CHAPTER TWO

THE CULT OF JUPITER DOLICHENUS

The cult of Jupiter Dolichenus appears, like that of Mithras, to have been chiefly confined to the military areas of Britain, and, although in these areas it undoubtedly enjoyed as great a popularity as the Persian cult, the evidence so far recorded is scarcely comparable in wealth and interest. That relatively few Dolichene sanctuaries have been recognised and excavated throughout the Roman Empire as a whole has been remarked by Merlat 1), and in this respect the British province is certainly no exception. Not a single temple has as yet been located, although the existence of two, if not three, is indicated by dedicatory inscriptions 2), and the presence of an elaborate shrine at Corbridge may be inferred from the various architectural fragments identified by Prof. Richmond 3). Apart from these fragments there are only two pieces of sculpture which may with certainty be attributed to the cult, the majority of the recorded monuments being altars and inscribed stones of which not a few are now missing. As a consequence of its primarily military appeal, the cult is largely concentrated in the north, on Hadrian's Wall and in the area adjacent to it, and it is, moreover, interesting that there are indications of iron working in the neighbourhood of several of the sites at which the worship of Dolichenus has been noted. Such a correlation is indeed no cause for surprise in view of the origins and character of the god, but it is none the less notable that this was already appreciated by antiquaries of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries such as Gibson and Horsley.

The most impressive and varied collection of Dolichene material yet found in Britain is undoubtedly that from the military site at Corbridge (*CORSTOPITVM*), first a fort and later a supply-

1) Merlat, *Jup. Dol.*, p. 129; for such temples as have in fact been found cf. pp. 129-67.
2) See below pp. 61-2.
3) See below pp. 58-60.
base, just south of Hadrian’s Wall on Dere Street, where the establishment of an important iron working depot “gave the cult a special local appeal and almost makes its presence inevitable” 1). The existence of the worship of Dolichenus on the site has indeed been known for some time through the discovery of a well known altar, but the recent identification of part of a statue of the god, and the recognition of fragments of a frieze, two panels or metopes, and a pediment as belonging to “a small and elaborate shrine” 2) have provided further striking evidence of its popularity.

The altar 3) (Pl. XIII) was found in 1910 forming part of the kerb of a street dating to A.D. 369, though the piece itself, dedicated by a centurion of the Sixth Legion, must necessarily be earlier than the fourth century 4). Three feet in height, the altar is in a good state of preservation and the sculptured figures on either side of the die are readily identifiable. To the right a Genius, wearing a mural crown and bearing a cornucopiae stands beside an altar over which he pours a libation, while on the left side is a walking Cupid who carries a bill-hook in his raised right hand and a bunch of grapes in his left 5). Above, in the centre of each bolster, is a human face, and the ends of the bolsters on the front were further decorated, though the details are no longer discernible.

The dedication of the altar, to Jupiter Dolichenus, Caelestis Brigantia and Salus 6), is an interesting example of “the liberal attraction of other deities which was a feature of the Dolichene

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4) The office of centurion, held by the dedicator, had ceased to exist by the fourth century (AA, XXI (1943), p. 193, and cf. Rép., p. 267, n. 2).
5) For some observations on these figures see Merlat, Jup. Dol., p. 107; Rép., p. 267. Dolichenus, Caelestis Brigantia and Salus are each in some degree associated with universal or personal prosperity, and both the Genius and the Cupid are therefore generally appropriate as symbols of abundance. The Genius is, however, particularly relevant to Brigantia as a local goddess, while of the three it is perhaps Salus who is most closely connected with the fruits of the harvest represented by the Cupid.
6) IOVI AETERNO | DOLICHENO | ET CAELESTI | BRIGANTIAE | ET SALVTI | C. IVLIVS APOLINARIS | LEG(IONIS) VI IVSS(V) DEI.