

# THE HISTORY AND FUNCTION OF ISTANBUL'S GRAND BAZAAR

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## ABSTRACT

Istanbul's Grand Bazaar is a city in itself reflecting the features of the city for more than five hundred years. It has been the center of commerce, trade and industrial activity throughout its history. The Grand Bazaar covers about 300,000 square feet of land and stretches over 4,000 shops, 2 core fabric markets called Bedesten, 65 streets, and 20 manufacturing and accommodation centers for merchants. Additionally, there are 7 fountains, 1 well, 2 mosques, 2 water distribution centers, as well as the new establishments such as restaurants, cafes, tea houses, and banks.

Markets (bazaars) have always played an important role in the formation of cities. Likewise, the location of Grand Bazaar has been a focal point since the city's establishment in the 7th Century B.C. When, in the 4th Century B.C., a market center was needed, the Forum of Constantine was built nearby. Upon Istanbul's conquest by the Turkish Ottomans, Fatih Sultan Mehmet inaugurated a long period of restoration of the city. His building program included a palace--Topkapi Palace, a mosque as a religious, education and community center--Fatih Mosque, and a bazaar as a trade and industry center--The Core Fabric Market. These three centers formed a triangle among the government, community/ higher education establishment and trade sector that closely interact in any society.

There is no imposed plan for the Grand Bazaar. The core fabric market grew organically over the years; this takes away all the monotony and makes it a very romantic and attractive shopping center. The Grand Bazaar was established on its present site in the 15th century.

No record is available as to when the 65 streets of the Grand Bazaar were covered. The roofs have small windows on the sides or on the walls to allow for natural light. Originally, each street was devoted to the sale of one particular kind of good. Therefore, the names of the streets reflected the trade practiced on that street. There were no signs over individual shops to show the identity of the craftsmen or shop-keepers. There were no ornaments and no advertisements either. It was purely an eastern practice, i.e. it was the noble, unambitious attitude of a Turkish-Islamic society that regarded any endeavor to attract customers or to praise one's own skill or one's own goods as shameful and degrading. Sales items were simply displayed on the shelves that were mainly shopping and specialty goods. People would join the owner sitting on the bench and carry out business leisurely.

Manufacturing and accommodation centers and a Turkish bath were added in the 15th and 16th centuries to the Grand Bazaar to generate revenue to support the upkeep of the Fatih Mosque and its higher education complex. These centers are 2-3 story stone buildings with trees and fountains in the courtyards. On the ground floor were storage rooms and stables for horses of traveling buyers and sellers. The second and third floor rooms opening onto the verandas that overlooked the courtyards were used for manufacturing and accommodation.

These buildings were used mainly as workshops or manufacturing centers. The raw materials brought were turned here into finished goods. Artisans from the same trade would work in the same manufacturing center. Additionally, bachelor artisans and workers needing lodging would stay here. Today, rooms in these buildings are rented as workshops to artisans who work with silver and gold jewelry, antique objects, and gift items.

Business practices and security of the Grand Bazaar were monitored by the highest officers of the government very closely. Each week, the head of the government, the chief justice, and the chief of the armed forces audited the Grand Bazaar. Traders or artisans who infringed craft or trade rules or regulations were punished severely.