



### Fact file: Marcus Nonius Balbus



Marcus Nonius Balbus is probably the most famous person whose name survives from Herculaneum. The Balbus in our stories is imagined to be a later descendant of the Balbus this fact file will look at.

The real Balbus was a wealthy and influential patron of the town, and we can still see from all the statues, inscriptions, and buildings named after him just how important he was in Herculaneum.

We know Balbus came from a local family; his father seems to have come from Nuceria, a nearby small town. But Balbus the son clearly became a very important person in Herculaneum.

After Balbus' death, he was commemorated by a big altar and a statue that were placed in an open space right by the bigger baths that overlooked the sea. An inscription tells us the great honours that the local council gave to Balbus after his death:

- A statue and an altar should be set up for Balbus
- Every year at the Parentalia festival (which remembers the dead), the procession should start at Balbus' statue
- Every year at the athletic festival, one day should be named for Balbus
- An empty place should forever be left in the theatre, a seat saved for Balbus to remember him



House of the Stags, where Balbus lives in our stories.

Balbus' terrace, with altar and statue.

View of Herculaneum looking from the sea towards the town.



Balbus' father  
- from the  
Basilica.

During his lifetime, Balbus left his mark on the town. The Basilica, the town's law court, was named after him and a statue of him and his father was found there.

We know he also really did have a statue in the theatre. The statue itself does not survive, but an indentation of it in the volcanic rock could be seen, showing that it was a statue of Balbus in the "heroic nude" (portrayed naked as mythological heroes were). Outside the theatre, he had two statues placed of himself and his father on horseback.

And we even have some evidence of Balbus that survives from outside of Herculaneum. Even though he wasn't very important outside of his own little town, Balbus does feature in the history

books written by Cassius Dio. Dio tells us that Balbus did a favour to Octavian, who would later become the emperor Augustus. Probably as a result of being in the good books of the emperor, he became a praetor, and got to govern the province of Crete for a little while. This was a very desirable job, as a praetor could make a lot of money from running a province, and Crete was wealthy, so Balbus probably got very rich from this.



Balbus on horseback. Statue  
from outside the theatre.

This wealth he invested into his home town of Herculaneum, funding new buildings, donating to good causes, setting up statues and altars, renovating temples, and having his name displayed across Herculaneum as the great benefactor of the town.

We don't know for sure where Balbus lived in Herculaneum. We have imagined him at the House of the Stags, as it overlooks the terrace where his statue and altar would be built.

