HISTORICAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE AEGEAN REGION THAT LOST THEIR IMPORTANCE AND THE REASONS BEYOND IT

Mehmet KARAKUYU1

Abstract

The site and situation of the cities, but also the economic, political and technological settings have been crucial in determining their importance. Some of the examples of such cities that accommodated important populations, served as capital cities in their times, and even provided the very first examples of planned cities of the world- may be found in the history of Turkey. However, as time progressed, these cities lost their importance, and today, they are remembered only for their historical and tourist characteristics. This study will examine some of the cities that played an important role in the early history of southwestern Turkey and will try to explore the reasons of the rise and fall of those cities.

Key words: Historical settlements, Aegean region, Urban geography, Urban historical geography.

Introduction

The basic prerequisite for a settlement to become a city is enough surplus food and fiber to support a nonagricultural class. An elaborate social organization to coordinate the collection, storage and distribution of the agricultural surplus also became a prerequisite for urban living. Originally, an elite priestly or military ruling group usually performed this function. These individuals kept the written records and levied the taxes necessary to support the nonagricultural populace, built public buildings and protective walls, developed elaborate irrigation systems, and supervised artisans and construction workers.

The first cities appeared in Southwest and South Asia about 4,000 to 6,000 years ago. They were well-organized agricultural, manufacturing, ceremonial, and military centers with strong central governments. Actually, cities emerge when a society begins to distinguish such social needs as defense, promotion of worship, symbolizing political control of a region, trade, and then combines these functions with the need to house a large population nearby. They were typically on great rivers such as Tigris-Euphrates, Indus, and Nile. Later urbanization in other parts of the world, particularly Mediterranean and northwestern Europe were largely a result of the Romanization of that part of the world between 50 BC and 350 AD. Roman conquerors established satellite capitals throughout Europe, southwest Asia, North Africa, and Anatolia (especially in the Western Anatolia) to administer their empire (Pounds, 1969).

Study Area

The Aegean region is located in the western part of Turkey. Because of its strategic location at the intersection of Asia, Europe, and North Africa (Figure 1) and its general physical geographic features, it has been a cradle for several civilizations since 2nd millennium BCE.

Herodotus, the father of history, claimed that the Aegean coast is the most beautiful and has the best climate in the world. The bays and peninsulas, coves and golden beaches that stretch the length of these beautiful shores certainly substantiate this claim. Countless

1 Fatih University, Department of Geography, Buyukcekmece- Istanbul, Turkey. mkarakuyu@fatih.edu.tr
events of mythology took place in this region and visitors will encounter the theaters, temples and agoras of ancient cities at almost every turn.

![Figure 1: The geographical location of selected historical cities in the western part of Turkey.](image)

**Methodology**

The aim of this study is to examine the reasons these cities lost importance in the Aegean region. First, five important historical cities selected which are lost their importance. These cities are; Ephesus, Miletus, Sardes, Pergamon, and Hierapolis. Second, historical adventures of these cities were investigated. Third, the reasons why these cities were founded in these places according to the physical character of a place were analyzed. Then, the selected 5 important historical cities were analyzed according to site and situation criteria's. Finally, the reasons of lost importance were determined. I do not propose to examine all aspects of this research, but simply to demonstrate that a related to site and situation characteristics and functions of the cities.

**Historical Adventure of These Cities**

Ephesus was located in Lydia where the Cayster River (*Küçük Menderes*) flows into the Aegean Sea. It was one of the cities of Ionia in Aegean Anatolia, and today it is one of the best preserved ancient cities in the world. No city ever had a more picturesque approach, or a more beautiful situation, than ancient Ephesus (Table 1; Although sacked by the Goths in 263 CE, Ephesus remained the most important city of the Byzantine Empire (after Constantinople) in the 5th and 6th centuries. This situation changed drastically in the early seventh century, perhaps as a result of the Persian invasions. Around A.D. 614, a date adduced from the evidence of coin finds, the buildings of the upper agora were abandoned, and the luxurious apartments of the embolos were ruined forever. The dwellings, which had seen constant activity through the end of the sixth century, were levelled, filled in with rubble, and eventually used as terraces for huts and a storehouse (Foss, 1977).

As the harbour became unusable, because the harbor completely filled in with silt from the Kucuk Menderes River, the old city of Ephesus was gradually replaced by a strongly fortified inland settlement on the hill of Ayasuluk, where the great church of Saint John provided a centre. The bishop of the city may have moved there by the sixth century (Foss, 1977; Ramsay, 1901; Easton, 1897). In the time of Porphyrogenitus, therefore, Ephesus was still an important city by the standards of the day, but one totally different from its late antique forebear. The centuries between Porphyrogenitus and the Turkish conquest of A.D. 1304...
were marked by both decay and expansion. The site by the harbour was finally abandoned, while that of Ayasuluk grew and spread outside its walls (Foss, 1977).

Table 2.

Ephesus was a flourishing metropolis in Late Antiquity as it had been in earlier centuries, when it was the greatest city of Roman Asia Minor (Foss, 1977). Its importance lay in its position as the greatest harbor on the eastern coast of the Aegean sea, and one of the main links of connection on the chief line of communication between the East and Greece or Rome (Ramsay, 1901).

In Late Antiquity, when it was the seat of the proconsul of Asia, a great port city and centre of government, commerce, and finance, the site of two church councils, and the home of such distinguished figures as Maximus the philosopher and Hypatius the bishop, Ephesus was large and flourishing (Foss, 1977). Beginning in the Roman Republic, Ephesus was the capital of proconsular Asia, which covered the western part of Asia Minor. The population of Ephesus has been estimated to be in the range of 400,000 to 500,000 inhabitants in the year 100 AD, making it the largest city in Roman Asia of its time. The archaeological record is substantial and unambiguous: the city occupied as great an area as it had under the Romans, it maintained most of its antique monuments, and it added new ones (Foss, 1977).

So, Ephesus was political, religious, cultural, economic, and trade center before 700 AD (Table 3).

**Table 1:** Shared site characteristics of selected historical cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Reliable Source of water</th>
<th>Safe from flooding</th>
<th>Strategic value</th>
<th>Shelter from poor weather</th>
<th>Where rivers are narrow</th>
<th>Gently sloping land</th>
<th>Good soil for production</th>
<th>Convenient Hunting Area</th>
<th>Scenic setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephesus</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miletus</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardes</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pergamon</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierapolis</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although sacked by the Goths in 263 CE, Ephesus remained the most important city of the Byzantine Empire (after Constantinople) in the 5th and 6th centuries. This situation changed drastically in the early seventh century, perhaps as a result of the Persian invasions. Around A.D. 614, a date adduced from the evidence of coin finds, the buildings of the upper agora were abandoned, and the luxurious apartments of the embolos were ruined forever. The dwellings, which had seen constant activity through the end of the sixth century, were levelled, filled in with rubble, and eventually used as terraces for huts and a storehouse (Foss, 1977).

As the harbour became unusable, because the harbor completely filled in with silt from the Kucuk Menderes River, the old city of Ephesus was gradually replaced by a strongly fortified inland settlement on the hill of Ayasuluk, where the great church of Saint John provided a centre. The bishop of the city may have moved there by the sixth century (Foss, 1977; Ramsay, 1901; Easton, 1897). In the time of Porphyrogenitus, therefore, Ephesus was
still an important city by the standards of the day, but one totally different from its late antique forebear. The centuries between Porphyrogenitus and the Turkish conquest of A.D. 1304 were marked by both decay and expansion. The site by the harbour was finally abandoned, while that of Ayasuluk grew and spread outside its walls (Foss, 1977).

Table 2: Shared situation characteristics of selected historical cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Proximity to other settlements</th>
<th>At the intersection of maritime or trade routes</th>
<th>Proximity to building materials</th>
<th>Proximity to farmland</th>
<th>Availability of surface and groundwater</th>
<th>Good location for defense purposes</th>
<th>Proximity to resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephesus</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miletus</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardes</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pergamon</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierapolis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Functions of selected historical cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Political center</th>
<th>Religious center</th>
<th>Cultural center</th>
<th>Economic center</th>
<th>Health center</th>
<th>Port</th>
<th>Trade (Market) center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephesus</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miletus</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardes</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pergamon</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierapolis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miletus was an ancient city on the Aegean coast of Anatolia, near the mouth of the Menderes River in ancient Caria. The site was inhabited since the Bronze Age. Miletus was a great centre of commerce and thought in the ancient world (Table 3). The city of Miletus became one of the twelve Ionian cities of Asia Minor (Roebuck, 1955). Miletus shows ample trace of building activity which attests a certain level of prosperity in Late Antiquity. The city also once possessed a harbor, before it was clogged by alluvium brought by the Meander. Miletus was one of the cities involved in the Lelantine War of the 8th century B.C. By the 6th century BC, Miletus had a maritime empire but brushed up against powerful Lydia at home (Garstang, 1930). So, Miletus was religious, cultural, economic, and trade center before 9th...
century (Table 3). In the tenth or eleventh century, the city walls and the theatre-castle were destroyed by earthquakes and rebuilt. At that time, Miletus consisted of an inner citadel, the theatre, and a larger fortified area with small houses scattered over the ruins and rubble of the ancient city. So, during the Byzantine and Ottoman time Miletus lost its importance (Foss, 1977).

Sardes was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, the seat of a proconsul under the Roman Empire. Sardes was built at a strategic road junction on the southern side of the broad and fertile Hermus valley and at the foot of foot of Mount Tmolus (Bozdağ) and had traditionally derived great prosperity from its abundant natural resources (Table 1; Although sacked by the Goths in 263 CE, Ephesus remained the most important city of the Byzantine Empire (after Constantinople) in the 5th and 6th centuries. This situation changed drastically in the early seventh century, perhaps as a result of the Persian invasions. Around A.D. 614, a date adduced from the evidence of coin finds, the buildings of the upper agora were abandoned, and the luxurious apartments of the embolos were ruined forever. The dwellings, which had seen constant activity through the end of the sixth century, were levelled, filled in with rubble, and eventually used as terraces for huts and a storehouse (Foss, 1977).

As the harbour became unusable, because the harbor completely filled in with silt from the Kucuk Menderes River, the old city of Ephesus was gradually replaced by a strongly fortified inland settlement on the hill of Ayasuluk, where the great church of Saint John provided a centre. The bishop of the city may have moved there by the sixth century (Foss, 1977; Ramsay, 1901; Easton, 1897). In the time of Porphyrogenitus, therefore, Ephesus was still an important city by the standards of the day, but one totally different from its late antique forebear. The centuries between Porphyrogenitus and the Turkish conquest of A.D. 1304 were marked by both decay and expansion. The site by the harbour was finally abandoned, while that of Ayasuluk grew and spread outside its walls (Foss, 1977).

Table 2). Its location, about 100 kilometers inland from Smyrna and the coast, gave easy access to the richest parts of Asia Minor and provided the economic basis for the growth of a large city (Foss, 1977).

In Late Antiquity, when it was a civil and ecclesiastical capital, a military base and seat of the only imperial weapons factory in western Asia Minor, and the home of a philosophical school of some renown, Sardes prospered and grew. As one of the seven churches of Asia, it was addressed by the author of the Book of Revelation in the Christian Bible in terms which seem to imply that its population was notoriously soft and fainthearted. The evidence presents a pattern similar to that of Ephesus: prosperity until the early seventh century, followed by a striking decline. The excavations of Sardes have covered a much smaller area than those of Ephesus, but have been executed, or at least reported, with so much more care that considerable information is available with a chronology satisfactorily established by coin finds (Foss, 1977; Hanffmann, et al. 1983).

In the Persian era, Sardes was conquered by Cyrus the Great and formed the end station for the Persian Royal Road which began in Persepolis, capital of Persia. During the Ionian Revolt, the Athenians burnt down the city. Sardes remained under Persian domination until it surrendered to Alexander the Great in 334 B.C. Once at least, under the emperor Tiberius, in 17 AD, it was destroyed by an earthquake; but it was always rebuilt. It was one of the great cities of western Asia Minor till the later Byzantine period. The early Lydian kingdom was far advanced in the industrial arts and Sardes was the chief seat of its manufactures. The most important of these trades was the manufacture and dyeing of delicate woollen stuffs and carpets. The stream Pactolus which flowed through the marketplace “carried golden sands” in early antiquity, in reality gold dust out of Mt. Tmolus; later, trade and the organization of commerce continued to be sources of great wealth. After Constantinople became the capital of the East, a new road system grew up connecting the provinces with the capital. Sardes then lay rather apart from the great lines of communication and lost some of its importance. It still, however, retained its titular supremacy and continued to be the seat of the metropolitan bishop of the province of Lydia, formed in 295 AD. It is enumerated as third, after Ephesus and Smyrna, in the list of cities of the Thracesian thema.
given by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the 10th century; but over the next four centuries it is in the shadow of the provinces of Magnesia ad Sipylum and Philadelphia, which retained their importance in the region (Hanfmann, et al, 1983).

At Sardes as elsewhere, the centuries of the Arab attacks are obscure; the city rarely appears in the sources, and the archaeological record is scanty until the ninth century. In the time of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Sardes consisted of the castle with houses, a chapel and cisterns, and settlements scattered like villages over the ruins of the ancient site. In the later centuries of Byzantine rule, Sardes prospered under the wise administration of the Lascarids whose rule is evidenced by a ruined five domed brick church near the Pactolus, the only major post-Justinianic construction discovered on the site. When the Turks came, they brought little visible change to the life of the city which continued for centuries to exist as a small town (Foss, 1977). Sardes was political, religious, economic, and trade center (Table 3). Furthermore the development of Sardes is parallel to that of Ephesus, but the contrast between its late-antique and Byzantine phases more extreme. The city prospered and even expanded in Late Antiquity when peace allowed the trade and agriculture on which the city depended to flourish (Foss, 1977).

Pergamon was an ancient Greek city, in Mysia, north-Aegean Anatolia, located on a promontory on the north side of the river Caicus (Bakırçay) (Sevin, 2001), that became an important kingdom and flourishing city during the Hellenistic period (Hansen, 1971). A new fortification wall was built to include only the early Hellenistic city on the acropolis; buildings on the lower slopes of the hill and the Roman quarters which extended out into the plain were excluded, while the world famous shrine of Asclepius outside the city was abandoned (Conze, 1912). A Gothic attack may have been responsible for the contraction of the city which remained in eclipse through Late Antiquity when it was neither a political, military, commercial, nor ecclesiastical centre (Foss, 1977). Although the physical record is one of decline, Pergamon was a major intellectual centre in the fourth century. It was the seat of the school of Adeusios who trained most of the famous sophists and theurgists-magicians, fortune-tellers, and clairvoyants-of western Anatolia. Maximus of Ephesus and Eunapius of Sardes were products of the school, and the emperor Julian was its most famous student. At the same time, Pergamon was the home of the medical writer Orbasius, whose voluminous writings still survive. Most of the Byzantine period at Pergamon is even more obscure than that of Late Antiquity; the sources are virtually silent until the twelfth century when the frontier was at the edge of the Anatolian plateau (Foss, 1977). Pergamon was one of the most important examples to land based urbanization and influential monumental planning (Toramanoğlu, 2006). Pergamon was the political, religious, economic, and trade center and lost importance after Byzantine time (Table 3). Hierapolis ("Holy city") was the ancient city on top of the famous Pamukkale hot springs. It was an important cultural and art centre famous for its training in sculpture. On the same road is found the iconic Pamukkale. The plentiful calcium-rich thermal waters flowing out of the mountain have, over time, created extraordinary rock formations making Pamukkale or "cotton castle" an extraordinary attraction. Here one may take a bath in the health-giving waters while gazing at this natural phenomenon, which is unparalleled in world geography. The ruins of the ancient city of Hierapolis lie behind this calcium terraced mountain. This place is listed as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. As the hot springs of Pamukkale were used as a spa since the 2nd century B.C., people came to soothe their ailments here. Many of them retired and died here. The large cemetery area covered with many sarcophagi (coffin made of stone) is thus known as a Necropolis. The great baths were constructed with huge stone blocks without the use of plaster, and consisted of various closed or open sections linked together.

In the year 17 A.D. an earthquake destroyed the city, which was rebuilt. Although it was the residence of the emperor Valens in A.D. 370, its history is unknown, but the recent excavations have revealed a remarkable abundance of churches which show the sanctity of the site and suggest that the resources available for construction must have been considerable (Table 1). city walls have been dated, on grounds which are not made clear, to the late fourth or early fifth century. Around the year A.D. 1000, however, this ramshackle town had a bishop who was able to purchase the great manuscript "A" of Plato, now in Paris, but, like many of his day, he may have been resident in the capital. By A.D. 1190, when the
Third Crusade passed through, the place could be described as dirutam civitatem Hierapolis; its history had long since ended (Ramsay, 1895). In the year 1534, another earthquake destroyed the remains of the ancient city (Verzone, 1971). Hierapolis was religious, economic, health and trade center (Table 3).

**Results and Conclusions**

According to site and situation criteria, a site is a point location and relates to the actual place where a settlement is located. The subsequent growth of a settlement then depends on its situation or regional environment—its point location relative to nearby physical features (e.g., natural resources) and human features (e.g., roads, other cities). Site selection criteria can include: a reliable source of water; safe from flooding; strategic value; shelter from poor weather; where rivers join with the sea meet the rivers; gently sloping land; good soil for food production; hilltop; where hunting activities available; and a scenic setting (Table 1). Situation factors include proximity to: other settlements; to trade routes or the intersection of trade routes; building materials and resources; proximity to resources; and surface and groundwater (Table 2).

Although sacked by the Goths in 263 CE, Ephesus remained the most important city of the Byzantine Empire (after Constantinople) in the 5th and 6th centuries. This situation changed drastically in the early seventh century, perhaps as a result of the Persian invasions. Around A.D. 614, a date adduced from the evidence of coin finds, the buildings of the upper agora were abandoned, and the luxurious apartments of the embolos were ruined forever. The dwellings, which had seen constant activity through the end of the sixth century, were levelled, filled in with rubble, and eventually used as terraces for huts and a storehouse (Foss, 1977).

As the harbour became unusable, because the harbor completely filled in with silt from the Kucuk Menderes River, the old city of Ephesus was gradually replaced by a strongly fortified inland settlement on the hill of Ayasuluk, where the great church of Saint John provided a centre. The bishop of the city may have moved there by the sixth century (Foss, 1977; Ramsay, 1901; Easton, 1897). In the time of Porphyrogenitus, therefore, Ephesus was still an important city by the standards of the day, but one totally different from its late antique forebear. The centuries between Porphyrogenitus and the Turkish conquest of A.D. 1304 were marked by both decay and expansion. The site by the harbour was finally abandoned, while that of Ayasuluk grew and spread outside its walls (Foss, 1977).

In almost every instance, the cities prospered in Late Antique times. This is especially true of the provincial capitals, but not confined to them. Extensive rebuilding and new construction took place, and public services were maintained. At the same time, city walls and churches gave the cities a new aspect, as the bodies and souls of the inhabitants were fortified. At Ephesus and Miletus there is some indication of deterioration in the appearance of the cities as the classical regularity of their plans was partially obscured by new and shoddy buildings, but in general, the age seems to have been a relatively flourishing time.

All the selected cities located in fertile river valleys where food, water and transportation possibilities were available. Also these cities have many shared characteristics. These are: the fortification of the city with walls; the presence of temples; the presence of specialized markets. Furthermore, these cities were political, religious, cultural, economic, and also trade centers. As the time passed, the location of important cities, type of economic activities, main trade routes and technology were changed. Transportation shifted from the sea orientation to land orientation. Defense purpose settings and proximity to building materials lost its priorities. Later, Buyuk Menderes and Kucuk Menderes plains silted by Buyuk and Kucuk Menderes rivers which are located near Miletus and Ephesus. Then large boats could not enter to these two harbors. And old coastal area was transformed into marsh. Thus, malaria disease appeared and number of population decreased in these cities. So, these selected historical cities lost their importance as a settlement and political,
economic, military, cultural center. But they continue to their life as historical and touristic center.

Discussion

The historical adventure of selected cities here presented raises many questions: when did these cities appear? what caused the change? Is war sufficient to account for such evidently drastic decline, or should some divine agency, like climatic and geomorphologic change, be suspected? Were the cities, perhaps, already in decay before the invasions? What were the shared site and situation characteristics, and what were the functions of these cities? These are simple questions. Yet answering them proves to be complicated and occasionally contentious. Nevertheless, they are timeless questions; each century poses distinct questions and endeavors to find better evidence that will help us understand the adventure of the cities.

References