are filled with goods coming into or leaving Turkey. All day, big cranes lift the containers and place them on ship decks or truck beds. For centuries, Istanbul's symbols have been the domes of its many mosques. Today, the cranes are also symbols of the city.

A Hub of Business, Trade, and Travel The city is the economic center of Turkey. Almost two thirds of the country's industry is located there. Nearly half of all goods bought and sold in Turkey pass through the city. It is also Turkey's banking center.

Istanbul's busy port welcomes ships from all over the world. Ships arrive with machinery, oil, metals, medicines, plastics, and chemicals. They leave carrying textiles, clothing, steel products, foods, and minerals.

The city connects Turkey to the rest of the world. It has been a railroad center since the early days of train travel. Rail passengers took the famous Orient Express from Paris to Istanbul. From there, they boarded the Baghdad Railway to travel into Southwest Asia. Today visitors arrive by air and ship as well. Most people who travel to Turkey start or end their visit in Istanbul.

No Longer the Capital City Many primate cities are also capital cities. Government buildings and offices are housed there. Legislatures meet there to make laws.

As you read, Istanbul was once both a primate city and a capital city. However, it lost its place as a capital city in 1923, the year the Republic of Turkey was formed. The president of the new country, Kemal Ataturk, wanted Turkey to have a capital that had not been the center of ancient empires. By choosing Ankara as the capital city, he hoped to show the world that Turkey was a very modern place. Still, Istanbul remains Turkey's primate city.

Ships on the Bosphorus Strait

Every year, tens of thousands of ships move through Turkey's Bosphorus Strait. All of this shipping makes the Bosphorus the world's most crowded waterway. Its narrow passages and tricky turns also make it one of the most dangerous.

25.5 A Center of National Life and Culture

Every day, almost half a million people shop in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. A bazaar is a bit like an ancient shopping mall. But instead of stores, it has stalls. Instead of hired salespeople, it has traders selling their goods. The Grand Bazaar has more than 60 streets and at least 3,000 shops, all under one roof. It is one of many attractions drawing people to this primate city.

The Grand Bazaar: A Reflection of Turkish Culture There are no price tags at the Grand Bazaar. Buyers bargain with sellers. As a general rule, sellers may name a price that is 10 times what the object is worth. Buyers counter with a price that may be one tenth what it's worth, and the haggling begins.

Travelers from all over Turkey and the world come to the Grand Bazaar. Here they can find pottery, jewelry, metalwork, and other items that reflect Turkey's culture. They can also find Turkey's famous carpets. Carpet weaving is an ancient and honored art in Turkey. Each village has its own traditional designs.

Istanbul's Grand Bazaar

The Grand Bazaar reflects Turkish culture in its displays of arts and crafts. Its stalls present a colorful mix of rugs, pottery, jewelry, and clothing. There are workshops where skilled workers beat copper, brass, and silver into useful objects. This craft has been passed down from one generation to the next for hundreds of years.

A Cultural and Sports Center Although Istanbul is not Turkey's capital city, it is still its cultural and sports center. The country's most important museums are found in this primate city. So are art galleries and concert halls. Musical events range from opera to jazz and rock concerts. Nightclubs offer more traditional entertainment such as Turkish songs and dance.

Istanbul has long been a sports center. Visitors can still see the ruins of the Hippodrome. That ancient sports stadium could hold 100,000 people. Romans gathered there for horse races, chariot racing, and other athletic events. Turks still gather in Istanbul's sports stadiums. But today they come to watch soccer.

Historic Sites and Cultural Symbols The city draws tourists from all over the world. Its historic structures are cultural symbols of Turkey as well as tourist attractions.

One of the most visited historic buildings is the beautiful Hagia Sophia. Its name means "Holy Wisdom." The Byzantines built Hagia Sophia as a Christian church in the 500s. In the 1400s, the Ottomans turned it into an Islamic mosque. Today it is a museum. The Hagia Sophia reminds visitors how long Istanbul has been a major meeting place of many cultures and peoples. The city's history includes both Christian and Muslim ways of life.

The Topkapi Palace is a symbol of Turkey's Ottoman heritage. This sprawling mix of buildings and gardens was once home to the Ottoman rulers. Visitors can see great wealth on display at Topkapi. One famous object is the Topkapi dagger. Made in the 1700s, it is a sword covered with diamonds and emeralds.

The Blue Mosque is another important symbol of Turkey's Ottoman past. The mosque takes its name from the 20,000 blue tiles





that line its inside walls. Built in the 1600s, it is famous for its many domes and minarets. A minaret is a tall, slender tower attached to a mosque.

No visit would be complete without a trip to Istanbul's public baths, called *hamam*. Turks go to the baths to wash, have massages, and visit with friends. Some baths date back more than 500 years. In this ancient primate city, that is not so old.

25.6 Beginning to Think Globally

In this chapter, you learned that Istanbul is a primate city. It has more than twice the population of the next largest city in Turkey. It is also the country's business and cultural center. Its site and situation have attracted people for over 2,500 years. Today Ankara is Turkey's capital city. But Istanbul still stands out as by far the country's largest and most important city.

Some countries have primate cities, but others do not. France is one example of a country with a primate city. Its capital city, Paris, has more than twice the number of people as the next largest city. It is also France's economic and cultural center. Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, is another primate city. It draws people and resources from the rest of the country. China and Canada are two countries that do not have a primate city. That is, they do not have one city that stands out as the center of the country's population, economic power, and culture.

Primate cities are magnets. They attract people, trade, culture, and ideas. Think about this as you look at the map of primate cities around the world in the next section.

Hagia Sophia, "Holy Wisdom"

This immense church was built in just five years. When it was completed in 537 C.E., a writer described its effect on visitors. "No one ever became weary of this spectacle, but those who are in the church delight in what they see." Today it reminds visitors that Istanbul has long been a meeting place of religions and cultures.

25.7 Global Connections

This physical features map shows primate cities around the world. Note that some countries do not have a primate city.

What role do site and situation play in the development of primate cities? As you can see on the map, many primate cities are found along a coastline. Such cities often enjoy a mild **climate**. Primate cities away from a coast are usually located on a river. Being next to an ocean or a river helped these cities become important trading centers.

What relationship do you see between primate cities and capital cities? Most primate cities are also capital cities. This is not surprising. Many countries choose their largest and wealthiest city as their capital. But not all capital cities have twice as many people as the next largest city. Some capital cities, including Washington, D.C., and Ottawa, Canada, just don't measure up. Others, like Ankara, Turkey, or Canberra, Australia, have been chosen as capitals because they were not their country's largest cities. This is a way of spreading power more evenly throughout a country.

What might explain why some countries do not have a primate city? Countries without primate cities usually have many large cities. But no city is by far the largest and most important in the country. This is most likely to be true of very large countries such as India or the United States. In such countries, there are often several very large cities with a lot of economic power and culture.

Primate Cities Around the World



