



Balbours (Antiquity)

Summary :

City in northern Lycia. Balbours was probably founded in the first half of the 2nd century BC by a mixture of local peoples. During the Hellenistic period four different languages were spoken there: Greek, Pisidian, Solymian and Lydian. Balbours formed a tetropolis with its neighbouring cities of Kibyra, Oinoanda and Boubon, an alliance that was dissolved by the Roman general Murena in c. 84 AD. In the Roman Imperial times the city was a member of the Lycian League. In later periods it appears in the Byzantine bishopric list.

Other Names

Balura, Barburon, Balburon, Barbula

Geographical Location

Asia Minor

Historical Region

Lycia

Administrative Dependence

Lycian League

Geographical Coordinates

36° 57.2'N, 29° 35.0'E of Greenwich

1. Anthropogeography

Balbours (modern Çölkayıđı) is located in the mountainous region of northern [Lycia](#), near the modern town of Dirmil (Altinyala). At a height of c. 1500 metres it was the highest city in the region in ancient times. Its remains are visible on two hills situated on either side of a stream, forming a tributary of the Xanthos river. Balbours's early fortified acropolis was built on the southern slopes and peak of the northern hill, though in its later history the city centre expanded to the plain below. The territory of Balbours, covering some 700 kilometres, extended east approximately 35 kilometres and northeast as far as Sođut Lake. The neighbouring city of [Oinoanda](#) was 20 kilometres to the south and ancient [Boubon](#) 21 kilometres east. The city was probably founded in the first half of the 2nd century BC by a mixture of local peoples, called Kabalians, and Pisidians from further east. Strabo verifies this was a mixed cultural region during the Hellenistic period in which four languages were spoken: Greek, Pisidian, Solymian and Lydian.

2. History

Little is known about the history of Balbours. Pottery has been discovered at the site dating from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD, with some stray finds as recent as the 13th century AD. The early inhabitants may have been native Kabalians, descendants of the [Lydians](#), and Ptolemy¹ includes Balbours amongst the cities of 'Kabalia'. The Hellenistic foundation of the city in the early 2nd century BC is attested by the discovery of an inscribed land allotment list. A mixed population is indicated by the appearance of both Greek and indigenous Pisidian names. According to Strabo (13.4.17 [631]), Balbours formed a tetropolis (political organization consisting of "four cities") with its neighbouring cities of Kibyra, Oinoanda and Boubon. Kibyra being the largest and most powerful of the four, the name 'Kibyrtis' became associated with the region. The alliance was dissolved by the Roman general Murena c. 84 AD. Under the Roman empire, and though a full member of the Lycian League, the city lacked characteristics of Lycian culture and language. Hierokles includes Balbours in the Byzantine bishopric list. Ottoman records indicate no permanent settlers in the area.



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3. Economy

The region of Balboura comprises fertile plains, rocky slopes, and flat highlands appropriate for pasture and agriculture. An ear of wheat decorates the reverse of one of Balboura's coins. Surface survey in the territory of Balboura has revealed a number of small rural settlements near arable land. The discovery of large stone press weights and rock-cut tanks has been related to grape cultivation for producing wine. An inscription from Balboura names market controllers (agoranomoi) responsible for keeping the city markets in order, and for maintaining the corn-supply at a reasonable price.

4. Institutions

Inscriptions from Balboura indicate political organization similar to Oinoanda and other Lycian cities in Roman times. A letter of [Antoninus Pius](#) granting permission for the foundation of the games of Meleager (c. 160 AD) was addressed to the magistrates, council (boule), and people (demos) of the city. The council included the secretary (grammateus), president (prytaneis), and market controllers (agoranomoi). Treasurers (tamiai) oversaw the financial administration of the city, and there was an overseer of public works (epimeletes demosion ergon). Other administrative offices included the dekaprotoi, or 'leading ten', a board of the city's ten wealthiest citizens responsible for collection Imperial and local taxes.

5. Religion

Religious practice at Balboura is well-attested by the large number of rock-cut votive reliefs extant in the city and its environs. Greek language inscriptions preserved on a few confirm their function as thank-offerings to Graeco-Roman and local deities. The cults include a Triad of armed males, named Theoi Agrioi ('wild gods') by inscription, the Dioskouroi, Kakasbos (the local Herakles), Artemis Lagbene, and Zeus. Reliefs occur in groups at a few rural sanctuaries. One example is the cluster of Dioskouroi reliefs in and around the entrance of a cave in Balboura's territory. Many others are found near natural water sources. The dedicators in many cases have indigenous rather than Greek names. Remains of religious structures are virtually unknown at Balboura with the exception of the small Roman temple of Nemesis located near the southwest corner of the agora. The festival and games of Meleager, a wealthy local citizen, were founded under Antoninus Pius, for which a games presenter (agonothetes) and festival controller (panegyriarch) are attested.

6. Buildings

6.1. General features

Balboura was built initially on the peak and southern slopes of a steep hill (acropolis), and later on the plain below. The fortification wall is the earliest surviving structure. Apart from a 2nd-1st century BC theatre, no buildings survive within the upper circuit. Also visible on the southern slope are Hellenistic rock-cut votive reliefs to the Dioskouroi and a rock-cut tomb of Roman date. Under the Roman empire, the city expanded beyond the fortifications. A piped water supply and fountain house were built 74-76 AD, and a bath building appeared at about the same time. The lower city developed on a flat area at the foot of the acropolis on the east side. By the mid-2nd century AD a monumental street ran through the lower city, lined with statues and honorific monuments. The paved agora was framed by porticoes (stoas), and a monumental triple-arched gateway was incorporated early in the 3rd century AD. The city's second theatre belonging to the lower city was never completed. Three necropoleis (cemeteries) have been located to the north, west and southeast of the acropolis. Remains of five early Byzantine churches are visible in and around the city.

6.2. Public buildings

Balboura's modest architectural structures share much in common with the more substantial Graeco-Roman cities of central and southern Lycia. The best studied are the three roughly contemporary Roman buildings near the southwest corner of the agora. The two exedrae (recesses, usually semicircular or rectangular in shape) and small temple faced southward onto a paved road. The west exedra, displaying statues of the Demos and Boule of Balboura, was set up by a city slave (demosios)



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named Onesimos. The east exedra was dedicated by Meleager, a wealthy local citizen, and dates 158-161 AD. Between these was the temple of Nemesis, also built by Onesimos. The two theatres belonged to separate phases of the city's history. The Hellenistic theatre (c. 2nd-1st century BC) was constructed on the south slope of the acropolis. It featured a scene building (skene, a rectangular building at the back of the orchestra in an ancient theatre that contained dressing rooms and storage areas) supported by a buttressed platform, as well as a cavea (seating area of an ancient theatre) with some 21 rows of seats and an orchestra (the level round or semicircular space between audience and stage, used by the chorus). The later theatre, located below on the edge of the valley 200 metres south of the Roman town, was an unfinished late Roman venture.

6.3. Private buildings

The remains of houses are identified at village settlements in Balboursa's territory. The average number of houses was 10-20 per settlement, these being constructed of stone in their final phase. Burial practices are well-documented by the survival of rock-cut and chamber tombs (a built room used for burial, sometimes approached by a corridor) in Balboursa's territory. Early examples are similar to well-known Lycian tombs, dating to the 5th-4th century BC. Large numbers of stone **sarcophagi** have been recorded from the necropoleis of the city and from the territory. The characteristic type shows a lion draped across the top of the gabled lid and dates from the 2nd-3rd century AD.

1. Ptolemaeus V 3, 5

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Webliography :



Balbours

<http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/resources/www/pictures/turkey/index.html#balbours>

Glossary :



sarcophagus

A large rectangular stone coffin in which a dead person was laid to rest. In some cases sarcophagi were made also of clay, wood or metal.