

EPIGRAPHIC TESTIMONIES OF JUPITER DOLICHENUS: IATRIC ASPECTS

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Abstract

The Jupiter Dolichenus cult, as it is well known, originates from the region of nowadays North Syria and Southern Turkey. Among the considerable number of epigraphic testimonies dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus discovered so far in the Roman world, only a few are related as well to the healing divinities such as Asclepius/Aesculap(i)us, Hygia, and Telesphorus. Three inscriptions of Moesia Superior, Numidia, and Dacia are indicative and essential because they link the Dolichenian deity directly to the appropriate iatric cults and point towards its curative aspects.

Keywords: *Roman Pantheon – Jupiter Dolichenus – epigraphic testimonies – healing aspects.*

Among the considerable number of epigraphic testimonies dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus discovered so far in the Roman world, only a few of them are related as well to the healing divinities such as Asclepius/Aesculap(i)us, Hygia, and Telesphorus. This article aims to shed new light on this fascinating phenomenon and outline some suppositions on the purpose of the existence of these monuments, their finding spots, and their dedicants.¹

The worship of Jupiter Dolichenus, as is well known, is native to the present-day area of northern Syria and southern Turkey. It is generally connected with the Commagen-

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Fig. 1. The altar from Prizren (private collection of dr Petar Petrović)

ian town of Doliche (Dülük in today's Turkey).² His homeland has a significant meaning after the interpretation of many inscriptions discovered in the Roman world and dedicated to the Dolichenian deity. This is an area rich in iron ore, as indicated by the epigraphic formulas *ubi ferrum nascitur*,³ or *ubi ferrum exoritur*.⁴ Iron metallurgy is evident in Doliche itself and on the Anatolian Plateau, rich in mineral deposits in the past and today. The two regions are considered the centers of origin of the cult.⁵ Within the Roman Pantheon the Dolichenian deity was connected and identified with Jupiter, the primary deity of the Roman state religion, under the name of *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus*. Within the Roman Pantheon, the Dolichenian deity was connected and identified with Jupiter, the supreme god of the Roman state religion, under the name of *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus*. The cult gained popularity in the 2nd century AD, peaked under the Severan dynasty in the early 3rd century AD, and virtually disappeared shortly afterward. But it is evident that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus existed in Roman society even before the second century, based on the epigraphic material, primarily connected with the settlers and recruited soldiers of Syrian origin.⁶

The followers of the Commagenian deity derive not only from one group of believers of Eastern origin, primarily soldiers, as is usually thought, but we can also trace them among social classes like priests, traders or artisans, freedmen, and those connected with the mining areas.⁷ The dedicants associated with healing activities and locations could further enlarge this list.⁸ Among the large number of epigraphic material on Jupiter Dolichenus, three inscriptions from Moesia Superior, Numidia, and Dacia are indicative and vital as they connect this divinity with the proper iatric cults. The first inscription comes from the extreme southwest of Moesia Superior, located at the border with the Dalmatia province, close to the present town of Prizren.⁹

2 Blömer 2021.

3 *Civitas Taunensium* (Heddernheim): *AE* 1902, 17; *Statio Vetoniana* (Pfünz): *AE* 1889, 68; *Novae* (Svishtov): *AE* 2008, 1187.

4 *Apulum* (Alba Iulia): *CIL* III, 1128.

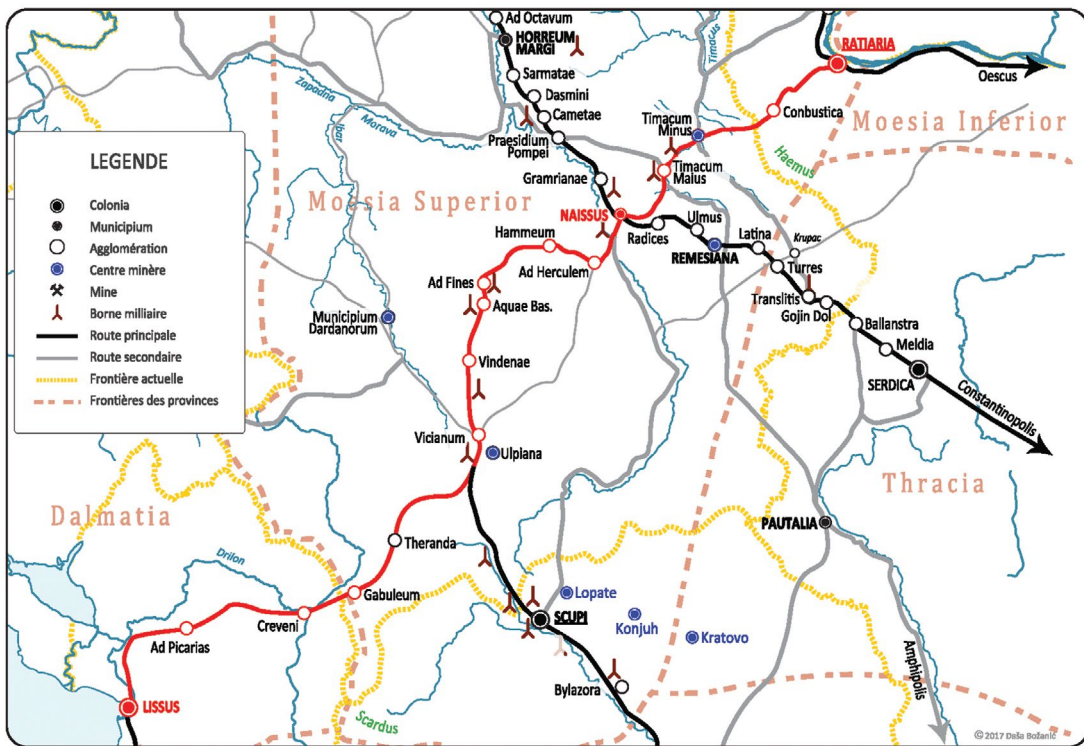
5 Concerning the homeland of the Dolichenus cult, see Dörner 1965; Speidel 1978, 45; Gavrilović-Vitas 2021, 92–113.

6 Petrović 2015, 323–332.

7 Popescu 2004, 317; Petrović 2019, 101–120.

8 Speidel 1980, 182–185.

9 Prizren: *ILJug* III, 1438 = *CCID* 126 = *AE* 1981, 739; Dušanić 1984.



Map 1. Roman Road Lissus - Naissus (Daša Božanić and Vladimir P. Petrović)

It reads: [Telesphoro Hygiae] || As|clep[ī]l⁵o | So[3] | Heracliti Sulrus [m]et(allarius) pro(curatoris) | Gen(io) l(ovis) O(ptimi) Dolic(h)eni |¹⁰ Paterno deo et Geni(o) | co(ho) rtis votum libies(!) f(ecit) (fig. 1). This area, situated on the slopes of Mount Scardus (Šar Planina), is crossed by one of the oldest and most important transbalkan Roman land communication lines.¹⁰ It connected the Adriatic coast and the town of Lissus (Lezha) with the main urban settlement of the central Balkans, the city of Naissus (Niš) (fig. 2).¹¹ This Roman road, depicted in Tabula Peutingerina, was actually in its major part the compendium or shortcut that linked the Adriatic coastline major urban centers (Lissus, Apollonia, and Dyrrachium) with the main Balkanic North–South communication axes. It ran from the Danube (Singidunum – Belgrade and Viminacium – Kostolac), along the Morava (Margus) and Vardar (Aksiós) River valleys, to the north Aegean coast and the town of Thessalonica (Thessaloniki). The oldness, character, and importance of the Lissus–Naissus route are further supported by the unique inscription from Hadrian’s epoch mentioning a *Via Nova* and a *compendium*.¹² The inscription of Jupiter Dolichenus from the vicinity of Prizren could be related to the station of Gabuleum or, more likely, Theranda, which are mentioned on Tabula Peutingeriana.¹³

10 Speidel 1980, 183.

11 Petrović 2019, 109–114.

12 AE 1980, 786 = AE 1984, 792; Petrović 2019, 102.

13 About *Gabuleum* and *Theranda*, Petrović 2019, 103–104.

In my last article about Jupiter Dolichenus, I connected this inscription with the mining activities in the region of the South of the uppermoesian mining district of Dardania, *metalli Dardanici*, as this was the primary economic activity in this region.¹⁴ Surus, the dedicator of this altar, was presumably a member of one of the uppermoesian cohortes, maybe I Aurelia Dardanorum, who have been dispatched to the office of the procurator of the Dardanian mines (*metallarius procuratoris*).¹⁵ It should also be borne in mind that in the text of the inscription, Jupiter Dolichenus is mentioned as *paternus deus*,¹⁶ which certainly indicates that the dedicant was foreigner probably of Eastern origin and that he found some work on the soil of Upper Moesia, primarily as a soldier, and then as part of the administration in mines. Based on analogies in the inscriptions known so far, there were associations (*collegia*) of foreigners - migrants bound by common origin and activity in Upper Moesia. Ethnic associations were limited to the mining regions in this province.¹⁷ They did not have to be exclusively soldiers but could be employed in administrative jobs or as miners. They consecrated altars to their ancestral deities and directly connected them with the supreme god of the Roman pantheon as part of the Romanization process to which they were exposed. The associations of migrants from Thrace, Bithynia, Anatolia, Dalmatia, Syria, and other empire regions in the uppermoesian province are attested.¹⁸ Therefore, this was not necessarily an example of Jupiter Dolichenus cult spreading among the local population. Still, it may be an individual spiritually connected to the place of its origin.¹⁹ On the other hand, as the altar is dedicated to Asclepius, Hygia, and Thelesphorus in addition to Jupiter Dolichenus as *deus paternus*, it could be presumed that there were some direct relations between proper iatric divinities and the Commagenian god. As the author of this study, I am inclined to the belief that Surus dedicated this altar in one sanctuary of Asclepius that probably existed in the area of Prizren to the Roman healing divinities, which became more firm and decisive with the support of Jupiter Dolichenus. Even though it is not clear from the text of the inscription, Surus may have been driven to this action, *ex praecepto*, by a dream, as is the case with similar inscription found in Apulum (*Dacia*).²⁰ In support of the sanctuary of Asclepius in the vicinity of Prizren, reports another votive monument dedicated to Asclepius, in the Greek language, with a dedication and a relief representation of the healing deity.²¹ It runs: Κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῷ Σωτῆρι | ἔθη|καν | Μικ(—), Γαι(—), Ἀσκλη(—), |⁵ Ουα(—), Δημη(—), Ἄρτε(—) | ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτῶν | σωτηρίας δῶρον. It was not found *in situ* but was secondarily embedded in the apse of the Church of the Holy Sunday in Prizren, the endowment of young King Marko Mrnjavčević from 1371. Like the previous one, this inscription was brought from the immediate vicinity, from the station

14 On mining activities in the Central Balkans in Roman times, see Dušanić 1977; Dušanić 2004; Petrović 2015, 323–332.

15 Dušanić 1984, 31; Petrović 2015, 323–332.

16 Grbić 2015, 128.

17 Grbić 2015, 133.

18 Grbić 2015, 128.

19 Grbić 2015, 134.

20 Apulum: *CIL* III, 1614 = *CIL* III, 8044 = *CCID* 158.

21 *SEG* 44.646,1; Dušanić 1984.

of *Gabulem* or, more likely, *Theranda*. It is a standard dedication to the healing deity by six individuals. The names of the dedicants are listed without patronymics or gentilic, so it is logical to assume that they were slaves or individuals from a lower social class who may have been bound by a common job or joined in some *collegium*.

Given that not far from today's Prizren, the Roman road left the province of Upper Moesia and entered the hilly regions of the province of Dalmatia towards Lissus, and that there was also a beneficiary and customs stations, it is logical to assume that votive monuments could also be dedicated to Asclepius and other healing deities as gratitude for health or recovery after a strenuous journey, especially in case of the second inscription without the explicit connection with Jupiter Dolichenus.²²

The second altar of Apulum is dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus and Aesculapus by Veturius Marcianus, a veteran of the legion XIII Gemina.²³ This inscription reads: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D(olicheno) | ex praecepto | Num(inis) Aesculapi | somno monit(us) |⁵ Veturius Marcian(us) ve(teranus) I(egionis) XIII G(eminae) p(ro) s(alute) s(ua) suor(um)q(ue)*. The inscription points to the same conclusion about the strong bond between healing divinities and Jupiter Dolichenus. Its finding place is connected with the mountainous area of *Aureriae Dacicae*, where massive mining activities occurred, similar to the Prizren altar.

The third altar, dedicated to Asclepius, Hygia, and Jupiter Dolichenus by Titus Flavius Maximus, the highest ranking officer of the legion of III Augusta, derives from Lambaesis in Numidia (Lambèse – Tazoult, Algeria), the Roman legionary fort and colony (fig. 3).²⁴ The text of the inscription reads: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Dolic(heno) | Aesculapio | (H)ygiae cetelrisq(ue) di(i)s | immort(alibus) T(itus) Fl(avius) |⁵ Maximus ex I(centurione) | praet(oriano) p(rimus) p(ilus) praef(ectus) | [[I(egionis) III]] Aug(us-tae) Severi(anae) | cum Antonia An|tonina coniulge v(otum) s(olvit)*. The Roman settlement of Lambaesis, located on one of the major roads in the province of Numidia, was the headquarters of the III Augusta Legion. It had a sizeable civilian colony and abundant water springs from the mountains nearby, as evidenced by the remains of



Fig. 2. The altar from Lambaesis (EDCS 20600075)

22 Dušanić 1984, 29–30.

23 Apulum: *CIL* III, 1614 = *CIL* III, 8044 = *CCID* 158.

24 *CIL* VIII, 2624 (p. 1739) = *D* 4323 = *CCID* 624 = *Hygiae* p. 123.

aqueducts.²⁵ The temple of Asclepius, unfortunately severely damaged, was located among the other religious buildings. It was inspired by the famous sanctuary of Asclepius in Epidaurus (Greece), the well-known Doric temple dedicated to the medical god.²⁶ This was a specific medico-religious complex used by soldiers and their families to cure themselves and improve their health conditions, using thermal waters protected by the deity who could strongly contribute to the curative processes.

Based on these three inscriptions mentioned above, it is acceptable that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus was thus also associated with medical deities in Roman times. Its basic features, such as the “eternal preserver”, the “firmament preserver”, and the “invincible provider” should be linked to health in symbiosis with purely medical divinities. Jupiter Dolichenus, in combination with the strictly iatric cults, contributed to the strength, faithfulness, invincibility, and positive outcome of the medical treatment. The finding places of all three altars are linked to mountain slopes abundant with water sources and mineral resources, the natural areas of the apparent healing character, positioned on strategic itinerary roads, and with various populations—the land of passage, land of anchor.

25 Christol and Janon 2005, 73–86.

26 *CIL VIII, 2680 = CCID 620 (from Lambaesis in Numidia): Pro s[alute] et incolumitate | Imp(eratoris) Cae[s(aris) Traia]ni Hadriani Augusti | Sex(tus) Iuli[us Maio]r legatus ipsius propraetore | templ[um I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D]olicheno dedicavit.*

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