9. PRIESTS OF IUPPITER DOLICHENUS IN THE
ROMAN ARMY

Traditionally in Rome, public life and religious life were one. Just as Augustus sacrifices on the Ara Pacis, so does Trajan on his Column conduct the sacrifice in the army purification rite of the lustratio exercitus. Other commanders likewise performed the official sacrifices for their troops as seen, for example, on the famous Bridgeness slab from the Antonine Wall in Britain, or on the painting showing the sacrifice by Iulius Terentius, tribune of the cohors XX Palmyrenorum in Dura-Europos. Consequently, apart from special assistants, such as the turarius and victimarius, the army needed no particular priests for its corporate worship and the great number of altars erected to the gods—including Iuppiter Dolichenus—by the various units generally state in their inscriptions that they were dedicated under the direction of either their commanders or of a ranking soldier, not by priests. By contrast, the oriental religions needed holy men of special birth or initiation (kohen, komar, etc) to direct the rites of worship and guard the doctrines of the faith. In the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus the priesthood played a particularly important role: the priests are mostly of oriental origin, frequently with such professional names as Marinus (from the Syriac Marina ‘our lord’), Apollinaris, Aquila, Barhadados, etc. and they seem to direct the acts of worship and the dedications to an even greater extent than in other comparable cults. Thus, where a group of soldiers worshipped Iuppiter Dolichenus they needed a priest. Would it have to be a

142 For the painting of Iulius Terentius see Cumont (1926) Atlas 49 and 50. For the Bridgeness slab: RIB 2139. For a Roman officer sacrificing to Iarhibol in Dura see C. Hopkins, Dura Reports 5, 153 ff.
144 For the names see Merlat (1951) p. 397 and above, p. 22. For the role of the Dolichenus priests see Merlat (1960) 190-197. As Ulpius Chresimus the Parthian shows, Tóth (1971) is wrong to assume they all came from Comagene or that they are known only from the reign of Commodus onward.
civilian outsider, or would army regulations permit a soldier to become priest and function as such?

The Apollo-Artemis relief of Ulpius Chresimus, discussed above, provides the answer. There, Ulpius Chresimus, while described as *sacerdos Iovis Dolicheni*, is also qualified as belonging to the squadron of Issius, that is he served at the same time as an active cavalry-man. If a member of the imperial guard in the mid-second century A.D. was priest of an oriental religion, then soldiers throughout the Roman army must have been free to become priests of such religions. Scholars generally denied that possibility, at least for the western parts of the empire and for the time of the principate, surmising an official policy of exclusion against the oriental religions in the army. Chresimus, consequently, was either considered a veteran by the time he became a priest,145 a possibility that is now ruled out by the new reading of the relief, or, alternatively, he was assigned a date late in the third century when the old order of things was breaking down,146 a hypothesis incompatible with our dating of the monument. It follows that Rome had no policy of repression against the oriental cults even as far as the priesthood was concerned.147

Given the encouragement the oriental religions received from high ranking governors and army commanders already in the early second century A.D. (1; 35 ff.) the fact that an active soldier could be priest of Iuppiter Dolichenus is not so surprising. The priesthood will have interfered very little with a man's duties as a soldier, for it was by no means a full-time job: there were several priests within some congregations and in one case a civilian priest of Iuppiter Dolichenus is known to have been a wine-merchant.148 Likewise, the cult of Mithras had certainly Magi (and apparently also priests) in the ranks of the army. If there had been any danger

---

146 Nock (1972) 789 n. 263.
146 Domaszewski (1895) 64; even then no breakdown: Hoey (1939) 475; see also M 238 and M 239, note 3.
147 For a different opinion see Hoey, Nock, ll.cc.; cf. Gilliam (1954); Fink-Hoey-Synder (1940).
148 Wine-merchant IGBulg. III, 2 1590 = M 8; several priests: M 192 and M 200; cf. Nock (1972) 786.