

XI

MUSEUM NOTE, 1983 A FRAGMENTARY ALTAR TO JUPITER FROM WALLSEND

J. C. Coulston, B.A., M. Phil.

A fragment of an altar to Jupiter Optimus Maximus was found in 1894 west of the fort at Wallsend (Tyne and Wear). According to its restored inscription (*RIB* 1301) the altar had been erected by Cornelius Celer, *praefectus* of the *cohors IIII Lingonum*. It is now in store at the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne.¹

The sinister side of the shaft has in relief an axe and a sacrificial knife; the dexter has part of a full-length human figure, evidently male, with a shaft held in its missing right hand and wearing a waist-belt with circular buckle. The man's left arm, surviving almost to the wrist and clad in a long sleeve, lies along his side.

The belt and buckle are unequivocally military and third century A.D. in type and their appearance on the altar marks the figure as a god in military dress, presumably Jupiter or Mars, or as a soldier, presumably of *IIII Lingonum*. The type of buckle appears in sculptured religious reliefs and, more often, on funerary reliefs of soldiers.

The first- and second-century iconographical type of the infantryman in "undress" uniform has two plated *cingula*, protective "apron", *pugio* on left hip, *gladius* on right hip suspended by rings from a narrow *balteus*, short-sleeved tunic and *paenula* with "W" front profile.² It is superseded from the Severan period onwards by a new third-century type. This generally shows a soldier with long-sleeved tunic, *sagum*, and a *gladius* or *spatha* on the man's left hip suspended from a very wide *balteus* which has applied decorative plates. The scabbard often has for suspension a vertical scabbard-runner, facing outwards, and a circular or flat-ended chape. A waist-belt with a circular buckle often has long strap-ends which loop down from one or both sides of the buckle, are tucked in behind the belt and appear again at one hip hanging down with ivy-leaf terminals. The first half of the first century A.D. saw the apogee of figured military tombstones in the Rhineland and, after the Roman conquest, in Britain. However, the infantry full-figure and the *Reitertypus* continued through the first and second centuries to enjoy, particularly in the case of the former, something of a renaissance in the third. From rare fourth-century sculptures, archaeological small-finds, and paintings, it seems that the type of equipment described above did not survive the end of the third century.³

The transition of types is not reflected in the official art of Rome itself where the third century is a great sculptural hiatus. The Arch of Severus in the Forum and the Porta Argentariorum both show soldiers in undress uniform of the early type.⁴ However, the tombstones of praetorians postdating the Severan reform of the Guard



ALTAR TO JUPITER FROM WALLSEND
Photograph: University Library, Newcastle upon Tyne

do fall within the third-century type.⁵ Funerary reliefs from the Aquileia area,⁶ the Danubian provinces,⁷ and the Istanbul region, where troops from the Danube were grouped under Severus,⁸ exhibit singly or in combination the third-century features, particularly the circular belt-buckle of the type seen on the Wallsend altar. Given the rising importance of the Illyrian soldiery⁹ it is not impossible that the transition of equipment originated on the Danube, but if this was ever a regional phenomenon it soon ceased to be. The new equipment occurs in Syria in the Dura-Europos frescoes which depict the wide *balteus*, the circular buckle, and tucked-up strap-ends.¹⁰ A Palmyrene relief shows the *balteus* appliqués and circular buckle.¹¹ Two tombstones, one from Ramleh in Palestine, the other from Alexandria,¹² clearly represent the latter feature. Roman figures on the Sassanid victory reliefs of Bishapur and Naqshi-i Rostam clearly show the *balteus* plates, circular belt-buckles, scabbard-runners, and tucked strap-ends.¹³ These may be indicative of equipment bought by troops moved east for the campaigns against Shapur I, but with the Dura evidence and the tombstones they may demonstrate a general currency in the eastern provinces. Palmyrene, Parthian and Sassanid styles of equipment preclude any suggestion of origins in these quarters. Oldenstein has collected some of the small-find examples of buckles, scabbard-runners, and *balteus* plates from forts on the Middle Rhine and has demonstrated their use and relationship to the sculptural representations.¹⁴

Sculptural examples in the West are less common, with very few indeed along the German frontier,¹⁵ but Britain provides several. The tombstone of Vivius Marcianus, a *centurio* of *legio II Augusta*, from Ludgate Hill, London,¹⁶ has *sagum*, long-sleeved tunic, and circular buckle. Another tombstone, from Bath,¹⁷ depicts a soldier with *sagum*, long-sleeved tunic, and massive scabbard-chape, holding a standard or a *pilum*.¹⁸ These two compare favourably in quality with continental examples. The same cannot be said for the tombstone of Marcus Aurelius Nepos, a *centurio* of *legio XX Valeria* from Chester.¹⁹ Like Marcianus he carries a *vitis*, and his elongated body is dominated by a wide belt with circular buckle. A fourth example, from Carrawburgh (Northumberland), is probably an auxiliary tombstone and depicts a *gladius* on the standard-bearer's left hip, a circular belt-buckle, a prominent scabbard-chape, and a strap-end on the right hip.²⁰

The Wallsend example is, however, not in a funerary but in a religious context. If the figure on the side of the altar represents the dedicator, that is, the *praefectus Celer*, one would perhaps expect him to be shown making libation on a small altar at his side. Soldiers generally do not appear on altars unless making such an offering or unless the relief is on a grave-altar.²¹ The altars of T. Flavius Felix (A.D. 211) from Eining²² and Aurelius Secundus from Vindobona,²³ for example, both depict the celebrant in undress uniform. The Wallsend figure, which has an upraised right arm and part of a shaft held in the missing hand, could represent a *vexillarius* as seen on various dedicatory stones from the area of the Wall,²⁴ but seems more appropriate for a military deity and certainly not for the dedicator.

Gods with military attributes may appear naked or in classical attire, usually variants of the muscled cuirass and *pteruges*. This may supersede a local dress, for example the lamellar cuirasses of Palmyrene deities,²⁵ but on occasion the classical

mode (though not the pose) is abandoned and details of military equipment actually in use by Roman soldiers at the time are applied. For example, a relief from Mavilly (Côte d'Or), of the first century A.D., depicts Mars in *lorica hamata* with large shoulder-pieces and chest cross-piece.²⁶ He is bare-headed and holds a hexagonal shield. The surface rendering and shape of the *lorica* are exceptionally good. A column-relief from Alzey, analogously dated to c. A.D. 170–90, depicts Mars wearing a *lorica hamata*, an accurately modelled helmet with cheek-pieces and neck-flange, and possibly holding a *pilum*.²⁷ A fragmentary figural relief from Eining, of first- to second-century date, showing a crude but effective *lorica squamata*, may also represent Mars.²⁸ From Britain the well known gabled relief of Mars from Custom Scrubs, Bisley (Glos.),²⁹ seems to combine a classical cuirassed Mars, rendered by a native British sculptor,³⁰ with third-century details of equipment: circular waist-belt buckle, *gladius* on the left hip with prominent chape, and perhaps a long-sleeved tunic. Comparable to this are two reliefs of Gallic deities, one of a Hammer God from Oberseebach (Seltz, Switzerland),³¹ the other of a goddess with third-century hair-style and a god with cup/horn and serpent/staff from Herange (Menthe).³² Both show round belt-buckles distinguishing them from other reliefs of their respective iconographical types. The Wallsend figure is, therefore, likely to represent a deity, but his identity is unclear. Although the dedication of the altar is to Jupiter, Prof. Toynbee has pointed out in another context that, with the exception of syncretic Celtic Sky Gods, Jupiter Columns and Dolichenus figures, armoured Jupiters are very unusual.³³ Another altar to Jupiter (R.I.B. 1300) shows Hercules strangling snakes, so perhaps a mixture of dedication to Jupiter and figure of Mars is not impossible on Celer's altar.

The *cohors IIII Lingonum equitata* is named on the three I.O.M. altars from Wallsend (RIB 1299–1301). Of these, two were erected by *praefecti*, Celer and Rufus, one by a seconded *centurio* of *legio II Augusta* commanding the *cohors*. From the situation of the *Lingones* at Wallsend in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Occ. XL, 33) it has been assumed that their occupation started, and that their altars were erected, in the third century.³⁴ This is well supported, therefore, by the figure on the side of the altar set up by Cornelius Celer.

NOTES

* Prepared for the press by D. J. Smith, with warmest thanks to the author.

¹ Inv. No. 1894-4 (1), misquoted in *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* (Great Britain I, 1, No. 114. (See this for details.)

² *Germania Romana: ein Bilder Atlas*, III (1926), *Die Grabdenkmäler*, Taf. I, III–V, XIII, XXVIII (hereafter GR).

³ U. Monneret de Villard, 'The Temple of the Imperial Cult at Luxor', *Archaeologia* 95 (1953), Pls. XXX–XXXII; R. S. O. Tomlin, p. 261 in P. Connolly, *Greece and Rome at War* (1981).

⁴ R. Brilliant, 'The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum, Rome', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* XXIX (1967), Pls. 49–59, 61.

⁵ F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le Symbolisme Funéraire des Romains* (1942), Pl. XX, I; M. Durry, *Les Cohortes Prétoriennes* (1938), Pl. X, B.

⁶ *Museo Archeologico di Aquileia: Catalogo delle Sculture Romane* (1972), Nos. 348–55.

⁷ For example, *CSIR (Deutschland)* I, 1, Nos. 29, 31, 33, 34, 350, 371; *CSIR (Österreich)* III, 2, No.

86; R. B. Bandinelli, *Rome: The Late Empire* (1971), Pl. 124; R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (1963), Pl. G. For (?) funerary statues see D. Alicu *et al.*, *Figured Monuments of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegethusa*, B.A.R. Internat. Ser. 55 (1979), Pl. XLIX, Nos. 395, 397; I. Berciu and G. Anghel, *Alba Iulia* (1965), 49.

⁸ G. Mendel, *Catalogue des Sculptures Grecques, Romaines et Byzantines, Musées Impériaux Ottomans* III (1914); M. P. Speidel, 'Eagle-Bearer and Trumpeter', *Bonner Jahrbücher* 176 (1976), Figs. 1–5.

⁹ For the latest treatment see J. J. Wilkes, 'The Illyrian Provinces: External Threat and Internal Change', pp. 515–24 in A. King and M. Henig (eds.), *The Roman West in the Third Century* (1981).

¹⁰ F. Cumont, 'Rapport sur une mission à Salihyeh sur l'Euphrate', *Comptes Rendues de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 1923, p. 27, for a good reproduction of the Tribune Terentius fresco; *J.R.S.* 32 (1942), Pl. V, detail of same.

¹¹ M. A. R. Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra* (1976), Pl. 103.

¹² A. von Domaszewski, 'Die Fahnen in Römischen Heere', *Abhandlungen des Archäologisch-Epigraphischen Seminars der Universität Wien* V (1885), Fig. 14; E. Breccia, *Alexandria ad Aegyptum* (1914), Figs. 40–41.

¹³ R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians* (1962), Pls. 197, 202, 204; G. Herrmann, *The Iranian Revival* (1977), 92–4.

¹⁴ J. Oldenstein, 'Zur Ausrüstung römischer Auxiliereinheiten', *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 57 (1976), 49–284, Taf. 9–90.

¹⁵ None so far in published *CSIR* fascicules, or in *GR*, along the Rhine, but see M. Martin, *Römer-*

museum und Römerhaus, Augst (1981), No. 80 for an example from Kaiseraugst.

¹⁶ *RIB* 17, with fig.

¹⁷ *CSIR* (Great Britain), I, 2, No. 47.

¹⁸ See Durry, *op. cit.*, Pl. X, B, for a similar *pilum* shaft.

¹⁹ *RIB* 491, Pl. VII.

²⁰ Domaszewski, *op. cit.*, Fig. 90; H. Russell Robinson, *What the Soldiers Wore on Hadrian's Wall* (1979), 32.

²¹ For example, W. Altmann, *Die römischen Grabaltäre der Kaiserzeit* (1905), Fig. 189; Mendel, *op. cit.*, No. 1155; *Römer in Rumänien* (Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Köln, 1969), No. G 191.

²² *CSIR* (Deutschland), I, 1 No. 477.

²³ *CSIR* (Österreich), I, 1, No. 18; A. Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (1974), Pl. 77, for a votive relief from Keisby (Lincs.) of a soldier or deity with altar.

²⁴ *RIB* 1466, 1615.

²⁵ Colledge, *op. cit.*, 42.

²⁶ E. Espérandieu, *Recueil des Bas-Reliefs, Statues et Bustes de la Gaule Romaine* (1907–38), No. 2067 (hereafter *Esp.*); A. Grenier, *Manuel d'Archéologie Gallo-Romaine*, 4 (2) (1960), Fig. 205; H. Russell Robinson, *The Armour of Imperial Rome* (1975), Fig. 176.

²⁷ *CSIR* (Deutschland), II, 1, No. 6.

²⁸ *CSIR* (Deutschland), I, 1, No. 476.

²⁹ *RIB* 132; J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain* (1962), Pl. 65.

³⁰ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 152.

³¹ *Esp.*, No. 5564.

³² *Esp.*, No. 4541.

³³ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Art in Britain under the Romans* (1964), 67.

³⁴ D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall* (1976), 242, 255; P. A. Holder, *The Roman Army in Britain* (1982), 119.

