



Summary :

Dio (Cocceianus) Prusaesus, also known as Chrysostomus, was an orator and a sophist, one of the precursors of the Second Sophistic movement. He was born in Prousa (Bursa) of Bithynia in the mid-1st century AD and spent part of his life in exile, during the reign of Emperor Domitian. After the emperor's death he returned to his birthplace, where he was occupied with common affairs and rhetoric. His work includes mostly speeches as well as historical and philosophical treatises.

Other Names

Cocceianus, Prusaesus, Chrysostomus

Date and Place of Birth

Prousa (Bursa) of Bithynia, mid-1st c. AD.

Date and Place of Death

circa 120 AD

Main Role

orator, sophist

1. Biography

Dio was born into a notable family in the city of [Prousa](#) (Bursa) in Bithynia between 40 and 50 AD. His father, Passicrates, was a member of the local [aristocracy](#) as well as an honorary citizen of the neighbouring city of Apamea (Myrleia). His mother was a Roman citizen, obviously due to the close relations between her father and the Roman emperor, possibly Claudius.¹ His family was distinguished for its numerous benefactions towards the people of Prousa, according to the imperial standard of living in the provincial cities of the Roman Empire. It appears that his grandfather had spent the greatest part of his assets in this way. Among others, they had funded the organisation of sports events, the honorary funeral services whose expenses were covered by the state as well as the erection of statues. This standard was later followed by Dio himself, who never forgot to emphasise his family's contribution to the public life of his birthplace.²

Towards the end of 60 AD Dio left his birthplace (leaving behind his wife and child), in order to complete his studies in Rome. He went to the school of Musonius Rufus, a very important philosopher of the time, who was also the teacher of the subsequent stoic philosopher Epictetus. However, the circumstances in Rome during the reign of Vespasian were not particularly favourable for philosophy and Dio turned to [rhetoric](#). This turn was made known in two libels, *Κατὰ τῶν Φιλοσόφων* ("Against the Philosophers") and *Πρὸς Μουσώνιον* ("To Musonius").

Nevertheless, this atmosphere of intolerance and obscurantism was meant to get worse during the reign of [Domitian](#) and, finally, not even Dio remained untouched by the whirlwind of this era. Due to his friendship – according to him³ with a prominent Roman who was considered an enemy to the emperor, Dio was convicted to live in exile. Nevertheless, his sentence was rather mild, as he was forbidden to stay in Rome and the Italian peninsula in general or in Prousa, but he was allowed to go anywhere else in the empire. Dio chose the life of a wanderer, as it appears that this was the advice of the Delphi Oracle, to which he turned for guidance.⁴ He made sure to emphasise his image as a wandering philosopher, adopting the look of the cynic Diogenes: although he should have continued to receive an income from his [land property](#) in Prousa, which was not expropriated,⁵ he walked around dressed in rags, with messy hair and beard, holding a stick.⁶

This persona of the scruffy philosopher and orator was maintained after the end of his exile, which came in 96, with the assassination



of Domitian. There was a rumour that after the assassination he was found in an encampment of Roman troops, where a mutiny was about to take place. Dio addressed the soldiers and by verbally attacking the dead emperor, he managed to appease the soldiers' hate and calm them down.⁷ His close relationship with emperor Nerva ensured his comeback to the privileged position he had enjoyed before his exile. However, he chose not to return to Rome but permanently reside in Prousa. He was actively involved in the [affairs of the city](#), but also in the politics of other cities, either voluntarily or following their request. In return, many of these cities nominated him as their citizen. With his mediation, Prousa gained some privileges, especially during the reign of [Trajan](#), for whom Dio wrote four *Royal speeches*,⁸ in which he described the ideal monarch according to the Platonic ideals. It is said that Trajan, a man of battle rather than words, claimed that although he did not understand a word of what Dio said, he still loved him as much as he loved himself.⁹ Nevertheless, his involvement in common affairs was not always greeted in the appropriate way by his fellow citizens. It seems that in many cases he caused rivalries or the intervention of his opponents in the Roman authorities. The case of the law suit pressed against him by a number of citizens of Prousa, headed by Flavius Archippus and Claudius Eumolpus, according to which Dio had built for his wife and son who had died in the meantime a monument with an arcade, which probably had a funerary character, is rather characteristic. His prosecutors accused him and claimed that, on the one hand, he spent public money (he claimed that he only spent his private property) and, on the other hand, he erected a statue of Trajan next to this funerary monument, which was obviously considered a bad omen for the emperor.¹⁰ This incident took place around the time that [Pliny the Younger](#), whose correspondence with emperor Trajan has survived until today almost intact, was senator of Bithynia (around 110). However, the outcome of this judicial case is not known. Nevertheless, his testimony is important as this is the last historical testimony which concerns Dio. His date of death remains unknown, but it must have been sometime around 120.

2. Work

Dio was a precursor of the so-called [Second Sophistic](#) movement and his works were mostly rhetoric and philosophic, while some were also historical. The latter, nothing of which has survived, includes a treatise called *Getika* (Getic history), the history of the Getae, the barbarian tribe settled in the Danube region, which Dio claimed that he had written based on an autopsy. The dictionary *Suda* also attributes to Dio an eight-volume history of [Alexander the Great](#), although this work has not been confirmed. Small fragments from some of his treatises, albeit somewhat insignificant, are included in *Florilegium* by Stobaeus. The most important of them belongs to a speech about economy. Five letters assigned to Dio by ancient writers are probably false. The greatest part of his work that remains today includes a total number of 80 speeches.¹¹ Many of these speeches circulated as reading material or even school material already in the Roman period and, therefore, someone or some people transcribed them and included them in a single volume.¹² Prominent among these are the *Royal Speeches* ("Βασίλειοι λόγοι"), which have already been mentioned above and praise the ideal monarch and the *Olympic Discourse* ("Ὀλυμπικός λόγος"), which must have been written in 89 or 101 AD.¹³

Dio's work is characterised by a contradiction: on the one hand, his obsession with cynical philosophy, which supposedly rejects public life and the excesses or its lack of morality and, on the other hand, a rhetorical attitude that can only be expressed by someone who cares deeply about public life. Indeed, Dio is a precursor of [Aelius Aristides](#) and other writers and orators of the 2nd century and managed to overcome the differences and combine these two attitudes.

Nevertheless, on a first level, this overcoming of differences may appear to the modern reader as simple hypocrisy. One must deeply understand Dio's psyche as well as the social reality in which he lived in order to trace the reasons that led him to this behaviour and realize his great need to bridge the gap in a time where feuds between citizens or cities were starting to become intense. Even his attack against Plato is made in such a way that a new interpretation of the great philosopher, in accordance with the moral and social demands of the era, rather than a complete rejection of his work is merely given.

Dio was a contemporary of Plutarch and in some cases it is clear that they were both concerned with similar issues. However, although Plutarch was exclusively interested in improving the person based on human values, Dio was more concerned with values as these appear and are implemented in the social and political field. In essence, it is felt that Dio – even when he is philosophising – never rejects his capacity as an orator. His words are always addressed to an audience and are characterised by rhetoric. It is obvious from the style and the selection of words that his speeches were not written to be read but to be heard out loud.



One of the elements which make his work particularly eloquent is the fact that he often includes anecdotal stories, even real incidents, often biographical, told in such a way that they become a narration. This could be the reason why he was characterised as ‘golden-mouthed’ (Chrysostomus) later on. In that way, he managed to gain the interest of his listeners and make his speech memorable. Therefore, for example, in *Euboicus*¹⁴ he tells the story of how he shipwrecked in Euboea and the adventures he encountered there, so that -later on- he could comment in an experiential way on social issues, such as work and social morality. In another case, in the *Trojan Discourse* ("Τρωικός λόγος"),¹⁵ he essentially reconstructs the legend of the Trojan campaign in order to combine it with his arguments. Incidents or persons of the Trojan cycle were at the centre of other speeches as well, as they were obviously common knowledge among the educated audience he addressed.

In general, Dio's works may be of philosophical, autobiographical or political character. The first category includes works such as *Περὶ πλεονεξίας*, *Περὶ Εὐ δαιμονίας*, *Ὅτι εὐ δαίμων ὁ σοφὸς*, *Περὶ πίστεως*, and *Περὶ Ἀπιστίας*. In these works, Dio analyses the relevant ideas and tries, through them, to see what is good for man. On the other hand, his autobiographical works aim to outline aspects of political life, in order either to thank for the honours he was given or to express his anger for the hardships he had to endure by the imperial power or his fellow citizens. This category includes works such as *Ἐν Ἀθήναις περὶ φυγῆς*, *Περὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ φιληκούσας*, *Περὶ ἀναχωρήσεως*, *Φιλοφρονητικὸς πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα εἰ σηγουμένην αὐτῷ τιμᾶς*, *Πρὸς τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι*, and *Δημηγορία ἐν τῇ πατρίδι*. Finally, the greater part of his speeches, one way or another, directly or indirectly, concerns the correct political attitude and the integration of the citizen in society or the relations between cities.

Apart from the speeches which concerned political theory, such as *Περὶ βασιλείας καὶ τυραννίδος ἢ τοῦ βουλευέσθαι*, Dio also wrote hortative orations towards particular cities about issues which concerned them. Noteworthy among these were the following: *Πρὸς Νικομηδεῖς περὶ ὁμοιοῦς τῆς πρὸς Νικαεῖς*, *Περὶ ὁμοιοῦς ἐν Νικαίᾳ πεπανμένης τῆς στάσεως*, *Ἐν τῇ πατρίδι περὶ τῆς πρὸς Ἀπαμεῖς ὁμοιοῦς* and *Πρὸς Ἀπαμεῖς περὶ ὁμοιοῦς*. In these four speeches – as well as other parts of his work – his interest for the cease of discord and competition between cities can be seen, mostly due to the imperial privileges and the establishment of the [imperial cult](#). This phenomenon was a problem for both public finance and the relations between cities, while it concerned other writers of the time as well.

Through his work, a mixed effort to appease, if not flatter, Rome, on the one hand, by recognising the fact that it was the world-dominating power, and, on the other hand, to enhance the Greek values and avoid mimicking the Roman morals and customs may be seen. Among others, he is against mimicking the Roman way of dressing,¹⁶ homosexual behaviour,¹⁷ as well as the tendency of the Greek cities to address the Roman authorities as arbitrators of their conflicts, thus strengthening the latter and weakening the former.

3. Evaluation of Dio's Work and Personality

Dio was undoubtedly a prolific writer. He strongly believed in the value of communication, especially in the framework of political society, and, therefore, wrote speeches about issues that might seem less important or even funny (such as the way one looks or wears his hair). The colourfulness of his style and his rhetoric eloquence gave him the nickname ‘golden-mouthed’ (Chrysostomus), mostly by later Byzantine writers. However, his work lacks the acuteness and pervasiveness which could really make it timeless. His effort to bridge the gap between completely different views makes his speeches sometimes seem ‘artificial’, as his polemic is often exhausted in rhetorical figures and does not reach deep into the heart of the matter.

In a final analysis, reading the work of Dio makes for an excellent historical source, not so much because of the writer's philosophical or rhetorical capacity but because of the way in which the elite of the Roman Empire's provincial cities conversed with authority, understood its role and tried to preserve its position or formulate a new one. The sense of intellectual supremacy as well as political weakness is obvious in his work.

1. This information is provided by Dio himself in his orations (*Orationes* 41.6, 44.5, 46.3 and elsewhere), without naming specific



emperors or other influential members. See also Klauck, H.J., *Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede oder über die erste Erkenntnis Gottes* (Darmstadt 2000).

2. The burial monument of his mother was an altar, which suggests that the city (or her family) may have worshipped her as a heroised dead. See from *Or.* 44.3 onward.
3. This information is provided by the very important and autobiographical *Or.* 13, *Ἐν Ἀθήναις περὶ φυγῆς*.
4. Oration 13.9.
5. Philostratus (*Βίοι Σοφιστῶν* 1.7) reports that he earned his living as a stalking horse or gardener. However, probably he did it because he wanted to be identified with his ideas and the image he wanted to create for himself, while it may have been invented by his biographer.
6. See the speech *Δίωνος κόμης ἐγκώμιον*.
7. Philostratus, *Βίοι σοφιστῶν* 1.7.
8. *Orations* 1-4.
9. See also Schmitz, T., *Trajan und Dion von Prusa*, p. 318.
10. See also oration 45, *Ἀπολογισμὸς ὅπως ἔσχηκε πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα*.
11. Two of them, no. 37 (*Πρὸς Κορινθίους*) and no. 64 (*Περὶ Τύχης*) probably were written by his student Favorino. See also Barigazzi, A., 'Note critiche alle orazioni *Corinthiaca* e *de fortuna* di Favorino', *Athenaeum* N.S. 28 (1950), pp. 95-115.
12. The main publications of the complete speeches of Dio are: de Arnim, J. (edit.), *Dionis Prusaensis quem vocant Chrysostomum quae exstant omnia* (Berolini 1893-1896); Dindorff, L. – De Bude, G., *Dionis Chrysostomi Orationes*, 2 vol. (Lipsiae 1916-1919) and Cohoon, J.W., (edit.), *Dio Chrysostome: Discourses* (London – Cambridge MA), pp. 1932-1951.
13. Chronology is mainly based on the fact that Dio, on the one hand, addresses the Eleans, who organised the Olympic Games, which means that he delivered (or intended to deliver) the speech during the Olympic Games and, on the other hand, he refers to a recent expedition against the Dacians. The only possible dates are the years 89 (in Domitian's reign) and 101 (Trajan's reign). See also Klauck, H.J., *Dion von Prusa: Olympische Rede oder über die erste Erkenntnis Gottes* (Darmstadt 2000), pp. 26-27.
14. Oration 7.
15. Oration 11.
16. A typical example is his oration *Borysthenicus*, where he praises the Borysthenites because they grow long hair and beards and have not adopted the Roman style with short hair and shaved faces.
17. Particularly in the first and second *Tarsians* speeches.

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Auxiliary Catalogs

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2. *Περὶ Βασιλείας Β'*
3. *Περὶ Βασιλείας Γ'*
4. *Περὶ Βασιλείας Δ'*
5. *Λιβυκὸς μῦθος*
6. *Διογένης ἢ Περὶ τυραννίδος*
7. *Εὐβοϊκὸς ἢ Κυνηγός*
8. *Διογένης ἢ Περὶ ἀρετῆς*
9. *Διογένης ἢ Ἰσθμικὸς*
10. *Διογένης ἢ Περὶ οἰκετῶν*
11. *Τρωικὸς ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἴλιον μὴ ἀλῶναι*
12. *Ὀλυμπικὸς ἢ Περὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐννοίας*
13. *Ἐν Ἀθήναις περὶ φυγῆς*
14. *Περὶ δουλείας καὶ ἐλευθερίας*
15. *Περὶ δουλείας καὶ ἐλευθερίας Β'*
16. *Περὶ λύπης*
17. *Περὶ πλεονεξίας*
18. *Περὶ λόγου ἀσκήσεως*



19. Περί τῆς αὐτοῦ φιληκοῖας
20. Περί ἀναχωρήσεως
21. Περί κάλλους
22. Περί εἰρήνης καὶ πολέμου
23. Ὅτι εὐδαίμων ὁ σοφός
24. Περί εὐδαιμονίας
25. Περί τοῦ δαίμονος
26. Περί τοῦ βουλευέσθαι
27. Διατριβὴ περὶ τῶν ἐν συμποσίῳ
28. Μελαγκόμας Β' τῆ τάξει Α'
29. Μελαγκόμας Α' τῆ τάξει Β'
30. Χαρίδημος
31. Ροδιακός
32. Πρὸς Ἀλεξανδρεῖς
33. Ταρσικὸς πρῶτος
34. Ταρσικὸς δεύτερος
35. Ἐν Κελαιναῖς τῆς Φρυγίας
36. Βορυσθενικὸς ὃν ἀνέγνω ἐν τῇ πατρίδι
37. Κορινθιακός
38. Πρὸς Νικομηδεῖς περὶ ὁμοιοῖας τῆς πρὸς Νικαεῖς
39. Περί ὁμοιοῖας ἐν Νικαία πεπαυμένης τῆς στάσεως
40. Ἐν τῇ πατρίδι περὶ τῆς πρὸς Ἀπαμεῖς ὁμοιοῖας
41. Πρὸς Ἀπαμεῖς περὶ ὁμοιοῖας
42. Διαλέξεις ἐν τῇ πατρίδι
43. Πολιτικὸς ἐν τῇ πατρίδι
44. Φιλοφρονητικὸς πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα εἰσηγουμένην αὐτῶ τιμᾶς
45. Ἀπολογισμὸς ὅπως ἔσχηκε πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα
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51. Πρὸς Διόδωρον
52. Περί Αἰσχύλου καὶ Σοφοκλέους καὶ Εὐριπίδου ἢ Περί τῶν Φιλοκτῆτου τόξων
53. Περί Ὀμήρου
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73. Περί πίστεως
74. Περί ἀπιστίας



75. *Περί νόμον*
76. *Περί ἔθνους*
- 77-78. *Περί θρόνου*
79. *Περί πλούτου*
80. *Περί ἐλευθερίας*
81. *Δίωνος κόμης ἐγκώμιον*