

The Ancient History and Archaeology of Pergamon (Bergama)

The Ancient History of Pergamon

The origins of Pergamon are enshrouded in myth. The founder of the city, Telephus, was the grandson of the Peloponnesian king Aleus of Tegea. Upon visiting the Delphic Oracle, Aleus was told that his daughter's son would harm his family. Telephus, the son of Hercules and Aleus' daughter, slew Aleus' sons as prophesied and then traveled to Asia Minor, where he became king of Mysia and founded the city of Pergamon. This story is the underlying tradition for the migration of people to Pergamon. Thus, the earliest rulers of Pergamon, the Attalids, claimed descent from Telephus, Hercules, and Zeus. The earliest settlements on the acropolis at Pergamon date to the eighth century BC.

The earliest reference to Pergamon comes from Xenophon, who indicates that Greek soldiers passed through Pergamon in 399 BC. At that time Pergamon was controlled by the Persians. However, in 334 BC Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and Pergamon was free. Following Alexander's death, the Pergamon rulers (the Attalids) were able to maintain their independence by strategically forming alliances with the kingdoms that were jockeying for power in the region. Alliances with the Macedonians, Seleucids, Ptolemies, and Romans allowed Pergamon to grow in power and influence. When the Romans, assisted by the Attalid king Eumenes II, finally defeated the Seleucids at the battle of

Fig. 112 Pergamon Roman Bridge

There are three Roman bridges visible today crossing the ancient Selinus River in Pergamon. Most of them are still used, a tribute to Roman bridge construction. The Roman arch could support incredibly heavy loads and was used not only for bridges but also for the construction of theaters, stadiums, and numerous other structures. One of Pergamon's bridges is 643 feet wide and functions as the substructure supporting the Red Basilica. This was the widest bridge in the Roman world. The bridge pictured here is located a short distance south of the larger bridge and is used today for foot traffic.



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Fig. 113 Pergamon Amphitheater

Amphitheaters, such as this one in Pergamon, are rare in the eastern Roman Empire, though they are more common in the western Mediterranean. In AD 157 the renowned Galen was appointed as physician to the gladiators, and he significantly reduced the rate of death among the competitors in the Pergamon arena. Amphitheaters were used primarily for the “spectacles,” shows which included such entertainments as animal hunts (venationes), gladiator contests, and public executions, where the condemned were tortured, burned, torn apart by beasts (damnatio ad bestias), dragged, crucified, or killed in theatrical productions (fatal charades). It is not known how Antipas was killed (Rev 2:13), nor whether he was executed in the amphitheater, but it is clear that he was martyred for his faith in Christ. The Greek word used to describe Antipas as “my witness” is the same word that was later used to describe martyrs. Later in the second century, three Christians, Papyrus, Carpus, and Agathonike, met their deaths as martyrs in this arena.

Magnesia ad Sipylum in 189 BC, the Romans ceded all of Asia Minor up to the Taurus Mountains to the Pergamene Kingdom. The city of Pergamon went through fifty years of great prosperity and most of the temples and important public buildings were

constructed at this time. Attalos III had little interest in maintaining the dynasty and kingdom, and upon his death in 133 BC the Pergamene Kingdom was bequeathed to Rome.



Fig. 114 Pergamon Temple of Trajan

The temple of Trajan was begun during the latter years of Trajan and was completed under Hadrian. It was used as an imperial temple honoring both Trajan (AD 98–117) and Hadrian (AD 117–138), his successor. Trajan continued the policies of mistreatment for the Christians in Asia Minor that were instituted by his predecessor, Domitian. In an exchange of letters between Pliny the Younger, the governor of nearby Bithynia, and Trajan, both writers acknowledge that trials for Christians who had committed no offenses were commonplace. Executions for those who persisted in confessing Christ were normal, and such practices received Trajan's support.

In 129 BC Rome established the new province of Asia Minor in the western portions of the former Pergamene Kingdom. Pergamon probably functioned as the capital of the province for a few years until Ephesus assumed that position. In 88 BC Pergamon joined together with Mithridates VI, King of Pontus, along with several other cities, in a revolt against the Romans. When the revolt was put down, the Romans punished Pergamon. Fifty years later, Pergamon regained its stature. In 29 BC Augustus granted Pergamon

the right to build an imperial temple, an honor that was highly sought among ancient cities. During this time the population of Pergamon was probably 150,000–200,000 people. New building activity was initiated during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian in the early second century AD, when another imperial temple was constructed. Then, with the dedication of a temple to Caracalla in the early third century, the city was named Neokoros (guardian of the imperial temple) for the third time.

Christian Beginnings at Pergamon

Pergamon is another one of the seven churches of Revelation whose origins are a mystery. It is possible that Paul could have visited the city during the course of his second or third missions, since Pergamon was

along the route that he traveled. It is known from Cicero that a large Jewish population existed in Pergamon, and it is also known that Paul frequented synagogues in large cities during his travels. The



Fig. 115 Pergamon Acropolis Theater

The acropolis theater at Pergamon could seat as many as ten thousand people. Due to the slope of the acropolis hill upon which it was built, this is the steepest theater in Asia Minor, and it provided attendees with an amazing view of the lower city. The theater was built in the third century BC and was later modified by the Romans. The stage and background (known as the skene) were constructed of wood and were removable. The fittings for the wooden posts are still visible.

Apocalypse (Rev 2:12–17) indicates that at the end of the first century the city had a vibrant and diverse congregation. The church was commended because they did not deny their faith in the face of persecutions. An individual, Antipas, was cited as a martyr who was slain during these troubles. On the other hand, the church at Pergamon was rebuked because there were some within the congregation who were holding to the teachings of Balaam, and others who were following the teachings of the Nicolaitans. The former group may have compromised their faith by participating in imperial festivals and emperor worship. The Nicolaitans may have been a primitive Christian-Gnostic group.

Galen, the most famous ancient physician, was born in Pergamon in AD 129. He was trained at the sanctuary of Asklepius in Pergamon and traveled to medical schools throughout the Mediterranean world. After returning to Pergamon, Galen became the physician of the gladiators who were injured in the amphitheater at Pergamon. He learned a great deal of anatomy, physiology, and medicine by operating upon the wounded gladiators and examining the remains of those who died in the spectacles. The amphitheater was used for not only the gladiator contests but also public executions. Galen mentioned the Christians in his writings, and no doubt some of his exposure to the Christians came



Fig. 116 Pergamon Dionysus Temple

The patron deity of theatrical productions was Dionysus. Many theaters throughout the ancient Greek world had sanctuaries or altars of Dionysus near or even within the theater (such as at Priene, to the south). This temple to Dionysus was located on the periphery of the theater. The temple contained an entry of twenty-five steps and was first erected in the second century BC. It was later rebuilt during the reign of Caracalla in the third century AD.

from those who had been thrown to the beasts or slaughtered by gladiators in the amphitheater. The third-century church historian Eusebius reported

the martyrdoms of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonike in Pergamon during the reign of Marcus Aurelius around AD 170.

The Current Remains at Pergamon

Pergamon has some of the best ancient remains in Turkey. Most of the remains are located at two sites: on the acropolis and about a kilometer away at the Asklepion. The bulk of the Roman city sat between the acropolis and the Asklepion, straddling the ancient Selinus River. Three ancient Roman bridges still span the river. They are all in excellent shape and are used by the residents of Bergama, the modern city. Else-

where in the city one can see the Red Basilica (originally a second-century-AD temple to Serapis and later converted to a fifth-century Christian basilica) and three more poorly preserved Roman structures: a theater, a stadium, and an amphitheater. The remains of the amphitheater are impressive and important. There are only three known amphitheaters in all of Anatolia. Such structures were rare in the eastern empire. The

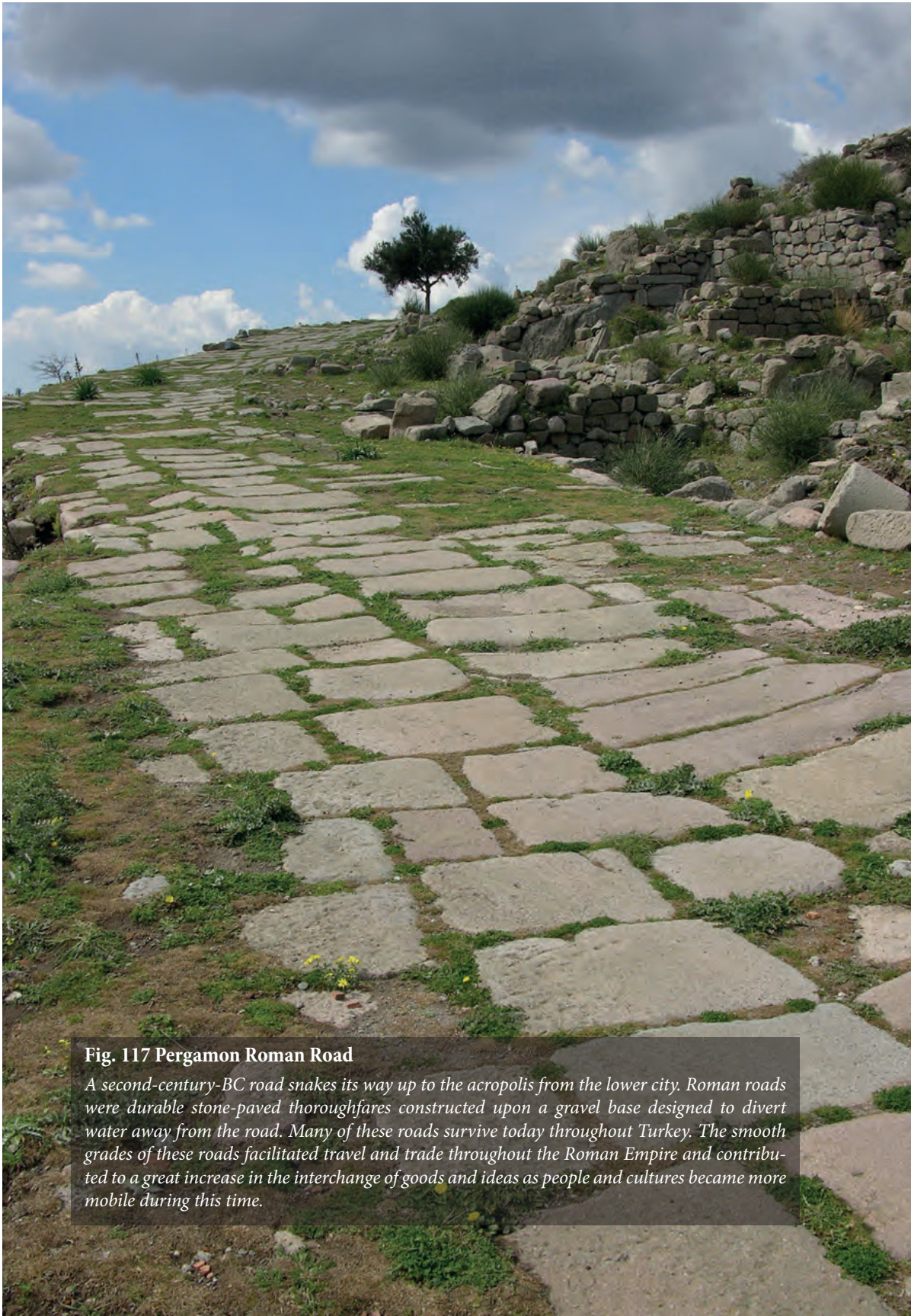


Fig. 117 Pergamon Roman Road

A second-century-BC road snakes its way up to the acropolis from the lower city. Roman roads were durable stone-paved thoroughfares constructed upon a gravel base designed to divert water away from the road. Many of these roads survive today throughout Turkey. The smooth grades of these roads facilitated travel and trade throughout the Roman Empire and contributed to a great increase in the interchange of goods and ideas as people and cultures became more mobile during this time.



Fig. 118 Pergamon Altar of Zeus

Some of the best preserved remains of the acropolis at Pergamon are currently housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. The Germans were one of the early excavators at Pergamon and the remains of the great altar of Zeus were brought to Berlin and wonderfully reconstructed. What currently remains on the acropolis are the five steps of the crepidoma, the base of the structure. The altar was constructed in the middle of the second century BC and was built in the shape of a squared U. A large frieze encircled the altar, depicting the battle between the gods and the giants. Many scholars believe that the reference to “Satan’s throne” in Rev 2:13 alludes to this altar. Others believe Satan’s throne refers to the Asklepion.

excellent Bergama Museum also lies between the acropolis and the Asklepion (figs. 112 and 113).

The acropolis is loaded with ancient structures that have been well excavated and are in good shape. There are three tiers of the acropolis. The ruins on the upper acropolis mostly date from the Hellenistic period. At the south near the entrance gate is an early Hellenistic Heroon, where the Attalids were

honored. Northwest of this was the third-century-BC temple of Athena, and further north was the famous, two-hundred-thousand-volume Pergamon Library, the second largest in the ancient world. On the east side of the acropolis there are several peristyle residences from the early Hellenistic period. These are assumed to be the palaces of the Attalid kings. Dominating the upper acropolis is the temple of Trajan (early second century AD) (fig. 114). The temple was



Fig. 119 Pergamon Acropolis Building Z

This building, designated as Building Z, was first constructed at the beginning of the second century BC. The structure was enlarged in the following years and by the time of the Roman period the building had become a peristyle dwelling with an atrium, mosaic floors, and frescoes. The building may have been used for cult purposes and may have been associated with the nearby sanctuary of Demeter, which was constructed at about the same time.

supported by large barrel vaults that are still present and it had colonnaded porticoes on three sides. The temple itself had six Corinthian columns on the ends and ten columns on the sides. Both Trajan and Hadrian were worshipped there. The ten-thousand-seat Pergamon acropolis theater was on the western slope of the acropolis (fig. 115). This structure was built in the third century BC and was modified by the Romans. The theater had eighty rows of seats and had a removable stage (skene) of wood. The fittings for the wooden posts are still present. Not surprisingly, a temple of Dionysus was at the bottom of the theater and a bit to

the north (fig. 116). The twenty-five-stepped temple was originally built in the second century BC, and was rebuilt and dedicated to Caracalla in the early third century AD. South of the theater and west of the Heroon was the altar of Zeus (fig. 117). All that remains of the altar are the five steps of the base. The rest of the altar was removed and has been reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. The mid-second-century-BC altar was dedicated to Athena and Zeus and had colonnaded porticoes shaped in a U. The large frieze that encircled the altar contained scenes of the battle between the gods and the giants.



Fig. 120 Pergamon Acropolis Gymnasium

This gymnasium, located on the lower terraces of the acropolis, was originally constructed during the Hellenistic period and was supplemented during the Roman period. The gymnasium was constructed on three terraces with exercise areas on each terrace and included a narrow running track, an Odeon for music and poetry, and baths on both the eastern and western ends. The upper terrace, the largest, had a large open-air palaestra surrounded by colonnaded porticoes. The middle terrace had a small temple and altar dedicated to Hercules and Hermes, the patron deities of athletic competition.

A second-century-BC street led from the upper acropolis to the middle acropolis (fig. 118). After a short walk down this street, one passes Roman baths on the right and then a Heroon complex on the left, dedicated to Diadoros Paspáros and built around AD 100. The Heroon complex included a public latrine, baths, an Odeon, and a cult hall. Further down the street there was a large cult hall for Dionysus from the second century AD. Still further down the hill on the right, a sanctuary of Hera was built in the second century BC, and to the west of this there was a peristyle building that has been recently

opened for public viewing. The second-century-BC Hellenistic building has been enclosed to protect the mosaics and portions of painted frescoes that were unearthed (fig. 119). The building probably served as a cult building for Demeter. Next to the villa are the interesting remains of the sanctuary of Demeter. The sanctuary, from the second century BC, had a small propylon leading to the temple precincts that contained five altars. The largest altar has been reconstructed and is situated seven meters in front of the temple. On the south side of the temple precinct, overlooking the city, stood a long colonnaded



Fig. 121 Pergamon Sacred Way

A Roman road, known as the Sacred Way, leads from Pergamon's acropolis and the lower city to the city's chief claim to fame, the medical facility, dedicated to the chief healing god of the Greco-Roman world, Asklepius. Although Asklepius' most important sanctuary was at Epidaurus, about twenty-five miles southeast of Corinth, the facility at Pergamon ran a close second. Desperate people seeking medical treatment came from all corners of Asia Minor to be healed. Their hopes were pinned upon primitive medical practices coupled with gifts to the god and bribes paid to the priests.

portico. On the western side, ten rows of seats provided space for worshippers during the ceremonies. A huge three-tiered Gymnasium complex occupied the remaining space on the middle acropolis. The Gymnasium complex was built during the Hellenistic period and was altered during the Roman period. The top tier was the largest and had a large palaestra surrounded by colonnaded porticoes (fig. 120). At the northwest corner of the complex there was a small one-thousand-seat Odeon, and at the eastern

end there was a large bath complex. The lower tiers of the Gymnasium complex were for younger children and were smaller in size. The largest structure of the lower acropolis was the Lower Agora, with two-storied colonnaded porticoes on all sides. Shops were located behind the stoas.

The Asklepiion was a healing center named after the chief god of healing, Asklepius, the son of Apollo. Although there were numerous asklepiions throughout



PERGAMUM

Design by **TUTKU TOURS**

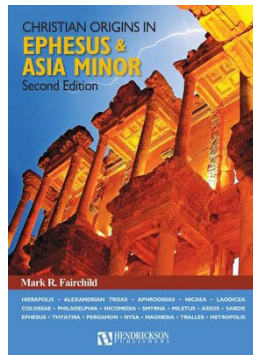
the ancient world, the Askleion at Pergamon was one of the three most prominent. Galen, a court physician to three Roman emperors, was born there and practiced medicine there before moving to Rome. Pergamon's Askleion was preceded by an eight-hundred-meter colonnaded Sacred Way that led from the ancient city at the foot of the acropolis to the Askleion (fig. 121). The Sacred Way terminated at a square courtyard with three colonnaded porticoes. In the middle of the courtyard stood an altar to Asklepios with reliefs of serpents (the symbol of Asklepios and the city of Pergamon). The uncolonnaded side (the west) had a second-century-AD propylon with four Corinthian columns that functioned as the main entrance to the Askleion. The temple of Asklepios was a round domed structure twenty-six meters in diameter located south of the propylon. The temple was constructed in AD 150. To the west

of the propylon and temple was a large square with columns lining the north, west, and south. In the northwest corner of the square there was a 3,500-seat Roman theater with a three-storied stage building, although little of the stage has survived. Three healing pools were found in the square along with three small Hellenistic temples dedicated to Asklepios, Apollo (his father), and Hygieia (his daughter), the three primary gods of healing. A Doric portico branched off to the west from the middle of the western portico and a gymnasium was located south of this portico. Both the portico and the gymnasium date to the Hellenistic period. In the middle of the large square, steps led underground to an eighty-five-meter walkway (or cryptoporticus) that ran in a southeastern direction to a large two-storied round building that scholars guess was a treatment center. The building was built in the second century AD.

Revelation: The Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:18–29)

The letter to the church at Thyatira was similar to the letter sent to Ephesus (Rev 2:1–7). Both began with an acknowledgment that the Lord knows “your deeds” (or works). For the Ephesians these deeds consisted of toil and perseverance and for the Thyatirians these deeds involved “love, faith, service and perseverance.” The letter gives evidence that John had previous contact with this church, since he added “your deeds of late are greater than at first” (2:19). While the Ephesian church was chastised because they left their first love, the church at Thyatira was trending upward. It may be that John had visited the church at Thyatira earlier or that one of his messengers had been there previously. Whatever the case, the church at Thyatira was demonstrating their faith and commitment better than before.

As with most of the letters in Revelation, however, there were problems at Thyatira. The church was tolerating a woman prophet, whom John labeled “Jezebel.” In the Old Testament, Jezebel was the Phoenician wife of Ahab, a king over the kingdom of Israel. She induced her husband and the northern tribes to follow the Canaanite god Baal, thus committing apostasy. Although the name Jezebel was used metaphorically, just as Balaam was used metaphorically in 2:14, the reference was clearly to a woman who was spreading false teaching at Thyatira.

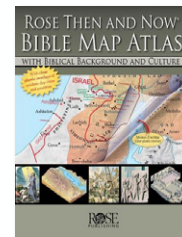


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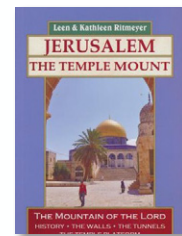


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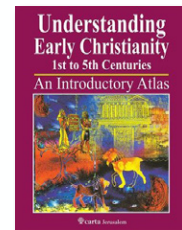


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