1. Location

Olba was an ancient city of Rough Cilicia. It was located close to the modern site of Uğara, almost 25 kilometers northeast from Seleucia ad Calycandus (modern Silifke). In the 1st century the nearby sanctuary of Zeus Olbius evolved into a separate city under the name Diocaesareia. During the Roman period the two cities, Olba and Diocaesareia, were adorned with lavish public buildings, such as theaters, aqueducts, temples and colonnaded streets.

2. History

It has been suggested that Olba corresponds to the Hittite Ura (or Harrua or Hyria according to Stephanus Byzantius), capital of the land Pirindu, and one of the most important cities of southern Anatolia during the Bronze and Iron Age, the exact location of which has not been discovered.

According to a mythical tradition, the city of Olba and the neighbouring sanctuary dedicated to Zeus were founded by the hero Aias, son of Teukros, and like many Asia Minor cities it attributed its foundation to the emigration which followed the Trojan War.

During the Hellenistic period, the city, the sanctuary of Zeus Olbius (who was identified with the local deity Tarhuunt in the framework of the religious syncretism), as well as the surrounding area were administered by local priests—kings, the Teucrids, under the Seleucid supremacy. The dynasty of the priests was maintained in power later on by Marcus Antonius and then Octavian Augustus, who thus maintained a control over the local populations of the area, namely the Kennatai and the Lallaseis. In the 1st century Marcus Antonius Polemo, possibly an heir of Aias, is referred as the dynast of the city according to numismatic evidence. During the 1st century the city lost its autonomy, due to the foundation of the province of Cilicia (72 A.D.), whereas the settlement of the sanctuary was separated from Olba and constituted a new city under the name Diocaesareia. During the Byzantine times the cities of Olba and Diocaesareia constituted bishoprics of Isauria.

3. Minting

The first bronze issues are dated to the 1st century B.C. and were maintained throughout the Imperial times by both cities. Among the iconographic types stands out Zeus Olbius, whereas frequent are the depictions of other deities worshipped in both cities, such as Hermes, Athena, Selene, Helios, Dionysus, Heracles, Dioscouroi, Nemesis and Sarapis. It is also worth noting that cities such as

Summary:

Olba was a city of Rough Cilicia in the modern site of Uğara, northwest of Seleucia on the Calycandus. It is possibly identified with the important Hittite city of Ura. In the Hellenistic era it passed under Seleucid control, whereas the sanctuary of a local deity, situated at a distance of about 4 kms, was transformed into a monumental Hellenistic complex dedicated to Zeus Olbius. In the 1st century B.C. the settlement of the sanctuary was upgraded into a separate city named Diocaesareia. During the Roman period the two cities, Olba and Diocaesareia, were adorned with lavish public buildings, such as theaters, aqueducts, temples and colonnaded streets.
Diocaesarea, bear on the coins the title metropolis of the Kennatae.  

4. Topography – Buildings

4.1 Olba

The remains of ancient Olba are situated on a rocky hill, close to the modern settlement of Uğara. There are still visible some traces of the fortifications, the largest part of which is dated to the Hellenistic period; of particular interest are the surviving rectangular towers, which reinforced the walls' defense. Architectural remains of private houses of the Roman and Early Byzantine period were found on the hill's slopes. At the north part of the hill the arcade of an aqueduct were discovered, which supplied the city with water. According to epigraphic testimonies, the monument was built in the period of Septimius Severus and was funded by a certain Heracleides. To the west, below the hill, just at the city centre there was a small theater, as well as a monumental nymphaeum. These public buildings are dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries respectively. A monumental colonnaded street facilitated the communication between the two cities, Olba and Diocaesarea. A necropolis with rock cut tombs as well as sarcophagi was found at the southern side of the hill. It is also worth mentioning a heroon, in the form of a small Corinthian prostyle tetrastyle temple, the remains of which are located at the southern part of the plain.

4.2. Diocaesarea

The remains of the sanctuary of Zeus Olbius and of Diocaesarea were located between two hills in the area of the modern Turkish village of Uzuncaburç. The site experienced a magnificent building activity in the 1st century A.D., due to the foundation of the new city.

The sanctuary of Zeus Olbius was located in the city centre, on a low hill. An enclosure of ashlar masonry surrounded the rectangular complex, whereas on its eastern side it was closed by a portico, the erection of which is attributed to Seleucus I Nicator (306-281 B.C.). The temple of the sanctuary was of the Corinthian order (measuring 33.7 by 21.2 meters), peripteral with 6 by 12 columns. According to the stylistic features of its architectural forms it is dated to the 2nd quarter of the 2nd century B.C. It has been considered as one of the over-ambitious building projects of Antiochos IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.), who in the short period of his reign attempted to revive the prestige of the Seleucid kingdom and served his political interests through the foundation of lavish temples. The religious propaganda of the king focused on the cult of Zeus, whereas the selection of the Corinthian order apparently matched the preferences of a kingdom which was influenced by the oriental tradition. During the early Christian period the temple of Zeus Olbius was transformed into a three-aisled basilica.

To the northwest of the sanctuary of Zeus, there was a temple dedicated to Tyche built around the second half of the 1st century A.D. It is a Corinthian-style temple elevated on a podium, the erection of which was funded by a certain Oppius, son of Obrimus, and his wife, according to the dedicatory inscription of the architrave.

On a slope in the southeastern part of the city in the interior of the sanctuary complex there was the theatre, which is dated to the 2nd century A.D. It was a Roman-Asia Minor type theatre, oriented towards the south, which was divided horizontally by a broad corridor (diazoma, praeincino) into two zones (maeniana). The lower section of seating (theatron, ima cavea-maenianum) was formed on the natural slope of the hill, whereas for the construction of the upper section of the seating area (summa cavea, epiteatron) and of the retaining walls (anallelata) there had to be made artificial substructures.

The aqueduct bringing water into the city ended at the monumental nymphaeum in the form of an exedra, dated to the 3rd century A.D and situated on the Decumanus maximus. This central street heading from east to west was flanked by colonnades and led along the precinct of the sanctuary from the theater area to the temple of Tyche, whereas on the east of the temple it passed through monumental gate-buildings with Corinthian columns and lavish sculptural decoration. The other central street of the city, the cardo, headed from north to south and was 12.5 meters wide. It was also flanked by colonnades and led to a monumental Gate opening on
the defense wall with three archways, dating from the 2nd century.21

The architectural remains of a rectangular building from the Imperial era at the south of the sanctuary have possibly been identified as the gymnasium of the city. Extremely interesting is the Hellenistic rectangular tower measuring 12.49 by 15.6 and 22.5 meters high spreading on six storeys. The tower was situated on the north side of the defensive wall. It is built with isodomic masonry. In the interior the three lower storeys are divided in five rooms each. A stone staircase facilitated access to the upper storeys whereas there were also small windows for allowing light in the interior. According to an inscription the tower was built by the priest Tarkyares, around the 2nd century B.C. From this Hellenistic tower comes the name of the modern Turkish village, namely Uzuncaburç, which means tall tower.22

Outside of the city walls, about 1 km to the south, there was discovered one more Hellenistic square tower, with a stepped pyramidal roof, which probably consisted the funerary monument of some priest.23 Also extra muros were discovered necropoleis of the Roman and Byzantine era with burial chambers and arcosolia.24


2. Pirindu was the name of the western part of Cilicia, possibly Rough Cilicia. See Mackay, T.S., “The major sanctuaries of Pamphylia and Cilicia”, ANRW II.18.3 (Berlin 1990), p. 2086. See also Neue Pauly, 8 (Stuttgart-Weimar 2000) s.v. “Olba”, p. 1158-1159 (F.Hild).


4. Strabo, 14.5.10. For that reason the local priest-kings of the city were called Teucrids, whereas the majority amongst them bore the name Ajax or Teucros. See RE 17.2 (1937), s.v. Olbe., Cols 2399-2403. Williams, C., “The Corinthian Temple of Zeus Oblios at Uzuncaburç: a reconsideration of the date”, AA 86, 1971, 37-54. Mackay, T.S., “The major sanctuaries of Pamphylia and Cilicia”. ANRW II.18.3 (Berlin 1990), pp. 2084, 2087, 2099.

5. God of the weather conditions. See Mackay, T.S., “The major sanctuaries of Pamphylia and Cilicia”, ANRW II.18.3 (Berlin 1990), pp. 2084, 2087, 2099.


7. These were local tribes who dwelled at the eastern part of Rough Cilicia. See Jones, A.H.M., Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces (Oxford 1971), pp. 195, 209-210.

8. In detail about the high priest and dynast M.Antonius Polemo and the issue of his correlation with the king of Pontus Polemo II see Mackay, T.S., “The major sanctuaries of Pamphylia and Cilicia”, ANRW II.18.3 (Berlin 1990), pp. 2092-2095.

9. The foundation of Diocaesarea and its distinction from Olba is attributed possibly to the emperor Tiberius (14-37), although according to some scholars it was either Vespasian (69-79) or Domitian (81-96) who were actually responsible for the creation of the new city. For this issue see Mackay, T.S., “The major sanctuaries of Pamphylia and Cilicia”, ANRW II.18.3 (Berlin 1990), pp. 2087-2089. See also Kristen, E., “Diocaesarea und Sebaste”, AAWW 110, 1973, pp. 355-359. Lang, G., Klassische Antike Stätten Anatoliens (Norderstedt 2003), p. 196; Hotz, W., Die Mittelmeerküste Anatoliens (Darmstadt 1989), p. 91.


22. Regarding the identification of the building it has been suggested that it was the house of the high priest, whereas other scholars think of it as a funerary monument. The issue of the dating of the tower is also left open; see McNicoll, A.W., *Hellenistic Fortifications from the Aegean to the Euphrates* (Oxford 1997), p. 178-181.


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Glossary:

arcade
An arch is the opening formed between two columns or pillars. The rows of two or even more such openings are called arcades.

arcosolium
(lat.) A tomb carved out of a wall (solium) with an arched niche (arcus) above it.

corinthian order
The most elaborate of the ancient greek architectural orders. It was developed in the 4th century BC in Greece and it was extensively used in Roman architecture. It is similar to the Ionic order. Its capitals being four-sided and composed of a basket-shaped body decorated with volumes and rows of acanthus leaves.

decumanus
An east-west street that served as a secondary main street in ancient Roman city planning.

diazoma (lat. praecinctio)
The circular passage way between the lower and upper tiers of seats in an ancient Greek theater.

gymnasium
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.

isodomic masonry (opus quadratum)
A type of masonry in which blocks of equal length and thickness are laid in courses, with each vertical joint centered on the block below.

prostyle temple
A term applied to a temple with a portico of columns in front.

Roman-Asia Minor type of theatre, the
The edifice of the theatre as it was formed during the Roman period in Asia Minor. It was a merge of the Greek and the Roman type, with koilon larger than the semi-circle and monumental multi-storeyed scene, which often adjoined to the curve of the tiers and clogged the whole construction.
three-aisled basilica

An oblong type of church internally divided into three aisles: the middle and the two side aisles. The middle aisle is often lighted by an elevated clerestory. In the Early Byzantine years this type of church had huge dimensions.