CHAPTER XXVI

THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS MILICHIIUS

The small temple near the northeast corner of the block containing the theatres is entered from Stabian Street. The court (Fig. 84, 2), like that of the temple of Vespasian, has a colonnade across the front; only the foundation and a Doric capital of lava are preserved.

At the end of the colonnade on the right is the room of the sacristan (4). The large altar (Fig. 251) stands close to the foot of the steps leading up to the temple. It is built of blocks of tufa, with a frieze of triglyphs and panels like those found on walls in the first style of decoration.

The steps extend across the front of the temple, the unusual elevation of which is explained by the inequality of the ground. Of the six columns in the tetrastyle portico no remains have been found, but three capitals of pilasters are preserved, two belonging to those at the corners of the cella, and one, considerably smaller, to a doorpost; they are of tufa, and were once covered with white stucco.

The excellent proportions and fine workmanship of the capitals point to the period of the first style of decoration; there was formerly a remnant of that style on the north wall of the cella, copied before 1837. Nevertheless the quasi-reticulate masonry of the cella, closely resembling that of the Small Theatre, dates from the early years of the Roman colony. In this period the temple in its present form was built, perhaps with the help of native Pompeian masons.
Attached to the rear wall of the cella was an oblong pedestal on which were placed two statues, representing Jupiter and Juno, together with a bust of Minerva, all of terra cotta and of poor workmanship. The suggestion at once presents itself that this was the Capitolium, erected by the Roman colonists soon after they settled in Pompeii. It is incredible, however, that colonists who had the means to erect monumental buildings, such as the Amphitheatre and the Small Theatre, should have housed the great gods of the Capitol in so modest a temple, in so inconspicuous a spot, and should not have provided more costly images.

All the evidence is in favor of the explanation, already proposed (p. 66), that after the earthquake the worship of the gods of the Capitol was transferred hither temporarily from the temple in the Forum, until that should be rebuilt.

What divinity thus became the host of the Roman gods? It would be impossible to say but for the fortunate recovery of an Oscan inscription, which was set up in the passage of the Stabian Gate. This commemorates the work of two aediles, M. Sittius and N. Pontius, who improved the street leading out from the Stabian Gate 'as far as the Stabian Bridge, and the Via Pompeiana as far as the temple of Zeus Milichius; these streets, as well as the Via Jovia (and another, the name of which cannot be made out) they placed in perfect repair.'

It is natural to suppose that the Via Pompeiana, mentioned in immediate connection with the road leading to Stabiae, was the continuation of the latter within the city, or Stabian Street. This, then, led to the temple named in the inscription, and as there is no other temple on the street, the small sanctuary in which the images of the Capitoline divinities were placed was the temple of Zeus Milichius.

This building, however, is not old enough to have been mentioned in an Oscan inscription. It probably stands in the place of a much earlier edifice. The masonry of the wall on the south side of the court is different from that of the other walls, and older; as it shows no trace of a cross wall, it must always have stood at the side of an open space, such as that of the present court. To the earlier building the capitals belong, the style of which, as remarked above, is pre-Roman.

In view of this explanation, we should probably recognize in the head carved on the smallest of the pilaster capitals (Fig. 85) a representation of Zeus Milichius, a divinity honored in many parts of Greece, especially by the farmers; Zeus the Gracious, the patron of tillers of the soil. The serious, kindly face, bearded and with long locks, was more than a mere ornament; it was the god himself looking down upon the worshipper who entered his sanctuary. As a representation of Zeus it probably exemplifies an ancient type.