

# The First Capital of the Ottoman Empire

*The Religious, Architectural,  
and Social History of Bursa*

Suna Çağaptay



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**I.B. TAURIS**

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*In loving memory of my mother, Sultan, for teaching me that Malatya  
is not all about apricots and Bursa is not all about peaches...*



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## Preface

This book is about how the Ottomans made the city of Prousa their Bursa. It deals with the first hundred years of the Ottomans, a nomadic tribe of humble origins in Central Asia, as they came into Prousa and began mixing in with the local populace and their new urban setting. During this time, the Ottomans were in the process of creating a cultural identity for themselves, both internally and externally.

Prousa was founded by Prousius I (also known as the Lame or Χωλός) in the third century BC. It was sacked by another Lame ruler, Timur (تمور لنگ Temūr(-i) Lang), in 1402. It was the native city of the golden-mouthed Dio, orator and philosopher of the Roman Empire, who constructed a colonnaded street to rival Antioch's in the Roman East. Its holy mountain functioned as a refuge for both Byzantines and Ottomans, and the clergy fleeing from Constantinople in the Iconoclastic period settled there. Its luscious green and verdant landscape gave inspiration to Michael Psellos, an important political and literary figure of the middle Byzantine period. During a year spent at Horaia Pege, the Monastery of Beautiful Spring on Mount Olympus, he wrote letters to John VIII Xiphilinos (1064–75), Patriarch of Constantinople, which included phrases praising his surroundings including “a Platonic lotus, a plane tree, and myrtles.”<sup>1</sup> A shrine was built on the foothills of the same mountain to bless the memory of Abdal Murad, an early Ottoman nomad raider-turned-saint. Its *madrasas* laid the groundwork for Sheikh Bedreddin, an early fifteenth-century influential mystic and theologian, to spread his revolutionary thoughts on promoting a new commune based on the principles of justice, equality, and fraternity. Bedreddin's religious mission and teachings resonated anew in the prose of Nazım Hikmet Ran, a renowned poet who was imprisoned at Bursa in the mid-1940s. The following lines by Ran echo the starting point of this book:

Galloping full-tilt from furthest Asia,  
craning its mare's head to reach the Mediterranean;  
this land is ours.<sup>2</sup>

So far, several studies have covered the religious, cultural, and political setting of the period. This book tries to do something else. It situates Bursa at an intersection of cultures and peoples and analyzes the character and context of the architectural production. It examines the buildings as cultural artifacts and considers the impact of multiple actors, such as donors, builders, tradesmen, and saintly figures. In the following pages, the reader will learn about the creation of an urban culture in Bursa as a city witnessing the rise of the Ottomans and their assumption of power from the retreating Byzantines. These two cultures were not monolithic, and the transition of power was by no means binary and sudden. Many players, including Greeks, Jews, Turks, Armenians, Rum Seljuks, Latin Crusaders, Genoese, Venetians, Mamluks, Mongol–Ilkhanids, and non-Ottoman Muslim principalities, also played a political role in the peninsula at the time, and the Byzantine to Ottoman “shift” often took the form of a cultural and political marketplace.

This book focuses mostly on the Ottoman urban enterprise, and much of the narrative revolves around the city itself, its walls, and its suburbs. It follows the Ottoman rulers and their expansionist agendas as they made alliances and arranged intermarriages to gain an upper hand in the early fourteenth century. Vignettes will paint pictures of an Ottoman sultan conversing with Byzantine captives or another modeling himself as Alexander the Great; of a French traveler being so captivated by the hot springs of the city that he linked their therapeutic qualities to the foundation myths of the city; and of Genoese tradesmen stopping over to sell and buy products. Rather than looking at Bursa as iconic, this book explores how the city and its fourteenth-century actors of different backgrounds were perceived and imagined. By looking at the multifaceted milieu of its fourteenth-century dynamics, one can see the exchange of skills, ideas, and forms. I hope this book acts as my ultimate tribute to the city’s continuity, diversity, and multiplicity in architectural production in the medieval period, allowing the early Ottomans to claim Bursa as their own.

## Acknowledgments

Walled cities and towns have always attracted my interest. I grew up living very close to one in eastern Anatolia, and I finished the final corrections of this book while admiring the views of another in Istanbul. I visited Bursa's walled city for the first time in 1993 while working as a nurse for the Turkish Red Crescent Society summer camp. It loomed large when I decided to change careers to archaeology, later earning a PhD in architectural history and theory. I will always remember how the Bursa walls clung tenaciously to the foothills of Mount Olympus and how the city within had beautiful vistas onto the plain. My memory also recalls a mash-up of details belonging to different periods, such as the tombs of the Ottoman founders, which were rebuilt in the nineteenth century on the remains of fourteenth-century conversions of Byzantine religious edifices, the nineteenth-century clock tower, and the cannonballs and tombstones of the Turkish Independence War.

The present book branches out from my dissertation, in which I examined the fourteenth-century cultural transition from Byzantine to Ottoman rule and its reflection on the built environment in Bithynia, with Bursa at its center. Over the years, I have published various sections from my dissertation as articles. Because no comprehensive study exists examining the birth of the first Ottoman capital, I decided herein to narrow my lens to Bursa, narrating the first century of Ottoman-era transformations in the walled city and the suburbs.

I would like to thank Robert Ousterhout for supervising my doctoral studies and dissertation, as well as my committee members, Dede F. Ruggles, Anne D. Hedeman, and Rick Layton. I owe them all my knowledge about art and architectural production in the Byzantine and Medieval worlds (East and West), and I am so deeply grateful. Each also shaped and redirected my approach to teaching and my goal to inspire my students to care about what they are looking at so that they understand why it matters and can grasp the ways cultural and artistic legacy shapes our understanding of the world.

I extend my thanks to Tomasz Hoskins, Rory Gormley, James Tupper, and Yasmin Garcha of I. B. Tauris for carefully editing my work, and Adriana Brioso

for designing the elegant cover. I am grateful to Mohammed Raffi, Aarthi Natarajan, and Nandini Sathish for their kind assistance and prompt response in the typesetting process. Many thanks are due to the constructive comments of the anonymous reader. I am also grateful to Jason Warshof for teaching me how to write and also reading almost everything I have written in my postdoctoral years. I thank Alyssa De Villiers for reading and meticulously editing this whole text.

I am also grateful to several institutions for supporting my pre- and postdoctoral fieldwork and archaeological survey in Bursa. These include the Alan K. and Leonarda F. Laing Fellowship at the University of Illinois, the Barakat Trust at the University of Oxford, the Dan David Foundation at Tel Aviv University, the Turkish Cultural Foundation, the American Research Institute in Istanbul, Dumbarton Oaks, the Consulate General of Sweden in Istanbul, and the Anatolian Civilizations Center at Koç University. For granting me a permit to conduct an archaeological study, as well as opening their storage and discussing the results of the salvage excavation notes and visuals with me, I am most grateful to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Bursa Archaeological Museum. The Ministry of Defense in Turkey granted me a permit to carry out my fieldwork on their premises, and the Metropolitan Municipality of Bursa assisted me in the best possible way they could. Asuman Arslan was the representative from the Ministry overseeing my work, and I appreciate her kind assistance in overcoming bureaucratic and fieldwork problems. I did most of the revisions on the book while working as a postdoctoral associate in “The Impact of the Ancient City,” a project funded by the European Research Council (Grant/ERC Advanced Grant Agreement n693418) at the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge. I am grateful to the members of the project, especially Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Elizabeth Key Fowden, and Beth Clark. The project meetings encouraged me to rethink the concepts of the classical versus Islamic city and the formation of the Ottoman city.

Several colleagues, mentors, and friends have shown a genuine interest in, and followed, my work on Bursa. Among them, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Enver Yücel, founder and chairman of Bahçeşehir University, who back in 2010 when I started teaching at Bahçeşehir encouraged me to write a book on the birth of Bursa as an Ottoman city. I am grateful to the former deans, the late Ahmet Eyüce, Sema Esen Soygeniş, and current dean Murat Dündar of the Faculty of Architecture and Design at Bahçeşehir University for their support. Along the way, I have also received exemplary counsel, encouragement, and

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my sisters, Ayten, Gülten, and Hatice, and brothers, Ali, Hüseyin, and Soner, who always stood by me and supported me with their unconditional love and affection, along with financial support, room and board, loans of their cars, rides to the sites, help with bureaucracy when I was out of the country, and especially filling me up with *içli köfte*, *pirpirim cacığı*, *sumaklı çoban salata*, *sütlaç*, and endless cups of coffee. Two of my nephews, Uğur and Deniz, accompanied me on my first trips to Bursa back in 2003 and 2004 purely out of interest in *iskender kebab* and *marron glacé*. Soon after they became fans of the *hans* and the *Ulu Cami*.

Of course, my long-gone parents deserve an acknowledgment. Sultan and Mehmet always advised that a good education would result in life's greatest wisdom. Their perhaps naïve devotion to the pursuit of knowledge coupled with an awareness of the world around them was taken up as a mantra, especially by two of my brothers, Ali and Soner, to whom I cannot express enough gratitude. My mother, in particular, kindled my interest in cities by playing a memory game with me that included naming a fruit or vegetable and a monument or a historic figure for which each Turkish city was famous. Our picnics in Malatya involved visiting the derelict Armenian churches, the tombs of Alevi saints, and the *Ulu Cami* in Malatya.

Rumeli Hisarı (Istanbul)

September 2019

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## Note on Copyright for Previous Publications

Some parts of Chapters 2 and 3 have been previously published as the articles noted below. I would like to thank the editors of *BMGS* and *Muqarnas* for permitting me to reprint them.

“Prousa/Bursa, A City within the City: Chorography, Conversion, and Choreography,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 35.1 (2011): 45–69.

“Frontierscape: Reconsidering Bithynian Structures and Their Builders on the Byzantine-Ottoman Cusp,” *Muqarnas* 28 (2011): 155–91.

## A Note on Spelling, Names, Maps, and Quotations

This book uses modern Turkish “scholarly” spellings for names and place names. The modern Turkish alphabet has 29 letters, of which three consonants and three vowels are unfamiliar to those who do not know Turkish. These are:

C as J in Jane  
Ç as Ch in Chalk  
Ğ silent; lengthens the previous vowel  
İ as dotted I in Cousin  
Ö as Ö in German Schön  
Ş as Sh in Ship  
Ü as Ü in Tür

Turkish also has a dotted i/İ, which this book uses for Ottoman personal and place names, for example, İznik not Iznik (but not used for Istanbul).

Although the book uses the modern academic spelling for personal names and toponyms, I have used older treatments for names such as Murad, Bayezid, and Mehmed for the Ottoman sultans Murat, Beyazıt, and Mehmet. For architectural terms, for cultural groups, I have followed the spellings in the *Cambridge History of Islam*, such as Rum Seljuks, Aydinids, and Mamluks; for general Islamic architectural terms in Arabic and/or Turkish, without diacritical marks and italicized (*madrassa*, *masjid*, *iwān*, *zaviye* and *imaret*). For toponyms, I have used both Anglicized Greek names and their Ottoman equivalents for the first mention or when a transitional cultural context is implied: see, for example, Prousa/Bursa and Nicaea/İznik. I have used the term Mongol-Ilkhanids when referring to the group in its own realm in Anatolia and Persia, while I have used Mongols in the larger context. For Greek and Latin terms, I follow the spelling in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, except for Prousa instead of Prusa, for which I prefer its ancient Greek spelling.

The quotations used in the book have been shortened, and the text has been revised when translated from other languages.

# Chronological Chart

Osman (r. 1290s–1324)

Orhan (r. 1324–62)

Murad I (r. 1362–89)

Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402)

Interregnum Period (1402–13)

Mehmed I (r. 1413–21)

Murad II (r. 1421–44 and 1446–51)

# Introduction

## The First Capital of the Ottoman Empire

A moon arose from the holy man's breast and came to sink in Osman Ghazi's breast. A tree then sprouted from his navel, and its shade compassed the world . . . [When Osman awoke] he went and told the story to the sheikh, who said, "Osman, my son, congratulations for the imperial office [bestowed by God] on you and your descendants."

Aşıkpaşazade, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarihi*, 9–10.

Osman, the eponymous founder of the Ottoman Empire, is famed for having had the dream recounted above, in which a tree "sprouting from his navel" becomes fully grown, symbolizing the stamina of his successors and the domains they would conquer.<sup>1</sup> With this dream, Osman took on the mantle of responsibility for leading his people. This dream became a myth, it probably was always one. But the rise to power of the Ottomans several decades later required more than myth or the intervention of a divine hand—it necessitated the conquest of people, villages, and cities.<sup>2</sup>

Situated on a hilltop nestled against Mount Olympus, a walled city known to the Byzantines as Prousa<sup>3</sup> (Figure 1) was conquered by the Ottomans in 1326, whose impressive topography was beautifully drawn by the Swedish diplomat and artist Carl Gustaf Löwenhielm in 1825. It quickly became an important urban center while serving as the first capital (*ilk payitaht* in Turkish) of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup> The city was also known as *yeşil Bursa* (lit. green Bursa), given its importance in the hierarchy of Ottoman capitals and its verdant landscape.<sup>5</sup> Ibn Battuta, traveling in 1331, just five years after the conquest, praised the city for its vibrant commercial life and "fine bazaars, and wide streets, surrounded on all sides by gardens and running springs."<sup>6</sup> The mountain backdrop and the built environment led the French botanist Joseph de Tournefort to compare it, in 1701, to Granada, Spain.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1** A view into Bursa in 1827 from the west, by Löwenhielm. (Uppsala University, Rare Books Collection).

The city was a commercial center where textiles and spices were exchanged between east and west. For example, Bertrandon de la Broquière reported leaving Bursa for Istanbul “with three Genoese merchants who were taking spices to Pera,” the district today known as Beyoğlu, in Istanbul.<sup>8</sup> Travelers from the fourteenth century onward emphasized the city’s impressive practices of moriculture and sericulture (raising mulberries for silkworms).<sup>9</sup> Johannes Schiltberger, a Bavarian captive in the city in 1397, compared Bursa’s silk industry with that of Crimean Caffa and Damascus.<sup>10</sup> The city’s therapeutic waters were also praised by many. In 1665, Jean Thévenot wrote, “The castle has been founded by the daughter of the Byzantine emperor, who suffers from leper, for being miraculously cured by the natural hot springs.” He continued: “Waters that run through the town are so hot that they easily boil eggs.”<sup>11</sup> Evliya Çelebi noted that houses had running water and is often quoted as having said, “In sum, Bursa consists of water.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite these fascinating details and its status as the first capital of the Ottomans, no comprehensive study of the city during this period exists. Furthermore, descriptions of the rise of Ottoman Bursa have largely ignored how the city’s *sui generis* early Ottoman identity was shaped by the synthesis of Byzantine and Ottoman cultures, two major ethno-religious cultures at that time. This book thus takes on the task of reconstructing Bursa’s Ottoman identity in the fourteenth century.

The Ottoman buildings of this period reveal different functions and design concepts compared to their Byzantine counterparts; at the same time, much can be learned from the similarities. Considering the involvement of Greek masons and builders from Bithynia (northwestern Turkey, the region where Bursa is located; see Map 1) who worked for the Ottomans, as well as evidence on construction practices and materials used, the relationship between the two cultures can be regarded as fruitful. I therefore discuss how cross-cultural and cross-religious borrowing and integration played into the creation of the built environment of Ottoman Bursa. I also focus on the impact of individual builders and workshop practices, in contrast to an emphasis on patronage. My discussion does cover patronage-related material, but mainly as a means of allowing for complete discussion of the overall subject matter. The emphasis on hybrid culture, meanwhile, allows me to escape the bind of previous scholars who were overreliant on patronage. My portrait strives to avoid the rigid typologies of the past, instead depicting dynamic contributors to the transitional capital of a rising empire.



**Map 1** Map of Anatolia in the mid-fourteenth century. (Drawn by the author and Oğuz Orkun Doma).

## Previous and Current Scholarship

Historian Colin Imber has called the fourteenth century a “black hole”<sup>13</sup> in the formation of the Ottoman state in Bursa, owing to a paucity of textual evidence. Perhaps for this reason, no book has ever been devoted to Bursa during the transition from Byzantine to Ottoman rule. This book draws from the limited textual record noted by Imber, but more notably it examines structures and the stories they tell. It also complements several recent monographs (published books and dissertations) that show nuance, critical thinking, and scholarly rigor. These include Rachel Goshgarian’s “Beyond the Social and the Spiritual: Redefining the Urban Confraternities of Late Medieval Anatolia” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2008) on methods of conquest and *ahis* (guilds, linked to inverted-T structures, that briefly ruled in fourteenth-century Anatolia); İklil Selçuk’s “State and Society in the Marketplace: A Study of Late Fifteenth-Century Bursa” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2009) on state-sponsored economic life and the *ahis*; Buket Kitapçı Bayrı’s *Warriors, Martyrs, and Dervishes: Moving Frontiers, Shifting Identities in the Land of Rome (13th–15th centuries)*, Brill, 2019) on Turkish-Muslim frontier narratives, identity, and geography; and Suzan Yalman’s “Building the Sultanate of Rum: Memory, Urbanism and Mysticism in the Architectural Patronage of ‘Ala al-Din Kayqubad (r. 1220–37)” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2011) on Rum-Seljuk urbanism.

Several important studies have addressed the topic of larger Anatolia, but Patricia Blessing’s *Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest* (2016) omits the period my book covers. Çiğdem Kafescioğlu’s *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (2009) demonstrates how urban practices made Istanbul the representational face of the Ottoman Empire. In a sort of parallel, my book attempts to recount the rise of Ottoman Bursa and the unique synthesis between Byzantine and Ottoman cultures, as well as other cultural shapers, such as Latinized Byzantium and the Mamluks, that have affected Bursa’s urban identity.

Most scholarship has encouraged nationalism on one side or the other.<sup>14</sup> A century ago, Herbert Gibbons published *The History of the Ottoman Empire* (1916), which posits that the mix of “wild Asiatic” and “European” ethnicity foreordained the greatness of the empire. In texts published in 1922 (*Anadolu’da*

*İslamiyet*; Islam in Anatolia) and 1935 (*Les origines de l'empire ottoman*), M. Fuat Köprülü rejected Gibbons's claim to a Byzantine contribution to Ottoman greatness, focusing instead on Mongol-Ilkhanid and Rum Seljuk origins. Just a few years later, Paul Wittek (*The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*) explained the Ottoman rise in terms of the *Gazi* thesis, a desire to expand Islam.<sup>15</sup>

Wittek's paradigm endured for several decades, as historians identified Ottoman military, political, and societal aspirations. Most recently, Heath Lowry has argued that Wittek saw Ahmedi, a fourteenth-century literary figure who cited *gaza* or *gazis* in his verses, as an indication of actual events.<sup>16</sup> Lowry contends that Wittek's flawed conception of Ahmedi as the "versified chronicler" of the period, along with his errant transliteration of the "1337 inscription,"<sup>17</sup> does not justify the claim that what united Anatolian Muslims was a common desire to vanquish the infidels.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Wittek's *Gazi* thesis drew counterarguments from many, among them Speros Vryonis, who contended that Islam's rise in the region long predated the emergence of the Ottomans.<sup>19</sup> Rudi Paul Lindner, in rigorous if imperfect fashion,<sup>20</sup> demonstrated the tribal nature of the Ottomans, noting the Christian contribution to their rise.<sup>21</sup> Other critics include Colin Heywood, in his reading of Wittek's autobiography; Colin Imber, in line with his aforementioned famous quotation citing a lack of textual evidence;<sup>22</sup> Cemal Kafadar,<sup>23</sup> who tapped new fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources, as well as Turkish and non-Turkish scholarship, to reconstruct the Anatolian frontier; and Heath Lowry, again, who argued for the emergence of a "confederate brotherhood" based on (1) the Byzantine and Balkan nobility and (2) Christian peasant life in the fourteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

While historians were busy discussing the *Gazi* thesis, art and architectural historians turned to the buildings and sites to understand the broader context, producing a new wave of scholarship on the cultural transition from Byzantine to Ottoman. In this sense, the first seeds of this book were planted in 1968, six years before I was born. That year, leading Byzantinists Cyril Mango and Ihor Ševčenko initiated a three-year project to study Byzantine churches and monasteries surviving on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmara. Following in the footsteps of F. W. Hasluck, who suggested continuity in construction techniques from the Byzantine to Ottoman periods,<sup>25</sup> Mango and Ševčenko drew attention to the similarities between late Byzantine architecture and Ottoman architecture in Bithynia, and particularly the role of Bursa in this transition.<sup>26</sup> This work was taken up by Slobodan Ćurčić and Robert