1. Topography

Prusa, known today as Bursa, is built at the foot of mount Olympus (Uludağ), at a point where the mountainous territory recedes and gives way to a fertile and rather extensive plain. Meanwhile, a rocky hill, surrounded by a wall in antiquity, offered a natural fortification which was necessary for an ancient acropolis. At a small distance from the city, in the present-day suburb of Çekirge, there were hot springs, which soon became an attraction for visitors. Furthermore, Olympus, with its dense forests of chestnut trees and beeches, constituted for centuries a unique source of timber and forest-related products, whereas today it has been proclaimed as a national park.

2. History

2.1 The foundation of the city

According to tradition, Prusa was built by the king of Bithynia Prusias I, son of Ziaelas. Ancient sources, however, offer a second version regarding its foundation. Strabo believes that it was “built by Prusias, who fought against Croesus”, whereas Stephanus Byzantius, varying a little from Strabo, speaks of a “building of Prusias who fought against Cyrus”. In both cases the initial foundation of the city is located in the 6th century B.C. and not in the 2nd century B.C., as would have been the case if one accepted foundation by the Bithynian king.

Arrian, on the contrary, related the foundation of the city with the royal dynasty of Bithynia, whereas Pliny maintains that the city was built by Hannibal at the time when he was a refugee at the Bithynian court. The most prominent intellectual of the city, the orator and sophist Dio Chrysostomus, writing around 100, does not mention an early founder. It is possible, however, that by that time the reminiscence of an early foundation had been erased.

Moreover, the archaeological remains do not attest to such an early foundation as that mentioned by Strabo and Stephanus Byzantius. However, inscriptions earlier than the end of the 2nd century B.C., date of the possible foundation of the city by Prusias I, have been discovered. This epigraphic material is dated at least in the 3rd century B.C. The coins, on the other hand, which bear the portrait of the founder Prusias and which are all dated to Roman Imperial times, give an idealistic representation of the founder, which does not lead to an identification with a specific historical personality known from other portraits. The conclusion of the scholars
specializing in the history of the city is that Prusa may have pre-existed as a settlement, built by a local monarch or general during the Archaic or the Classical period, yet it was Prusias I who re-organised it in the form of a city, thus constituting it the southernmost fortified site of his kingdom.8

2.2. Hellenistic period

Regardless of its foundation date, the city seems to have been in obscurity for a long time. From the few surviving inscriptions of the Hellenistic period one learns that the city was organized according to the civic model of the Greek poleis, with a Council and a body of citizens (demos), yet it was not a completely free and independent entity, as epigraphic evidence attests to a superintendent, i.e. a governor appointed by the king.9 The city came into the historical forefront for the first time in the 1st century B.C., when Mithridates VI of Pontus held territorial claims over the Bithynian kingdom, which its last king, Nicomedes IV, had bequeathed to the people of Rome. In order to defend their inheritance, the Roman troops of Pompey, under the leadership of C.Valerius Triarius,10 or perhaps headed by a certain Barba mentioned by some sources,11 conquered the city and used it as a stronghold for their further attacks against the Pontic army.

2.3. Roman period

After the complete subjugation of Bithynia and the Pontic kingdom to the Roman state at the end of the Third Mithridatic war, Pompey proceeded to the reorganization of the area, according to the conditions of the Amisos treaty. The former kingdom of Bithynia, together with a part of the former kingdom of Pontus, constituted the Roman province of Bithynia-Pontus. Pompey attempted to impose an administrative system based on that which was in use in the Italian peninsula. Thus, the territory of the province were administered as “chora” to the twelve larger cities, which had total control over their lands. The basic civic instruments were the senatus and a censor appointed by Rome. The number of councilors is not clear, yet we know that the city made petitions to Rome in order to increase the body of its councilors, a petition which was finally accepted by the Roman central administration at the end of the 1st century.12 The city had also an organized body of citizens (demos), divided at a still uncertain number of “tribes”, as well as a gerousia, which did not have political duties but undertook an organizational role in issues regarding athletic games and other festivals.13 Among the public offices attested in epigraphic or literary sources are those of the secretary of the council and the people (grammateus tes boules kai tou demou), of the agonothetes, of the gymnasiarchos, or the pontifex (for the imperial cult) and of the sebastophantes, who had the duty of carrying the holy symbols during public processions. The supreme office was that of the archon. In fact, there was a council of archons, with a single-digit body of members, ahead of which was the “first archon”, who often held also the offices of agonothete and gymnasiarchos.14 The picture we have on the public life of the city, both from Dio and Pliny the Younger, is that the constant desire of the city to acquire a status of full freedom and in general to increase its prestige and size often bounced again the obstacles caused by the political behaviour of its upper classes, marked by dissent, both among different factions and between the inhabitants of Prusa and those of other Bithynian cities, such as Apamea (present-day Mudanya at the shores of the Sea of Marmara).

3. Economy

As mentioned above, the soil of the plain where Prusa was built was particularly fertile. The basic agricultural products were cereals, linen and wine. A large part of its wealth, however, relied upon the timber of the slopes of Olympus. Many inhabitants worked in the field of wood processing and trade. This was also the basic means of maintenance in the settlements which formed part of the administrative district of the city, as attested by representations in relief on funerary stelae.15 Some of the names of those settlements are preserved on inscriptions, among which feature Sarcotyle, Tatalulenon kome, and Eikote. An important part of the city income, however, came probably from its baths, which became famous in the Roman period, and remained so, uninterruptedly, until today.16 The initial building of the baths lies possibly underneath the later Byzantine and Ottoman baths known as Eski Kaplica. The baths attracted a large number of tourists.17
4. Cults

Although no temple edifices have been discovered, a large number of deities were worshipped in Prusa, as attested by epigraphic and numismatic evidence. The most commonly mentioned god is Apollo, who must have had a temple at the small town of Tataulenon, since he is also mentioned with the attribute Tataulenos. Epigraphically attested are also Zeus, Dionysus, Hermes-Anoubis, Hosios and Dikaioi, Cybele, Nemesis, Anoubis, Hosios and Dikaioi, Cybele, Nemesis, Isis and Sarapis. The Roman coins, particularly of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, reveal several more worshipped deities of the Greek pantheon, such as Aphrodite, Artemis, Asclepius and Hygeia, Athena, Demeter, Helios, Pan, Poseidon, Selene, Thanatos, Eros and Telephoros. The Tyche of the city was also worshipped, as well as Rome, whereas it is obvious from the offices of pontifex and sebastophantes that imperial cult was also practised, although the city never held the status of neocoros. Finally, abstract notions, such as Eirene (Peace) and Dikaiosyne (Justice) were also worshipped in a personified form.

5. Prusa through the eyes of Dio Chrysostomus

The prolific Dio Chrysostomus, a prominent citizen of Prusa at the second half of the 1st century, offers, deliberately or not, information on his hometown, on his co-citizens, on the political and social atmosphere, and on the cultural events. Some of his texts are addressed to his co-citizens and concern crucial issues of the time, usually criticizing the problems, whereas other texts are referring to himself, his family and their position in the society of Prusa. Dio acknowledges that his hometown does not count among the oldest nor among the most glorious of the empire, yet it has managed to acquire fame and to enlarge its body of councilors. The major problem seems to be the dissent among the citizens, as well as the frequent rivalries with other cities, which often made public life explosive and unpleasant. In some cases he declined from undertaking public offices, although they were offered to him, as he obviously did not want to get involved in conflict and to endanger his good reputation. However, he did not always manage to stay above all those problems, since we know that on several occasions he was accused by his co-citizens for his building activity, particularly during Trajan’s reign, who held an unlimited admiration for him.


12. Dio Chrysostome in his 28th oration refers that the senatorial body was enlarged in his times by 100 senators. The final number of senators remains obscure, yet it is estimated, according to what was the case in other Bithynian cities of a similar size, that it was something between 500 and 600.


15. See Corsten, T., *Die Inschriften von Prusa ad Olympum*, (Bonn 1993), v.1, insc.nos. 65, 82, 93, 120, 123, 144, 161, which refer to defunct lumberjacks and inscr. No. 149, stele of Onesion, who is depicted bearing the tools of the wood-cutter.

16. The thermal springs of Prusa, also called “royal springs”, are mentioned by Stephen Byzantius, s.v. Therma, by Athenaeus, *Deipn.* II.17, as well as in a funerary epigram from the grave of Hermogenes in Athens, *IG II/III* 2 10116 (See appendix 3), and even in a 6th century epigram by Leontios Scholastios *Anthologia Graeca* IX 630.

17. The earliest mention of the baths is the one in oration 29 [49]. 9 by Dio Chrysostome, who apparently had benefited from the fact that his estates lay close to the baths, and had built a colonnade and shops which aimed at the improvement of the sojourn of the visitors as well as to his own personal profit.


28. Typical of this kind of orations are the “To my fatherland on the concord with the Apameans” and the “To the Apameans, on the concord”, with which he attempted to put an end to the conflict between Prusa and its neighbouring Apamea, as well as several of his
philosophical orations, such as the „On Kingship and Tyranny”, “On becoming a decurion”, “On peace and war”, “Borysthenic, which I addressed to the hometown”, “Lectures to the hometown”, “Political oration addressed to the hometown” etc.

29. The most important of those works are “To Athens on the flight”, “On my desire of hearing”, “On departure”, “Complimentary to the hometown offering him honours”, “On practicing philosophy in the hometown”, “Declaration to the hometown”, “On abandoning the office of the decurion”.

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Glossary:

- **agonothetes, the**
  
Official assigned with the task of organising and hosting the contest in the framework of a contest.

- **archon**
  
Term that designates a governor in general. When it is not used in a technical sense, it denotes members of the aristocracy, high officers of the
byzantine empire and it is even used for independent princes.

censor

senior Roman magistrate responsible for financial matters, the supervision of the morals and public order.

gerousia (senate)

The council of elders in Greek cities of Asia Minor. The members were chosen from the wealthy and leading families of the city.

gymnasiarch, the

The man responsible for the supervision of the youngsters and the adolescents who were trained at the gymasia and at the palaestrae. This rank, widely diffused in all cities of the ancient Greek world, constituted a public office which was usually bestowed on the most eminent and rich citizens, since it required great expenses.

senate, the

The top political body of the Roman state. During the early Republic, it was represented by the council of the consuls, the top archons of the roman state. Later on, its power and responsibilities increased. As a result, it became the main governmental body of Rome. However, during the Imperial period, the responsibilities of the senate were restricted.

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