



## Summary :

Prytaneia were public buildings usually situated in the Agoras of the ancient Greek cities. They symbolised the typical house of the city and accommodated the sacred hearth, while the various devotional rites dedicated to goddess Hestia were held there. Architectural remains of prytaneia have been found in several cities of Asia Minor.

## Date

Classical, Hellenistic and Roman period

## Geographical Location

Asia Minor

## 1. Introduction

The prytaneion, the public building where the prytaneis convened and official guests, ambassadors, delegates and people of honour were accommodated, played a religious and a particularly important political role in ancient Greek cities.<sup>1</sup> In late archaic years it was established as a political organisation, while its name was derived from the ruling body of prytaneis, who held increased executive power.<sup>2</sup> In the classical period the prytaneis are incorporated into a new political framework and the prytaneion assumes a new political role in the life of the classical city and at the same time it thrives as an organisation independently of the prytaneis. It accommodates the common hearth with the sacred flame, the symbol of life of the city-state and represents the typical house of the city. However, in Hellenistic times its importance fades because the political role of the prytaneion is weakened along with the decline of the city-state. Yet particular emphasis is given on its religious character. This political decline was completed in the Roman period, when prytaneia became the exclusive centres for the worship of goddess Hestia.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Prytaneion and its Functions

The prytaneion was the dining place for the prytaneis, ambassadors from other cities and citizens of honour. In particular, three kinds of meals were offered there: Xenia,<sup>4</sup> Deipnon and Sitiesis. The difference between the first two kinds is that the Xenia was intended for foreign guests, while the third kind was intended for the citizens who were considered official delegates of the city. The Sitiesis was honorarily provided to the citizens who had offered valuable services to their city or had excelled in Pan-Hellenic games. The Sitiesis in the prytaneion was also a privilege offered to some public officials, such as the prytaneis.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, the prytaneion was the symbolic 'House of the City' and was of particular political and religious importance, given that although hospitality was dictated by the religious consciousness, it also had its political aspects.

The prytaneion also housed the sacred hearth, which symbolised the city's life. That was the reason why among all public buildings the prytaneion was the best symbol of the city. This was a clearly religious function connected with the worship of Hestia; sacrifices and other devotional rites dedicated to the goddess took place there. Historic heirlooms of the city as well as statues of historic figures and deities were kept in the premises of the prytaneion.<sup>6</sup>

There is little information about the people who performed the various duties at the prytaneion. Among them are recorded the titles οἰνοχόος (oinochoos, cupbearer), μάγειρος (public cook) and αὐλητής (auletēs, flute player), whose duties were connected with the meals at the prytaneion. Furthermore, a citizen was appointed as responsible for welcoming the foreign official guests, while the sacred hearth was under the supervision of virgins. In Roman times, when emphasis was given on the religious character of the establishment, the people were mainly of a religious nature. For example, in [Ephesus](#), where the annual lists of officials were inscribed on the architectural elements of the prytaneion in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the following titles are preserved: πρύτανις (prytanis),



ἱ ερουργοί (sacrificing priests), Κουρήτες (Couretes, religious college of six members), ἱ εροσκόπος (inspecting victims), ἱ εροφάντης (hierophant, one who teaches rites of sacrifice and worship), σπονδαύλης (player the flute at a drink offering to a god), ἱ εροκῆρυξ (herald or attendant at a sacrifice) and ἱ εροσαλπικτής (a trumpeter at a sacrifice).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Architectural Form

The Prytaneion was usually within or near the Agora, often in the vicinity of the [Bouleuterion](#).<sup>8</sup> The buildings of prytaneia were in no particular architectural style. However, they have similar top views and morphological details meeting their functional needs. Some of their architectural characteristics are also found in houses, although their monumental morphology and their functional character differentiates them from private premises and places them among the public buildings of the ancient Greek architecture.

The prytaneion included the following separate spaces: the courtyard, the dining room, the room of Hestia and the subsidiary rooms. The premises of prytaneia often included a prostas, which was a front chamber leading to the main rooms of the building. In architectural terms the room dedicated to Hestia was equally important to the room where official meals were served. The common hearth was at the centre.<sup>9</sup> The size and the capacity of the room permitted the participation of the faithful in the sacrifices. The sundry subsidiary rooms of the prytaneia were used for storage of tables and couches.<sup>10</sup>

### 4. The Prytaneia of Asia Minor

The architectural remains of the prytaneia found in Asia Minor cities date from the Hellenistic period and are particularly important in studying both the architectural form of the particular type and its function as a public building.

In [Magnesia ad Maeandrum](#) the prytaneion was in the Agora and dates from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. It included a spacious peristyle courtyard with rows of rooms opening on its north and east side. The central room of the north side was of particular architectural interest. It was an [exedra](#), a type of room usually found in [gymnasia](#) with an [Ionic](#) colonnade instead of a continuous wall on its facade, which was directed to the central courtyard. The room in the northwestern corner of the building was possibly the dining room, while the religious premises may have been in the rooms of the eastern side.<sup>11</sup>

The [Prytaneion of Ephesus](#), on the northern side of the [public Agora](#) of the city, beside the [odeum](#), is particularly important. It included a peristyle courtyard, to the north of which there were four rooms arranged in pairs. Archaeological research traced four building phases, but most of the preserved remains date from the years of [Augustus](#) (1<sup>st</sup> c. BC), while the numerous inscriptions provide valuable information about the function of the building, which was mainly of a devotional character.<sup>12</sup>

The prytaneion in [Colophon](#) was one of the public buildings of the Agora. Its premises were beside a preexistent stoa, whose colonnade had been extended and, as a result, the two buildings had a common facade. It dates from about the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, probably not long used as in 299 BC Colophon was captured by [Lycimachus](#) and its inhabitants were made to move to Ephesus.<sup>13</sup>

The Prytaneion in [Priene](#) is similarly developed at the back of a stoa, to the northeast of the [Agora](#), behind the Sacred stoa and exactly beside the [Bouleuterion](#). There are few remains of the original building dated in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, for the building was restored in the Imperial years. A row of rooms existed on the northern side, while traces of the common hearth were discovered in the southeastern hall, where goddess Hestia was worshipped. In the Imperial period the building included a peristyle courtyard with rooms for a variety of uses arranged on its three sides.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning some buildings described as prytaneia, although there is no ample evidence verifying their identification. Such were the so-called prytaneion of [Miletus](#), on the western side of the [North Agora](#),<sup>15</sup> and the so-called prytaneion at the acropolis of [Pergamon](#), to the west of the sanctuary of Demeter.<sup>16</sup> Research considers the rectangular building at Alazeytin Kalasi,



dating from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC, was a prytaneion as well.<sup>17</sup>

1. The scientific research and the related bibliography regarding the prytaneia of the ancient greek cities is particularly poor with the exception of Miller's work. See Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978).
2. *Der Neue Pauly* 10 (Stuttgart-Weimar 2001), columns 494-495, βλ. λ. "Prytaneion" (K.W. Welwei).
3. Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978), p. 128-131. M.H. Hansen, T. Fischer-Hansen, Monumental Political Architecture in Archaic and Classical Poleis, in D. Whitehead (ed.) *From Political Architecture to Stephanus Byzantius* (Historia ES 87) (Stuttgart 1994) p. 30-31.
4. The term Xenia was used in Athens, while in other cities the meal offered to foreigners in the prytaneion was called Xenismos. This meal could also be offered at other places than the prytaneion, like temple, see Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978), p. 6-7 footnote. 5.
5. It is worth noting that just as political constitutions varied in the ancient greek cities, so did the titles of the officials vary too. It is thus possible that the Athenian prytaneis corresponded to offices differently named in other Greek cities. In case that a city did not have prytaneis, there would have existed other names for the public buildings fulfilling the functions of the prytaneion, for example the ἱεροθεῖον at Lindos, at δαμοργεῖον Knidus and at ἀρχηγεῖον Cassandra. See Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 9-11.
6. In the Athenian prytaneion the laws of Solon were preserved. Pliny (*Naturalis historia* XXXXVI.99) states that the stone which the Argonauts had used as an anchor was kept in the prytaneion in Cyzicus. According to epigraphic evidence the Prytaneion in Athens functioned as a lawcourt as well as a social welfare institution. See Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 16-20.
7. See H. Engelmann, D. Knibbe, R. Meikelbach, *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, Teil IV (Nr. 1001-1445 Repertorium), (IK , Bonn 1980).
8. In the city center the bouleuterion was often built near the Prytaneion. The vicinity of the two buildings is related to their public character and to Hestia's cult, since in the bouleuterion the goddess was worshipped as Hestia Boulaia. See D. Geisz, *Das antike Rathaus: das griechische Bouleuterion und die frühromische Curia* (Wien 1990) p. I-II, 5, 208-210.
9. Pollux I.7, IX.40.
10. Details regarding the architecture and the rooms of the Prytaneion See Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 26-37. A different view is presented by M.H. Hansen and T. Fischer-Hansen who state that the Prytaneia never gained a fixed architectural form and plan. They claim that the archaic and classical prytaneion was a modest building without architectural and sculptural embellishments, while during the Hellenistic period this building type didn't have a specific architectural form and unlike other public buildings was not developed into a monumental structure. It is worth adding that the literary and epigraphic sources testify the presence of 91 prytaneion in the ancient Greek cities, few of which have been identified. See M.H. Hansen, T. Fischer-Hansen, Monumental Political Architecture in Archaic and Classical Poleis, in D. Whitehead (ed.) *From Political Architecture to Stephanus Byzantius* (Historia ES 87) (Stuttgart 1994) p. 30-37, where a detailed catalog of the ancient Greek prytaneia is given. See also *Brill's Neue Pauly* entry "Assembly buildings" (Leiden, Boston 2003) col. 176 (C. Höcker), where it is also stated that the prytaneia like the lawcourts, did not evolve into a specific architectural form.
11. The formal character of the exedra lead to the conclusion, that the common hearth of the city was placed there, while the rooms on the eastern side of the court consisted the subsidiary premises. An altar found in the central room of the eastern side refuted this conclusion, while the identification of the building as Prytaneion is also disputed. See Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 112-115.
12. See Knibbe, D., *Der Staatsmarkt. Die Inschriften des Prytaneions. Die Kureteninschriften und sonstige religiöse Texte*, Forschungen in Ephesos, 9. 1.1 (Wien 1981).
13. This structure hasn't got the typical features of a prytaneion, since there was not a courtyard and a dining room. However this building is



identified as Prytaneion by the excavators. See L.B., Holland, "Colophon", *Hesperia* 13 (1944) p. 103-106. Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 109-112. M.H. Hansen, T. Fischer-Hansen , Monumental Political Architecture in Archaic and Classical Poleis, in D. Whitehead (ed.) *From Political Architecture to Stephanus Byzantius* (Historia ES 87) (Stuttgart 1994) p.36.

14. It should be noted that the archaeological evidence do not confirm the identification of the building as Prytaneion, since its design and plan can not be restored due to later renovations. On the identification's problem S.G Miller assumed that the Prytaneia in Priene and Colophon, as they do not have the prytaneion's typical features, belong to a different category. Their architecture reflects the differentiation of the institution during the Hellenistic period. However there is a possibility that they are separate public buildings related functionally with the prytaneia of the corresponding city. See Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 115-126. M. Schede, *Die Ruinen von Priene* (Berlin 1964) σελ. 63-67. F. Rumscheid, *Priene, A Guide to the "Pompeii of Asia Minor"* (1998) p. 46-51.

15. Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p. 231.

16. Miller, S.G., *The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form* (London 1978) p 204, 233-234.

17. The village Alazeytin is located in the east side of Halicarnassus, the ancient name of the site is not known. This building, which was initially identified as bouleuterion, seems more probably to have been a prytaneion. See D. Geisz, *Das antike Rathaus: das griechische Bouleuterion und die frühromische Curia* (Wien 1990) p. 184-186, 304.

#### Bibliography :

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	<b>Miller S.G.</b> , <i>The Prytaneion. Its Function and Architectural Form</i> , Berkeley – Los Angeles 1978
	<b>Eder W.</b> , "Prytaneion", <i>NPauily 10</i> , 2001, 493-494

#### Glossary :

	<b>exedra, the</b>
	1. Large semicircular niche-like structure with stone seats ranged around the walls, often outdoors or with a hemidome over. An exedra may also be expressed by a curved break in a colonnade, perhaps with a semi-circular seat. 2. The rectangular hall of the palaestra, open to the courtyard with columns at the front. The exedrae in gymnasium and palaestra could have served many functions. Usually a hall of such type was the Ephebeum.
	<b>gymnasium</b>
	The gymnasium was one of the most important centres of public life in Greek cities. The institution of the gymnasium, directly connected with the development of the Greek city, aimed to create virtuous citizens and gallant warriors. As educational institutions of public character, the gymnasia were intended for the physical and theoretical education of the young and consisted of separate spaces for special purposes.
	<b>ionic order, the</b>
	An architectural order devised in Ionia and developed in Asia Minor and the Greek islands in the 6th century BC. Its columns have elaborately moulded bases, fluted shafts (with fillets, ending in fillets), and volute capitals. The entablature consists of an three-fasciae architrave, a continuous frieze, usually richly decorated with reliefs, and a cornice. The Ionic order was more elaborate in dimensions, comparing with the Doric.
	<b>odeum, the</b>
	Public building similar to the theatre, but roofed and with smaller dimensions, which was used for musical contests.