Temple of Zeus
Uzuncaburç

Uzuncaburç has “the best-preserved temple dedicated to Zeus in Asia Minor,” heralds the website travellinkturkey.com. “The road to the town of Uzuncaburç (High Tower) climbs through the Taurus mountains for about an hour from Silifke to roughly 3000 feet above sea level. Along the road there are tombs, stone sarcophagi, and temple-tombs. At the beginning of 2nd century B.C., the priests of the temple of Zeus at Olba became the rulers of this region. These ruler-priests were called Teukrides.”

“Five beautiful columns, each cut from one piece of granite remain from the Temple of Psyche. According to one inscription in the architrave, the temple was dedicated to the goddess in the 1st century B.C.

The main entrance to the city was through the three-arched gate rebuilt by Arcadius and Honorius in the 4th century. Only a few remains of the theater which is believed to have been built by Marcus Aurelius remains. The area abounds with tombs, one from the Doric period, fragments of walls and towers.

The site of Olba, which is joined by an ancient stone road still partially in use. Here, the water installations, and ruins seem to belong to a different period. Some stone tombs can still be seen, and stone fragments from very early history have been rebuilt into walls. Throughout all of this rocky land portions of the Roman aqueduct stand in majestic memory of the master builders of the ages.”

History

The following excerpt is quoted from The Princeton Encyclopedia of classical sites. “Originally the hieron of Olba, the town around the temple was incorporated as a separate city, whose first known coins were minted under Domitian but whose foundation may have dated from ca. A.D. 72 when Vespasian made one province of Cilicia. The city’s history, subsequent to its separation, is virtually unknown. It may also have been known by the native name of Prakana.

The temple town is located 23 km inland at a height of 1000 m on an ancient road, paved in Roman times, which led N from Seleucia and Calycadnum, and from the temple NW to modern Mağara (Kirobaşi), thence probably W to Claudiopolis (Mut) and over the Taurus to Laranda (Karaman). There are heroa along the road, those around Imbriotó Komé perhaps belonging to Seleucia, one grave tower at Ovacık, ca. 9 km S-SE of Uzuncaburç, probably to Olba or Diocaesarea. Guarding the road about halfway up to the temple are watch towers and behind them a fort (Meydan Kalesi), probably built in the Hellenistic period to defend the territory of Olba. Diocaesarea and Olba are connected by a road marked by Roman milestones, the earliest dating from A.D. 75-76, others from 197 and ca. 308. How the two cities were separated and what area each controlled is not known. On imperial coinage both claimed to be metropolis of the Keninateis, apparently the name of the local tribe. Both also claimed to be metropolis of Cetis, probably Rough Cilicia, referring to the time when Olba was capital of the country, then called Pirindu.

The city lies in a flat area among low

Costs - 3 TL Entrance Fee
Getting There - About 4 hours from Incirlik. Outdoor Rec has GPS and trips to this location.
Physical Difficulty - EASY Mostly flat land. Strollers are possible in an “off road” way.
Enjoy a cup of çay after exploring. Bring 1 TL coins to give as a donation for the tea.
hills. It was walled, its area roughly oval in shape, ca. 700 m E-W, 500 m N-S. Houses of the modern town are scattered around the site. The most conspicuous remains are those of the temple and a great tower. The priests of the Temple of Zeus at Olba claimed that the temple was founded by Ajax, the son of Teucer, the hero of the Trojan war, who founded Salamis in Cyprus. At present there is no evidence to confirm or deny early settlement of any sort in this upland area, or an early shrine on this spot. The temple, the earliest datable monument in the city, is peripteral, Corinthian in style, the stylobate being remains of the interior walls, although 33.70 x 21.20 m, 6 x 12 columns, all of which save three are standing at least in part, four with capitals in position.

The columns are faceted to about one-quarter of their height, fluted above. Noth with capitals in position.

In the 1st c. A.D. the main streets were colonnaded. One runs E-W along the N wall of the temple peribolos, with many of the columns still standing. Across the street just E of the temple are the remains of an ornamental gateway consisting of two parallel rows, each of six columns, supporting an entablature. Five at the S end are still standing. The central intercolumniation was spanned by an arch continuing the line of the entablature. The columns are unfluted, with Corinthian capitals, and have consoles to support statues protruding from them. At the W end of the street, near the city wall, are the remains of a tychaion. A row of six unfluted, monolithic, granite columns with Corinthian capitals, of which five still remain, stands at the E end of a long, narrow platform, at the W end of which is a square cela, open to the E, nearly 34 m away from the row of columns, which has an architrave. The inscription on it, dating to the second half of the 1st c. A.D., records the donation of the tychaion to the city. East of the tychaion a colonnaded street (no columns standing) leads N to a well preserved triple arched gate in the city wall. On this is an inscription recording a complete repair (of the wall as well as the gate?) under Arcadius and Honorius (A.D. 398-405). The gate is probably of the 2d c. A.D.

The remains of the theater are to the E of the temple, just S of the E-W street. The cavea is dug into the hill; a considerable number of seats, a diazoma, and vomitorium are preserved. No remains of the scene building are visible in place, but an architrave block probably from the proscenium has an inscription to Lucius and Marcus Verus, dated A.D. 164-65, perhaps the date of the theater. The most noteworthy of the other remains in the city is a long rectangular building of the Roman period, perhaps a gymnasium, S of the temple. Outside the city, crowning a round hill ca. 1 km to the S is a grave tower, square in plan with shallow pilasters at the corners, Doric capitals and entablature, and a stepped pyramid above. This is generally considered to be the tomb of one of the priests of the Hellenistic period.

Outside the city wall along the ancient road leading to Mağara, and along a road leading NE from the city are extensive cemeteries with rock-cut tombs and sarcophagi of the Roman and Christian periods. Besides the temple church there are the remains of two other churches, one of the 4th or 5th c.

BIBLIOGRAPHY