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Sol

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Chapter 1.

Sol in the Roman Empire: Previous Research, General Trends. A Brief Survey of the *Status Quaestionis*.¹

In the revised third edition of the Oxford Classical Dictionary (2003), under *Sol*, we read that Rome was home - at different times - to two utterly different solar deities: Sol *Indiges*, a Roman god, in the Republic, and Sol *Invictus*, a Syrian god, in late antiquity. This remarkable idea that there had been two distinct sun gods in Rome has been the dominant view in Classical scholarship for well over a century. Nonetheless, this is a modern myth for which there is quite simply no evidence. The evidence we do have suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, that the Romans had venerated Sol as a Roman god for as long as they could recall, and never ceased to do so until the demise of polytheism. This then is the stark conclusion with which we preface this chapter, namely that generations of classicists have ignored the evidence we have for solar worship in Rome, and in particular for the Roman nature of the sun god Sol and the continuity of his cult in Rome, in favour of a mirage.

To understand how that could be, we must first identify a number of basic tendencies that have dominated research into Roman sun cults, although these are difficult to define precisely. Most earlier studies of Sol, whether *Indiges* or *Invictus*, were heavily laden with prejudice. Many scholars felt uncomfortable with the concept of a Roman sun cult; some were openly hostile towards it. This hostility, which was ideological in nature, has had a strong influence on research into the cult of Sol at Rome. The second tendency, related to this hostility and equally difficult to pin down, is that many scholars have felt that solar cult is inherently, or at least implicitly monotheistic.² If the sun was a god at all in a given culture, the assumption was that he must have been a great god. Hence, the fact that he was clearly not a major god in either Greece or early Rome - in Greek mythology Helios was actually a Titan rather than a god, and cults for Helios were sporadic and relatively late³ - is then taken to indicate that solar cult was not native to these cultures.⁴ As a result, the role of the sun in Greek and early Roman religion has tended to be

¹ Significant parts of this chapter were published previously as an article (Hijmans 1996). Matern (2002, 20-46) covers aspects of the same material from a different perspective; her conclusions closely mirror mine.

² Cf., e.g., Wallraff 2001, 13 (and in particular n. 23)..

³ Helios's father was Hyperion, his mother Thia (both Titans); cf. Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 1.2.2; Hes. *Th.* 371-5; Pi. *O.* 7.39. Paus. 2.11.5 speaks of Titan as the sun's brother. The main evidence for pre-Hellenistic cults for Helios in Greece comes from Athens, Corinth, and Rhodes; there is also some evidence for a cult on Kos. Pausanias refers to cults or cult-related activities connected with Helios - all of unknown age - at Hermione (2.34.10) and Taleton (3.20.4) in the Argolid, and in Thalamai, Lakonia (3.26.1). For a useful summary of the evidence, cf. Matern 2002, 9-19 (includes evidence of Roman date). Fauth (1995, xvii-xxxiii) gives an excellent overview of roles of Helios in Greek culture with greater emphasis on philosophy. For the cult of Helios on Rhodes, cf. Zusanek 1994.

⁴ Cf., e.g., Nilsson 1941, I, 33, 189, 789-793. The sources Nilsson (1941, 790 n.5) adduces - Ar. *Pax* 406-413; Pl. *Cra.* 397C - clearly indicate that in Classical Athens *major cults* of Helios were associated with non-Greeks rather than Greeks, but that does not mean that the Greeks themselves did not consider Helios and Selene to be gods. On the contrary, as Pl. *Ap.* 26d, for example, clearly shows, the "normal" attitude in Athens would be to deem the sun and the moon to be gods. Cf. Soph. (TrGF F 738 Radt): Π ζ προσκυνε δ τ ν στρέφοντα κύκλον λίου (cf.

downplayed, culturally as well as religiously, to a greater extent than the evidence warrants. Conversely the evidence for solar cult in late antiquity, and notably for the half-century from Aurelian to Constantine, is commonly exaggerated to the point that Roman religion is sometimes portrayed as centring on Sol in an almost monotheistic fashion.⁵ As we shall see, both views are overstatements. The sun was a god in traditional Roman and Greek religion, but never an important one. He did gain importance in late antiquity, but never to the level of supreme deity.

Nonetheless it is against the background of these basic assumptions that scholars have consistently postulated that clear distinction between the Republican Sol *Indiges* and the Imperial Sol *Invictus* that is still maintained in the Oxford Classical Dictionary. The Republican Sol has generally, albeit sometimes reluctantly, been treated as a Roman sun god, possibly with Sabine roots, while the imperial Sol was long said to have been a totally different, oriental deity, imported from Syria. In order to understand how this differentiation came about, we must first devote some attention to previous scholarship surrounding the Roman sun god in the Republican period.

Sol in the Roman Republic

The relevant ancient literary sources, though scant, claim unanimously that the cult of Sol and Luna was rooted in earliest Rome.⁶ Nonetheless, not all modern scholars have accepted this. In

Wallraff 2001, 7). Indeed, how else should we explain Helios's role at oaths (Hom. *Il.* 3.277), or the (admittedly late) reference in Paus. 2.1.6, 2.4.6 that Poseidon and Helios competed for Corinth and ended up splitting the site, with Helios receiving the Acrocorinth, and Plato the Isthmus? Helios was no doubt a minor deity to Greeks, but clearly not a foreign one, and one whose importance gradually increased over time. Wallraff's contention (2001, 29) that cults of Helios in Greece were reminiscences of archaic or non-Greek cults that gradually receded in the course of the "cultural development" of Greece is not supported by Matern's evidence (cf. n 3), which implies that cults of Helios were noticeably more widespread in the Greek world by the early imperial period (1st c. BC - 1st c. AD) than they had been in Classical Greece. The increase in the amount of evidence may be the result of other factors than an increase of cult alone - the more widespread use and survival of inscriptions for example - but that does not change the fact that the cult of Helios was not uncommon in the Greek world at the beginning of the Roman era.

⁵ Cf. most recently Wallraff 2001, 29 - 39. On p. 32, e.g., Wallraff states that in the course of just a few decades in the 3rd c. AD, Sol *Invictus* had a "kometenhaften Aufstieg zum unumschränkten Reichsgott"

⁶ According to Varro (*L.* 5.74) the cult should be traced back to the days of Titus Tatius: "Et arae Sabinum linguam olent, quae Tati regis voto sunt Romae dedicatae: nam, ut annales dicunt, vovit Opi, Florae, Vediovi Saturnoque, Soli, Lunae, Volcano et Summano, itemque Larundae, Termino, Quirino, Vortumno, Laribus, Dianae Lucinaeque". On the Sabine roots, cf. also Dion. Hal. *Ant.* 2.50,3, and Aug. *C.D.* 4.23. Festus links the introduction of the cult to the Aurelii, a family reputedly of Sabine origin (Paul. Fest. 22.5 ff L.). This suggests it may have been one of the *sacra gentilitia*. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.74,1) mentions a *vetus aedes apud circum* for Sol, generally accepted to be Republican in date; cf. Tert. *Spect.* 8.1. Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.7.12) mentions a temple or shrine (*pulvinar*, cf. n. 11) on the Quirinal. Connected with it there was a *sacrificium publicum* for Sol on the 8th of August, and/or *feriae* on the 9th of August (cf. *infra* n. 18), dedicated specifically to Sol *Indiges* (*Fast. Vall.*, *InscrItal* 13.2, 148-9; *Allif.*, *InscrItal* 13.2, 180-1, *Amit.*, *InscrItal* 13.2, 190-1). Sol *Indiges* also had a temple in Lavinium (Dion. Hal. *Ant.* 1,55,2; Plin., *Nat.* 3,56). The *fasti* also record an *agonium* on the 11th of December for one or more of the *Di Indigetes* (*Fast. Amit.*, *InscrIt* 13.2, 198-9, *Osti.*, *InscrIt* 13.2, 106, *Maff.*, *InscrIt* 13.2, 83, *Praen.*, *InscrIt* 13.2, 136-7, and *Ant. Min.*, *InscrIt* 13.2, 210). Lyd. *Mens.* 4, 155 links this specifically to Sol (cf. *infra* n. 17). A festival celebrated on the 28th of August in honour of Sol and Luna, recorded in the Calendar of 354, probably also had Republican roots, if it is indeed the same as the one referred to in the *Fast Praen.* (*InscrIt* 13.2, 134). Unfortunately

the nineteenth century a concept of Early Roman religion was developed, which culminated in the work of Georg Wissowa; and Wissowa (1912, 23-26) claimed that "natural phenomena" were altogether absent from early Roman religion. In his view, the early Romans had straightforward beliefs, with practical gods whose roles were clearly defined, and this excluded more abstract religious concepts. Neither the sun, nor the stars, nor the planets were revered, astrology had no role to play, and even such "typical" Roman abstractions as Pax, Fides, or Fortuna belonged to later Roman religion. Therefore Wissowa (1912, 315-317) rejected the belief that Sol was Roman, and suggested that he was in fact the Greek Helios, imported into Rome no earlier than the Second Punic War. He thus denied that Sol was one of the traditional Roman *Di Indigetes*, despite the fact that the sources unanimously treat him as one of the earliest gods in Rome and the *fasti* as well as certain late sources refer to him specifically as Sol *Indiges*. Wissowa was not alone in taking this point of view,⁷ although it is no longer defended. It is still of interest to us, however, because Wissowa's line of argument is an excellent example of the relative force of ideology and methodology in his approach to Roman religion.

In order to prove his point that Sol in Republican Rome was actually the Greek Helios, Wissowa needed above all to explain how Helios came to be called Sol *Indiges*. He himself had defined the *Di Indigetes* as the oldest Roman gods,⁸ but in the case of Sol he suggested that the epithet was added in Augustan times in order to denote the earlier Sol (who was actually Helios, according to him) as "(...) den «einheimischen» (...), im Gegensatz zu den orientalischen Sonnenkulten, die gerade in jener Periode in Rom einzudringen begannen (...)".⁹ He offered no reason to suppose that Sol was not called "Indiges" before Augustan times, other than his general postulate that there could be no place for a solar cult in Early Roman religion.

Wissowa's suggestion is not compelling, because there is no parallel for the use of the term *indiges* as "indigenous" or "traditional". However, the meaning of the word is not at all clear.¹⁰ All that can be said with certainty is that *indiges* was used either collectively to denote a

it is not certain to which calendar day these fragments belong. Finally, it is likely that the *agones* instituted by Aurelian in honour of Sol for Oct. 19-22 had roots in an earlier festival. The *fasti* record an *armilustrium* for October 19th, and there is reason to believe that part of that festival took place in the Circus Maximus. Given the prominent role of Sol in the circus, it is unlikely that he was on the sidelines at this religious event; cf. Salzman 1990, 127, 150; Schofield 1969, 640-650. Etymologies of the word Sol are given by Var. *l.* 5,68; Cic. *N.D.* 2.68, 3.54; Macr. *Sat.* 1.17.7, *Somn.* 1.20.4; Mart. Cap. 2.188; Lyd. *Mens.* 2.4.

⁷ Cf. Roscher, *lex. s.v.* "Sol" (vol. 4, 1138-1139, F. Richter); Bernhard 1933, 276; Wili 1944, 123 (cf. Chapter 7).

⁸ Wissowa 1912, 19.

⁹ Wissowa 1912, 317; cf. Wissowa 1904a, 184.

¹⁰ The OLD, 883, s.v. *indiges* states simply that it is an "obscure title applied to certain deities". For the unsolved problems concerning its etymology and meaning cf. OCD 2003³ s.v. *indigetes* and Neue Pauly 5, 975 s.v. *indiges* II & III. Koch (1933, 67-118) offers an exhaustive analysis of both the term *indiges* and the *Di Indigetes* in general. For other attempts to solve the etymological problems cf. A. Walde & J.B. Hoffmann, *Lateinisches ethymologisches Wörterbuch*, (Heidelberg³ 1938) s.v. *indiges*, as well as M. Leumann, *Lateinische Laut- und Formenlehre*, (Munich 1977), 373. The fourth edition of A. Ernout & A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latin. Histoire des mots*, (Paris 1985), 315 s.v. *indiges* states simply that the etymology is unknown. Most

group of gods (*Di Indigetes*) or else was linked to individual gods, mainly Jupiter, Pater and Sol. As Wissowa rightly points out, the precise meaning of the word was already forgotten by the time of Varro. Thus his explanation, though unlikely, was not impossible.

In a second argument against the existence of an early Roman sun-god, Wissowa points out that the temple of Sol on the Quirinal was called a *pulvinar*,¹¹ and states that this term was linked to the *lectisternia* of the *graecus ritus* and was never used in connection with an Italic-Roman god.¹² This is incorrect, for in fact a *pulvinar* is mentioned in connection not only with Sol on the Quirinal, Castor in Tusculum, and with Juno Sospita in Lanuvium, but also with the deified Romulus, and even Jupiter Capitolinus.¹³ Thus irrespective of the origin of this practice,¹⁴ it was obviously not restricted to non-Roman and non-Italian deities as Wissowa claims.

The only other argument for the non-Roman character of Sol Indiges offered by Wissowa is that there is no sign of the cult either in the *Fasti* or in the orders of priests.¹⁵ This is a particularly weak argument, especially because Wissowa had to emend the *Fasti Amiternini* to create it: he rejected the entry AG IN for AG(onium) IN(digeti) under December 11th, claiming that it must have been a stonemason's error, and proposed AGON(alia) instead, as this would leave the tutelary deity in doubt. The *Fasti Ostienses* however, which were found after Wissowa

recently, Perfigli (2004, 219-265) has again tackled the issue. Cf. Altheim 1938, 109-114; Vetter 1956, 22-28; Latte 1960, 45 n.1; Richard 1976, 917-918; Radtke 1979, 150-151; Schilling 1979. Wissowa never offered a final solution himself (cf. Wissowa 1904a, 179; *RE* IX, 1334 s.v. *indiges*), but tended to interpret *indiges* as "indigenous", used as an antonym for *novensis*. This is untenable (cf. Neue Pauly 8, 1027 s.v. *Novensides, Di*), although the mistaken idea that *indiges* and *indigenus* are somehow linked is tenacious; cf. Halsberghe 1972, 26.

¹¹ Wissowa 1912, 315. A *pulvinar* was a sacred couch, but the word could also be used as a *pars pro toto* for a temple (Serv. *Georg.* III, 533). Cf. van den Berg 2008; Matern 2002, 22 n. 162.

¹² "(...) Dieser mit den Lectisternien des *graecus ritus* untrennbar verbundene Ausdruck [kommt] sonst nie mit Beziehung auf eine italisch-römische Gottheit vor (...)".

¹³ *Pulvinar* of Sol on the Quirinal: Quintil. *Inst.* 1.7.12; of Castor in Tusculum: Fest. p. 419, 15-17 ed. Lindsay; of Juno Sospita in Lanuvium: Livy 21.64.4; of the deified Romulus: Ovid, *Met.* 14.827; of Jupiter Capitolinus: Livy 5.52.6. Wissowa (1912, 269-270) argues that the *pulvinaria* in Tusculum show that Castor was definitely Greek. The fact that the Romans built a temple for Castor *intra pomerium* on the Forum itself as early as 484 B.C. would simply show that it was the Tusculani who had imported Castor from Greece, while the Romans imported him much later from Tusculum, forgetting his Greek origins. He does not mention the presence of a *pulvinar Iunonis* in Lanuvium, which, according to Wissowa (1912, 187-8) was a very old Italian cult centre. According to R.M. Ogilvie, *A commentary on Livy books 1-5*, (Oxford 1965), 745, the ceremony described by Livy in connection with the *pulvinar* of Jupiter Capitolinus, "being part of the *Romanus ritus*, is of the greatest antiquity (...)".

¹⁴ *RE* 23.2, 1977 s.v. *pulvinar*; Koch (1933, 30-32) argues against a close link between the *pulvinar* and the Greek *lectisternium*, stating that in certain cases the setting up of a *pulvinar* was a purely Roman practice.

¹⁵ Wissowa (1912, 315): "Weder im Festkalender noch in der Priesterordnung [findet] sich irgendwelche Spur dieses Gottesdienstes (...)".

wrote, carry the entry [AG]ON(ium) IND(igeti), making Wissowa's emendation untenable.¹⁶ Of course these entries could be taken to refer to the *Di Indigetes* in general, but Laurentius Lydus (*de mens.* 4, 155) states that the festival of the 11th of December was dedicated γενάρχη Ἡλί, and for other reasons as well it is now generally accepted that Sol Indiges must be meant.¹⁷ And that is not all. In making the argument, Wissowa furthermore simply glossed over four other *fasti* which indicated that there was a *sacrificium publicum* for Sol Indiges on August 8th, and/or *feriae* on August 9th.¹⁸

There is other evidence for the antiquity of the cult of Sol Indiges as well. Pliny the elder names a *lucus Solis* near Laurentum and the Numicius river - that at least is the reading of all manuscripts¹⁹ - but Wissowa is perhaps to be excused for omitting this. The mss reading *Solis* has been rejected since 1494, when, in his commentary on Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, Ermolao Barbaro emended it to *Iovis*.²⁰ In support, Barbaro refers to Livy,²¹ Solinus,²² Dionysius of Halicarnassus,²³ and Cicero.²⁴ Of these, Livy is the only one to refer specifically to Jupiter Indiges near the Numicius. Solinus refers to Aeneas as Pater Indiges as does Dionysius, and the reference

¹⁶ The *Fasti Ostienses* were discovered in 1921. Vetter (1960, 92-4) suggested that the entry be read as AGON(iorum) IND(ictio), but this is far-fetched (rejected by Degrassi, *InscrItal* 13.2, 536). For the *Fasti* in question cf. *InscrItal* 13.2, 104-106 & 185-200. Degrassi dates the *Fasti Amiternini* shortly after 20 A.D., and gives the *Fasti Ostienses* a *terminus ante quem* of 2 A.D. Cf. also the *Fast. Maff.*, *Praen.*, and *Ant. min.*, with entries AGON or AG for the 11th of December (*InscrItal*. 13.2, 70-84, 107-145, 201-212).

¹⁷ Wissowa (1912, 317) mentions Lydus in passing, but does not explain his statement that the games were dedicated γενάρχη Ἡλί; cf. Wissowa 1904b, 231-2; Wissowa 1923, 371-2 (cf. n. 30). Further support for the identification of December 11th as the festival of Sol can be found in Schilling 1979. In general on Sol and the *Fasti* cf. Koch 1933, 63-67; Latte 1960, 44-45; Alföldi 1963, 252-3; Degrassi, *InscrItal* 13.2, 535-6; Richard 1976, 917-8 & n. 15; Scullard 1981, 203; Engels 2007, 118-9. It is worth noting that the *agonalia* were apparently a very ancient rite over which the *rex sacrificulus* officiated at the *regia* (Var. *L.* 3.12, Ov. *F.* 1.318, Dumézil 1970, 172-3). Four *agonalia* were held per year: January 9th (Janus), March 17th (Mars), May 21st (Vediovis), and December 11th (Sol); cf. *RE* s.v. *agonium* (Wissowa).

¹⁸ August 8th (*sacrificium publicum*, *Fast. Vall. InscrItal* 13.2, 148-9) and August 9th (*feriae*, *Allif.*, *InscrItal* 13.2, 180-1; *Amit.*, *InscrItal* 13.2, 190-1); Latte (1960, 231-232) believes the two entries refer to one ceremony, but Kl. Pauly V, 258 s.v. *Sol* treats them as different. Wissowa (1912, 317) mentions only the entry for August 9th (quoting CIL I² p. 324), qualifying it as an "unsolved problem". The Neue Pauly 11, 691 s.v. *Sol* likewise does not mention August 8th. Degrassi (*InscrItal* 13.2, 152) notes that the *Fasti Vallenses* contains numerous errors.

¹⁹ Plin. *NH* 3,56.

²⁰ Barbaro 1494, np (about p. 27): "Locus Solis Indigetis: legendum Lucus Iovis Indigetis".

²¹ Liv. 1.2.6. Barbaro only specifies the passage in Cicero, referring to Livy and his other sources simply by name.

²² Solin. *Mirab.* 2, 15.

²³ Dion. Hal. 1, 64.

²⁴ Cic. *ND* 3, 42.

to Cicero is based on an incorrect reading of the text.²⁵ Servius speaks more generally of *di Indigetes* so that even from the sources adduced by Barbaro it is already clear that multiple *Indigetes* were revered in that region of Latium. Thus this evidence can hardly be deemed sufficient to necessitate an emendation that goes against every manuscript reading. It is all the more striking, therefore, that only in the last few decades the text of the manuscripts has begun to regain acceptance over Barbaro's emendation.²⁶

Needless to say, Wissowa's interpretation of Sol Indiges as the Greek Helios is no longer accepted.²⁷ It is now generally agreed that the Republican Sol was a minor god revered together with Luna, and one whose cult had roots in the earliest Roman traditions. He was possibly introduced into Rome during the monarchy, together with other Sabine gods, and apparently his cult was linked to the Aurelii as one of the *sacra gentilitia*.²⁸ We should keep in mind, however, that most scholars agree that this cult was never important, and that until recently it was widely maintained that it had disappeared altogether by the beginning of the second century A.D.²⁹ Thus those who rejected Wissowa's views still held that there was no connection between the Republican Sol and the imperial Sol, the latter said to have been imported in the late second or early third century A.D. from Syria.

My aim in focusing such attention on Wissowa's position on Sol Indiges was not to reject his conclusions - his views on this topic have no adherents today as it is - but to draw attention to his approach to the subject. For as we shall see, this approach offers an excellent foretaste of the type of scholarship we will encounter when reviewing past work on Sol in imperial Rome, invariably referred to today as Sol "Invictus" although that epithet was not, in fact, used by the Romans to identify a specific Sol or Sol-cult.

We cannot dismiss Wissowa's views on Sol Indiges as inadvertent errors of a mediocre scholar. Wissowa was one of the leading Roman historians of his day and his work is still very influential. This broaches the fascinating and fundamental question: *why* did Wissowa feel

²⁵ According to Barbaro, Cicero "ex herculibus sex tertium cognomento Iovis Indigetis vocatum scribit", but the now accepted reading of that passage is "Tertius est ex *Idaeis Digitis*; cui inferias adferunt Cretes."

²⁶ Schilling 1979, 61 n. 1; cf. Engels 2007, 118.

²⁷ For early rejections: F. Cumont in Daremberg-Saglio IV.2 s.v. Sol, 1381-1382; J.B. Keune in *RE* 2. Reihe, III (1929), 902-903 s.v. Sol; Koch 1933. Cf. Von Domaszewski 1909, 173. Cf. also Matern 2002, 23 n. 164

²⁸ Koch (1933) was the first to study the Republican Sol systematically, and to argue for the acceptance of the antiquity of his cult; Dumézil (1970, 169-170; 389 n. 29; 432-3) is still sceptical, but most now accept this antiquity: cf. Latte 1960, 231-233; Halsberghe 1972, 26-28; Richard 1976, 917-918 and n. 15, with references; Schilling 1979, *passim*, esp. 60-61; York 1986, 189-191; Matern 2002, 20-26. On the connection with the Aurelii, cf. Dumézil (1970, 432-3, 621) and Richard (1976), who accept the link, and Santi (1991), who suggests that the supposed linkage with the Aurelii is a forgery dating to the reign of Aurelian. On the presumed unimportance of the Republican Sol, cf. also Wallraff 2001, 28-9.

²⁹ *RE* II, 3 s.v. Sol, esp. 905-906; Wissowa 1912, 365; Latte 1960, 233; Halsberghe 1972, 35, 54. Wallraff (2001, 28-9) rejects a Syrian origin for the imperial cult of Sol, but maintains the concept of two different forms of solar cult, the one Republican, the other late Imperial. Matern 2002, 45-56 takes a more nuanced position, postulating some degree of continuity between the Republican Sol and the sun god of late antiquity.

compelled a) to reject the unanimous view of our ancient sources on the Republican Sol; b) to attempt an impossible etymology of the term *indiges*; c) to give clearly incorrect information about the use of the word *pulvinar*; and finally d) to resort to an artificial argument from silence that he created by emending some sources and ignoring others, all in order to deny that Sol Indiges was Roman? Richard (1976, 918) felt that Wissowa “fut de tout évidence mal inspiré le jour où il développa [cette] idée (...)”, implying that it must have been a momentary lapse. A lapse it certainly was, but hardly a momentary one: Wissowa first set out his views in 1892 and vigorously defended them even after the discovery of the *Fasti Ostienses* in 1921.³⁰ It was not lack of data, nor lack of reflection which caused Wissowa to be “mal inspiré”, but his general perception of Roman religion, in which he allowed himself to be led by his intuition, his idea of what Romans must have believed.³¹

Koch, Latte, and others believe that Wissowa so vehemently opposed the idea of a Roman solar cult because he was intent on maintaining his overall structure of Roman religion.³² But would the admission that Sol was Roman really have made such a fundamental difference to that structure? I believe not, especially if the cult were shown to be no more than a minor one. In fact, I believe, it was not Wissowa's perception of early Roman religion which was at stake, but rather his perception of the nature and character of solar cults. For the claim that all sun-cults were foreign, and notably that Sol “Invictus” was Syrian, was not a neutral scholarly hypothesis. In the tradition to which Wissowa belonged, such claims amounted to an indictment of solar cults in general, and that of the imperial Sol in particular, as inferior and unworthy of the “superior” Romans. The origin of such claims, I believe, lay in nineteenth century ideology rather than in a flawed methodology.

Wissowa himself does little to clarify the ideological preconceptions which govern his work; these are present more by implication than by argument. To get a clearer idea of the framework within which Wissowa worked we must turn to other scholars of the same “school”. The manner in which they approached the problem of the imperial Sol will prove to be

³⁰ Wissowa 1904a, 180-181): “Sol deus (...) Augusti aetate indigetis cognomen accepit, ut probe dinoscere-
tur ab externis dis solaribus, quorum iam tum cultus Romae percrebescere coeperat (...)”; cf. Wissowa 1923, 371-
372.

³¹ Especially revealing is Wissowa (1923, 372) in his reaction to the *Fasti Ostienses* and the reading [AG]ON(ium) IND(igetis): “Denn abgesehen davon, dass eine Verehrung des Sonnengottes in der frühen Zeit der römischen Religion, aus welcher die Festordnung stammt, allen sonstigen Zeugnissen widerspricht und darum ein so später und bedenklicher Gewährsmann wie Io. Lydus in dieser Sache keinen Glauben verdient (...), bleiben die durchschlagenden Beweisgründe, die ich an anderer Stelle [i.e. Wissowa 1912, 317] gegen die Möglichkeit einer solchen Ergänzung angeführt habe, mit unvermindertem Gewichte bestehen (...)” (these arguments are of a technical nature, and concern the choice of abbreviations and letter-type used on the *Fasti*-inscriptions). In fact there are no “Zeugnisse” *against* an early cult of Sol Indiges at all, and Wissowa simply ignores what evidence there is. For a refutation of his technical epigraphic arguments cf. Degraffi (*InscrIt* 13.2), 536. On Lydus cf. Maas 1992.

³² Koch (1933, 10), “Der altrömische Dienst von Sol und Luna gehört in die Reihe derjenigen Kulte, die von der Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts, welche in dem bedeutenden Werke von G. Wissowa ihre systematische Zusammenfassung erhielt, als ungelöste Rätsel in den Anhang verwiesen wurden, da sie für die Eingliederung in den Bau des Ganzen keine Handhabe boten”. As Latte (1960, 233 n. 2) puts it, the problem was that “Theorien den tatsächlichen Befund beiseite zu schieben suchten”.

instructive. Before reviewing these specific studies, however, it is important to turn for a moment to a more general, and in our case fundamental, tendency in past scholarship. Although in a different context, Halsberghe states unequivocally: "Religion often provides the best key to the nature and fundamental traits of a people (...)". This clear linkage between the nature of the religion and the character of a people plays a fundamental role in the development of the theories concerning the origin and character of the imperial Sol and it is a persistent, albeit often unstated, theme in the literature on the subject.³³ The whole concept cannot be separated from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period of developing nationalism which provided the ideological basis for an ethnocentric approach to religion.

Once *ethnos* and religion are connected in this manner, scholars are forced to explain changes in religion in terms of change in the fundamental character of a people and its nationhood as a whole. In the nineteenth century certainly, western scholarship, in line with the nationalistic, imperialistic and racially oriented concepts of the time, treated the "nature and fundamental traits of a people" as immutable, changing only under the influence of foreign imports and intrusions. The implications are clear: with religion so closely linked to society, it too would change only as the result of the import of foreign religious concepts and practices, introduced by immigrants, sailors, or soldiers who had been stationed abroad. In other words, this conviction is one of the basic justifications for diffusionistic explanations of religious changes.

The importance of this diffusionistic approach will quickly become apparent when we study the nineteenth-century perception of Sol "Invictus".

The Imperial Sol in previous research

The discussion surrounding the imperial sun god, usually referred to as Sol Invictus, is more complex than that concerning solar cult in the Roman Republic. Until the last few years, it was widely held that the imperial sun-god was one of the Syrian Ba'alim, who came to the fore in Rome under the Severi, and most notably under Heliogabalus.³⁴ After the death of Heliogabalus it was thought that the imperial Sol virtually disappeared from view until he was reinstated under a different guise by Aurelian as *Dominus et Deus Imperii Romani*. Many held (or continue to hold) that for the next fifty years this Syrian god was one of the most important gods of Rome, until his cult, like that of all pagan gods, was supplanted by Christianity.³⁵

³³ Halsberghe 1972, 26. Cf., e.g., Wissowa 1912, 366, describing Heliogabal's religious reforms as "die ärgste Entwürdigung, die römisches Wesen und römische Religion je erfahren haben"; Wili 1944, 164.

³⁴ I shall use this name for the Emperor to avoid confusion with the homonymous god, whom I shall call Elagabal. On the history and meaning of the various forms of the name Elagabal see Turcan 1985, 7-8.

³⁵ A majority of the most recent studies involving Sol have abandoned the notion of an imported Syrian deity. See Hijmans 1996, Neue Pauly 11, 694 s.v. Sol D.; Wallraff 2001, 12-13, Matern 2002, 35-9, Berrens 2004, 235-242. On the role of solar deities in Syria, cf. Matern 2002, 36-7, 134-137. For recent summaries of the cult of the imperial Sol broadly along the traditional lines see MacMullen 1981, 85-86, von Heintze 1983; Halsberghe 1984; Kellner 1985, 60-1, 64; Muth 1988, 190 n. 519, 201, 286; Clauss 1990, 423; Del Ponte 1992, 244-250; Beard, North, & Price 1998, 1.254, 258 (with acknowledgement of Roman roots as well); di Palma 1999, Aguado Garcia 2001. Hansen 2005. Turcan (1985) is more cautious, differentiating to some extent between Elagabal, Sol Invictus, and Sol Invictus Mithras, but he, too, in the end, considers Aurelian's Sol to be much indebted to Elagabal of Emesa (cf. especially pp. 251-254); cf. Straub 1972, 554. Letta (1989) assumes that the imperial Sol was the result of

Only in the last decade has this consensus begun to unravel. There were earlier dissenting voices - notably those of Noiville, Seyrig and Chirassi Colombo³⁶ - but they were largely ignored in debates that centred not on the question whether the imperial Sol originated as an oriental god, but rather on his precise character, and especially on his connection with Elagabal of Emesa. Many scholars felt that Aurelian's Sol must have differed from Heliogabalus's Elagabal, and suggested that he was actually the Palmyran Malachbel, or even Mithras. Most also admitted a degree of Roman influence, but differed on its extent. Some, like Wissowa, felt that Aurelian's Syrian solar cult was merely disguised by a veneer of faux Romanness, while others, like Turcan, see a real merging of oriental and Roman traditions. Much of what was written on Sol "Invictus" can therefore best be characterized as an attempt to identify exactly which oriental god it was that inspired Aurelian to institute his cult of Sol in Rome, and what role Roman traditions played therein.³⁷

In part, the confusion is a result of the fact that there is no actual evidence for the supposedly oriental nature of the imperial Sol, and scholars relied on a handful of oblique literary references that could conceivably be read as such. In support of the claim that solar religion was

syncretistic tendencies, in which oriental sun-gods played a major role; this was also the line taken by Groß in RAC I, 1007 s.v. Aurelian. Cf. also Kleiner 1992, 359, 400, 463. Among older studies, cf. Keune in *RE* II.3 (1929) s.v. *Sol (die orientalischen)*, 906-913; Usener 1905; Richter 1909-1915, 1143-1150; Wissowa 1912, 89-90; 365-368; Nilsson 1933, 161-2; L'Orange 1935, 330; Altheim 1939, 226-229, 277-286; 1957; Halsberghe 1972; Dörrie 1974. To my knowledge only Noiville (1938), Seyrig (1971, 1973) and Chirassi Colombo (1979) held fundamentally dissenting views. Noiville proceeds from the (mistaken) assumption that the major festival of the imperial Sol was celebrated on the 25th of December. There being no trace of such a festival in the religious traditions of either Syria or Egypt, he concludes that Aurelian's Sol and his festival were Roman in origin. Noiville highlights the lack of evidence for Syrian antecedents for the cult of Sol promoted by Aurelian, but there is no evidence that December 25th played a major role - or indeed any role at all - in Aurelian's solar cult, undermining the basic premiss of Noiville's argument. Seyrig (1971) also approached the problem from a Syrian angle. He rejects the idea that Ba'alim were solar deities, and suggests that a different origin for the imperial Sol must be found. Chirassi Colombo discusses the relationship between Mithras and Sol Invictus, and suggests that they were direct competitors. She stresses the Graeco-Roman elements pertaining to Sol and his cult and suggests that it was supported by the emperors as a counterpart to oriental Mithraism. A number of her arguments will be recognized in mine, although she approaches the problem from a different angle. This, perhaps, explains why her conclusions were not integrated into scholarship concerning Sol.

³⁶ *Supra*, n. 35

³⁷ Habel 1889, 99-100 (Mithras); Keune, *RE* 2. Reihe 3 (1929) s.v. *Sol (die orientalischen)*, 906-913, also feels that Sol Invictus and Mithras are often identical, but believes that Aurelian imported Malachbel. Cf. Richter 1909-1915, 1147; Dussaud 1903, 376; Wissowa 1912, 367. Cf. also Nilsson 1933, 162. Marquardt (1885, vol. 3, 83) suggested that Aurelian reinstated Elagabal on the basis of SHA Aurel. 25,4-6; this was rejected by the *RE*, (*supra*), but taken up again by Halsberghe 1972, 1984 (see below). Although it was generally accepted that Aurelian attempted to combine Graeco-Roman and oriental traditions in the cult of The imperial Sol, this point was not stressed before Turcan (1985), and attention remained focused on the oriental character of solar religion; cf. *RE* 2. Reihe 3 s.v. *Sol (die orientalischen)* 908; *OCD*³ (2003) s.v. *Sol*. An eloquent summary of the perceived manner of the diffusion of the cult can be found in Frazer (1925, chapter 12)

preeminent in Syria, usually Tacitus, *Hist.*, III, 24³⁸ was quoted, although such a conclusion is not, of course, warranted on basis of this passage alone. In addition, scholars regularly defined Ba'alim as solar deities, despite the fact that in antiquity they were almost always identified with Zeus or Jupiter. Seyrig (1971) in particular pointedly refuted the idea that Ba'alim were sun-gods. Indeed, he denied that sun-gods of any kind played a dominant role in the Syrian pantheon.³⁹ His views, however, had little impact.

In fact, although the sources all agree that Aurelian had a special veneration for Sol,⁴⁰ scholars were hard put to find even indirect indications that this Sol was anything other than Roman. One ambiguous passage, often quoted, is SHA Aurel. 5,5:

"Data est ei (sc. Aureliano) praeterea, cum legatus ad Persas isset, patera, qualis solet imperatoribus dari a rege Persarum, in qua insculptus erat Sol eo habitu, quo colebatur ab eo templo, in quo mater eius fuerat sacerdos".⁴¹

On the basis of this passage Habel (1889) went so far as to conclude that Aurelian's Sol was identical to the Persian Mithras.⁴² Clearly, however, the author's main point is that Aurelian, at a time when he was but a *legatus*, was already treated as an emperor by the Persian King. This special treatment is further emphasized by the fact that the plate he received as a gift was "custom-made", representing Sol in a way well-known to Aurelian, and therefore by implication not in a manner typical of Iran.

More to the point is a second passage in SHA Aurel. (25, 3-6), describing the divine help Aurelian received in a decisive battle against Zenobia. After the battle, Aurelian immediately went to the most important temple of nearby Emesa, namely that of Elagabal.

"Verum illic eam formam numinis repperit, quam in bello sibi faventem vidit. Quare et illic templa fundavit donariis ingentibus positis et Romae Soli templum posuit maiore honorificentia consecratum".⁴³

Only a superficial reading of these two sentences, however, would allow one to conclude that Aurelian must have recognized the god Elagabal himself as his divine helper. It is striking, to begin with, that this is not stated explicitly. *Ea forma numinis* is carefully vague, and need not necessarily refer to Elagabal at all; indeed, it probably cannot, because we know that in Emesa

³⁸ "Undique clamor, et orientem Solem (ita in Syria mos est) tertiani salutavere". Cf. Halsberghe (1972, 36 n. 1 - but cf. 35-6 n. 10!).

³⁹ Cf. also Seyrig 1973, Matern 2002, 37.

⁴⁰ E.g. SHA Aurel. 35,3; 39,2; Eutropius *Brev. AUC* XI,15. For a full overview of the sources, cf. Homo 1904, 184-195.

⁴¹ Furthermore, when he had gone to Persia as ambassador he was given a plate of the type that the king of the Persians normally gave to emperors, on which Sol was engraved in the same guise as the one in which he was venerated in the temple in which Aurelian's mother had been priestess.

⁴² How Aurelian's *mother* came to be a *priestess* of Mithras is not explained by Habel.

⁴³ In fact he found there the very deity (form of divinity) that he had seen in battle supporting him. And therefore he founded temples there, depositing enormous donations, and in Rome founded a temple for Sol, dedicated with greater display of honour.

the cult of Elagabal was centred on a sacred black stone or baetyl,⁴⁴ while *forma numinis* seems to imply an anthropomorphic figure.⁴⁵ As the second sentence shows, Aurelian took the divine helper to be Sol - explicitly named, without any reference to Elagabal - for whom he built temples not just in Rome, but also in Emesa. It would be quite surprising that Aurelian should want to build a new temple in Emesa - as *illic templa fundavit* clearly states - if in fact we are expected to identify Sol wholly with Elagabal. On the other hand, there would be nothing intrinsically unlikely in the assumption that Aurelian saw a statue of Sol or Helios in the precinct of Elagabal's temple - Elagabal was after all a deity with stronger solar connotations than most ba'alim - and that it was in this statue that the author would have us imagine Aurelian recognizing *eam formam numinis* for whom he then built a separate temple in Emesa. That seems to me the most straightforward reading of this passage, even if one leaves aside the fact that Sol was invariably represented in traditional Graeco-Roman iconography during Aurelian's reign, and that there are absolutely no indications from either coins, inscriptions or any other source that he considered Sol and Elagabal to be identical. Certainly it is clear that there is nothing in this passage which forces us to conclude that Aurelian's Sol and Elagabal must have been the same, the more so because we must keep in mind that the readers for whom the SHA was intended already knew the nature of Aurelian's Sol, so that the author did not need to elaborate. If an ancient reader already knew Aurelian's Sol to be Roman, she would find nothing in this passage that would cause her to rethink that.

I give this somewhat detailed exegesis not because I believe that somehow the truth about Sol can be teased from such passages along these lines.⁴⁶ My aim is rather to illustrate just how superficially they were read by those who did, ostensibly at least, set out to establish what it is that we know about Sol by a "close" reading of the sources. That passages such as these could be quoted as evidence that Sol was oriental is simply another example of the type of scholarship we already encountered in Wissowa's discussions of the sun-god of the Roman Republic.

In fact, as I have already pointed out, many scholars rejected an identification of Aurelian's Sol with Elagabal, notwithstanding the passage we have just discussed. They did so not because they felt that the evidence was too weak, but because they considered it inconceivable that Aurelian should choose to reinstate the infamous Elagabal in Rome. Hence, quoting two different passages, these scholars argued that it was actually Malachbel of Palmyra whom he transformed into the imperial Sol. The evidence quoted in support of this supposition is equally feeble. The first passage (SHA Aurel. 31,7) states simply that Aurelian wanted the temple

⁴⁴ The central importance of this stone for Emesa and its cult is clear from the fact that it appears on many of the coins minted by Uranius in 253/4, when he organized the defence of Emesa against Sapor I. RIC IV.3 p. 205 nrs. 1-2, p. 206, nr. 8.

⁴⁵ *Forma* is used in the first place to denote the figure or stature of a person. In connection with a god, *forma* therefore almost automatically assumes this meaning; *formae deorum* can even - poetically - be used as the equivalent of *dii* (Ovid, *Met.* 1, 73). If Aurelian had seen a vision of the aniconic baetyl in battle, which he later recognized in the temple, *forma* would be ill-suited to describe this, and one would rather expect a word such as *effigies*, *imago*, or *species*. Cf. Turcan 1985, 252.

⁴⁶ Aside from the fact that the SHA provides little concrete information on Sol, the source itself is of course one of dubious reliability. Cf. the introduction to *Histoire Auguste*, texte établi et traduit par J.-P. Callu, Paris 1992.

of the sun in Palmyra restored, while the second (Zos. 1,61) states that a statue of Bel from Palmyra stood next to a statue of Sol in the temple built by Aurelian in Rome. It is curious that the latter passage should be cited as "proof" that the imperial Sol was no other than the Palmyran Bel. The fact that there were two separate statues seems to imply quite the opposite, and surely the fact that the Palmyran Bel was set up in Aurelian's temple can be far more logically explained as visual proof of Aurelian's total victory over Palmyra. That scholars have argued that Aurelian elected the god of a defeated city to become the supreme deity of the Roman Empire becomes even stranger when one takes into account the inconvenient fact that the Palmyran Bel was Jovian, not solar. In Palmyra, as in the Graeco-Roman world, the sun was of relatively minor religious importance.⁴⁷

Aurelian, of course, was thought to be the second emperor to have introduced the sun cult into Rome, after the failure of the Severan attempt, especially under Heliogabalus. Concerning the religious activities of this much-maligned boy-emperor our written sources are more abundant (though no more trustworthy); here the problem is of a different nature. There can be no doubt that according to the literary sources a new god, Elagabal, was imported into Rome by the emperor Heliogabalus.⁴⁸ Various sources state that he was installed in Rome as supreme deity⁴⁹ and that he was a sun-god,⁵⁰ although there are some doubts about his precise nature.⁵¹ After Heliogabalus's death his religious reforms were immediately repealed,⁵² and the god Elagabal was bundled off back to Emesa.⁵³ Thus as far as the sources are concerned, the rule of the Emesan Elagabal in Rome lasted less than four years (219-222). They give no indication that

⁴⁷ On the identification of the temple of the sun in Palmyra cf. Drijvers (1976, 20), who rejects the idea that Palmyran deities with solar connections - all minor gods - in any way influenced Aurelian. Cf. also Matern 2002, 38. She is right, of course, that the whole issue should be moot because the Bel of Palmyra was not a sun god, but that is precisely the point. It *should* be moot, but for some reason it is not. What this illustrates is again just how frail the evidence is upon which the postulated oriental nature of Sol was based. For a recent reference to these two sources as evidence of Sol's oriental side, cf. Beard, North & Price 1998 I, 245.

⁴⁸ Herodian 5,5,7 ("νέον θεῶν Ἐλαγάβαλον"); Cassius Dio *Hist.* 79 (80) 8,4; SHA Heliog. 1,6; Zonaras *Epit.* 12, 14, B.

⁴⁹ Herodian 5,5,7; Cassius Dio *Hist.* 79 (80) 8,4; SHA Heliog. 3,4; 7,4.

⁵⁰ Herodian 5,6,5; Cassius Dio *Hist.* 78 (79), 31,2.

⁵¹ His chariot, for instance, was drawn by six horses (Herodian, 5,6,7), which is suitable for Jupiter rather than Sol (Tert. *Spect.* IX,3). In the SHA Heliog. 1,4 some hesitation is apparent when the emperor is described as "Heliogabali vel Iovis vel Solis sacerdos (...)". The name Elagabal has a Semitic etymology unconnected with sun. It is probably derived from Elah Gabal, meaning God of the Mountain (Neue Pauly s.v. Elagabal). Its Latinized form Heliogabalus, suggesting a connection with Helios, is late (SHA, Eutropius); earlier writers used more direct transcriptions which did not incorporate 'Helios' (cf. n. 34). On the Jovian nature of Elagabal cf. Seyrig 1971, 340-345. In inscriptions the emperor Heliogabalus uses the title *sacerdos Solis Elagabali*, but this linkage of Sol and Elagabal (note the form of the name) is no more (and no less) informative about their respective identities than for example the commonly invoked Zeus Helios Sarapis is about the identities of Zeus, Helios and Sarapis.

⁵² Herodian 6,1,3.

⁵³ Cassius Dio *Hist.* 79 (80), 21,2.

the god's arrival antedated the reign of Heliogabalus, or that his cult survived in Rome beyond the latter's death.

The sources, then, offer no support for the contention that the Roman Sol and Emesan Elagabal were one and the same god, yet somehow this became an almost uncontested commonplace in modern scholarship.⁵⁴ It is perhaps typical of nineteenth century positivistic historiography that such scant literary sources were considered adequate to conclude confidently that the sun god of Imperial Rome was an oriental Ba'al of some kind.⁵⁵ The question remains, however, why nineteenth century scholarship jumped to this conclusion. *How* could this conviction have taken root so firmly?

As we have already seen, religious historians in the nineteenth century systematically attempted to exclude solar and astral elements from what they considered truly *Roman* religion. This made the Republican Sol a problem, but a minor one, solved by presenting him as perhaps Greek rather than Roman, and certainly of minimal importance. Indeed, his cult was played down to the point where it was said to have disappeared completely early in the empire. Against this background it is obvious that the imperial Sol *a priori* had to be considered a new and foreign god. This does not, however, explain why scholars were convinced that he was Syrian. Virtually all cultures within the empire had a sun-god, and surely any sceptical reevaluation of the sources would have been enough to reveal their weakness as proof of an exclusively oriental origin of the imperial Sol.

But we should not blame flawed methodology for the tenacity of the conviction that the imperial Sol was oriental. It can only be explained in conjunction with the general perception of Solar religion. In nineteenth century scholarship, which was surprisingly hostile towards solar and astral religions in general, this conviction had a strong ideological function. It tended to treat the advent of Sol "Invictus" not just as an oriental innovation, but as a bad one at that. To some extent this can be explained by the negative treatment Heliogabalus receives in our sources.⁵⁶ But this should not blind us to the fact that many nineteenth century scholars went further, and bent the sources to fit their own world-view. Réville (1886, 240-2) perhaps offers the best example of this negative approach, and it is worth quoting his remarks on Heliogabalus and Syria extensively to catch the tone:

"Cette fois le triomphe de l'Orient était complet. L'empire du monde dévolu à un enfant de quatorze ans, choisi par des soldats parce qu'il était beau et parce qu'il était prêtre! Le gouvernement dirigé par des femmes d'Émèse! Un Baal affirmant cyniquement sa souveraineté à la barbe du Jupiter Capitolin! Et le Sénat de Rom s'inclinant platement devant le dieu et devant son prêtre! (...)

Il n'y a, en effet, plus rien de romain ni d'occidental en la personne d'Elagabal ou de sa

⁵⁴ Cf. Halsberghe 1972, 1984. If one adduces other evidence as well - notably epigraphic - the story of Elagabal in Rome becomes more complex and less straightforward than our written sources imply. Cf. Matern 2002, 30-35.

⁵⁵ Inscriptions are often adduced in support of specific tenets, but although they are more numerous than our literary sources, they are less explicit, and none offer conclusive proof for any specific claim concerning the imperial Sol.

⁵⁶ Frey 1989; Optendrenk 1969.

mère Soaemias. En eux le vieil esprit de Canaan, contre lequel les prophètes d'Israël se sont élevés avec tant d'énergie, s'affirme encore une fois dans un débordement suprême avant de disparaître de l'histoire. Amenée par deux siècles de bonne administration à un haut degré de civilisation matérielle, la Syrie, d'ailleurs si heureusement dotée par la nature, était devenue un lieu de rendezvous pour les représentants de toutes les traditions religieuses orientales et pour les apôtres de toutes les sectes. Au sein d'une population frivole et légère, ardente à la passion mais indolente à l'effort, avide de nouveautés mais superficielle, rusée et subtile mais sans consistance, toutes les théories et toutes églises s'étaient réciproquement fécondées et avaient produit une abondante floraison de systèmes religieux syncrétistes. (...)

Le dieu d'Émèse (...) était franchement cananéen et n'en avait point honte. (...) C'était un dieu solaire, personnification du principe mâle et de la chaleur fécondante".

The overtly racist, imperialist and sexist overtones of this passage are already breathtaking by current standards, but Réville goes further. Following a discussion of the meaning of the name Elagabal he catalogues at length the emperor's notorious excesses, as reported in our sources, emphasizing their oriental nature, and accusing Heliogabalus of being even worse than the average oriental despot, as the latter at least keeps his debaucheries confined to the palace away from the public eye.⁵⁷ For the Romans, he feels, all this must have been the apex of horror, but Réville (1886, 251) resolutely rejects the idea that the emperor was simply mad: "Les nombreuses excentricités d'Elagabal que les historiens ont considérées comme des inspirations de la folie, ne furent également le plus souvent que l'application de certaines coutumes syriennes (...)". Réville emphasizes that Heliogabalus was simply a typical oriental and that his character and actions were precisely what one could expect of such an individual.

Réville did not stand alone in his conviction that the oriental race was inferior (not to mention the female gender). This evaluation was shared by many and is closely connected with the "decadence"-theory. Broadly speaking, the whole imperial history of Rome was seen as one of cultural, political and moral decline,⁵⁸ and according to scholars like Réville this was largely caused by corruptive oriental influences.⁵⁹ By idealizing the Republic and vilifying the Empire they followed, to some extent, a trend set in antiquity, sharing the Republican nostalgia of their

⁵⁷ Here Réville is echoing E. Gibbon, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire*, Methuen's Standard Library, (London 1905 [1776]), vol. 1, 147, who contrasts the "inexpressible infamy" of the "public scenes displayed before the Roman people" under Elagabal with the "licence of an eastern monarch (...) secluded from the eye of curiosity by the inaccessible walls of the seraglio".

⁵⁸ In the words of Cumont (1929, 22): "Cette société manque (...) d'imagination, d'esprit et de goût. Elle paraît atteinte d'une sorte d'anémie cérébrale et frappée d'une incurable sénilité (...). Elle ressemble à un organisme incapable de se défendre contre la contagion". Cf. chapter 7 for a similar assessment by Mommsen.

⁵⁹ Cf. Cumont (1929, 22) for a concise summary of this race-oriented approach (which he rejects) and Optendrenk (1969, 6; cf. 109 n. 20); on anti-oriental racism cf. also Christ (1983, 5) who quotes G. Niebuhr as describing "orientals" as a "durch und durch böses und sittlich verdorbenes Volk" (1847).

ancient counterparts.⁶⁰

Obviously this made all typically imperial institutions and innovations highly suspect, but few elements of imperial society were seen as such clear examples of this perceived decadence as the cult of the deified emperor.⁶¹ The distinction between the human and the divine is so deeply rooted in our consciousness that any attempt to cross that barrier has been interpreted as an almost inconceivable act of *hubris*. This perception of imperial divinity brought emperors into conflict with the "ideal" (namely Republican) Roman as described by Livy, among others. The concept of a divine emperor is therefore often considered distinctly "un-Roman" and thought to be modelled on the "oriental despotism" of the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Near East.⁶² The ruler cult, like Sol, with whom many scholars felt it was specifically linked,⁶³ became an "indubitable" oriental import. The abandonment of Republican temperance and the introduction of the cult of the deified ruler was thus fitted into the general framework of an all-pervasive orientalization of the Roman Empire.⁶⁴

As the Roman East was the home of Semitic peoples, various scholars tended to discuss the orientalization and perceived decadence of Rome along racist lines. Many felt that all

⁶⁰ The pro-Republican bias of Roman historians like Livy and Tacitus has often been discussed, and this is not the place to go into this further. Walsh (1982, 1064) states that the temptation to idealise the past was overwhelming for Livy and his whole generation, suggesting that they contrasted Republican Rome with the degeneracy of the first century for personal reasons (civil war) as well as for propagandic purposes. Cf. the remarks of Price, *infra* n. 61.

⁶¹ Beurlier (1891, 1) shows clearly how his contemporaries felt about the imperial cult stating that "entre les différentes formes des religions antiques, celle qui nous choque le plus est peut-être l'adoration des souverains". An excellent discussion of previous scholarship on this topic, concentrating on preconceptions of the type mentioned here, can be found in Price (1984, 11-15), who shows that ruler-cults in the Graeco-Roman world have been regularly treated as a final stage in the decline of ancient religions. Even more telling are the modern "prejudice" Price (1984, 17-19) discerns, pointing out that many scholars, refusing to accept that *Romans* could have taken the imperial cult seriously, treat it as *Graeca adulatio*; "Roman historians surveying the empire from the centre have taken over the attitude of members of the senatorial upper class (...) and have dismissed the Greeks under Roman rule as bickering flatterers contending for empty titles". Clauss (1999, 17-38) amply illustrates the extent to which these problems still persisted 15 years later.

⁶² The concept of "oriental despotism" played an important role in eighteenth and nineteenth century social and political sciences from Montesquieu to Marx, as did the dichotomy between the Graeco-Roman and the Oriental worlds as a whole. The classic study is Said (1979). Cf. Nippel (1991, 24), who discusses this in relation to Max Weber, referring among others to J. Deininger, "Die politischen Strukturen des mittelmeerisch-vorderorientalischen Altertums bei Max Weber" in: W. Schluchter (ed.), *Max Weber's Sicht des antiken Christentums* (1985), 72-110. The opposition Orient-Occident was already fostered in antiquity (one need but think of the comparison made between Octavian and Anthony) and this dichotomy has continued to have an almost uninterrupted influence up to the present day. Cf. Cracco-Ruggini & Cracco 1973, 17-19; Dossa 1987; Springborg 1992.

⁶³ On the emperor and Sol: Usener 1905, 468-9; Bernhard (1933), 277; Alföldi 1935, 94, 107-8; L'Orange 1935; Nock 1947; Brilliant 1963, 208-211; Kantorowicz 1963; MacCormack 1972, 727-733; Turcan, 1978, 1042-3, 1071-1073; Bastien 1982, 263-274; Bergmann 1998; Berrens 2004. Cf. LIMC *Helios/Sol* 408-450.

⁶⁴ Halsberghe (1972, 36-7), referring to the Eastern sun-god: "The emperors, who more and more came to consider themselves as Eastern despots, saw in (...) the indestructible and ever-victorious sun god a symbol of their power".

political and religious imports of an apparently Semitic nature were so inferior to Roman usage, that they could never have been successful in Rome if the Semitic population itself had not increased drastically in the West.⁶⁵ They not only attributed a supposed decline in morals to this influx of orientals but claimed that it also contributed physically to the decadence of Rome because it caused the degeneration of the supposedly superior Italic and Celtic stock of the West.⁶⁶

We can now begin to discern a pattern of interconnected preconceptions and prejudices, leading to an intricate circular argument. On the one hand there is the negative evaluation of the Roman Orient with its racist connotations, best understood against the background of the nineteenth-century justification of West-European imperialism. On the other hand we see the widespread and highly popular conviction that the fall of the Roman West followed on logically from its decadence. It is hardly surprising to find the Orient treated as the source of the negative and corruptive influences which led to the supposed decadence of the Roman Empire. The imperial Sol, identified with one or other sun-god of Syria and often closely linked to the maligned ruler-cult, in many ways seemed to epitomize this dominance of the Orient. The very fact that Aurelian identified him as *dominus et deus imperii Romani* could be seen as a sign of the "oriental despotism" scholars loved to deride. Is it going too far to suggest that Wissowa's consistent opposition to a Roman Republican Sol stems from this conviction that the Imperial Sol "Invictus" was utterly un-Roman and even anti-Roman?⁶⁷

Franz Cumont strongly attacked the predominant negative evaluation of the Orient, and played a fundamental role in reshaping the conception of the role of oriental cults in the Roman Empire. Although Cumont did not deny the supposed decadence of Rome (cf. *supra* n. 58), in his view the influence of the East was so strong because oriental cultures, and especially oriental religions, were more advanced than anything Rome had ever offered.⁶⁸ Cumont therefore easily

⁶⁵ The terms 'oriental', 'eastern', 'Syrian', 'hellenistic', 'Semitic', etc., are used so loosely in the studies under consideration that they are virtually interchangeable.

⁶⁶ A famous example of this approach is a study by Frank (1916), based mainly on funeral inscriptions. He attempted to show a strong increase of Semitic blood in the occidental veins of the Roman plebs in the first centuries A.D., claiming that this fundamentally changed the racial character of Rome. Cf. Cumont (1929, 22) and Baynes (1943, 31-33), for discussions (and criticism) of this and similar approaches.

⁶⁷ Scholars went to surprising lengths to exclude Sol from mainstream Roman religion. In a number of articles, for example, J. Fontenrose argued that Sol and Apollo were not yet identified with each other in the 1st c. BC, with thinly disguised contempt for such "syncretism" hovering in the background of his arguments. Cf. Fontenrose 1939, 1940, 1943a, 1943b. It is instructive to read his attempts to reconcile this position with, e.g., the alternation between Sol and Apollo in the *Carmen Saeculare* of Horace. Cf. chapter 7. On the pejorative connotations of syncretism, cf. Feldtkeller 1996, 36-7; Wallraff 2001, 38-9.

⁶⁸ Cumont 1929, 2: "Si Rome, appuyée sur la force de son armée et sur le droit qu'elle constitua, garda longtemps l'autorité politique, elle subit fatalement l'ascendant moral de peuples plus avancés qu'elle. A cet égard, l'histoire de l'Empire, durant les trois premiers siècles de notre ère, se résume en une "pénétration pacifique" de l'Occident par l'Orient".

accepted the oriental origin of the imperial solar cult as a proven fact.⁶⁹ It fitted in well with his interpretation of the general development of later Roman culture and the role the Orient played in it. Cumont (1909) further supported this conviction with a discussion of the philosophical and theological base of the cult of the imperial Sol. He distinguished two major constituent elements, both of which he described as oriental: Chaldaean astrology on the one hand, and stoic philosophy on the other.⁷⁰ According to Cumont (1909, 478-479) this led to a solar theology which was the result of the combined efforts of Mesopotamian and Syrian priests and philosophers. This theology, he feels, probably gained dominance in Syria from the time of the Seleucids, transforming all local Ba'alim into solar deities. From there it penetrated the West from the first century A.D. The success of this cosmic and almost monotheistic religion was due to the fact that it was far superior to Roman "idolâtrie".

In this way Cumont radically changed the tone of the discussion, but strengthened its basic tenets, providing a general oriental background against which the development and spread of the cosmic solar cult could be understood. However, as we have already seen, the interpretation of events in Rome to which Cumont adheres lacks support, as does his claim that the Syrian Ba'alim were solar deities.⁷¹

Cumont's approach greatly strengthened the conviction that the imperial Sol was Syrian, and by the first decade of the twentieth century the oriental origin of the imperial solar cult appeared beyond doubt. Attention focussed on determining when the oriental sun-god entered Rome, the question now being at which point the *Roman* cult of the sun (namely Sol Indiges) was superseded by the *oriental* cult. Both the perceived problem and the most popular solution are summarized succinctly by Wissowa: "Einer für Sol oder für Sol und Luna bestimmten Weihinschrift kann man es (...) in den meisten Fällen nicht ansehen, ob sie sich auf den römischen oder den orientalischen Kult bezieht; doch spricht seit der Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts die Wahrscheinlichkeit an sich für den letzteren, und im dritten ist (...) unter Sol kaum je ein anderer Gott als einer der syrischen Ba'alim verstanden worden".⁷² According to Wissowa the name *Sol Invictus* or *deus Invictus* invariably points to an oriental milieu. He emphasizes,

⁶⁹ E.g. Cumont 1909, 447.

⁷⁰ Cumont feels that it is justified to treat the whole of Stoic philosophy as basically oriental because a number of Stoic philosophers, such as Poseidonius of Apamea, Cleanthus of Assos, and Chrysippus of Soli came from the East. Actually, according to Dr. B.L. Hijmans Jr. (personal communication), the Romans (e.g. Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, M. Aurelius, etc.) did not regard the Stoic school as "foreign" or "eastern" at all, and certainly not in the way Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, for example, were seen as such.

⁷¹ Seyrig 1971. Cumont's influence on the study of Roman religion can hardly be overstated, yet few of his basic suppositions stand up to rigid reexamination. For sharp criticism, cf. MacMullen 1981, 116, 122-3, 200 n. 11.

⁷² Wissowa (1912, 365). In support, Wissowa cites as "interesting" an inscription (CIL VI 700), *Soli sacrum*, dedicated by a freedman in Rome who was born in Syrian Nisibis (currently Nusaybin on the Turco-Syrian border). One inscription has little force as evidence, of course, and in fact another inscription in the same volume of the CIL (2821 & 32551), not mentioned by Wissowa, carries a dedication dated 246 A.D. by some *Belgian* soldiers from Viromandui to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Mars, Nemesis, Sol, Victory, *et omnibus diis patrensibus*. Despite this, the footnote in question is often cited as "proof" of the oriental origin of Sol "Invictus"; e.g. Richter 1909-1915, 1142.

however, that Aurelian gave this Syrian cult a Roman form, being "(...) weit entfernt davon, wie Elagabal den ganzen Schwulst und Schmutz eines semitischen Ba'alsdienstes den Römern aufdrängen zu wollen". This would explain why the imperial Sol on coins of Aurelian has a wholly Graeco-Roman iconography, according to Wissowa.

This common line of thought hinged on the assumption that the epithet *invictus*, despite being Latin, is so obviously Syrian that the oriental origin of Sol Invictus is clear from his name alone. Yet there is absolutely no evidence to support the contention that *invictus* is a specifically "oriental" term. Cumont (*infra*, n. 73), argues that the term *invictus* was a translation of the oriental-Greek *ἀνίκητος*, was not used in the West until the beginning of the Roman Empire, and after that was almost exclusively applied to deities of a solar or astral character. This is not supported by the available evidence, for one can easily give a Roman tradition for the epithet *invictus*: the *OLD* (1973, 959 s.v. *invictus* 2b) quotes *Apollo Invictus*, *Jupiter Invictus*, *Hercules Invictus* and a number of other gods from authors like Hostius, Vergil, Ovid, Propertius, Horace and Martial. Hercules Invictus is also mentioned on coins, and on inscriptions he is almost as popular as Sol Invictus. Other *invicti* on inscriptions include Jupiter, Mercurius, Saturnus, Mars and Silvanus. Surely one cannot maintain that in all these cases "oriental", "solar" or even "astral" gods were meant.⁷³

Weinstock (1957), in a more general approach, traces the origins of the epithet to Alexander the Great, who was called *ἀνίκητος* by the Pythia in Delphi in 336 B.C. In the East, Alexander's example was followed by the Seleucids; in the West Scipio Africanus introduced *invictus* as a semi-divine epithet for himself in a concerted program clearly inspired by Alexander.⁷⁴ Other generals followed this example with variations, and Weinstock (1957, 229-237) extensively discusses Caesar's policy in this respect, referring to a statue of him, dedicated in the temple of Quirinus with the inscription *Deo Invicto*. Weinstock feels that it is not surprising that Augustus dropped all references to Alexander, stressing his human preeminence

⁷³ On the Republican occurrence of *invictus* as divine epithet, cf. Weinstock 1957, 215-7. Cumont (1899, 47-48 n. 2), referring to the many inscriptions in CIL VI (nrs. 312-332), is puzzled by the popularity of Hercules Invictus. He tentatively suggests that in these cases "Hercules" stands for the planet Mars. Similarly he explains Silvanus Invictus as a result of the fact that this god "était devenu un dieu solaire". With Jupiter the epithet *Invictus* is simply poetic for *omnipotens* (Cumont refers only to Horace *c.* 3,27,73). In fact Cicero (*leg.* 2, 28 - not mentioned by Cumont) clearly implies that *Invictus* was a normal epithet for Jupiter. The circularity of Cumont's "explanations" for Hercules *Invictus* and Silvanus *Invictus* is obvious. For *invicti* cf. *Thes. L.L.* s.v. *invictus* Ic (Hercules *Invictus* inadequately represented). I do not know of any explanations of the "oriental" character of *invictus* more explicit than that of Cumont. Keune (RE 2. Reihe 3 (1929) s.v. Sol, 906) states baldly: "Man nimmt jetzt zumeist an, dass wir (...) überall da mit fremden Gottheiten zu tun haben, wo auf einer Inschrift etwa der Zusatz *aeternus*, *divinus* oder *invictus* (bei letzterem ohne Einschränkung) begegnet". L'Orange (1935, 93-4) simply refers to Usener (1905, 469), who does not give any sources or explanation. Letta (1989, 593) also simply states that the term is oriental, without providing sources. For Mars *Invictus*, cf. the *Fast. Venus*. May 14th (1st c. BC); Hercules *Invictus*, *Fast. Amit.* August 12th (1st c. AD), cf. *Fast. Allif.* (1st c. AD), *AE* 1985, 555 (reign of Tiberius); Iovi *Invicto*, CIL 11, 5996a, cf. *Fast. Ant.* April 13th, Iovi *Victori* (1st c. AD); Mercurius *Invictus*, *Fast. Ant.* Ides of May (1st c. AD); Saturnus *Invictus*, CIL 8, 2667; Silvanus *Invictus*, CIL 2-5, 37 (54 BC), *AE* 1947, 115 (3rd c. AD; cf. Bowman 1998, 75). Cf. *AE* 2001, 30 (Propitio *Invicto*), *AE* 1997, 178 (*Invicto* Fonti et Nymphis *Divinis*), *AE* 1998, 1538 (*Invicto* numini Deae *Caelestis*), CIL III, 7531 (*Hero(n)i Invicto*, AD 216), CIL VI, 499 (*Attidi Invicto*, AD 374), CIL VI, 574 (*Serapi Invicto*), CIL VI, 30940 (*Sabazi Invicto*), CIL VIII, 22644,5 (*Genio Invicto*), CIL X, 123 (*Apollini Invicto*).

⁷⁴ Weinstock 1957, 221-222.

as *imperator* rather than a divine status implied by invincibility.⁷⁵ Commodus, the 'new Hercules', was the first emperor to readopt the title *invictus* officially, obviously referring to Hercules Invictus.⁷⁶ Caracalla was the next, and in this case, according to Weinstock (1957, 242), it was due to his interest in Alexander; he rejects the idea that any reference to Sol Invictus is intended. After Caracalla, *invictus* remained as a standard title for emperors until 324.

Clearly *invictus* cannot be treated as an oriental term, imported into Rome in the early Empire, and used specifically for astral deities. It was already present in Rome as a divine and semi-divine epithet by the early third century B.C., and by the first century A.D. it had as strong a tradition in the West as it ever did in the East.⁷⁷ More important, however, for our understanding of the imperial Sol, is a point stressed recently by Berrens, namely that irrespective of its origin, *invictus* was never a defining epithet for Sol, and certainly not in the sense that it denoted a specific type or cult of Sol.⁷⁸ *Invictus* was commonly used to denote the invincibility of a range of official imperial deities - notably Jupiter, Mars and Hercules - as well as the emperor long before it was used in official context for Sol.⁷⁹ But at no point was *invictus* used consistently with Sol. It remained common practice to use other epithets, or no epithet at all. Thus although Sol became a common figure on imperial coins from the reign of Septimius Severus onwards, it was not until the 260s that we find him with the epithet *invictus* on coins for instance, and the addition of Sol to the list of numismatically depicted *invicti* did not diminish the use of the epithet with Jupiter, Mars, Hercules, or the emperor, which lasted until well into the reign of Constantine, disappearing at the same time as Sol Invictus. In other contexts, notably Mithraic but not exclusively so, we do find earlier mention of Sol as *invictus* or *victor*, but not before the early second century AD. At this time we also find the emperor, Trajan, addressed as *invictus* and as we have already noted it was an established epithet for various Roman deities by the first century BC if not before.⁸⁰ In short, the tradition to refer to Sol *Invictus* as a specific, recognizable deity does not reflect Roman practice. For the Romans, the sun/sun-god was simply s/Sol. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that prior to Aurelian his priests in the city of Rome were simply *sacerdotes Solis*,⁸¹ while after Aurelian's reforms they were *pontifices Solis*. The addition of the epithet *invictus* was not impossible - Aelius Tryfon refers to himself as a *sacerdos*

⁷⁵ As Weinstock (1957, 239 n. 159) points out, this decision was probably directed against Anthony, rather than Caesar.

⁷⁶ Cf. Bergmann 1998, 262-4; Clauss 1999, 260-2 On the use of *invictus* with Domitian and Trajan cf. Weinstock 1957, 241-2.

⁷⁷ Cf. Chirassi Colombo 1979, 665-667.

⁷⁸ Berrens 2004, 184-198.

⁷⁹ Berrens differentiates between Mithraic use of *Sol Invictus Mithras* and the occurrence of *Sol Invictus* on coins, imperial inscriptions, and other public monuments.

⁸⁰ For Traianus Invictus cf. Plin. *Paneg.* 8,2 and Berrens 2004, 186-7. On the earliest use of *invictus* and *victor* for Sol cf. chapter 5.

⁸¹ On priests of Sol in Rome in the 2nd and early 3rd c. AD, cf. chapter 5.

Solis Invicti in the latter part of the second century AD,⁸² and Iunius Gallienus is a *pontifex Solis Invicti* a century later⁸³ - but it was the exception rather than the norm both for the post-Aurelian *pontifices* as well as the pre-Aurelian *sacerdotes* of the sun.⁸⁴ In short, there is no evidence to support the notion that the imperial Sol was called “the invincible” (*invictus*) to identify him as Syrian and differentiate him from the Roman Sol Indiges. *Invictus* is simply one of many Latin epithets, and can be given to Sol as well as many other deities without fundamentally changing their identity.

Another important point tackled by Wissowa is the iconography of the imperial Sol, well known from the many coins on which he appears. How striking it is that among all the oriental gods in the Roman Empire, the imperial Sol alone appeared to show no trace of oriental or non-Roman elements in his iconography! Wissowa's explanation that Aurelian had this done on purpose to disguise the oriental origin of his sun-god misses the point, because the iconography of Sol was established long before Aurelian's reign.⁸⁵

Various scholars have tried to identify an oriental or Semitic element in the iconography of Sol in the later Empire, pointing notably to his raised right hand.⁸⁶ L'Orange (1935, 93-94) claimed that the introduction of the gesture in the iconography of Sol coincided with the introduction of the oriental Sol, named *Invictus*, by the Severi.⁸⁷ This claim, however, is difficult to maintain. The oldest dated inscription mentioning Sol *Invictus* is from AD 158 (CIL VI, 717), clearly antedating both the Severi and the earliest images of Sol with raised right hand.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that the raised right hand of Sol was an innovation which would be recognized by the Romans as an oriental gesture, identifying this figure of Sol - otherwise unchanged - as a new Syrian god. As a gesture, the raised right hand, palm facing outwards, fingers straight, is so common that one meets it in all cultures and ages, albeit with differing details and meanings.⁸⁹ Hence it is not in itself very significant that the gesture was

⁸² CIL VI, 1358.

⁸³ CIL XIV, 2082

⁸⁴ The priestly titles of the emperor Heliogabalus are quite different: he is invariably referred to as *sacerdos amplissimus Dei Solis Invicti Elagabali*. E.g. *AE* 1975, 775.

⁸⁵ Wissowa 1912, 367-8.

⁸⁶ On the supposedly Semitic character of the gesture: Cumont 1923, 69-72; cf. Ghedini 1984, 33-36.

⁸⁷ Cf. Cumont 1923; Alföldi 1935, 107; Brilliant 1963, 208-211.

⁸⁸ I know of only one earlier *Roman* representation of Sol with raised right hand, on a Cretan coin dating from the reign of Vespasian, BMCGrC IX, 3 nr. 13. Letta (1989) claims that this is the oldest example of Sol "nel gesto" in the Classical world. There are, however, also examples in Italic Greek art: cf. Helios in his quadriga on an Apulian oinochoe (LIMC Helios 78; cf. 19). See also Matern 2002, 129-46.

⁸⁹ Brilliant 1963, 24-5, offers examples ranging from the 8th century B.C. on Sardinia to the 6th century A.D. in Syria. Demisch (1984, 131-4) admittedly discusses the gesture as one typical of the hellenistic Orient, but see his figs. 160, 168, and 174, which show how widespread it actually was. The Apulian vases referred to in the previous note show that Helios could also be represented with a raised right hand in the Greek context of Southern

common in Syrian art under the Roman Empire.⁹⁰ In fact, this makes it all the more striking that in *Syrian* art sun-gods were hardly ever depicted with a raised right hand. Surely one cannot argue that such a universal gesture as the raised right hand served to remind Romans of Syrian sun-gods, when these themselves were virtually never represented in this manner. On the other hand, if the Severi had wanted to add a Syrian element to the Graeco-Roman iconography of Sol making him clearly identifiable as a new Syrian sun-god, the obvious differences between the iconography of the Syrian sun-gods and Sol would have given them enough possibilities. For the Syrian sun-gods were war-gods, armed with spear and sword and wearing armor. I do not know of any such representations of the sun-god outside Syria.⁹¹

Once again, therefore, we see how theories concerning the supposedly oriental Sol Invictus were built on quicksand. It is, in fact, impossible to find criteria by which the imperial Sol can be distinguished from the preceding Republican Sol. Yet the dichotomy was still forcefully promoted in the relatively recent studies on Sol written by G. Halsberghe (1972, 1984).⁹² Halsberghe's work is valuable, for it provides us with the most extensive review of literary and epigraphical sources for the imperial Sol to date, but he interprets the material completely within the framework of his predecessors, whose theories he accepts as proven. Thus Halsberghe (1972, 34-37) offers a fair amount of evidence, mostly epigraphical, dating from the first century A.D., which, he feels, refers to the "autochthonous" Sol of Rome.⁹³ He subsequently states simply that "when, starting in the second century A.D., the Eastern sun worship begins to influence Rome and the rest of the Empire, the rare indications bearing witness to an ancient cult of Sol disappear", failing to provide any evidence to support this.

Halsberghe identifies the new Sol Invictus decisively as Elagabal, the Emesan Ba'al and sun-god,⁹⁴ whose cult was spread over the Empire not only by converted soldiers and emigrated Syrians but also through the proselytism of the Emesan priests. In part he attributes the success of

Italy, although they cannot, of course, be connected with the Roman representations some four to five centuries later. Cf. Matern 2002, 129-147. On the significance of hands in general, see Corbeill 2004, 20-4.

⁹⁰ L'Orange cites Cumont (1926, 70-71), where a large collection is given of men and gods in Syrian art with raised right hand.

⁹¹ On the Palmyran sun-gods Yarhibol, Malachbel and Shamash cf. Drijvers 1976; Teixidor 1979; LIMC s.v. *Iarhibol* and s.v. *Malakbel*. Gawlikowski (LIMC V.1 s.v. *Helios, in peripharia Orientalis*, p. 1034) believes that Malachbel was not originally a sun-god, but that his solar aspect was the result of solar syncretism. On Shamash in Harran cf. Tubach 1986, 140-141; on coins of Helios-Shamash in Hatra, Tubach 1986, 286-290; on Barmanen in Hatra, Tubach 1986, 300-333.

⁹² In the following I shall refer only to Halsberghe's book in the EPRO series (1972), as his article in the ANRW (1984) is little more than a summary of the former. Halsberghe's work has met with heavy (and justified) criticism; cf. Beaujeu 1978, 19: "problématique, information, analyses, discussions, conclusions manquent également de pertinence et de solidité". On Helios in late antique literature (mainly Orphic hymns, magical papyri, Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*, Neoplatonic works, etc.) see Fauth 1995.

⁹³ Halsberghe (1972, 26-37) discusses Sol Indiges at length, regularly calling him the "autochthonous Sol".

⁹⁴ Halsberghe 1972, IX-X; 45, 52-53. Halsberghe claims, without supporting evidence, that all inscriptions mentioning only Sol Invictus also refer to Sol Invictus Elagabal.

oriental cults to the fact that "(...) in the course of the second century Rome had become an undermined and weakened body, unable to continue to resist the attacks and infiltrations of the Eastern religions".⁹⁵ According to Halsberghe the Severi did not, therefore, *introduce* the Syrian sun cult into Rome, but simply gave it their official support. Not only Heliogabalus played a key role in this, but also Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus, who came from Emesa and was the daughter of a priest of Elagabal.⁹⁶

Halsberghe (1972, 103-116) emphasizes (rightly) that the cult of Sol did not disappear after the death of the emperor Heliogabalus in 222, but he does so primarily to provide a double link between Aurelian's Sol and Elagabal of Emesa. Aurelian's decision to elevate Sol as highest god of the Roman empire was inspired by his experience at Emesa, according to Halsberghe, but the god himself was modelled on a more Romanized version of Elagabal, supposedly still present in Rome.⁹⁷ This Elagabal was no more than a point of departure for Aurelian in the development of a new Sol, who was to be *dominus imperii Romani*.⁹⁸ The final product was a Roman sun-god modelled on the Syrian Elagabal, but also incorporating elements derived from Roman models;⁹⁹ most notable among the latter, according to Halsberghe, is the iconography Aurelian chose for the imperial Sol. Halsberghe (1972, 162) attributes a lasting success to this Roman sun-cult of Aurelian, which he believes was a serious rival to Christianity. Even after the conversion of Constantine, he feels that the cult continued to be strong.¹⁰⁰

Halsberghe accepts the findings of his predecessors uncritically, even restating the conviction that Rome in the second century was an "undermined and weakened body". He struggles with the abundant evidence for a cult or cults of the sun in Rome well before the reigns of the Severan emperors, and is hard put to it to show the difference between the supposedly foreign Sol Invictus and Rome's "previous" sun-god. In the end the evidence he adduces shows simply that the dichotomy between the Roman Sol Indiges and the "eastern" Sol Invictus is wholly unconvincing. Equally Halsberghe does not show how all references to Sol from the second century onwards can suddenly refer to Elagabal only, as he claims. He also fails to give an adequate explanation for the continued existence of the cult of the imperial Sol after the death of Heliogabalus, although the sources state clearly that the cult of *Elagabal* was shipped out of Rome. Why persist in the assumption that the imperial Sol was the same as Elagabal, if the imperial Sol was present in Rome well before the Severi, if he cannot be differentiated from previous sun-gods in Rome, and if he remained present in Rome after the death of Heliogabalus despite the fact that all explicit references to Elagabal disappeared? For Halsberghe this assumption is essential, because he is convinced that Aurelian was inspired in Emesa to raise Sol

⁹⁵ Halsberghe 1972, 42.

⁹⁶ Halsberghe 1972, 45-48. This notion is reiterated by, for example, Chausson 1996.

⁹⁷ Halsberghe 1972, 139.

⁹⁸ For the various phases of the introduction of this "new" supreme deity see Halsberghe 1972, 139-148.

⁹⁹ Halsberghe 1972, 157-159.

¹⁰⁰ Halsberghe 1972, 168-171.

Invictus, i.e. Elagabal in his view, to the level of supreme deity. Otherwise he would be unable to explain the relationship between this imperial Sol, already present in Rome, and Aurelian's Sol Invictus "imported" from the "Orient".

Recent views

This review of older scholarship and its underlying ideology and preconceptions has shown how little factual evidence there was for the long dominant views on the origins of the Roman imperial sun god. These views were rooted ultimately in an ideologically biased and long since discredited approach to the religious developments in imperial Rome. That there is, in fact, no evidence for the postulated dichotomy between Sol Indiges and Sol Invictus, nor any conclusive sources in support of an oriental origin for Sol Invictus, that indeed the very concept of Sol "Invictus" as a distinct sun-god cannot be substantiated, should not surprise us. Scholars have increasingly challenged the idea that an all-pervasive "orientalization" of religion took place in the Roman Empire. No one would deny that Eastern cults had a certain degree of influence throughout the Empire. But that Sol was not an oriental deity fits in with the general reevaluation of Roman religious developments currently underway.¹⁰¹

Since 1996, when I published the article on which this chapter is based, first outlining these conclusions, the view that Sol had a continuous presence in Rome has gained ground.¹⁰² That being the case, the weary reader who has just ploughed through the preceding deconstruction of older theories may well wonder whether there was a point to repeating this exercise here. There is. For although the Syrian origin of Sol is no longer defended, even the most recent studies continue to ascribe an importance to the late imperial cult of Sol, and continue to accept a general chronology of the cult's presumed rise to prominence, that is very much in line with what one finds in older studies produced within the paradigm of an oriental Sol Invictus. I have been at such pains to emphasize not just the lack of evidence but in particular the profoundly ideological nature of that paradigm precisely because the implications of that aspect are not, or at least not sufficiently, acknowledged in these recent studies. On the contrary, in the two most important ones, by Martin Wallraff (2001) and Petra Matern (2002), one discerns a real tension between the traditional views that still lie at the background of much that they write concerning the imperial sun god, and the realisation that a core tenet of those views - that Sol was imported from the Orient - does not stand up to scrutiny. Both Wallraff (2001, 32-35) and Matern (2002, 35-45) still maintain that Sol Invictus was a new god (albeit Roman, not Syrian), first emerging on an inscription of AD 158¹⁰³, but neither clearly spells out the reasons for this suggestion. It is not self-evident that a new epithet (*invictus*) implies a new god or even a new

¹⁰¹ Alföldy (1989) offers an extensive reassessment of the so-called orientalisation of Roman religion. MacMullen's (1981, 112-130) radical reduction of the influence of the East is also highly refreshing, which makes it all the more surprising that he did not extend this to his evaluation of Sol; cf. Merkelbach (1984) on Mithras as a Roman god (the general approach is sound, but in specific arguments Merkelbach is often unconvincing); Fox 1986, 35-36, 574-575; Burkert 1987, 1-3; Turcan 1989, 13; Gordon 1990; Staerman 1990, 367; Belayche 2000; Bonnet et al. 2006. Alvar (2008) takes a more "traditional" position.

¹⁰² Cf. Wallraff 2001; Matern 2002; Neue Pauly s.v. Sol; Berrens 2004.

¹⁰³ CIL VI, 715.

cult, rather than a - quite possibly minor - innovation in an existing one, and in the case of Sol the use of the epithet *invictus* in any case does not follow any clear pattern that suggests a specific cult or version of Sol. Likewise, in surveying the evidence I see absolutely no indication of a hiatus or break in continuity between the Republican Sol and the late imperial one. Yet Wallraff contends that this new Sol Invictus was destined for a “comet-like” rise to prominence in the course of just a few decades. He claims that the new cult of this Sol, instituted by Aurelian when he built his famous temple, was no doubt rapidly popularized by the introduction of the chariot races in honour of Sol that formed part of the *ludi* also instituted by Aurelian. This is still very close to the older studies - the only true difference being that Wallraff squarely rejects the idea that Sol Invictus was oriental - and yet there is no more evidence for these contentions than there was for any in that paradigm.¹⁰⁴

One hears the same echoes in Matern’s study, though less decisively. She focuses a significant amount of attention on the Emesan god Elagabalus, on Syrian gods in general, on Aurelian’s temple, and in connection with these on Sol Invictus and on the raised right hand as a characteristic of what she terms the “invictus type”. Much of this is in response to the older paradigm, which she too rejects, but her rejection is tentative - too tentative: “Es gibt keinen wirklich gesicherten Hinweis, daß der Sol Invictus Aurelians ein syrischer Gott, wie der Elagabal Emesas oder gar der Iarhibol oder der Bel Palmyras, sein muß”, Matern writes in conclusion of her section on the origins of Sol Invictus.¹⁰⁵ In light of the ideological issues connected with the whole oriental paradigm, which I highlighted above, and in view of the profound weakness of the sources actually adduced to support that paradigm, this is really far too much of an understatement. But Matern ignores those issues, writing: “Einzig die Verbindung zu den erfolgreichen Feldzügen im Orient, die ungenaue, ja zweifelhafte Quellenangabe und die vermutete geringe Bedeutung des einheimischen Solkultes ließen diese Hypothese aufkommen.” However reasonable this may sound, it misses the cardinal issue that has bedevilled research on Roman veneration of the sun. The scant importance of indigenous Roman solar cults was not a matter of (incorrect) assumption (“vermutet”), but an ideologically driven postulate. To venerate the sun was deemed to be quintessentially un-Roman!¹⁰⁶ Hence it was not a matter of scant and obscure sources *allowing* the oriental paradigm to arise (ließen diese Hypothese aufkommen), but rather a case of scholars attempting to force the sources to fit their preconceptions. Notably in the case of Wissowa, I feel that I have illustrated quite conclusively the lengths to which scholars were prepared to go in such attempts.

It is because of the ideological impetus that directed much of the seminal scholarship on Sol - the main tenets of which were accepted by the most subsequent scholars - that we find ourselves essentially back at square one in the study of this Roman deity. It is not just a matter of

¹⁰⁴ For Matern (2002, 46), the precise nature of Sol Invictus is, in the final analysis, “unclear”, and to a degree he is a continuation (*Weiterentwicklung*) of the “altrömischen” Sol. But essentially Sol Invictus is, in her view, a separate deity: “Seit der Mitte des 2. Jhs. N. Chr. finden sich Spuren der Verehrung eines *Sol Invictus*, der allerdings erst unter Aurelian nachweisbar einen institutionalisierten Kult mit Tempel, Spielen und Priestern erhält.”

¹⁰⁵ Matern 2002, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Wili 1944, 123.

refining and revising specific conclusions of prior scholarship. The basic narrative can no longer be accepted without revisiting all the foundations upon it was constructed, because the central pillars supporting this narrative, namely the methodology applied and the ideological framework that informed it, have been discredited. Clearly, we will need to reinvent Sol.

That Wallraff does not attempt this is understandable. His study deals with early Christianity rather than Roman religion, and traces the influence of a perceived “solarisation” of religion in general within evolving Christologies in the early Church. Wallraff did not attempt, and indeed could not have attempted a comprehensive revision of our understanding of Sol and the sun in Roman religion and culture. Instead, he offers a thorough and sophisticated summary of current views that as such is a fascinating document of a paradigm in mid-transition. I do not agree with a number of key elements of his summary - notably the postulated rapid and farreaching “solarisation” of religion in late antiquity - but this does not diminish his impressive scholarship.¹⁰⁷ My own sense is that the so-called solarisation of Roman religion was less all-encompassing than Wallraff suggests - in particular under Constantine - and that much of the early Christian evidence he adduces is more metaphorical in character, rather than inspired by the more-or-less rampant solar veneration that Wallraff postulates. But this cannot be concluded on the basis of the present study alone. It is my *sense* that this is the case, and I explore the issue a bit further in chapter nine, but more work is needed, encompassing a far wider range of sources than I deal with here.

Some of that work should consist of a thorough reevaluation of all literary evidence. Fauth (1995) has done the study of Solar veneration in the Roman world a great service with his detailed analyses of a wide range of late antique Greek texts in which Helios features prominently in one capacity or another. But we should bear in mind that Fauth stresses that none of these are linked directly to actual *cults* of Helios/Sol, and a large part of his study is devoted to texts that are distinctly regional in character.¹⁰⁸ A significant portion of his study is also dedicated to very late sources (Julian, Nonnos, Proclus). Therefore this is not a study that itself contributes to a better synthesis of the role of solar veneration and speculation in the Roman world as a whole. As we move towards a new synthesis, however, Fauth’s study will contribute important components particularly in the realm of magic and, to some extent, late antique philosophy.

Of fundamental importance for a more balanced synthesis is also that we gain a better grasp of the visual evidence. Here one may have expected Matern’s monograph to contribute much, and she has certainly highlighted Sol’s symbolic nature more than most previous scholars. However, her stated aims as well as her methodological framework lead her to focus more on form and iconography than on context, function, and meanings of the images. To give an example, her discussion of the depiction of Sol on a Jupiter column from Kirchheim, Germany (3rd c. AD, cat. C2e.15) compares that relief directly to depiction of Helios in a silver cup from Kertsch in the Crimea (3rd c. BC), and discusses it together with the Augustus of Primaporta, a small gilded wrought metal depiction of Sol from Butzbach (compared to coins from Corinth), a

¹⁰⁷ I do take issue with some of his evidence, in particular his use of visual sources.

¹⁰⁸ Fauth 1995, 184. His largest chapter is on Greek magical papyri from Egypt, which not surprisingly show a strong Egyptian influence (34-120); another chapter is devoted to Heracles of Tyre (Melqart) and his solar aspects, as described in Nonnos (165-184).

bowl from Uşak in Turkey, and a mosaic from Mérida in Spain, as well as one other Jupiter column. This is because her discussion centres on a specific type of three-quarter frontal depiction of Helios or Sol in a quadriga, leading her to group together fourteen depictions that range geographically from the Crimea to the Iberian peninsula, span a date range of at least six centuries, and encompass all major media of visual production except gems and lamps.¹⁰⁹

This privileging of form is helpful when one aims to identify possible visual traditions and to recognize images that may be dependent upon a common prototype, and Matern (2002, 6) clearly indicates that prototypes and the reconstruction of lost statues are an important concern for her. To analyze the potential meanings of these images, however, I believe that context and date are more important than precise form. For example, any attempt to understand what associations that image of Sol on that Jupiter column may have invoked must begin with a comparative analysis of Sol images in that region - Rhine border -, of that period - third century AD -, and with a similar context - other Jupiter columns and other local cults - and evolve from there. Far less important, to such a project, is the differentiation between frontal and profile quadrigas, or even between Sol in a quadriga, a standing Sol, and a bust of Sol. Such differences in form may, of course, be meaningfully patterned, but that need not necessarily be so. Sol in the company of the other six planetary deities can be depicted as charioteer, as full-length figure, or as bust, and the differences in form do not appear to materially affect his function and meanings in the given contexts.¹¹⁰ Thus while Matern's work is useful as a source of many images, a notable number of which were omitted by Letta in the LIMC, and offers valuable insight into the history of common forms and iconographic conventions used in the depiction of Helios and Sol, it differs fundamentally from mine.

Stephan Berrens (2004) has recently studied the Roman imperial coinage bearing depictions of Sol. His review of the numismatic evidence is thorough and comprehensive, making this a very useful book. Berrens too concludes that there are no grounds to treat the imperial Sol as a foreign deity and he is the first to argue comprehensively that the modern practice to speak of the imperial sun god as Sol *Invictus* is misleading. On coins the epithet *invictus* does not appear until AD 260/1, almost 70 years after numismatic depictions of Sol became common.¹¹¹ The variety of epithets used on coins shows that the sun god was simply Sol, with a range of characteristics that could be highlighted by the choice of one epithet or another.¹¹² Berrens' interpretation of these coins is very straightforward: the image represents the sun god, with whom the Romans connected concepts of eternity,¹¹³ of new arising (often in the context of

¹⁰⁹ Matern 2002, 65-67.

¹¹⁰ Cf. e.g., cat. C2e.4 (full-figure), C2e.13 (busts), D2.4 (quadriga).

¹¹¹ Berrens 2004, 184-5.

¹¹² Berrens 2004, 171-204.

¹¹³ Berrens 2004, 171-6, discussing coins with various versions of *aeternitas* as legend.

the accession of a new emperor or the dawning of a new age),¹¹⁴ of victory,¹¹⁵ and of peace.¹¹⁶ Sol was a military deity (but by no means exclusively so),¹¹⁷ and could be *comes* or *conservator* of the emperor.¹¹⁸ By striking coins bearing the image of Sol the emperor showed interest in the cult of this god. The imperial radiate crown was another iconographic element linking the emperor to Sol.¹¹⁹ All this would appear to be defensible as far as it goes, but there are significant shortcomings. In discussing the coins minted by individual emperors, Berrens focuses almost exclusively on those bearing images of Sol. He makes little attempt to analyze these within the context of the issues as a whole in which they belonged.¹²⁰ He also shows little interest in the recipients of these coins. Depictions of Sol on *aurei* in Rome would reach a very different audience than, say, *antoniniani* minted in Siscia before the start of a military campaign, but Berrens does not attempt to identify such different audiences systematically. In short, Berrens takes the intended viewer more or less for granted, and does not make him or her part of the process of interpreting these coins. In fact, Berrens pays very little attention altogether to the manner in which coins disseminated information and the processes involved. As a result his interpretations tend to overstate the importance of Sol and focus too narrowly on Sol as a god, rather than on the broader symbolism with which such an image could be imbued.

Sol Novus

If we return now to the statement in the Oxford Classical Dictionary with which I opened this chapter, namely that Rome was home at different times to two utterly different sun gods, it will be clear why this can no longer be maintained. The study of Sol is - or at the very least, should be - in transition. That we must reject the old paradigm of two quite distinct cults of Sol does not follow so much from the weakness of the evidence for it - though we have seen how weak it actually is - but above all from the ideological preconceptions that gave rise to it in the first place. To accept uncritically any aspect of the old views on Roman solar cults - that is, to lay upon the present generation of scholars the burden of *disproving* those views - inevitably accords respect (unintended, of course) to those ideologies rooted in the powerful racist and imperialist sentiments typical of the nineteenth century world view in the West.

This is an aspect of Classical studies that troubles me, and it is this aspect that has led me to place such emphasis in this chapter on the ideologies that shaped past scholarship on Sol. Our

¹¹⁴ Berrens 2004, 176-84, on Sol Oriens.

¹¹⁵ Berrens 2004, 184-198, on Sol Invictus.

¹¹⁶ Berrens 2004, 198-202, on Sol as Pacator Orbis.

¹¹⁷ Berrens 2004, 202-4.

¹¹⁸ Berrens 2004, 205-12.

¹¹⁹ Berrens 2004, 213-5.

¹²⁰ Often the issues are difficult to reconstruct, of course. But in the case of the coinage of Aurelian, the information is readily available thanks to Göbl's (1995) excellent study.

discipline is unabashedly positivistic in its willingness to accept conclusions first posited a century or more ago, building on such established (but constantly refined) “facts” as if scholarship were an evolutionary process ever onwards and upwards towards the Truth. We often forget that the “facts” established by past scholarship are part and parcel of the ideology that produced them. As far as I am concerned, the fact that Réville, Wissowa, Frank, and countless other classicists of the nineteenth and early twentieth were racist imperialists in their understanding of the ancient world, means that *all* that they wrote is suspect, and not just the visibly or avowedly racist parts. In particular in the case of Sol, as I hope to have shown, profound, but only occasionally openly voiced prejudices led scholars like Wissowa to impose their postulate that Sol *could* not be Roman on the data at hand. This influenced not just their interpretation, but the actual selection of sources deemed relevant. Subsequent scholars have largely limited themselves to those pre-selected sources, even if - like Cumont - they radically differed on their significance in ideological terms, leading to the perpetuation of many a weak conclusion.¹²¹

The ground has been cleared for renewed research on Sol, and as we have seen we had best begin almost *tabula rasa*: we must approach the evidence without taking into account the old postulates rooted in nineteenth century scholarship. But what evidence should we tackle? The literary sources for the Roman sun god are scant, tangential and burdened with the prior interpretations attached to them. The most promising way to proceed is to grant primacy to the archaeological evidence and in particular the iconographical sources for Sol, which are both more abundant, more comprehensive and less studied. Such use of the archaeological record is not exceptional, or at least it should not be. It is valid for the study of many aspects of Roman history, for archaeology has “unique access to the long term”.¹²² Furthermore the literary record for the Roman period shows such major lacunae that we regularly find ourselves virtually in prehistory when dealing with aspects of the Roman past.¹²³ Archaeological material is not, however, well adapted to answering typically “historical” questions. This is obvious in the case of traditional history of “great men” and major events. Archaeology is almost completely incapable of providing the type of rich narrative of names, deeds and events that written sources can offer (if they survive). It is on stronger ground where social history (in the broadest sense) is concerned. Careful study of material remains (also in the broadest sense) can tell us a great deal about such diverse social topics as daily life, economy, identity, social and cultural integration and resistance, and the like. Religion falls somewhere in the middle. Doctrine and myth are essentially verbal, although they may be transmitted by visual means to a certain degree as well. Ritual, though ephemeral, leaves substantial traces in the archaeological record which not only reflect the ritual but also were instrumental in shaping it. In a broader sense, material culture

¹²¹ For example: from Wissowa (1912, 317) to Wallraff (2001, 28-9), the suggestion that there was but one feast day for Sol in the traditional calendars - the one Wissowa grudgingly acknowledged as an unsolved problem - has been widely repeated, despite the fact that besides August 9th, there is persuasive evidence for traditional feasts on August 8th, August 28th, December 11th, and even October 19th.

¹²² Hodder 1986, 77-102 (esp. 101), cf. 177.

¹²³ Fowden 1988, 180.

shapes the physical environment of the cult centre and is hence a major factor contributing to the religious experience of the participant. All told, then, material culture has much to tell us about religion.

In the case of the Roman world, specific circumstances further strengthen the value of archaeology over the written sources in many instances where, under ideal circumstances, written evidence would have a greater role to play. Roman religion is such an instance. With many specific cults that were popular in the Roman Empire we find ourselves in virtual or even complete prehistory. To give but two examples, Jupiter Dolichenus, popular on inscriptions, is not mentioned in any extant literary source, and even the names of the Danube riders and their goddess have not even been preserved epigraphically, despite their prominence in the Balkan provinces in late antiquity. Together with numerous similar examples such as Mithraism for instance, this reminds us how careful we must be not to treat surviving written sources dealing with aspects of Roman religion as representative, far less as comprehensive treatments of the subject. Such care is certainly warranted in the case of Sol.

Identifying material culture as the primary source of relevant information is one thing. Successfully utilizing material culture sources is quite something else. We cannot expect material culture to answer the same questions as traditional Classical historiography is accustomed to ask of the written sources. We must approach the material as informative not just in its own right, but also in its own manner. This means that we must pay particular attention to the way in which the objects or images we are studying are meaningfully constituted. In chapter two we tackle the theoretical and methodological issues involved, focusing in particular on the specific group of sources at the core of this study: the iconographical sources for Sol. The iconographical rules and principles governing depictions of Sol are discussed in chapter three. This is followed by a lengthy presentation and preliminary analysis of the actual images in chapter four. This chapter takes the form of an annotated catalogue of images of Sol and forms the core of this study. In five subsequent chapters we will explore selected case studies arising from the general conclusions in chapter four and the analyses presented there.

