

VI.—AN ALTAR DEDICATED TO JUPITER FOUND IN NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE.

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The close liaison between the North of England Excavation Committee and the County Council of Northumberland has produced a further interesting discovery on the Castle site of Newcastle.

On 16th December, 1932, the excavations for the extension of the County Council offices on the east side of the present offices (built in 1906) resulted in the removal of a large quantity of soil, and at a point some 4 feet east of the north-east corner of the building and well below the level of the 1906 foundations was uncovered a Roman altar of conventional type, lying in stiff clay and surrounded by loose soil and debris. There was no appearance of anything like a Roman occupation layer at this point, but near by was found a rim fragment of a Roman cooking-pot or *olla*, dated by Mr. E. B. Birley of the Committee as about A.D. 300.

The terrain falls abruptly to the east, and a medieval retaining wall running north and south on the west side of the point of discovery appears to have confused the original steep slope and to have broken up anything in the nature of a Roman occupation layer lying upon it. Mr. R. Burns Dick, architect to the County Council, at once communicated the news of the find, and Mr. Henry Kelly, the contractor carrying out the excavation work, gave every facility for investigation.

The altar, composed of a coarse-grained sandstone, is 24 inches in height with a capital 10 inches by 11 inches. The top has the usual *focus* and two tied *pulvinii*. The dexter side has the jug or *praefericulum* and the sinister

side the dish or *patera*, the conventional emblems of sacrifice. The back is plain. The die and one side are stained with a black mottled deposit in the grain of the stone, probably the effects of sewage. The base is well developed and the altar carving is sharp and clear, but the capital shows signs of considerable weathering as if the altar had stood upright with only the top exposed for many years. (Plate ix.)

The inscription on the die is in four lines formed of poorly cut letters in a restrained but semi-cursive script. The lines are slightly raised or tilted from the sinister side to the dexter as if the sculptor of the lettering had ruled four chalk lines parallel with each other but had ignored the true perpendicular centre line of the altar.

After washing, the inscription became more legible, and photographs and squeezes finally revealed all the letters.

I O M
 PRO SALV
 E E VICTOR
 IA AVG

I(OVI) O(PTIMO) M(AXIMO) PRO SALVTE ET VICTORIA AVG(USTI).
To Jupiter, best and greatest, for the safety and victory of Augustus.

It is tempting to speculate further on this unusual inscription. The dedicator omits his name and the name of his emperor. It is as it were a cry from the heart without any thought of personal advertisement.

The style is not datable, but there were not many occasions on the Wall when an emperor of Rome could stimulate such a local dedication in the fort at Pons Aelii.

The unknown official had been more than concerned about the welfare and the victory of Augustus, he had been really anxious, and he had appealed to Jupiter.

Roman altars appear to be records of the fulfilment of vows rather than bribes to deities, and it would seem that the dedicator had obtained his wish, the emperor was safe, victory was a fact, and as a result the altar had been piously carved and dedicated.



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