

42 Mega Cities of the Ancient World

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Among the most significant developments of the ancient world was the rise of cities. Urbanization is not a new phenomenon, and though many of today's metropolitan areas have populations in the tens of millions, some of the cities of the past were surprisingly large.

From the 19th century, when pioneering archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann found the ruins of Troy in Turkey, to British archaeologist Howard Carter's discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922, the ancient world has become a popular fascination. Thebes, Ur, Babylon, Xi'an, and Samarkand are just some of the legendary names from antiquity that bring out the Indiana Jones in us.

Archaeology has brought the ancients closer to us. It has been quick to embrace technology, such as carbon dating, to detail the stories from antiquity. Because of progress in geophysics, soil chemistry, satellite imaging, three-dimensional mapping skills, drones, software for ground-penetrating radar, and remote sensing, we have a better grasp of the complexity and sophistication of these ancient civilizations.

A recently published study has enabled us to understand the size and scope of the major cities of the ancient world. "Historical Urban Population, 3700 BC - AD 2000" was originally developed by the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and is the first spatially explicit global data set containing location and size of urban populations over the last 6,000 years. Using data from the report, 24/7 Wall St. has created a list of the 42 largest cities in ancient times.



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5. Nanjing

- > **Peak population:** 500,000
- > **Peak population year(s):** A.D. 500
- > **Location** 32.0° 118.8°, present day China

Nanjing, also known today as Nanking, was the world's largest city in the year A.D. 500 with 500,000 people, along with Constantinople and Luoyang, based on data from the report "Historical Urban Population: 3700 BC-AD 2000." Nanjing was one of the four ancient capitals of China along with Beijing, Xi'an, and Luoyang. Nanjing's importance was due to its key position on the Yangtze River.

The city served as the capital of 10 Chinese dynasties over an 1800-year period. Nanjing began its rise to prominence during the Three Kingdoms era (A.D. 220–280). Sun Quan, founder of the Eastern Wu Dynasty, shifted his court to Nanjing and presided over a dramatic increase in trade and prosperity for the city. Nanjing reached its peak in the mid-sixth century, as it benefited from migration of craftsmen and artists fleeing the violence in the north. Nanjing became capital for all of China during the Ming Dynasty, before the capital was moved to Beijing.