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Sol

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Chapter 6.

Not all light comes from the sun.

Symbolic radiance and solar symbolism in Roman art.

In this chapter we will look more closely at the most prominent element of Sol's iconography: the rays or radiate nimbus with which he is depicted. As we have seen, no single iconographic element is enough to identify a figure securely as Sol, and this includes symbolic radiance. Furthermore, we have seen that certain types of symbolic radiance are *never* associated with Sol: he cannot be depicted with a nimbus without rays, nor with a radiate crown with *lemnisci*. As for the admissible types of radiance - rays, radiate nimbi, radiate crowns without *lemnisci* - we must always keep in mind that with the exception of the rare radiate crown without ribbons, none of these is unique to Sol. In short, when a Roman artist made his choice from the visual paradigm for symbolic light, he did so in the knowledge that two conventions in that paradigm could not be used for Sol (nimbus and radiate crown with ribbons), while only one was exclusive to Sol (radiate crown without ribbons). The Roman viewer likewise could use his knowledge of Rome's visual language to either narrow down or expand the potential identities of a given figure, depending on which convention the artist had chosen from the paradigm for radiance.

Unfortunately, modern scholarship has been slow to recognize the care with which Roman artists deployed such conventions. There is still a strong tendency to assume automatically that symbolic light of almost any kind can be enough to associate a figure with Sol or even identify him as the sun, irrespective of the other iconographic characteristics of the radiate or radiant figure. Take, for example, the charioteer of a *biga* in the Catacomb of SS. Peter and Marcellinus, cub. 45-2-.¹ The figure has repeatedly been identified as Sol and yet he has a blue nimbus without rays, wears a toga (no chiton or chlamys), and drives a *biga* rather than a *quadriga*. His hair is shortish and apparently gray, and he holds neither a whip nor a globe, nor any other attribute of Sol. In short, every aspect of the charioteer's iconography emphatically precludes him from being Sol. Nonetheless, Perler (1953, 38-9) and others have identified him as the sun god and adduced this painting as the best parallel for the so-called Christ-Helios in mausoleum M of the Vatican Necropolis.²

This cannot stand. A figure who does not share even a single attribute with Sol, indeed one with attributes (clothing, nimbus, *biga*) that are incompatible with Sol, cannot be Sol. Scholars have misidentified him on the mistaken assumption that the blue nimbus can be a solar

¹ Deckers *et al.* 1987, 267-8 (with extensive bibliography); Wallraff 2001, 160-1, pl. VI, 14.

² Cf. most recently Wallraff (2001, 160-1), with a useful review of previous scholarship in n. 76. Wallraff rejects as "inexplicable" Deckers' (1987, 267-8) identification of this scene as Elijah, claiming that it is contrary to the vast majority of scholarly opinions, and arguing that in that case the nimbus causes "great problems", as it would be "by far" the earliest depiction in Christian art of a nimbate biblical figure other than Christ. That may be - it depends of course on the date of the painting, which may well be as late as the mid 4th c. - but Wallraff's problem pales in comparison with those raised by identifying this figure as Sol, for quite literally every aspect of this charioteer's iconography - and that emphatically includes the blue nimbus - is incompatible with that identification.

attribute and that it alone is enough to identify any charioteer as Sol.³ Such misidentifications persist despite the fact that Bergmann, and others before her, have long stressed the important differentiations between these conventions for symbolic light.⁴ Stephani (1859, 2) already scathingly denounced all who failed to recognize the wide range of conventions and applications of symbolic radiant light in ancient art. Nonetheless, even for Bergmann it would seem that rays are essentially solar - with exceptions - for she too considers the addition of rays alone to a figure who otherwise shares none of Sol's iconography as sufficient to assimilate that figure to Sol.⁵

There are certainly cases in which the primary identity of a figure as someone other than Sol is unambiguous, and yet at the same time his iconography may contain clear references to Sol. The degree of the reference can vary from figures depicted as almost identical to Sol, to those who merely "quote" some aspect of his iconography.⁶ Likewise, there are examples in which references to Sol are carefully excluded to avoid having viewers assume solar connotations where none were meant. On the reverse of a gold medallion minted in Antioch between AD 357 and 361, for example, Constantius is depicted in a frontal six-horse chariot. He has a raised right *ingens manus*, holds a globe in his left hand, wears sleeved military attire and a chlamys, and is nimbate. To either side are two winged victories crowning him with wreaths. The

³ Wallraff (2001, 144-151) discusses the nimbus extensively, but greatly overemphasizes its solar connotations., claiming "daß es bis in die Spätantike hinein nicht an nimbierten Heliosdarstellungen fehlt" (Wallraff 2001, 150). In support, he refers to LIMC Helios/Sol 170, 173, 189, 255, 257, 270, 302, 331, and 378 (Wallraff 2001, 150 n.32), but these do not support his point. In the fresco in the Domus Aurea (LIMC 170, cat. E8.4) for example, known only from inaccurate 18th c. copies, the central figure was almost certainly depicted with a radiate nimbus, rather than a nimbus only, and the identity of this figure is by no means certain, with suggestions including Apollo or Dionysus as well as Sol. On the votive relief in Naples (LIMC 189, cat. C1a.5) the head of Sol is lost and we do not know which convention was used to depict Sol's radiance. The fresco of Sol as planetary deity in Naples (LIMC 270, cat. E3.1) unmistakably depicts him with rays as well as a nimbus, and the same was true of the fresco in Pompeii IX 7,19 (LIMC 302, cat. E1b.2), now lost. Likewise the Sol on the votive triangle in Vienna (LIMC 331 with erroneous description, cat. C2d.9) is definitely radiate (4 or 5 rays). This leaves the handful of Mithraic reliefs cited by Wallraff, namely one in Dieburg (LIMC 173, cat. C2c.8), two in Karlsruhe (LIMC 255, cat. C2c.27 and LIMC 378, cat. C2c.58), and one in Alba Julia (LIMC 257, cat. C2c.37). The identity of Sol is obvious here from his position alone, but leaving that aside, we must contend in these cases with the problem of lost paint. Many, if not all, Mithraic reliefs were brightly painted, and it was common to depict details in paint alone. A good example is the relief from the S. Stefano Rotondo, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano (cat. C2c.48), on which details of the bull's sacrificial adornment are depicted with paint, but not in relief. Unfortunately, it is rare for the painted decoration to survive, and this makes it impossible to state with certainty that Sol was nimbate only on these four reliefs. If we weigh the undisputed importance of painted decorations on such reliefs against the lack of parallels for Sol with a nimbus only in other depictions, then the suggestion that on these reliefs painted rays once adorned the nimbi is clearly the most likely. Hence these reliefs are at best a weak *argumentum e silentio* for an otherwise unattested iconographic convention for Sol.

⁴ Bergmann 1998, 45.

⁵ Bergmann 1998, 40-54.

⁶ For near identification, cf., e.g., LIMC Souchos 24-26, with only the crocodile in his hand indicating that he is not the standard Roman Sol. For a possible quote, cf. LIMC Abraxas, *passim*, where the whip Abraxas holds may be a quote of Sol's iconography, in view of the apparently major importance of Sol in connection with Abraxas (Sol being sometimes identified as Abraxas, cf. LIMC Abraxas 32, 33).

inscription reads D N CONSTANTIVS VICTOR SEMPER AVG. Striking in this image are the six-horse chariot and the choice of *victor semper*, as both suggest an avoidance of references to Sol. For, while the raised right hand, the globe, the chlamys, and the nimbus are themselves generic enough (or, in the case of the nimbus, sufficiently non-solar) not to suggest any intended link to Sol, just imagine how this image would have been read if Constantius' chariot had been a split quadriga, and the more common *invictus* had been used, rather than *victor semper*. The identity of Constantius would have been no less clear, but in the mid fourth century any member of the Roman elite who received such a valuable medallion was certainly well enough versed in traditional iconography to see in the raised right hand, the globe, the chlamys, the quadriga, and the term *invictus* a concatenation of allusions to Sol that even the nimbus - itself not an attribute of Sol - would not have negated. It is these unintended allusions that the artist has deftly avoided with two seemingly minor choices: six rather than four horses, and the words *victor semper* instead of *invictus*.⁷

But the question I wish to tackle in this chapter does not concern solar references in general, but specifically whether rays alone always constituted a "solar quote" in Roman Imperial art. I will discuss three examples in which rays have commonly been interpreted as solar: a statue in Raleigh, N. Carolina, certain frescoes from Pompeii, and the radiate crown of Roman emperors (to which the largest part of this chapter is devoted). Analysis of these examples will show that in all cases direct solar allusions are absent. At times the images discussed do incorporate solar allusions at a secondary level, but never through the agency of the rays alone. While these examples do not constitute all, or even the most important cases of potential solar allusions - we cannot possibly review all Roman images and image-types that may or may not contain references to Sol - I believe that they will help us identify some of the general principles involved when establishing visual allusion in Roman art, and at the very least should highlight the complexity, ambiguity and elusiveness of such processes, thus serving as a useful counterbalance to the deceptive precision and clarity of the iconographic principles outlined in chapter three.

1. A statue in Raleigh

My first example concerns a statue in the North Carolina Museum of Art which is generally identified as a statue of Sol or of Caracalla-Sol (plate 4, 1-3, plate 75.1; cat A1b.2).⁸ This identification is based primarily on the presence of holes in the head, which, it is postulated, once held bronze spikes or rays, thus making this figure radiate (plate 4.3). It is certainly true that the

⁷ On the medallion, cf. Kent, Overbeck, Stylow 1973, 690.

⁸ Vermeule 1990. His suggestion that the statue is a portrait of Caracalla is unconvincing. Bergmann (1998) does not specifically mention the statue, and she apparently does not accept Vermeule's contention that it portrays Caracalla as she states that none of the 250 or so surviving sculptural portraits of Septimius Severus, Geta, and Caracalla are radiate (1998, 274). Papini (2002, 108) accepts my proposal that the statue is probably an idealized depiction of Castor without portrait features. Matern (2002, 113) also does not see any portrait features, but prefers to identify the statue as Sol rather than a Dioscure. She argues that the right arm may be outstretched in what she calls the *invictus* gesture, that Sol with a single horse does occur, that the headdress of the Raleigh statue is best understood as a (stone) nimbus with 12 metal rays, and that hence on balance this statue is likely - though not certainly - Sol.

statue could be Sol, for the figure is beardless and nude except for a chlamys. However, by his leg is the protome of only one horse, while any other defining attributes he may once have held have been lost. Sol, of course, is not the only nude male youth with a chlamys in Roman iconography, and doubts about the solar identity of this figure are raised by that single horse by his leg. This is a standard iconographic characteristic of the Dioscuri - likewise nude beardless youths with a chlamys (plate 75.3-5) - while there are no secure parallels for Sol with a single horse's protome.⁹ The doubts are reinforced by the fact that close examination shows that the lost attributes could also quite well have been those of the Dioscuri. The breaks in his left hand and on his left shoulder (plate 4.2) are consistent with the inverted short sword or *parazonium* that the Dioscuri normally hold (plate 75.4-6), while the outstretched right hand could well have held a lance (cf. plate 75.6). It goes without saying that if this statue was originally one of a pair, both holding a *parazonium* and a lance, and both accompanied by the protome of one horse, the identification as Castor and Pollux would be inescapable.

The holes in the head do not change this, for they do not tell us what they actually held. There may not have been a series of rays at all, but rather some other metallic object covering the head. This is especially likely, given that the top of the head is completely unfinished (plate 4.3). It is difficult to imagine why the sculptor would have left the top of the head so rough if the holes merely contained spikes. Be that as it may, I do not know of any parallel for this type of flaring stone headgear into which something metallic was attached, whether rays or some other object. Certainly there are no parallels for Sol with this type of headdress.¹⁰ This does not mean that he

⁹ I know of only two images of Sol that appear to depict him with the protome of one horse, rather than four, but I have strong doubts about both. The first, a statue in Copenhagen (plate 3.2, 75.2, cat. A1a.5), is problematic because it is one of a group of statues that were cobbled together in the 19th c. from the bits and pieces of a large number of statues, reused as rubble in a medieval wall. The reconstruction of this group of statues was so poorly done, according to Squarciapino (1943, 38), that it is doubtful whether the heads belong to the bodies and the bodies belong to the bases. The second example is a relief in Rome (Palazzo Conservatori, cat. C2w.6). Matern (2001, 112-113) argues that here the single horse's protome next to Sol is unmistakable. I am not so certain, for this part of the relief is so heavily damaged that Stuart Jones (1926, 202) describes it as "broken away". While I do agree with Matern that we are not dealing with a crouching lion here, as Stuart Jones suggests, I would also point out that the extent of the damage is such that there is certainly room for more than one horse's head, especially if the heads were staggered (note that the photograph in Stuart Jones gives a better indication of the extent of the damage than the photographs in the LIMC and Matern, which cut off the left edge of the relief.)

¹⁰ If the holes held rays, then presumably the *polos*-like element from which the "rays" emerged must be a nimbus. As an attribute, the radiate nimbus is rare for three-dimensional depictions of Sol. A marble bust in Venice (cat. A3.2) has a disc-like nimbus almost vertically over the top of the head with holes for rays set into the narrow edge of the disc. A bust in Madrid (cat. A3.11) is similar. These are the only cases I know of in which Sol is depicted three-dimensionally with a stone nimbus and metal rays, and in both cases the position and shape of the nimbus, as well as the location of the rays, differ significantly from the statue in Raleigh. There are only two other examples of three-dimensional representations of Sol with a nimbus and rays: the statue of Sol in Copenhagen (cat. A1a.5) has a stone nimbus with triangular stone rays in relief on the nimbus. A statuette in Leiden has a similar nimbus (cat. B1.21). In each of these four cases the radiate nimbus differs substantially from the unique headgear of the statue in Raleigh. I still have no definite idea how to reconstruct that headgear, but any proposal must explain why the whole top of the head was left rough and unfinished. Perhaps the rather angular, wreathed caps of the Dioscuri on a Hadrianic coin of Phoenician Tripoli give an idea (SNG Cop. 280). Cf. the capped and wreathed head of a statuette in Baltimore, sometimes identified as Sol (cat. B4a.1), and the marble head from Romula (B4b.1). This would be similar to Prof. E.M. Moormann's suggestion that it may have been a bronze, egg-shaped cap surmounted by a star

cannot be Sol, although the single horse and the unique headgear make this unlikely. It simply means that the identity of this statue will never be established with certainty unless by some fluke the missing attributes are recovered.

What has misled scholars is the automatic assumption that the holes in the head held rays and that the presence of rays means the statue must therefore be Sol. Both assumptions are incorrect. We have already seen that this headgear is unparalleled and that the unfinished top and back of the head make it doubtful that the holes contained rays only. But even if it could be proven that the holes held simple spikes and the statue therefore had a straightforward ring of rays, this would not necessarily have forced an ancient viewer to abandon the identification of this figure as a Dioscure. It is the figure as a whole, with all its iconographic elements, as well as the context of the figure, that determined its identity. It is true that we have no secure parallels for radiate Dioscuri (just as we have no secure parallels for Sol with a single horse's protome), but we must keep in mind that the Dioscuri were twin stars. There are certainly parallels for the depiction of stars with rays or radiate nimbus. This can be illustrated with my second example, the *Sternenstreit*.

2. *Sternenstreit*

A number of wall-paintings from Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae, depict a scene that has plausibly been identified as the mythical beauty contest between Venus and Hesperus (plate 75.7-10, plate 76.1). The scene consists of three main figures, sometimes with the addition of two attendants. In the centre is a male figure, usually seated. To either side of him, and facing each other, are a male and female figure respectively, either nude or in the act of revealing their nude beauty. The male figure is invariably radiate, often with the addition of a nimbus. Both figures are usually (but not always) accompanied by a female attendant and can be depicted seated or standing.¹¹

The interpretation of this scene has long been controversial, but consensus has grown that it depicts an obscure myth of a beauty contest between Hesperus and Venus, known as the *Sternenstreit*, over which the central figure presides as judge.¹² The contestants, Hesperus and Venus, are both stars of course. In fact, as the Greeks had established by the 5th c. BC, both were

(pers. comm.). Such a cap may have been fitted *over* the stone *polos*, hiding it from view

¹¹ Four representations of the scene or fragments of it can be found in the Naples Archaeological Museum (inv. 8839, 9239, 9449, 9537). Still *in situ* are four paintings in Pompeii: the house of Fabius Rufus (Ins. Occ.); I 3,25; VI 7, 23; VII 6,23.

¹² The scene has been the subject of some discussion. Elia (1962) identifies it as a Dionysiac gathering in which the radiate youth should be identified as Apollo-Helios. Moormann (1983) and Caso (1989) interpret the scene as the *Sternenstreit*. Although they differ on the interpretation of certain details, they both interpret the radiate youth as Hesperus. Leach (1991) identifies the youth as Phaethon and suggests the scene represents an episode from the Phaethon-myth as told by Euripides. Her reconstruction of this play, only fragments of which have survived, is not altogether convincing. As I have argued elsewhere, the interpretation of Moormann and Caso, though not without problems, is preferable (Hijmans 1995).

the *same* star, which is probably the whole point of the painting.¹³ The scene takes on different forms, indicating that the Pompeian paintings are not dependant upon a single prototype. This, together with the fact that it occurs fairly often in Pompeii, suggests that it was popular and widely depicted. We may assume that it was part of the normal visual repertoire of the average, reasonably educated citizen of the Roman Empire in the first c. A.D.

Hesperus, in these paintings, is a beardless youth, naked but for a cloak which is being removed (usually) by a female attendant, and radiate (with or without nimbus). In other words, he closely resembles Sol, although he lacks Sol's other defining attributes (whip or globe). Not surprisingly, therefore, he has regularly been mistaken for Sol, especially in fragments of the scene which depict only Hesperus and his attendant.¹⁴ However, in the one case in which he does have another attribute, namely a shepherd's crook (plate 75.9), this confirms that he is not Sol, as the latter is never depicted with such a crook.¹⁵ Furthermore, on one depiction of this myth both Hesperus at the left and the judge in the centre have a radiate nimbus.¹⁶ Like Hesperus, the judge rarely has an attribute, but at times he is associated with the omphalos of Delphi and when he does have an attribute, it is a quiver (in plate 75.10, the quiver is closer to the judge, now lost, than to Hesperus). Clearly then, the judge, sometimes radiate, is Apollo or Apollo-Helios.¹⁷ This further suggests that the radiate male contestant has been correctly identified as Hesperus, rather than Sol, with the rays emphasizing the radiant beauty of this star, but in no way conferring any solar characteristics.

These two examples illustrate how careful we must be not to assume a priori that radiate figures are necessarily solar. Even a beardless youth, naked but for a cloak, can be radiate without being Sol, especially if he appears in a recognizable context. Radiate nimbi and symbolic rays certainly could have strong solar connotations, but they do not dominate to the extent that their presence stifles any alternative, non-solar identification. Numerous figures were depicted

¹³ Later tradition ascribed the discovery that Hesperus and Phosphorus were the same to Parmenides or Pythagoras; cf. D.L. IX, 23, quoting Favorinus as source for the former, unnamed others as source for the latter, and stipulating that Callimachus rejects the authenticity of the latter source (cf. fig. 442 Pfeiffer).

¹⁴ Cf. Naples, Mus. Naz. 9537 (from Pompeii VII 4,51 & 31, Casa dei Capitelli Colorati), identified as Apollo-Helios or Sol and Rhodes (Elia 1932, 83 nr. 192, fig. 26; Schefold 1958, 184, i), and Naples Mus. Naz. 8839 (from Castellammare di Stabia, Villa in Campo Verano), identified as Sol (e.g. Matern, 2002, 186, 281 K22). These suggestions must be rejected. Not only do both lack any attributes of Sol other than the rays, but in both cases the female attendant removing his cloak, known from the Sternstreit scenes, establishes the lost pictorial context of these fresco fragments. Hence both are actually Hesperus and his attendant (of whom only the hands are preserved in the fresco from Castellammare). Cf. Hijmans 1995, 56-8, fig. 7; LIMC Helios/Sol 160.

¹⁵ Pace Elia 1962. Cf. Bergmann 1998, 45, n. 235 & pl. 7.2.

¹⁶ Naples, Mus. Naz. 9239; LIMC Apollon/Apollo 421b (ill.). Probably from Herculaneum. In older literature, the figure of Hesperus on this fresco is wrongly interpreted as a woman; cf. Barré & Roux Ainé 1841, III, 70-72, pl. 128; Helbig 1868, 193 nr. 970. However, Schefold 1958, 341 correctly identifies it as a *Sternenstreit*.

¹⁷ Cf. Hijmans (1995, 56) for the reasons why the central figure is Apollo, not Dionysus. A radiate nimbus is more appropriate for Apollo-Helios than for Dionysus, but the latter can be depicted radiate - e.g. on Rhodian coinage of the 1st c. BC (cf. Hijmans 1996c).

with rays without being Sol.¹⁸

The Imperial Radiate Crown (Plates 76-78)

This non-solar context of rays and radiate nimbi is important to bear in mind when we turn to the radiate crown, i.e. rays depicted as if they were part of a real object consisting of a fillet or, rarely, wreath around the head to which thin metal spikes have been attached as “rays”. There are two basic types: the first consists simply of a fillet with rays, while the second has the addition of ribbons hanging down from the back, where the two ends of the fillet are tied together.¹⁹ The usage of this attribute, as we have seen, is straightforward. Without ribbons or *lemnisci*, it is a solar attribute worn only by Sol. But it is a rare one, which occurs almost exclusively on coins and intaglio's.²⁰ Conversely, the far more common radiate crown with *lemnisci* is, in a strict sense, not solar or even a divine attribute, insofar as it is *never worn by Sol*, but only by mortals (plate 76.2, 77.1,4,5, 78.3). Of course the “mortals” who wear it in Rome are primarily emperors, and the first of these - Augustus - was probably not depicted radiate until after his death and apotheosis. Clearly these were not “mere” mortals, as they had at the very least an aura of divinity, if not outright divine status.²¹ Furthermore, there are clear cases where the radiate crown with *lemnisci* is used to “quote” Sol's iconography, rarely more evidently than when a ruling couple are depicted, he radiate, she with lunar crescent.²² Nonetheless, it is striking to note that *all* emperors from Nero onwards were depicted radiate during their lifetime, while at the same time *divi* - with the exception of Augustus - were almost always depicted without the radiate crown.²³

This raises difficult questions. Scholars have widely assumed that the rays of the imperial radiate crown with *lemnisci* endow the bearer with divine or even explicitly solar status, but can divine symbolism really be the primary connotation of these crowns? The usage seems to preclude this, for if the crown was a divine symbol, it is hard to explain why all living emperors were depicted radiate on a regular basis without being officially declared *divus*, while the actual

¹⁸ See Bergmann 1998, 70-72. Radiate deities who were not Sol include: Artemis (in particular Artemis of Perge); Ma, Men, Isis, Nemesis, various local Near Eastern deities assimilated with Zeus or Apollo, and, on a range of central Italian lamps of the 1st c. AD, Jupiter.

¹⁹ Cf. chapter 3.

²⁰ Examples include Rhodian coins depicting Helios (Bergmann 1998, 14, pl. (6.4a-b); Republican coins (e.g. Matern 2002, fig. 120); Imperial lamps (Matern 2002, fig. 94).

²¹ On the divine status of emperors: Clauss 1999.

²² Cf. Bergmann 1998 pl. 52 nr. 4.

²³ There are no radiate busts of *divus* Claudius under Nero, none of *divus* Vespasian under Titus or Domitian, none of *divus* Traianus under Hadrian, none of *divus* Hadrianus under Antoninus Pius, etc. In fact, Bergmann (1998) does not discuss any radiate busts of *divi* on coins at all, aside from Augustus. Trajan Decius did mint coins with the radiate bust of earlier *divi* such as Nerva or Trajan (ca. AD 250, e.g. RIC 83), but these radiate *divi* are on the obverse of antoniniani, i.e. double sestertii, with an eagle on the reverse. It was standard practice to identify double denominations with a radiate bust of the emperor.

divi - except Augustus - were not.

More important than usage is the iconography. We must not forget that at the time of Augustus, Roman art already had four established conventions for the depiction of divine or exalted luminescence: a blue or golden nimbus, rays emanating from the head, rays and nimbus combined, and Sol's radiate crown without ribbons. Augustus was not portrayed with any of these conventions, and the significance of that fact cannot have been lost on the Roman viewer. What she saw on the posthumous coinage minted under Tiberius was Augustus crowned with a new type of crown, depicted in a manner that emphasized its reality, notably through the addition of ribbons with which the fillet was fastened around his head. Thus both in iconography (ribbons) and nature (reality) this Augustan attribute was carefully depicted as something other than the existing conventions used to suggest symbolic, divine radiance. This clear "otherness" cannot be ignored.

The Imperial Radiate Crown: Iconographic Symbol or Real Object?

The imperial radiate crown has received much attention in the past, but the monograph of Bergmann (1998) now dominates the topic. Her thorough review of previous scholarship on this subject need not be repeated here.²⁴ Bergmann argues forcefully in favour of interpreting the radiate crown with *lemnisci* as a purely symbolic, honorary attribute with solar and divine connotations. She acknowledges that this is at odds with the depictions of the imperial radiate crown which suggest a real object, consisting of a fillet around the head, to which metal spikes were attached as "rays", and which was fastened at the back by ribbons. This depiction of reality is scrupulously maintained for the full three centuries that emperors were portrayed radiate. In fact, some of the most striking instances date to the third century AD, when Carus, for example, was depicted on certain coins wearing *two* radiate crowns, one above the other,²⁵ and others, like Probus, were depicted with a radiate crown draped over their helmet.²⁶ But for Bergmann, this *depicted* reality is not a sign of the existence of actual radiate crowns. Surely no emperor would really have worn one over a helmet! She argues that it simply shows that by the third century AD the radiate crown was increasingly "conventionalized",²⁷ with radiate portraits used to identify double denominations. She stresses, however, that it remained first and foremost an *Ehrenzeichen* with solar connections.

In Bergmann's opinion this honorary, solar symbol was depicted as something "real" for political reasons, for in her view outright solar deification of the emperor was not acceptable at the time of Augustus's death, and therefore the radiate crown had to be depicted as "*ein*

²⁴ Bergmann 1998, 112-126 and *passim*. Cf. also Bastien 1992, 103-116; Alföldy 19935, 139-141.

²⁵ RIC V.2, 135 #5, pl. 5,18; Bastien 1982, 268 pl. 32.6; Bergmann 1998, 278 pl. 53.6. Bastien suggests that given the longstanding convention to identify coins with a "double" denomination - such as dupondii - with radiate portraits, the coin of Carus must have been a *double* antoninianus, i.e. a double of a coin that was itself already a double coin, the antoninianus being a double sestertius, and invariably identified as such by the radiate portrait.

²⁶ E.g. RIC 5, 437, 491, 517; cf. Bergmann 1998, 278 pl. 53.7 (Gallienus).

²⁷ Bergmann 1998, 278.

Götterattribut, das aussieht wie ein Ehrenkranz, und ein Ehrenkranz, der das Götterattribut der Strahlen inkorporiert".²⁸ This honorary radiate "wreath" was never more than a "Pseudogegegenstand" - real ones did not exist²⁹ - used as an iconographical sleight of hand to introduce the politically sensitive attribute of divine solar rays into imperial portraiture.³⁰

This is a far more elegant interpretation than that of Alföldi (1935, 139-143) who suggests that the radiate crown was in reality a Hellenistic royal diadem, actually worn by the emperors, from which symbolic rays emanate denoting divinity. Leaving aside the iconographical problems involved in assuming that a depicted object is partially real (diadem) and partially not (rays), one would think that a diadem, Hellenistic symbol of kingship *par excellence*, was hardly the type of honour that would be bestowed on the early emperors of Rome, and certainly not on Augustus. The fact that in Rome it is precisely Augustus who is first portrayed radiate is far more readily understandable if we accept, with Bergmann, that the Roman radiate crown was depicted as a type of Roman wreath (sign of honour and *auctoritas*) rather than as a Hellenistic diadem with symbolic rays (signs of kingship and divinity).

However, by emphasizing that the wreath was symbolic, not real, and not so much an honorary wreath as a *Götterattribut* with strong solar connotations, Bergmann's own interpretation raises difficult questions. Why is it that after AD 64 all emperors are depicted on coins with radiate crowns during their lifetime? This soon happened as a matter of course, and with monotonous regularity. If the radiate crown was purely symbolic, conferring divinity and some relationship with Sol on the bearer, this has far-reaching implications both for the role of Sol (and the living emperor) in Roman imperial religion, and for the relationship between emperor and senate. Are we to assume that all emperors were equally interested in Sol, and equally willing to impinge upon the Senate's prerogative to bestow the status of *divus* upon the emperor posthumously? Commemoration of Sol himself is quite rare on Roman Imperial coins until the very last years of the 2nd c. AD.

Bergmann also struggles to explain why the radiate crown is depicted as if it were a real object, without any indication that it is actually something symbolic. How would Roman viewers have recognized that this was an object that did not actually exist? Would they simply have known? And if that was the case, then what was the point in disguising what is in essence symbolic radiance to look like a real wreath? Why not simply use one of the established forms of symbolic divine light, such as a nimbus or rays?

These questions are all related to the important factors of context and viewing. On Roman imperial coins the radiate crown with ribbons is worn by Augustus posthumously, by Nero from AD 64, and then regularly by all living Roman emperors from Vespasian to Constantine.³¹ It is

²⁸ Bergmann 1998, 118.

²⁹ Bergmann 1998, 121-123.

³⁰ Bergmann 1998, 3.

³¹ Caligula is also depicted radiate, but only on a handful Greek provincial coins; Bergmann 1998, 127-9. For radiate portraits of Vespasian, cf. RIC 471, 475, 476, 479, etc. all from AD 71, 554-5 (AD 74), 578 (AD 76); Titus, cf. RIC 116, 183; Domitian, cf. RIC 246, 267-8 (AD 84-5, 326, 367 (AD 88-9), 381, 392, 405 etc. ; Nerva RIC 61, 81, 84-5, 106, etc.; Trajan, cf. RIC 382, 385, 398 (AD 98-9), 411, 428-9, 454, 464, 467, 502, 512, 563, etc.;

thus one of the most common attributes of imperial busts on the obverse of Roman coins.³² Obverse busts are otherwise normally either bare-headed or laureate,³³ and other common attributes of imperial busts are: paludamentum or chlamys³⁴, cuirass³⁵, and consular toga. Later, attributes which also became common were: lance (from Marcus Aurelius onwards), sceptre and shield (both from Septimius Severus onwards), raised right hand (from Geta onwards) and orb or globe (from Gordian III onwards).³⁶ There are, of course, numerous examples of other attributes in connection with the obverse busts of emperors on coins, but none of these others occur with any frequency, and most are restricted to a very small number of emperors at best.³⁷ Besides the laurel wreath, the radiate crown with *lemnisci*, then, is the only type of headgear regularly shown on imperial busts on coins.

What is clear from this is that all the elements and attributes most commonly depicted with imperial busts were unremarkable as standard elements of the imperial “uniform” or court dress which all had a real existence.³⁸ Reality, therefore, is the primary characteristic of the context in which the radiate crowns occur. In other words, the image, which clearly depicts the radiate crown with ribbons as real object, is reinforced by the context insofar as all other common attributes of imperial busts are likewise real objects. This strongly suggests that the Roman viewer read the radiate crown with ribbons as being something that actually existed as part of the imperial regalia.

Bergmann counters this by describing the imperial radiate crown as a deceptive “pseudo-object”. In her opinion, the image was meant to deceive. Bergmann supports this view by arguing that the Roman radiate crowns were directly modelled on the radiate crowns or diadems of the

Hadrian, RIC 538 (AD 117), 554, 557, 570, 600, 601, 604, 605, 608, etc.; Antoninus Pius, cf. RIC 657-674, 681, 724, 765, 798, etc. All coins listed were struck during the reigns of these emperors, and all are dupondii. The list could be extended to include all emperors until Constantine phased out the radiate crown in the early 320s.

³² Emperors appear radiate primarily on coins with a “double” denomination (dupondii, antoniniani, etc.). Cf. Bastien 1982; Bastien 1992, 103-116; Bergmann 1998, 278.

³³ Obverse busts with oak wreaths do not occur after Galba, and other types of headdress (such as a helmet) are rare and restricted to an emperor or two at best

³⁴ Generally fastened with a fibula over one or both shoulders.

³⁵ Sometimes with the addition of a gorgoneion and aegis.

³⁶ For all attributes cf. Bastien 1992.

³⁷ Extremely rare are: sword, arrows, branches, *balteus*, whip, protome of one or more horses, thunderbolt, and caduceus. Also quite rare, though significantly more common than the preceding examples, are small statues of Victory (starting under Severus Alexander). From Trajan onwards, emperors were intermittently depicted with the attributes of Hercules, with an explosion of such depictions under Commodus, of course. But there were gaps of up to two generations in this type of depiction (e.g. between Septimius Severus and Gallienus), and it was never common. Cf. Bastien 1992.

³⁸ This does not imply that they were *commonly* worn. The queen of England does not habitually go forth wearing her crown - prime emblem of her office - and yet for all its symbolism the object is quite real and tangible.

Hellenistic kings.³⁹ These, she believes, were purely symbolic and directly associated the kings to Helios.⁴⁰ That this connotation was maintained without interruption in Roman times is, in her view, shown by such examples as the joint depiction of the emperor, radiate, and the empress with crescent, referred to above. In support of her conclusion that radiate crowns were never actually produced or worn, she points to the variation in early depictions of this crown on posthumous portraits of Augustus (apparently there was no single, physical example to copy),⁴¹ to the fact that statues were rarely depicted with radiate crowns (no three-dimensionality),⁴² and to the lack of reliable, independent evidence for the existence of radiate crowns with *lemnisci* as actual objects in the Roman Empire.⁴³

The assumption that the radiate crown of Augustus was inspired by Hellenistic models is widespread but problematic. The direct adoption of insignia of Hellenistic kings - even posthumously - runs counter to Augustus' general policy and would therefore be surprising, and as Bergmann points out herself, the physical appearance of the radiate crowns of Augustus was more reminiscent of Roman honorary wreaths than of the various types of radiate crowns and diadems current in the Hellenistic era.⁴⁴ Furthermore, only five or six Hellenistic kings were actually portrayed radiate: Ptolemy III, Ptolemy V, and Ptolemy VIII, Antiochus IV, Antiochus VI, and Aristarchos of Colchis⁴⁵ For there to be any meaningful link between these Hellenistic radiate portraits and those of Augustus, one must postulate that Roman viewers in AD 14 were acquainted with Hellenistic coins minted between 150 and 260 years earlier in Egypt or further East,⁴⁶ or with those of an insignificant ruler of a remote kingdom on the southeastern shore of

³⁹ Bergmann 1998, 99.

⁴⁰ Bergmann (1998, 47-57), arguing against the widely held view that the rays of Hellenistic rulers symbolized divine, but not specifically solar light. For the latter view cf. Smith 1988, 41; Mittag 2006, 134-8.

⁴¹ Bergmann 1998, 112, 118.

⁴² Bergmann (1998, 119-120) suggests both artistic grounds and meaning or principles to explain this. At the artistic level, there is a fundamental difference between portraying light symbolically in two-dimensional media (painting, bas-relief) and three-dimensionally: "Metallstrahlen, die aus einem rundplastischen Kopf hervorstehen, haben zweifellos eine befremdliche Wirkung". As a matter of principle, she argues, Romans may have felt that metal rays were "too exotic" for honorary statues.

⁴³ Bergmann 1998, 121-123.

⁴⁴ Bergmann 1998, 114.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bergmann 1998, 13-15, and plates 5.2 (Antiochus VI, ca. 145 BC), 9.3 (Ptolemy III, 246-221 BC), 9.4, (Ptolemy V, 204-180 BC), 9.5 (Ptolemy VIII, 138 BC), 11.2, 11.4 (both Antiochus IV, 175-164 BC), 12.1-2 (Antiochus VI, 145- ca. 142 BC), 18.1-3 (Aristarchos of Colchis, 52 BC). Bergmann, (1998, 85-88) accepts the suggestion, put forward by Jenkins, that on the Colchian coins the radiate bust depicts Pompey (who put Aristarchos on the throne of Colchis). The evidence is meager, based as it is on portrait features only. These portrait features vary too significantly from die to die to carry conviction.

⁴⁶ The coins of Ptolemy VIII bearing his radiate portrait were minted in 138/7 BC, representing the last radiate Hellenistic portraits barring those of Aristarchus of Colchis.

the Black Sea, minted almost 70 years before. This strikes me as very unlikely, and I see no grounds, therefore, to accept any connection between Augustan radiate portraits and those of six Hellenistic monarchs who on occasion appeared radiate on their coinage.⁴⁷

As for Bergmann's (1998, 121-123) arguments against an actual existence of imperial radiate crowns, these too are inconclusive. To begin with she feels that the range of variation in early depictions of the radiate crown suggests there was no real-life example to be copied by the artists. There is indeed the variation in early depictions of the radiate crown on portraits of Augustus pointed out by Bergmann, but it is counterbalanced by the distinct uniformity in subsequent centuries and thus could simply be the result of inevitable initial experimentation with a new element of imperial iconography which lacked precedent.

That statues are not often depicted radiate is also less significant than Bergmann suggests. It was common practice in antiquity not only to dress up statues in robes, but also to crown them with (temporary) wreaths.⁴⁸ Therefore if, as seems quite possible, there were different wreaths for different feasts or occasions, it would be preferable to produce statues without permanent wreaths so that they could then be crowned with temporary ones as the occasion called for. This would explain not only the lack of radiate crowns, but also of laurel wreaths (equally common on coins) on imperial statues.

Finally, Bergmann argues against the independent existence of radiate crowns in view of the lack of direct evidence for their existence. Bergmann's point is that potentiality does not make reality. Everyone accepts that any emperor *could* have had a radiate crown produced (and that some may even have done so).⁴⁹ But this does not mean that radiate crowns formed part of the actual imperial wardrobe.⁵⁰ I fully agree with Bergmann's analysis of the scant literary references to radiate crowns, in which she shows that these passages do not provide conclusive evidence for their actual existence. Nor do the radiate crowns in the mysteries of Mithras have any bearing on this question. These crowns, if indeed they existed as actual objects, had very specific ritual and religious functions related to the initiation grade of the Heliodromus in the mysteries. To suggest any link between these and the radiate crown of the emperor would create far more problems than it would solve. Nonetheless, this does not amount to conclusive evidence against radiate crowns either, as these are at best arguments from silence, and to counterbalance them there is the iconographical realism and context remarked on above.

⁴⁷ Non-numismatic radiate portraits of Hellenistic monarchs were equally rare, and even less likely to be known to Roman viewers.

⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. MacMullen 1981, 43.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g., *HA Gall.*, 16,4 "radiatus saepe processit". As Bergmann (1998, 121) emphasizes, this is one of the many attacks on Gallienus in the *HA*. Thus, irrespective of whether it is factually accurate or not, the passage implies that it was extraordinary to regularly wear a radiate crown. De Blois (1976, 145-6, 153) doubts the factuality of this statement in view of the rhetorical nature of this chapter of the *HA Gall.*

⁵⁰ Even the double radiate crowns or the radiate crowns on helmets on mid 3rd c. coins can be interpreted as part of the internal logic of the medium, with the radiate crowns adduced (or doubled) for some internal reason; the coin may be a double nominal (radiate crown on helmet) or a doubled double nominal (two radiate crowns on a double antoninianus) without necessarily suggesting independent reality of the depicted crown. Indeed, would any emperor actually have worn a radiate crown over a helmet?

More importantly, however, there is other evidence - hitherto not discussed in connection with the imperial radiate crown - that shows that certain types of honorary radiate crowns had a real existence in the Roman world outside the sphere of imperial honorifics, namely as agonistic prizes. This evidence shows that the imperial radiate crown had non-imperial counterparts in "real life" in much the same way as the imperial laurel wreath did, as well as all the other standard attributes of imperial portrait busts, listed above. It may sound far-fetched, at first glance, to suggest that the imperial radiate crown could be somehow connected with radiate wreaths awarded at *agones*. But as we shall see, *radiate* agonistic prize-wreaths were strictly limited to the Actian games, instituted at Nicopolis by Augustus after his victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra. Given that Augustus was the first to be depicted with a radiate crown, and for half a century was the only one, a connection between the imperial radiate crown and Actium is a possibility that cannot be ignored.

Agonistic wreaths and the Actian Games

The Actian Games were instituted by Augustus in honour of Apollo after his victory at Actium in 31 BC. They were celebrated quinquennially from 27 BC onwards at Nicopolis, the city founded by Augustus at Actium.⁵¹ From their inception, these games ranked among the most important in the Greek world and the Empire as a whole. They were an *γ ν ερός*, giving victors the same right to a lifetime of free meals in the Prytaneion of their hometown with which, e.g., Olympic victors were also honoured,⁵² and what is more, they were officially included in the *περίοδος* of the great Panhellenic Games. The honorary title of *περιοδονίκης* - traditionally awarded to an athlete who was victorious in the same discipline at all four Panhellenic Games (Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean) in one cycle, was now awarded to any athlete who was victorious in four out of five games, with the Actia included. The Actia achieved this status from the very first time they were held.⁵³

A measure of the popularity of the Actia is the extent to which they were "copied" by other cities. It was common practice for cities to organize local *agones*. According to Leschhorn (1997, 89), about 150 different *agones* are attested on imperial Greek coins alone, and in all we have evidence for over 500 different types. While most of these were organized according to their own traditions, cities could also decide to hold *agones* along the lines of famous Panhellenic games. The most popular ones were the Olympic, Pythian, and Actian games. Cities would send a delegation to the home towns of these games (Elis, Delphi, or Nicopolis), and apply for permission to organize games in their tradition, i.e. in honour of the same deities, according

⁵¹ On the Actia cf. Sarikaki 1965; Lämmer 1986; Fortuin 1996, 86-91; *Neue Pauly* s.v. "Aktia".

⁵² Cassius Dio LI, 1,2; Lämmer 1986, 30.

⁵³ Lämmer 1986, 31; cf. *IvO* 1, nr. 231, an inscription dated between 21 and 15 BC in which one Hermas of Antiochia commemorates his victories in Olympia and at all other games of the *periodos*, explicitly including the Actia.

to the same rules, and with the same prizes.⁵⁴ One of the cities to do this was Rome herself, where *Isactian* games, i.e. games in the Actian format, were held in AD 63 in honour of the birth of Augusta, the short-lived daughter of Nero and Poppaea.⁵⁵

Archaeological and numismatic sources give us a rather good impression of the appearance of Actian wreaths, suggesting at least three or four types, of which most share a trait that is highly suggestive in the context of this discussion: they are noticeably "spiky". In fact the only non-spiky wreath connected with the Actian games is the laurel wreath, a type one would expect given the connection with Apollo, but that was actually noticeably rare in Actian context.⁵⁶ One of the best depictions of an Actian wreath is on an early imperial stele discovered at Isthmia in 1970 and now in the local museum there. Eight different victory wreaths are shown on the stele, with the names of the agones at which they were awarded inscribed within them. The Actian wreath here appears to consist of bulbs of some sort from which long shoots emerge.⁵⁷ Similarly spiky is the wreath on an agonistic prize-table depicted on a lamp of the beginning of the second century AD, discovered during excavations at Nicopolis in 2000/2001 (plate 31.4).⁵⁸ It is explicitly identified as Actian by the word AKTIAKA incised below the table. Wreaths are also regularly depicted on coins from Nicopolis, often accompanied by the inscription AKTIA or an A-monogram (plate 78.1). The most common type was fashioned of reeds, and thus differs significantly from the wreath depicted on the Isthmian stele. However, the reed wreaths too were markedly spiky in nature.⁵⁹ Of the other two types of Actian wreaths on coins of Nicopolis, the more common one consists of straight spikes which appear to be connected to circles or spheres on the wreath.⁶⁰ This type differs from the wreath on the Isthmian

⁵⁴ According to Leschhorn (1997, 90-1), about 38 cities are known to have organized Isolympic Games, about 33 Isopythian Games, and about 15 Isactian Games. Fortuin (1996, 87-8) argues that Augustus instituted parallel games in Nicopolis and Rome.

⁵⁵ Tacitus *Ann.* XV, 23: "(...) et certamen ad exemplar Actiacae religionis decretum (...)".

⁵⁶ Among the numerous wreaths depicted on coins of Nicopolis, the laurel wreath occurs only 6 times. Cf. Oikonomidou (1975), pl. 21, nrs. 28-29 (Antoninus Pius); pl. 49, nr. 20a (Gordianus); pl. 61, nrs. 50-53 (Gallienus). By comparison, the most common wreath on coins of Nicopolis, the reed wreath, is depicted almost 50 times (cf. *infra* n. xx).

⁵⁷ Clement 1970, 167, pl. 141c. The bulbs somewhat resemble fennel. *Pace* Oikonomidou (1975, 42; 1987, 199), they bear no resemblance to apples, as they are different in shape the shoots are many times longer than any stems of apples.

⁵⁸ Pliakou 2007, 540-1, 559 nr. 106. Cf. nr. 98 (p. 557) with two less detailed crowns on an agonistic table.

⁵⁹ Oikonomidou (1975) pl 7 nr. 44 (Augustus, but cf. Kraay 1976); pl. 13, nrs. 15-20 (Trajan); pl. 20, nrs. 12b-14, 16-20, pl. 21, nrs. 21-27 (Antoninus Pius); pl. 21, nrs. 30b-32 (Faustina); pl. 22, nrs. 2-5, 10-11 (Marcus Aurelius); pl. 23, nrs. 14a-16 (Faustina minor); pl. 23, nrs. 23-25 (Lucius Verus); pl. 46, nr. 22 (Iulia Paula); pl. 49, nr. 26 (Gordianus); pl. 51, nrs. 9-12 (Philippus I); pl. 53, nr. 42a (Philippus II); pl. 59, nrs. 23b-24, pl. 61, nrs. 54-56 (Gallienus); pl. 62, nrs. 74a-78 (Salonina).

⁶⁰ Oikonomidou 1975, 42; pl. 7, nr. 45, pl. 9 nr. 72 (Augustus, but cf. Kraay); pl. 15, nrs. 15-22 (Hadrian); pl. 31, nr. 15 (Caracalla).

stele in that the spikes on the coins are straight and have the appearance of long, thin metal shafts, rather than shoots of bulbs. The final type of Actian wreath on coins is the rare laurel wreath already referred to above.

Agonistic prizes were regularly depicted on the coins of many Greek cities in the Roman East, especially in the second and third centuries AD. Initially the prizes were depicted as straightforward wreaths, but as time progressed, these wreaths were gradually replaced by more elaborate, cylindrical objects of varying shapes and - apparently - fabric. These objects make their first appearance in the latter part of the second c. AD and dominate agonistic coin-types in the third century. Scholars now generally accept that these cylindrical objects were large prize crowns which came to replace the less elaborate traditional wreaths.⁶¹ On many coins, one or more of these agonistic wreaths or crowns are depicted on tables together with palm branches and, in rare cases, prize-amphorae or the like.⁶²

Of the agonistic wreaths depicted on coins minted by other cities than Nicopolis, only a small number are radiate or spiky. The best parallels for the spiky wreaths of Nicopolis include a bronze coin of Tarsus struck under Commodus and a bronze of Pompeiopolis.⁶³ While spiky wreaths on coins other than those of Nicopolis are rare, matters change after the late 2nd c. AD, when large, cylindrical prize-crowns with protruding spikes occur with some frequency.⁶⁴ This is of interest to us because Klose (1997) has shown is that all coins bearing agonistic prizes with spikes - whether wreaths or prize-crowns - were minted either by Nicopolis itself, host city of the Actian games, or by cities that organized *Isactia*, i.e. games along the lines of the Actia. Clearly, spikes of some sort were an essential element of agonistic prizes awarded at Actian or Isactian games, to the point that they were retained even as the prizes themselves evolved from wreaths to urns or crowns. The evidence also clearly shows that the use of “spiky” wreaths and crowns was

⁶¹ The origin and nature of these large crowns have still not been fully established, and they differ markedly in appearance from one another. Some resemble baskets or urns (in the older literature they are often referred to as prize urns), but some also appear to be gem-studded (precious) metal cylinders, while yet others are apple shaped. Some also resemble stacks of wreaths more than anything else. Cf. Louis Robert, quoted by Floriani Squarciapino (1987, 176-7). Cf. also Leschhorn 1997, 89; Klose 1997.

⁶² Large cylindrical crowns on tables: Leschhorn 1997, figs. 10, 15, 18, 24, 25; wreaths: Leschhorn 1997, figs. 7, 8; wreath and crown: Leschhorn 1997, fig. 16.

⁶³ Klose 1997, 36, figs. 9-10, n. 29.

⁶⁴ Cf. Leschhorn 1997, 89, fig. 10. Leschhorn tentatively suggests that these are not true prize crowns at all, but can more easily be interpreted as piles of radiate wreaths of the type above. Cf. also, e.g. BMCGrC XIII, 34, 12-24 (Neocaesaria, minted under Gordian III), there still described as agonistic urns, but in SNG von Aulock I, nrs. 107-110, 114 described as *Preiskrone mit Strahlen* (cf. nr. 115, which may be such a crown seen from above). On Isactia at Neocaesaria cf. Sarikaki 1965, 156 n. 6. Comparable objects are depicted on SNG von Aulock III, 720 (Nicaea, minted under Valerian; 3 crowns, some or all possibly radiate); BMCGrC Thrace, 102 nr. 75 (Byzantion; Caracalla and Geta shaking hands above a radiate agonistic crown); Lindgren & Kovacs 1985, nr. 1447 (Anazarbus in Cilicia, minted under Valerian).

restricted to Actian and Isactian games only.⁶⁵

To date only Klose (1997) has attempted to analyse the nature of the Actian wreaths and their spikes, and interpret their significance. He argues that as they are most commonly depicted as made of reeds, they must somehow be connected with Poseidon, as he is the god most closely associated with reeds. The problem with this suggestion, acknowledged by Klose, is that the iconographic link between Poseidon and reeds is tenuous at best. Furthermore, it fails to explain why games dedicated to Apollo would have prize wreaths associated with Poseidon. Klose points out that the laurel wreath, most directly associated with Apollo, already had a long tradition at the Pythian games in Delphi, making it “unavailable” as a prize-wreath for the Actia. But the fact that the laurel wreath was not available does not mean that it was impossible to find a prize wreath linked to the patron god of the games. In fact, Apollo had a distinctly dual nature in Augustan religion: that of the Delphic, oracular Apollo celebrated in the Pythia, and that of the sun, Apollo-Helios.⁶⁶ While the laurel wreath is a distinctive feature of the former, the latter is characterized by his rays. I would argue, therefore, that the distinctly “spiky” nature of the Actian wreaths and prize crowns was an attempt to create a “radiate” agonistic wreath as prize at the Actia. This seems the more likely, because Nicopolis portrays two main types of wreaths on its coins. The one, made of reeds, is admittedly spiky, but does not, of course, closely resemble the radiate crown of Apollo-Helios. However, the other is characterized by precisely the straight, apparently metallic, spikes that one would associate with radiate wreaths.

That the more common type was apparently made of reeds need not surprise us. This would have been dictated by the long-established custom that Panhellenic prize-wreaths were made from specific plants - the wild olive at Olympia, celery at Nemea, fig and celery at Isthmia, and laurel at Delphi⁶⁷ - imposing two almost irreconcilable demands on the wreath-makers: the wreaths must be radiate, and they must be made of plants. This brings to mind the radiate wreath of Lucius in the *Golden Ass*.⁶⁸ One should keep in mind that the material of the wreaths at Actium varied - there was also the bulb-like wreath on the stele in Isthmia - but that spikes or long shoots of some sort were virtually always incorporated, and were scrupulously retained even after the transformation of prize-wreaths into cylindrical prize-crowns. Clearly, the defining characteristic of Actian wreaths was not the plant or material of which they were fashioned, but that they were spiky. Thus if we seek a link between the wreaths and Apollo, as we surely must, it is to their spikiness that we should turn first, leading to the obvious conclusion that the spikes symbolize the rays of Apollo-Helios. In short, the radiate Actian Apollo formed the solar

⁶⁵ Although spiky agonistic wreaths are rare on coins, we must bear in mind that the “agonistic” coinage tended far more towards depicting agonistic crowns than it did towards wreaths. Agonistic coinage is rare before the reign of Commodus, but almost all spiky wreaths date to the period prior to his rule.

⁶⁶ Gagé 1955; cf. Horace, *CS* and chapter x of this study.

⁶⁷ Klose 1997, 32, adding that when Domitian introduced the Capitolia, oak wreaths were adopted there. Cf. Sarikaki 1966, 150 n. 3.

⁶⁸ A radiate crown of plant material is not necessarily unlikely. In Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (11, 24) Lucius describes himself as dressed up *ad instar Solis* with, among other things, a *corona .. palmae candidae foliis in modum radiorum prosistentibus* - a crown with projecting palm leaves in the manner of rays.

counterpart to, rather than the double of, the oracular laurel-wreathed Apollo of Delphi.

The main importance of this evidence for Actian wreaths lies in the fact that it shows that wreaths with spike-like rays (and *lemnisci*) existed independently and as real objects in the Roman world, within the agonistic context of the Actian games. However, the wreaths discussed so far, though in some sense “radiate”, differ significantly from the apparently metallic imperial radiate crowns worn by Roman emperors, as they were either wholly fashioned from plants (apparently reeds and bulbs), or consisted of a bulb-like wreath with the addition of metallic rays. There is an inscription of the late 2nd c. AD, however, which mentions that the tragic actor Tiberius Iulius Apolaustus of Ephesus was crowned "(...) ργυρέ στεφάν Ακτιακ ν Νεικοπόλει τειμ ς χάριν".⁶⁹ This indicates that Actian wreaths could be made of silver, and could be awarded *honoris causa*.

This evidence for metal Actian wreaths is further supported by two representations of radiate wreaths which can be interpreted as Actian by their context, and which are depicted as partially or wholly of metal. The first is a mosaic, excavated between 1971 and 1973 in the Baths of the Porta Marina in Ostia, which dates to the reign of Trajan or Hadrian (plate 78.2).⁷⁰ It depicts athletes and a trumpeter grouped around a table in the centre, which bears a palm-branch and an elaborate radiate wreath with three rays, but no *lemnisci*. The rays are very long, straight, and thin, tapering to a sharp point, and emerge at right angles from the wreath. There is no indication whatsoever that either the wreath or the rays are made of plants of some kind. Floriani Squarciapino (1987, 164) believes that the wreath itself is either hammered sheet-metal or cloth, and that the rays are metal. This is not the only radiate wreath depicted in the mosaic, for the trumpeter is wearing a similar radiate wreath, but with five rays.⁷¹ The table with wreath and palm branch at the centre of the mosaic parallels the tables on agonistic coins discussed above. Thus we may assume that the radiate wreaths, twice repeated, inevitably associate the scene with the Actian or Isactian Games. We have evidence for competition of trumpeters at the Actia.⁷²

The second example comes from Nicopolis itself, where a wreath is depicted on a beautifully carved rectangular marble soffit block from an unknown, early imperial Roman building, reused in the Alkison-Basilica (plate 77.6). In the centre is an acanthus rosette within an oak wreath which in turn is enclosed within a lozenge, creating two triangular fields to either

⁶⁹ Sarikaki 1965, 159 nr. 24.

⁷⁰ On the date cf. Floriani Squarciapino 1987, 162 n. 7. Rumscheid (2000, 161), following Clarke, dates the mosaic to the early 3rd c., but this late date is not conclusively argued, and conflicts with the style of the mosaics.

⁷¹ Floriani Squarciapino (1987, 169) describes it as a four-rayed wreath, but a fifth ray is clearly visible behind the raised left arm of the trumpeter. She makes a strong case for interpreting the two wreaths as being of the same kind despite their differences, indicating that the one on the table "(...) è stata rappresentata molto più grande del normale e secondo una visione prospettica che consente la riproduzione di molti particolari".

⁷² Trumpeters: Sarikaki 1966, 159 nr. 17; Lämmer 1986, 29-30. Floriani Squarciapino does not mention the agonistic coinage except for a coin from Sardis discussed by Louis Robert (Floriani Squarciapino 1987, 176-7). Furthermore, none of her *comparanda* are radiate, due to the fact that her focus is on finding parallels for the combination of trumpeter and agonistic wreaths in general, rather than this specific type of wreath. This explains why she professed herself unable to determine to which specific games (if any) the mosaic refers. What she has missed is that of the major agones, only the Actian have wreaths which are spiky or radiate in nature.

side of it.⁷³ These fields contain additional elements of the wreath. On one side the triangular field is filled with the *lemnisci*; on the other are four straight inward-pointing spikes, tapering and pointed, the points not quite touching. The position of these spikes is dictated by the lozenge enclosing the wreath. They obviously form a counterpart to the downward-hanging *lemnisci* on the other side of the wreath, and can therefore be interpreted as (upward pointing) metal rays attached to the wreath. This, then, is a radiate oak wreath with *lemnisci*.⁷⁴ In view of the other evidence for spiky or radiate wreaths in connection with the Actia, such a radiate oak wreath as a decorative element in a public building in Nicopolis need not surprise us.

To these can be added two other examples of wreaths with rays of some kind. On a mosaic of the 3rd c. AD from the house of Menander in Antioch, we see the heads or busts of four wreathed figures. The male figure at the left is crowned with a thick wreath from which four thin spikes emerge, and holds a large palm branch in his hand. The others are crowned with flowers.⁷⁵ On a garland-sarcophagus of the second quarter of the 2nd c. AD from Arpaz two wreaths are depicted above the garlands. Respectively twelve and eighteen long, narrow, straight or lightly curved leaves (?) emerge as rays from the large, elaborate wreaths.⁷⁶ There is no explicit indication, except in the iconography, that these wreaths were connected with the Actian games, but also no reason to suppose that they were not.

What we can state with certainty, then, is that a significant variety of distinctly spiky as well as explicitly radiate wreaths with *lemnisci* existed in the Roman Empire. At some point, these types came to include oak wreaths with rays, as well as wreaths made of silver. These wreaths were agonistic prizes awarded at the Actian games.

The Imperial radiate crown as honorific wreath

Can there be any connection between the radiate agonistic wreaths of Actium and the radiate crown with which Augustus, Nero, and all emperors from Vespasian to Constantine are depicted? The imperial crown is certainly not identical to any of the spiky or radiate wreaths depicted in agonistic, Actian context. But three points are important: 1. the Actian wreaths were

⁷³ The basic pattern of the plaque is a play on geometric shapes, with an open disc or circle (rosette) within a closed circle (wreath) within two triangles (both halves of the lozenge) within a rectangle (the plaque) and with hexagons in each corner.

⁷⁴ Cf. Krinzinger (1987, 116-7), who does not comment on the *lemnisci* and the rays. Although he is justifiably cautious about giving a date for the relief in his text, Krinzinger (1987, 116) does refer to a second block, which he believes to be from the same building, as *frühkaiserzeitlich* (432, fig. 3).

⁷⁵ Rumscheid 2000, 154 cat. 83, pl. 39,2. The mosaic is currently in Princeton.

⁷⁶ Aydın, Mus. 1489. Rumscheid 2000, 155 cat. 85, pl. 40.1-2. Rumscheid (2000, 161) draws a parallel with the spikes of the crowns on the Ostia mosaic, suggesting that they too might be leaves, but based on the evidence discussed here, I would suggest the “leaves”, irrespective of their actual material, are meant as rays. Cf. also Rumscheid 2000, 168 cat. 114 (victorious charioteer holding palm and wreath with six spikes, identified by Rumscheid as long-stemmed flowers because of the red points); Rumscheid 2000, 172 cat. 122 (eros on biga holding palm-branch and wreath with four spikes, described by Rumscheid as “long-stemmed attachments”); Rumscheid 2000, 173 cat. 124 (eros on biga holding wreath with four spikes, described by Rumscheid as “long, round, pointed stems”).

real, not symbolic; 2. the essential, defining characteristic of the Actian wreaths were their spikes, either in the shape of plant shoots or metallic “rays”; 3. “Spiky” wreaths were linked exclusively to the Actia. If we turn now to the imperial radiate crown, the parallels are suggestive: 1. the imperial crowns were emphatically depicted as real objects with real spikes, without any suggestion of symbolic rays of light; 2. the key characteristic of these crowns are the spikes or “rays”; 3. the first Roman to be depicted with an imperial radiate crown was Augustus, whose defining achievement, his victory at Actium, was celebrated by the Actia. These parallels cannot be dismissed. Indeed, as we shall see, further analysis strongly bolsters their significance.

On coins, Augustus was first depicted radiate posthumously, but whether these were actually the first depictions of Augustus with a radiate crown can no longer be ascertained. There were other radiate portraits of Augustus - certainly on gems and reliefs, almost certainly in sculpture - which cannot always be dated with sufficient accuracy for it to be certain that none predated his death.⁷⁷

There are two numismatic types of radiate portrait of Augustus. The one depicts him seated left by an altar, holding a laurel branch in his right hand and a long sceptre in his left hand.⁷⁸ Bergmann argues that the altar is that of Providentia, as depicted on the reverse of certain asses.⁷⁹ These asses are among the fairly numerous bronzes of Tiberius that depict the radiate bust of Augustus on the obverse, that bust being the second, and more common type of radiate portrayal of Augustus. Coins depicting the radiate Augustus were minted under all Julio-Claudian emperors,⁸⁰ and Augustus was the only one to be depicted radiate on the official coinage of the Empire until AD 64, when radiate portraits of Nero appeared on his reformed bronze coinage.⁸¹ Again there are two types, the most common being the radiate bust of Nero on the obverse of the new *aes* coinage. Two reverses show Nero full-figure, radiate, in one case alone, holding a Victory on a globe in his left hand and a branch in his right, and in the other case next to a female figure - probably Poppaea - holding a patera in his right hand.⁸² It is particularly noteworthy that there were no radiate portrait busts of *divus* Claudius on the commemorative coinage produced at the beginning of Nero’s reign. Instead, Claudius’ bust on the obverse of these coins is laureate. Likewise, *divus* Julius was never depicted radiate.⁸³

⁷⁷ Radiate portraits of Augustus on gems: Bergmann 1998, pl. 22.2 (Cologne), 22.4 (Würzburg); in sculpture, cf. below.

⁷⁸ E.g. RIC Tiberius 49 (cf. Bergmann 1998, 107-8, pl. 20.3); RIC Caligula cf. variants in which the statue is on an elephant-drawn quadriga (e.g. RIC Tiberius 68).

⁷⁹ Bergmann 1998, 106-7, with references in notes 654, 658.

⁸⁰ Under Nero, the radiate bust of Augustus occurs only on provincial coinage.

⁸¹ Bergmann (1998, 172-3) convincingly rejects MacDowall’s suggestion that the first radiate coins of Nero should be dated to AD 62/3.

⁸² Bergman 1998, 174-181.

⁸³ On the dubious claim in Florus, *epit.* 2,13,91 that Caesar was honoured during his lifetime with a radiate crown, cf. Bergmann 1998, 89.

After Nero's death, Vespasian is the next to adopt the radiate crown, doing so on the first dupondii he issued, in AD 70. After his return from the Jewish campaign (AD 71), Titus too could be depicted radiate. Domitian, as Caesar under Vespasian and Titus, was not depicted radiate on dupondii, however, which indicates that at this point radiate portraits were not yet serving as markers of *dupondii* and other double nominations, as was soon to become the case. Once he became emperor, however, Domitian too was depicted radiate, and the practice was retained by all emperors until Constantine.

The radiate Crown as Augustan Attribute

The fact that in the first fifty years the radiate crown was limited to Augustus only suggests that it was primarily an Augustan attribute. In Bergmann's opinion, however, the crown was not in fact limited to Augustus during this period. She presents coins that, she argues, depict Caligula and Claudius radiate, to support her contention that the radiate crown did, in fact symbolize divinity. We must examine this evidence first, before we can proceed with our analysis.

In the case of Caligula, Bergmann refers to a small number of coins minted by three cities in Asia Minor: Aezani, Magnesia ad Sipylum, and Smyrna, with a radiate bust on the obverse.⁸⁴ In addition to these Bergmann identifies certain unnamed seated radiate figures on coins of Rome and Alexandria as Claudius (Rome) and Nero (Alexandria).⁸⁵ Before we discuss the radiate busts of Caligula, let us first turn to these radiate, seated figures.

As we have already seen, one of the two types of radiate portrait of *divus* Augustus depicted him seated on a curule chair by an altar, holding a branch in his right hand and supporting a long sceptre with his left hand, and identified as DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER (plate 76.4). The same figure is also depicted seated on an elephant quadriga,⁸⁶ giving the clear impression of a statue being drawn by that quadriga in a procession, and presumably recalling part of the consecration or funerary rites after Augustus' death. It is therefore widely accepted that the seated Augustus on these coins is modelled on, or is a copy of a prominent statue of Augustus.⁸⁷ Where that statue stood is uncertain, for as Bergmann has pointed out, the common suggestion that it is the one recorded in the theatre of Marcellus fails to account for the altar by Augustus' feet. If that altar is indeed that of Providentia, as Bergmann has plausibly argued, then it is tempting to suggest that the statue was connected in real life with that altar as it is on the coins. In that case, the coins commemorate the statue and altar that celebrated Augustus' divine

⁸⁴ RPC I 2454-5 (Magnesia), 2474 (Smyrna), and 3085-7 (Aezani).

⁸⁵ Bergmann (1998, 131 fig. 1) also briefly mentions a marble bust of Claudius, discovered in the 17th c. and known only from engravings as it is now lost. As Bergmann is careful to emphasize, the bust as depicted is something of a pastiche, and whether the rays are in any way original is hard to say. Therefore it cannot have much force as evidence.

⁸⁶ *Supra* p. xx, n. xx

⁸⁷ Bergmann 1998, 107-8.

providentia in providing for stable succession.⁸⁸

This statue-type also occurs on a number of provincial issues under Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius, with varying attributes in the right hand.⁸⁹ This suggests that the image was widely recognized and recognizable as one of the standard ways in which to depict Augustus, presumably achieved by setting up copies of the statue (and altar?) throughout the empire. One such copy appears to have survived in the seated statue of Augustus from the rostrum in front of the temple of Augustus and Roma in Leptis Magna.⁹⁰ The statue holds a globe rather than a branch, and the head is poorly preserved. Parts of an oak wreath, the *corona civica*, have survived, however, and there are traces of a fillet of some kind across the brow, with holes drilled below each wave of hair along the hairline.⁹¹ Rose (1997, 75) points out that none of the extant enthroned statues of Augustus predate the reign of Tiberius, and links their inauguration explicitly to the Divus Augustus Pater coins discussed above, a suggestion strongly bolstered by the evidence that the Leptis statue was radiate.

In Alexandria, coins were issued with a reverse depicting a seated radiate figure of this type in each of the first series of coins minted there under Nero in AD 56/7 - 59/60.⁹² The seated figure on the reverse is not explicitly identified, for the inscription reads *Pron(oia) Neou Sebastou*, and the genitive can, of course, be either object or subject of *Pronoia*. This means that there are essentially three possible interpretations of the reverse: 1. the seated figure is *Pronoia*; 2. the seated figure is the one whose *pronoia* ensured that there was a *neos Sebastos* (genetivus objectivus); 3. the seated figure is the *Neos Sebastos* (i.e. Nero), whose *pronoia* is honoured by the coin.

As Bergmann (1998, 160) points out, the figure cannot be *Pronoia* herself, for he is certainly male. This leaves the two other possibilities, and the consensus has largely been that the figure must be Nero.⁹³ This position is difficult to maintain, however, if one takes the perspective of the ancient viewer. Coin images did not exist in isolation. Ancient viewers had a visual

⁸⁸ Bergmann 1998, 100, 106 n. 654 (rejecting the suggestion that the altar was erected to commemorate the *providentia* that thwarted the conspiracy of Sejanus).

⁸⁹ Obverse: Tarracco RPC I 221-224 (Tiberius, only 224 clearly radiate), Thrace RPC II 511 (Titus/Domitian, 80-82, rays not discernible). Reverse (all RPC I): Turiaso 422 (Tiberius, no rays discernible), Tabae 2868, 2870 (dated to the late reign of Augustus on inconclusive grounds; cf. RPC I, p. 471. A date after Augustus is suggested by the type, which otherwise occurs only posthumously), and Crete, in both types: seated figure only, 964, 968 (Caligula and Claudius respectively; rays clearly visible), and seated figure on elephant quadriga, 963 (Caligula), 966-7 (Claudius).

⁹⁰ Now in the Museum at Tripoli. Cf. Zanker 1990, 318 fig. 249; Niemeyer 1968, 59-61, 106 nr. 89; Rose 1997, 185 cat. 127, pl. 235 and pl. 217 for the original location and context..

⁹¹ Rose (1997, 185) mentions only the *corona civica*. I owe the information on the holes to Dr. J. Rossiter, who examined the statue for me when he was in Libya in March, 2005.

⁹² RPC I, 5203, 5223, 5233, 5242, 5253. No coin of this type has actually been recorded for year 4 (57/8), but as most other coins of the series do recur in that year, this is probably chance.

⁹³ Bergmann 1998, 157-164, with references to earlier studies.

repertoire in mind on which they could rely to identify specific images. The problem for us, of course, is that much of that visual repertoire has been lost. Nonetheless, as a matter of methodology, we must approach these coin-images much as an ancient viewer who relied first and foremost on her visual knowledge to identify them. Starting with the image, then, what is clear is that previous instances of this image type (seated, radiate male with long sceptre) depicted Augustus, that the image type was probably based on an actual statue in Rome, and that this statue was probably connected with the Providentia-altar celebrating imperial succession. The seated-radiate-statue-type is one of only a few types used to portray Augustus posthumously. It was relatively rare, but nonetheless widely known. Besides imperial mints, at least six civic mints issued such coins. Furthermore, the only well-preserved statue of a seated Augustus, from Leptis, also closely resembles this type, not only because it holds a long sceptre, but also because the evidence suggests that it too was radiate. That it is from Leptis Magna shows that as an Augustan image-type the seated radiate figure was widely copied and recognizable.

This evidence does not amount to conclusive proof that this image type was already known to the citizens of Alexandria as Augustus, but certainly suggests that it was likely that they would recognize it as the seated-radiate-Augustus-linked-to-Providentia type.⁹⁴ Particularly telling is the fact that the statue on these Neronian reverses is radiate. Radiate *busts* of Augustus were common on imperial as well as civic coinage of the Julio-Claudian era, including the coinage of Alexandria, and as far as any citizen of Alexandria at this time knew, *only* Augustus was depicted radiate on coins.⁹⁵ In other words, our citizen of Alexandria, noting the rays, would bear in mind that the only Julio-Claudian to be depicted radiate was *divus* Augustus, and seeing a statue-type that was also standard for Augustus (and with which she was quite possibly acquainted), would have no reason to identify this figure with anyone other than Augustus. Whether she would know the statue to be linked to succession and Augustus' Providentia we can only guess, but certainly the pronoia legend points in that direction, offering further confirmation that this is indeed Augustus. And as final proof: if our citizen were to study the whole series of which this coin was one part, she would note that the series was obviously programmatic, and that Nero occurs only on the obverse, while each reverse refers to one aspect, attribute, or supporting element of his rule: his mother Agrippina, his wife Octavia, Roma, the People of Rome, Demeter (with echoes of Livia?), Dikaiosune, Eirene, Homonoia, Agathos Daimon (with an inscription celebrating Nero as the Neos Agathos Daimon), and our seated figure with the

⁹⁴ The London Papyrus 1912 records the erection in the first year of Claudius' reign of a statue group of Claudius' family, but does not stipulate which family members would be so honoured (Rose 1997, 185-8 ca.t 128).

⁹⁵ The chance that anyone in Alexandria knew of the few brief issues of three cities in Asia Minor, minted almost a generation earlier and apparently depicting Caligula radiate, is remote. The number of Eastern cities minting civic coinage was large, as was the number of coin issues they produced. These 7 coins depicting Caligula radiate amount to no more than 0.1% of the provincial coins listed in the RPC vol. I for the Julio-Claudian period. At the same time, the *volume* of these provincial issues was remarkably low. Based on the number of dies used and an estimate of the number of coins that could be struck with a die before it was worn out, Michel Amandry (pers. comm.) estimates that the Roman colony of Corinth, in its first 100 years, minted a total of about two million *sestertii*, i.e. an average of only twenty thousand *sestertii* a year. That is hardly more than it cost to maintain one legion for one day.

Pronoia legend.⁹⁶ This is the series that introduces Nero to Alexandria as the new emperor, and in that series the providentia of Augustus in ensuring yet another seamless succession fits elegantly, far more so than a hard-to-identify image of Nero, with an unprecedented attribute (radiate crown) and unspecified Pronoia. Furthermore, it is clear how conspicuous the absence of Augustus from this series would be, if this coin does not depict him.

There is nothing in either image or legend on these Alexandrian coins that would suggest to the ancient viewer that the depicted statue had shifted identity, and that the consistent practice to depict only Augustus radiate had been abandoned.⁹⁷ On the contrary, all aspects of the coin - the image type and its tradition, the fact that the figure is radiate, the Pronoia-reference in the legend, and the place of the coin in the series - point in one direction only: the figure depicted is Augustus.

In Rome, on imperial coins, the same seated radiate figure also appeared on the first issues of Nero, but this time as a statue on an elephant quadriga. This was one of two reverse-types celebrating *divus* Claudius, the other depicting a *tensa*. Both have a laureate bust of Claudius on the obverse.⁹⁸ Here the statue/seated figure, which is clearly radiate, has been widely identified as Augustus. However, Clay (1982) has argued that because the figure next to him is holding a military standard and therefore cannot be Livia, the seated figure cannot be Augustus. Bergmann agrees, and accepts Clay's suggestion that the figure must represent *divus* Claudius, the other figure being a military personification commemorating that Claudius was installed as emperor by the Praetorian Guard.⁹⁹

This too is very difficult to accept. To begin with, it means that Bergmann is arguing that a radiate seated statue/image-type that has hitherto represented only Augustus, now suddenly depicts Claudius in Rome and Nero in Alexandria. She does not indicate how the ancient viewer would know of these changes, and one wonders how, say, a merchant changing Alexandrian coins into Roman ones was to know that the apparently identical statues depicted on the reverse of these coins represented Nero in one city and Claudius in the other. In the second place, if, as all the evidence suggests, the seated radiate Augustus is the image/statue that most directly signifies the first emperor's *providentia* in ensuring stable succession, then the presence of that statue in the funerary procession is entirely logical, and there is no reason to assume that the identity was in any way compromised by the standing figure next to it, irrespective of whether one accepts, with Clay, that it is a military personification or not. Whether the figure next to Augustus is Livia or not is irrelevant, given that in almost all other instances this statue-image of Augustus is unaccompanied. This means that there is no latent viewer-expectation that the figure must or should be Livia. It is simply a figure next to a well-known statue of Augustus, and

⁹⁶ RPC 5201-5249 (multiple series).

⁹⁷ Bergmann (1998, 161) discerns voluminous locks of hair which echo those of Nero on a few rare dies. Leaving aside the fact that Bergmann's example is too worn to carry conviction, such a minute detail applied only to a small minority of the coins is far too inadequate to suggest to the ancient viewer in Alexandria that this may not be Augustus, but Nero

⁹⁸ RIC I, 150 nr. 6 (elephant quadriga); Bergmann 1998, 130.

⁹⁹ Bergmann 1998, 130.

problems would arise only if it were one with whom Augustus cannot or must not be associated. Clearly, that is not an issue in this case, as it is perfectly feasible to imagine a consecration ceremony for Claudius in which the Augustus-Pronoia statue and the personification of the army jointly visualized the pillars on which the smooth succession of power rested. Without compelling evidence to the contrary there is, therefore, no reason to see in this seated radiate figure anyone other than Augustus (or more precisely, his statue).

It is clear that the seated radiate statues depicted on the reverse of Nero's first issues in Rome and Alexandria can and should be interpreted as images of Augustus, rather than as Claudius and Nero respectively. This image/statue remained constant throughout the Roman Empire in the half century under discussion, and it gave even a viewer who was unaware of this Augustan statue type an easy tool by which to recognize the otherwise unnamed seated figure as Augustus, namely his rays, the viewer being aware that the only emperor depicted with rays was Augustus. From a viewer's perspective, this is much more logical than Bergmann's suggestion, that assumes that the identity of this image changed from Augustus to Claudius and Nero, and that it held the latter two identities simultaneously. This denies the viewer the normal tools for visual identification (image type, attributes, parallels) and gives no indication by what alternative means the viewer was to realize that this image was not what it appeared to be.

We should now turn to the provincial coins with radiate portraits of Caligula. Here the case is different. Three cities in Asia Minor minted a small number of coins depicting on the obverse a male bust with a radiate crown with ribbons. In all cases but one, the accompanying legend identifies the radiate figure as Gaius, but on one coin from Aezani the legend commemorates his father Germanicus.¹⁰⁰ These six or seven local coins are the only examples of a Julio-Claudian ruler other than Augustus depicted radiate before AD 64.¹⁰¹ We should not exaggerate the significance of this, just one brief occurrence (Caligula held power for a mere 4 years) in just three civic mints. Together, these coins represent only 0.1% of the total output of coin types by civic mints in the Julio-Claudian era, and they appear to be relatively rare in comparison to other Julio-Claudian civic issues. By comparison, the RPC lists 123 provincial issues with radiate busts of Augustus on either the obverse (65) or reverse (58) of provincial Julio-Claudian coins. Add to that the fact that in terms of volume the output of the provincial mints was dwarfed by that of imperial mints and it is clear that these isolated Caligulan issues cannot have had much impact. Why they were produced at all remains unclear. It presumably represent local initiative rather than an imperial directive, as one would otherwise expect the practice to have been more widespread. Moreover, it has all the hallmarks of a failed initiative, as it was not repeated (for Claudius, for example), nor copied by other cities. This lack of resonance implies that the towns realized that this was not an appropriate deployment of the radiate crown.

¹⁰⁰ RPC 2454-5 (Magnesia ad Sipylum), 2474 (Smyrna), 3083 (Germanicus) and 3085-7 (Caligula)(Aezani). In the case of Magnesia, these are the only two coins issued during the reign of Caligula. In Aezani they represent three/four of fifteen, and in Smyrna one of four.

¹⁰¹ Aezani also issued one coin on which the deceased (but not divine) Germanicus is depicted radiate; Bergmann 1998, 129, pl. 25.2

We can only guess at the reasons for this initiative, and even its source must remain enigmatic.¹⁰² In the final analysis, we will probably never know whether these coins represent an error of the minting authorities, or a failed initiative on their part. Either way they are the only exception to the rule that the radiate crown was an attribute restricted to Augustus only until AD 64.

The Reality of the Imperial Radiate Crown

There is no correlation between official *divi* and the radiate crown. It is true that Augustus was not depicted radiate on coins until after his death, when he was proclaimed *divus*, but Claudius was *not* portrayed radiate after being proclaimed *divus*, nor was the *divus* Julius Caesar. On the other hand, Nero was depicted radiate during his lifetime, as were Vespasian and Titus, as early as AD 70 and AD 72 respectively, well before either was officially declared a *divus*. We have already seen that the manner in which the crown was depicted, as very real object, subtly but unmistakably sets it apart from the various contemporary conventions for the depiction divine light, and that this was emphasized in particular by the ribbons at the back. The first 60 years of its usage further undermines Bergmann's suggestion that the crown was actually a "pseudo-object", a divine attribute *disguised* as an honorific wreath. For with *divi* not radiate, and non-*divi* radiate, there was absolutely no pattern connecting the crown with divinity.

Bergmann's explanation is in any case rather convoluted, and Claus explodes at it: "*Was ist ein Pseudogegegenstand?*" he demands, and he continues "*Wenn man angeblich zwischen Götterattribut und Ehrenzeichen unterscheiden konnte, wer unterschied und nach welchen Kriterien?*"¹⁰³ Claus dismisses the whole "problem" that, according to Bergmann, the "disguise" of reality was meant to resolve, as an anachronism based on modern bias against openly divine rulers. For Claus the matter is simple: the radiate crown of Augustus and his successors was from the outset an unambiguous symbol of imperial divinity and never understood as anything other than that.

I disagree with Claus's conclusion, but his rhetorical question - "If one could supposedly differentiate between divine attribute and honorary insignium, who differentiated, and on which grounds?" - is fundamental, and far more easily answered than Claus realizes. There is no doubt in my mind that the Roman viewer could and would differentiate, or at least would attempt to do so, on iconographic grounds. The essential point, addressed by Bergmann and too easily dismissed by Claus, is that the iconography is unambiguous. From Augustus to Constantine, what the Roman viewer saw depicted around the emperor's head was a real object. If our Roman viewer were to translate that image to "real life" she would not visualize a dazzlingly divine

¹⁰² Jucker (1982) and Levy (1988) both link the depictions to the rhetorical convention to hail the emperor as "Neos Helios", placing the initiative locally. Bergmann (1998, 128-9) suggest that an alternative explanation could be that this was a response to imperial encouragement in line with Caligula's well-known divine aspirations. Both explanations are problematic. The former assumes an incorrect use of the radiate crown, which is never used as direct solar symbol, as well as a break with the tradition not to depict the emperors as deities on coins, a tradition which is otherwise fairly scrupulously maintained by the civic mints under all Julio-Claudian emperors, including in general Caligula and Nero (cf. RPC I, 47-8). Bergmann fails to explain why only three civic mints responded to the purported imperial encouragement. Surely other cities would have followed suit, even if they had not been approached directly.

¹⁰³ Claus 1999, 377.

emperor, but simply one wearing a tangible, spiked wreath of some sort, fastened with ribbons. Roman viewers would do so, because they were perfectly aware of the various well-established conventions that we discussed above for the depiction of intangible light, such as the nimbus, rays emanating directly from the head, or a combination of both. It is one of these that the viewer would have expected the Roman artists to have chosen, if it was their task to depict *divus* Augustus emanating divine light.

Bergmann claims that the artists could not do so for political reasons, but, with Clauss, I am unconvinced by that argument. Every inscription openly titled Augustus *divus*, temples were built for his cult and it was conducted by *sodales* and other priests in Rome and the provinces,¹⁰⁴ and on the very same series of coins on which he appeared radiate, he was depicted with such attributes of divinity as a thunderbolt or a star. I cannot see how depicting him radiating divine light would be problematic when all those other signs of divinity were not. One can only conclude, in my opinion, that the imperial radiate crown differed from established conventions for symbolic divine light *because it was not meant to depict divine light*, but something different. It is that different meaning that the ribbons and explicit reality were meant to stress. For they would have focussed the viewers' attention on the radiate crown in two ways, emphasizing that, yes, this was a real object, and that no, it was not a visualization of intangible or symbolic light.

An Actian Honour for Augustus?

At an immediate level, then, the depiction is quite clear: this is an emperor wearing a thing. Indeed, for the first 50 years it is Augustus wearing that thing. To establish, if we can, what that thing was, we must search for parallels, and as we have seen, the closest real parallels are the “spiky” honorary and prize wreaths and crowns awarded at the Actia. Given the overt “honorary” connotations of the radiate crown of Augustus, would not a Roman viewer suspect some connection between it - so visibly a “real” object - and the radiate wreaths of “his” Actian games? Bergmann herself toys with the idea that the Augustan radiate crown was a symbolic honour bestowed on Augustus posthumously by the senate to commemorate his divinization.¹⁰⁵ Can we take this one step further, and suppose that Augustus was awarded a very specific honorary crown “of the Actian type”, *honoris causa*? In considering this, we should bear in mind that Actian wreaths soon became widely known. The evidence ranges from Tarsus to Ostia, and *Isactian* games (games in the Actian format) were organized by other cities.¹⁰⁶

A systematic review of the evidence offers much to support this hypothesis. Particularly

¹⁰⁴ For a good survey of all divine honours for Augustus, both during his lifetime and after his death, cf. Clauss 1999, 54-75, 221-2 (*genius Augusti*), 227-232 (*Genius Augusti in lararia, numen Augusti*), 238 (calendar changes, Rome), 242-245 (calendar changes, provinces), 245-6 (*pulvinar*), 246-54 (Augustus as Jupiter), 304 (Ovid on divinity of coin portraits), 312-13 (right of asylum connected with statues of Augustus), 324 (thanks offerings), 335-6 (sanctity of images), 343 (divine honours), 351-2 (miraculous growth of trees), 356 (meaning of *divus*), 360-1 (consecration), 387- 8 (cult), 390 (priests); 394 (cult statues in Rome); 394-419 (public and private cults and priests in the provinces); cf. 473-6, 482-4, 486-7, 489, 503-6, 526.

¹⁰⁵ Bergmann 1998, 118-119.

¹⁰⁶ Leschhorn 1997, 90-91; Fortuin 1996, 86-7. Tacitus (*Ann.* XV, 23) records Isactian games in Rome, held in AD 63 in honor of Augusta, Nero's daughter.

interesting are the depictions of the seated, radiate statue of Augustus. His divinity is obvious regardless of the radiate crown, for the sceptre is a divine attribute, and the pose as a whole is reminiscent of Jupiter. Following Bergmann (*supra*) I take the altar by Augustus' feet to be the altar of Providentia. The laurel branch in his right hand is a symbol of victory connected to Apollo. If we interpret the radiate crown as a more specific symbol commemorating the Actian victory in particular the statue as a whole then neatly depicts Augustus as divine (pose, sceptre, altar) and his main achievements as establishing peace through Actium (radiate crown), maintaining it through his victories in general (laurel branch), and ensuring its perpetuity through his *providentia* for a seamless succession (altar). During the political unrest and opposition against hereditary imperial rule that dogged the first years of Tiberius' reign, this would be precisely the image with which to sum up Tiberius' claim to imperial authority.

Most images of the radiate Augustus depict the radiate crown as a simple fillet with rays and *lemnisci*, but in Leptis the rays were clearly combined with an oak wreath or *corona civica*.¹⁰⁷ This is not unique. Augustus was likewise depicted with a radiate oak wreaths on a relief in Ravenna, which dates to the Claudian era,¹⁰⁸ and on cameos in Vienna and St. Petersburg.¹⁰⁹ In addition, portraits of Augustus in Vicenza and Saintes depict him with an oak wreath with holes for rays, and there are other portraits of Augustus with evenly spaced holes around the head, but without the *corona civica*, in Venice, Luni, and Praeneste.¹¹⁰

The radiate oak wreath depicted on the ceiling block from Nicopolis now gains extra relevance (plate 77.6). It provides us with a direct link between Nicopolis and certain radiate portraits of Augustus. Though it is not conclusive proof, this soffit block decorated with a radiate *corona civica* provides strong circumstantial evidence that the Augustan radiate crown was directly connected with his Actian victory. The *corona civica* itself had been awarded to Augustus for saving the lives of citizens by ending Rome's civil war.¹¹¹ The addition of an Actian honorary crown would pinpoint the precise moment that was achieved.

There remains the problem, however, that radiate portraits of Augustus usually omit the

¹⁰⁷ Other enthroned statues of Augustus: Selçuk Mus. Inv. 1957, from Ephesus (only torso and head preserved: Rose 1997, 175 cat. 115, pl. 214); Temple of Augustus and Roma in Leptis Magna (only head survives, but a contemporary inscription indicates that Augustus was depicted enthroned; Rose 1997, 182-184, cat. 125, pl. 218); The cult statue in the temple of Divus Augustus, as depicted on coins of the Antonine period, commemorating its reconstruction (Rose 1997, 118 cat. 41, pl. 115). Seated statues of Tiberius and Claudius also survive, from Caere (both), Paestum (Tiberius), Privernum (Tiberius), and Leptis (both). Some are too damaged to determine the pose, but those that are well enough preserved clearly differ from the statue of Augustus in that they do not hold a long sceptre in the left hand as Augustus does.

¹⁰⁸ Rose 1997, 100-102 cat. 30, pls. 98,99, 101.

¹⁰⁹ Bergmann 1998, 108, 110, pls. 21.4, 22.1, 22.3.

¹¹⁰ Bergmann 1998, 110-112, pl. 24, 1-6. As with the statue in North Carolina which we discussed above, we cannot, in these cases, be certain what these holes held, but contrary to that statue, the top of the head of Augustus is finished in all these examples (with the exception of the Luni-bust, which is too much damaged), and the two cameos and the Ravenna relief provide parallels that support the suggestion that these holes held rays.

¹¹¹ Dion Cass. LIII.16; Val. Max. II.8.fin.; Suet. Cal. 19.

oak wreath and depict him wearing a simple radiate crown. Was the radiate *corona civica* a distinct object? Or did the radiate crown replace the oak wreath as it conveyed essentially the same message, but with greater emphasis on Actium, and as a crown unique to Augustus? The answers to these questions are bound up with the whole process of introducing the new radiate crown into Augustan imagery, and that process remains hidden from us. All we can say is that the coexistence of a radiate *corona civica* and the radiate crown in early Augustan portraiture does not disprove our hypothesis that the radiate crown was an Augustan and Actian attribute. A closer look at the later use of the radiate crown reveals significant further support for this hypothesis. It also raises further doubts about the radiate crown's supposed solar connotations.

The radiate crown from Nero to Constantine

Until the reign of Nero, the radiate bust of Augustus was a characteristic image on Roman Imperial bronzes. Under Nero, no bronzes were issued initially, until after a coinage reform in AD 64. Nero's new bronzes were minted on a reduced standard, and therefore to continue with the practice of depicting Augustus on the obverse of the reformed coinage would have been confusing. Hence a new image, the radiate bust of Nero, was introduced. Leaving aside the obvious attraction of the continued connection between radiate portraits and bronze coinage, as well as Nero's eagerness to associate himself with Augustus, we can only guess at how he "obtained" the radiate crown for himself. Assuming that the Augustan radiate crown was an "Actian" honour it is tempting, given the date of the first radiate portraits of Nero, to suggest a link also with the Isactian games held at Rome in AD 63 in honour of Nero's daughter, in which, one assumes, Nero participated and at which he was hence a victor. The connection with victory is certainly stressed by the coins minted between AD 64 and 66 that depict Nero on the reverse standing, radiate, holding a branch and victoriola.¹¹² His participation in the Actia is recorded for his trip through Greece in 66/7 and it was presumably on that occasion that Nicopolis was renamed Neronicopolis.¹¹³

An Exkurs: The Colossus of Nero

It is worth pausing here for a moment to look more closely at the Colossus of Nero (cat. A2b.1), and in particular consider what light our hypothesis concerning the imperial radiate crown may shed on that enigmatic statue. The Colossus is probably the most famous statue of the sun in the Roman world. Unfortunately, we can say little about its appearance with certainty as we are dealing with a statue of which nothing has survived.¹¹⁴ Based on coin images and an ancient gem, Bergmann (1994) has produced the most convincing reconstruction of it,¹¹⁵ but that reconstruction raises significant problems concerning the statue's identity. If we accept it as correct (and I see no reason not to), then it is immediately clear that this was not a

¹¹² Cf. Bergmann 1998, 175-178, pl. 34, 4-6.

¹¹³ Suet. Nero 22-24; cf. Bradley 1978. On Neronicopolis cf. Kraay 1976.

¹¹⁴ On the Colossus cf. Marlowe 2006, Albertson 2001, Smith 2000, Bergmann 1994.

¹¹⁵ Bergmann 1994, 26 fig. 10.

straightforward statue of Sol. Its iconography differed strikingly from the norm of the standard image type [sol]: in Bergmann's reconstruction the statue is radiate, but completely nude (no chlamys) and its attribute, a rudder resting on a globe, is without precedent or parallel for Sol.¹¹⁶ Hence only the rays potentially refer to the sun god, but as we have seen this is not necessarily the case.

In the course of its existence the statue underwent a number of transformations. It was originally meant to be a statue of Nero, but Vespasian (re?)dedicated it as a statue of Sol. Hadrian moved it to make way for his temple of Venus and Roma, reportedly taking the opportunity to remove the likeness of Nero from its features.¹¹⁷ He also apparently planned to pair it with a twin Colossus of Luna, but that plan was never carried out.¹¹⁸ Commodus changed the statue into one representing himself in the guise of Hercules, and after his death the statue was changed back into one of Sol.¹¹⁹ There is some evidence that the statue was redefined again under Maxentius, who dedicated it to his deceased and deified son, but it reverted back to Sol immediately after Constantine's victory at the Milvian bridge.¹²⁰

Because this statue was initially meant to represent Nero but was rededicated as a statue of Sol by Vespasian in AD 75,¹²¹ scholars have long assumed that originally the statue was meant to depict Nero in the guise of Sol.¹²² If that was the case, however, we must reject Bergmann's reconstruction of the statue, for it does not depict Nero with the attributes of Sol. Bergmann recognizes this, but downplays its significance.¹²³ In her opinion the radiate crown automatically identifies the statue as solar and neutralizes the problem of all the other attributes and aspects of

¹¹⁶ Bergmann 1994, 16.

¹¹⁷ SHA Hadrian 19, 12-13: transtulit et Colossum stantem atque suspensum per Decrianum architectum de eo loco in quo nunc Templum Urbis est, ingenti molimine, ita ut operi etiam elephantos viginti quattuor exhiberet. 13 et cum hoc simulacrum post Neronis vultum deletum, cui antea dicatum fuerat, Soli consecrasset, aliud tale Apolodoro architecto auctore facere Lunae molitus est.

¹¹⁸ If we can accept the *SHA* as accurate on this count - which is far from certain - the implication of Hadrian's activities and plans is that the identity of the statue as Sol needed to be strengthened both iconographically (changing of the features) and through context (addition of Luna).

¹¹⁹ Bergmann 1994, 11-13.

¹²⁰ Marlowe 2006, 228.

¹²¹ Plin. *NH* xxxiv, 45; Suet. *Nero* 31; Dio lxxv,15,1; *SHA Hadr.* 19, 12-13.

¹²² Marlowe 2006, 227: "The statue could thus have been conceptualized as Nero-in-the-guise-of-Sol or Sol-with-the-portrait-features-of-Nero. Either way, Zenodorus's intentions are not particularly relevant for our concerns; what is certain is that the statue bore the attributes of Sol and was widely believed to represent Nero."

¹²³ Bergmann (1994, 11) suggests, for example, that the Nero-statue was not given Sol's whip as attribute due to its humbleness ("Niedrigkeit") and also argues that the iconography of Sol as a standing figure had not yet been fixed, stating that she knows of only three examples (a Hellenistic coin, a Cretan coin from the time of Vespasian, and a wall-painting, cat. E1a.1). To these can be added: cat. B4a.1 (doubtful), C2e.2, E1a.2, H6a.1, H6a.2, H6aa.1, H6f.1. Cf. Bergmann 1994, 15-17.

the statue that are foreign to the iconography of Sol. I disagree because this runs counter to the principles set out in chapter three (no single attribute is enough to identify a figure firmly as Sol) as well as to the way I believe that Roman viewers viewed. Any interpretation which is obliged in effect to ignore major aspects of the statue's iconography such as the rudder and globe or the total nudity is, in my opinion, suspect. This means that either Bergmann's reconstruction of the statue's iconography is wrong, or that the Neronian colossus represented Nero in some other guise, but not that of Sol.

I believe that Bergmann's reconstruction is sound, which means that we must adequately explain not only the rays but also the nudity and the rudder-and-globe. The easiest way to do so is to assume that the statue was crowned with a radiate crown or wreath with *lemnisci*, the tell-tale ribbons hanging down in the neck which served to differentiate the honorary radiate wreath of Augustus from the solar radiate crown.¹²⁴ As an attribute linked to Augustus, the imperial radiate crown would complement the other main attribute of the statue, rather than clash with it. For the rudder-and-globe is also an attribute with strong Augustan connotations.¹²⁵ The full impact of those connotations is hard to ascertain as we know of the rudder-and-globe in connection with Augustus almost solely from coins, and within the web of visual information spun by Roman rulers coins generally played a supporting role. The lead players were larger: statues (often multiple copies set up strategically in various parts of the empire), buildings and their decorations, major (ephemeral) events and the visual elements associated with them, such as imperial funerals, etc.¹²⁶ The evidence certainly allows the possibility that the globe and rudder on the coins of Augustus, Tiberius, Nerva and others were referents to some major image or monument of Augustus, in which case the Roman viewer would be in no doubt about the links the colossus aimed to establish between Nero and Augustus. This would be in line with other elements of Nero's message in the last years of his reign, which stressed his Augustan connections, not least through the deployment of the radiate crown.¹²⁷

In my opinion, then, Vespasian inherited the Colossus as a statue of the athletically or heroically nude Nero-Augustus wearing an imperial radiate crown. It was begun in AD 64, i.e. shortly after the Isactia had been held in Rome and in the same year as Nero's radiate portrait was introduced on the reformed bronze coinage. To what degree it was finished when Nero died is

¹²⁴ On the different types of radiate wreaths cf. Chapter 3 and chapter 6.

¹²⁵ Cf. the denarii of Augustus depicting a capricorn with globe and rudder (RIC 126-130, 547a); asses of Tiberius (Arnaud 1984, 115-6, fig. 54); denarii of Nerva with the radiate bust of Divus Augustus on the obverse and a rudder-and-globe on the reverse (RIC 131). For further examples, see Bergmann 1994, 16. Cf. Arnaud 1984, 109-10 n. 154. Bergmann (1994, 16-7) offers persuasive reasons to assume that the rudder-and-globe was a part of the colossus from the outset, and not a later addition.

¹²⁶ The ancient viewer, geared to interpreting the coin image in allusion to or in context with some major image, monument or event, would realize that she did not fully understand the coin if she did not know to which major visual example it alluded.

¹²⁷ Bergmann 1994, 6.

unknown, but it was not until AD 75 that Vespasian formally dedicated the statue.¹²⁸ Clearly he could not do so as originally intended, and that he dedicated it at all is slightly surprising. One assumes that the statue was an artistic and technical *tour de force* that was too impressive to destroy, notwithstanding its subject. But having decided to conserve this work of art, Vespasian had to redefine it into something acceptable. Our sources hint at confusion in this respect, with some suggesting that it was a portrait of Titus or even, still, Nero, while others say it depicted Sol.¹²⁹ Whatever the cause and extent of that confusion, it is clear that we cannot deduce from the fact that Vespasian dedicated the statue to Sol that Zenodorus designed it to depict Sol or Nero in the sun god's guise. As we have seen, that was clearly not the case, unless Bergmann's reconstruction is incorrect. In other words, Vespasian did not dedicate the Colossus to Sol because it depicted Sol, but simply because that was his best option under the circumstances.

What were in fact his options, once he had decided not to dismantle this colossal masterpiece portraying Nero-Augustus? Not many. It is important to note that the rays in particular limited the possibilities. In Roman art at this time the two major radiate figures were Augustus and Sol, each with his own particular type of rays. Transforming the Colossus into a statue of Augustus would have required a complete remodelling of the facial features and neck. Removal of the rays would merely enhance the impact of Nero's portrait features and thus also require extensive modifications of the facial features. The only other possibility was to retain the rays in modified form - they could easily be changed into "solar" rays by removing the characteristic ribbons from the back of the Augustan crown - and pass off the statue as one of Sol despite its anomalous iconography. It would appear that this was what Vespasian did, though with limited success judging by the confusion reported in our sources.

Ironically, then, the most famous Roman statue of Sol was not designed to depict the sun god and iconographically never really did.

The radiate crown as standard imperial attribute

Perhaps the strongest evidence that the radiate crown was not a divine symbol, but rather an honorary crown uniquely linked to Augustus, lies in the fact that Vespasian adopted it from the outset of his reign. If the radiate crown symbolized divinity, it is difficult to understand Vespasian's motives in copying Nero's adoption of that symbol.¹³⁰ But if we take the radiate crown as a symbol of Augustus' Actian victory, Vespasian's move becomes completely logical. In general, Vespasian was concerned to forge links between himself and Augustus, and to present himself as one who, like Augustus, had put an end to civil war and restored peace and prosperity to the empire. Adopting the radiate crown as Augustan symbol makes eminent sense in this context, the more so because Vespasian could present himself as having achieved a victory that

¹²⁸ It is not clear how far advanced work on the colossus was when Nero dies, but it was probably not completed. Smith (2000, 536-538) therefore suggests that nothing needed to be changed, and that the statue may never have had the features of Nero, emphasizing at the same time that really we do not know. It seems to me likely, however, that at least the head - with rays - was finished. Otherwise it is hard to explain how a statue with this iconography came to represent Sol.

¹²⁹ Marlowe 2006, 227-8.

¹³⁰ Cf. Bergmann 1998, 231-2, who quotes Alföldi.

was truly comparable to Actium in his defeat of Vitellius, ending civil war. In this sense it also served to contrast Vespaian favourably with Nero, as Vespaian could claim to have achieved a victory that was verily Augustan in scope, a far cry from any “Actian” achievement that Nero may have claimed. Finally, as symbol of Augustan victory, it is also clear why Titus was awarded the crown in AD 72, after suppressing the Jewish revolt, while Domitian remained without during the reigns of Vespaian and Titus.

The coinage of Vespaian and Titus further underlines the Augustan and Actian connections. For example, a number of issues of both Vespaian and Titus depict, on the reverse, a rostral column surmounted by a radiate statue (plate 76.3).¹³¹ The image is identical to that on coins issued by Augustus in 28 BC,¹³² with the one difference that on the Augustan coins the statue is not radiate. Two rostral columns were erected in Rome under Augustus. The one, in the Forum, commemorated his victory at Naulochus, the other, in the precinct of Apollo on the Palatine, erected immediately after Actium, commemorated that victory. That the Augustan coins of 28 BC depict the latter is obvious - Actium had eclipsed Naulochus - and is confirmed by the Flavian coins that depict the statue of Augustus atop the column now radiate.¹³³ These coins significantly reinforce the argument that the radiate crown was an Augustan honour connected specifically with Actium, and that by its adoption Vespaian and Titus portrayed themselves as elevated to Augustan stature through their victories of Actian proportions.

Other coins, minted after Vespaian’s death, also link him closely to Augustus. The seated radiate statue type is now deployed again, and again in two variants, either by the altar of Providentia or on the elephant quadriga.¹³⁴ Of the first type, one still bears the legend DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER and hence directly imitates the first, Tiberian bronzes of this type. The other depicts a figure with somewhat different features, but also radiate, with branch and long scepter, and a new legend DIVVS AVGVSTVS VESP. Closely related is the legend on the coin with the elephant quadriga (DIVO AVG VESP), and here too the iconography of the seated figure has been slightly changed: he holds a victoriola in his right hand. On all of these coins the iconographic reference to Augustus is explicit and unmistakable, but at the same time there is an important innovation. On two of the three, the seated figure is apparently identified as Vespaian, with only the nearly identical figure on the third still being Augustus. The message seems clear: Vespaian is the new Augustus, victor in a new civil war, who like Augustus himself has again established continuing peace and prosperity by ensuring a new line of succession (*providentia*).

In the case of these coins, such a shift in identity of the seated radiate figure is straightforward, and there are none of the problems associated with Bergmann’s proposal for the coins of Alexandria and Rome, minted early in Nero’s reign. In the first place, these Flavian

¹³¹ Bergmann 1998, 110; BMCRE II, 45 nrs. 253-4; 225 nrs 12-3; 228, 27-9.

¹³² BMCRE I, 103.

¹³³ Cf. Hill 1980, 212. That the Augustan coins postdate Actium is clear from the legend IMP CAESAR, as the title IMP was not introduced on Augustan coinage until 29 BC. Earlier studies, followed by Zanker (1990, 41-2), erroneously dated the coin to the late 30s and hence identified the monument as that of Naulochus.

¹³⁴ Bergmann 1998, pl. 42.1-3.

coins have unequivocal legends linking the seated figures to either Augustus or Vespasian. In the second place, they confirm, as we argued above, that the vested identity of the seated, radiate figure was Augustus. Through these coins - as indicated by their legends - as well as perhaps through a new, closely similar, seated radiate portrait statue of Vespasian (at the altar of Providentia?), the echoes of Augustus, evoked by this type, were now transferred to Vespasian. This shift in identity was further facilitated by the fact that the radiate crown had now lost its exclusively Augustan connotations, and had in the preceding 15 years become a more generally imperial attribute. Ancient viewers would not still have assumed a priori that a radiate figure must be Augustus, as they would still have done in the late 50s.

Nonetheless, we must take care not to exaggerate the clarity of these coins. There is typical visual (and verbal) ambiguity here, allowing multiple readings at different levels condensed into these small objects. On the DIVVS AVGVSTVS VESP coin, for example, the ancient viewer confronted a paradox. Her immediate reading that this image was Augustus would be at odds with the legend stating that it was Vespasian. In a society like ours, that privileges word over image, resolving such a conflict is straightforward: the words trump the image and (re)define it. But we cannot assume that Roman attitudes and reactions were the same. Given the more limited literacy on the one hand, and the elaborate, rigid, and consistent nature of Rome's visual semiotic system on the other, the "balance of power" between images and words in the Roman world was a very different one when it came to constructing and reading meanings. Word and image enhanced each other on these coins in the fashion, almost, of a visual/verbal oxymoron. This coin, then, was designed to be more ambiguous than it may appear to us. The image *is* Augustus, enhanced by the legend to somehow encompass Vespasian as well.

The same is true of the other two coins. At first glance the DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER coin may appear less ambiguous - it faithfully imitates the coins of Tiberius - but in the context of these posthumous issues celebrating the newest *divus*, Vespasian, it too takes on multiple meanings. For in this context, the term *pater* in the legend surely evoked Vespasian, the *divus* of the day, of whom the new emperor, Titus, was the *filius*, and at the very least reminded the viewer of the extent to which Vespasian had become identified with Augustus in the imperial ideology. On the third coin there is an interesting shift in case. The dative DIVO AVG(usto) VESP(asiano) identifies for whom the procession with the elephant quadriga was, but does not explicitly identify the statue drawn by the elephants as Vespasian. Under the Julio-Claudians it had been Augustus, recalling his *providentia*, and these connotations remain. For the imagery is calculated to ensure maximum reference to Augustus, without actually identifying the statue as Augustus. In fact, it is only the changed attribute, now a victoriola, that suggests the statue is not the traditional one of Augustus. This is logical, given that it was not Augustus' *providentia* that had ensured smooth transition of power to Titus, but that of the new Augustus: Vespasian.

These ambiguities should neither surprise nor trouble us. In the complex fabric of imperial propaganda, coins such as these were but minor threads of the communication between authority and audience. The aim was not to transmit with precision a narrowly defined message with these coins, but to evoke in broad, general terms, the main thrust of one or more of the major themes of propaganda, which were transmitted with greater detail, clarity, and impact through other means, both visual and verbal. Most of this propaganda has been lost to us, not just through the destruction of time, but also because much of it was ephemeral to begin with - the processions, the speeches, the proclamations, the festivals, and the like. This has deprived us of

much of the context with which these coins interacted, and leaves us to guess at the full scope and thrust of the ideological discourse of which they were an element.

Later Empire

By the end of the reign of Domitian, radiate portraits of the living emperor had become standard fare. The radiate crown was now a conventional and conventionalized symbol of imperial authority, ultimately rooted in the honorary crown of Augustus, and used primarily on coinage, where it was a useful marker identifying double denominations such as dupondii and, later, antoniniani. On coinage the seated, radiate statue was repeated one more time, for Titus, and then abandoned.¹³⁵ There is some evidence for imperial radiate portrait busts of marble, as a few survive with evenly placed holes that may have held bronze spikes as rays. These holes are not in the head itself, but in some sort of fillet, crowning the head.¹³⁶

In short, the radiate crown with *lemnisci* remained an Augustan attribute throughout, and it was as such that later emperors adopted it. It continued to be depicted as a real crown because it *was* a real crown, awarded uniquely to Augustus and almost certainly connected to Actium. Within the Roman visual semiotic system, the radiate crown with *lemnisci* did not belong in the paradigm for divine light. It was carefully differentiated from the various forms of rays and nimbi because in nature and function it was different. Hence it did not associate its bearer with divinity or Sol, but identified the bearer as the Actian victor Augustus or, later, as imperial and Augustan - the visual counterpart of the imperial title *Augustus*, if you will. This offers further confirmation

¹³⁵ An interesting passage in Pliny's panegyric for Trajan may shed some light on these seated radiate statues (Plin. Paneg. 52): horum unum, si praestitisset alius, iam dudum illi radiatum caput, et media inter deos sedes auro staret aut ebore, augustioribusque aris et grandioribus victimis invocaretur. Tu delubra non nisi adoraturus intras, tibi maximus honor excubare pro templis postibusque praetexi. Bergmann's (1998, 240-2) analysis of this passage is unnecessarily complicated and not wholly convincing, not least because she professes herself puzzled by the *media inter deos sedes* (241 n. 1467). While the precise events to which this passage alludes are not clear (or at least, not as clear to us as they were to Pliny's audience, who had witnessed them), I believe we can still understand the general gist of it without too much trouble. In the first sentence, horum unum refers back to the achievements of Trajan previously enumerated, often contrasted with the (negative) actions of his (unnamed) predecessor. Likewise in these sentences the contrast must be with Domitian. The implication appears to be that Domitian was depicted radiate and had a throne of gold or ivory "among the gods" and was invoked with "more august" altars and "greater" sacrificial animals, all during his lifetime, and that these were honours bestowed upon him (at his instigation) for achievements which paled in comparison with those of Trajan. We have no evidence indicating where this was, but the adjective *augustus* clearly suggests that we should think of a context that included Augustus. As a guess, I would hazard a group of statues that consisted of Augustus and the Flavian *divi*, seated (on thrones of gold or ivory), and radiate, as we know them on coin reverses (*supra* nn xx,xx,xx). Pliny's passage would then indicate that Domitian had a statue of himself placed among these *divi*, also seated, also radiate, which was connected with a "more august" altar (clearly a comparative, contrasting it with the altar of Augustus, or of the other *divi* in general) and received more elaborate sacrifices than the others. This is conjecture. Pliny goes on to refer to the many statues (of Domitian) in gold and silver that stood in the temples of Rome, and perhaps it is to one of these he refers.

¹³⁶ Cf. A bust of Gordian III in Florence (Bergmann 1998, pl 55.1), and of Gallienus in Copenhagen (Bergmann 1998, pl. 55.3), both with stone "fillets". Very similar is the portrait of an unidentified older man in the Louvre, MA 4710, dated to the early 3rd c. A bust of Alexander Severus differs slightly, in that it has a groove across the head that presumably once held a metal fillet, and holes just above the groove.(Bergmann 1998, pl. 55.2) A bust thought to be of Commodus, in Rome, is similar (Bergmann 1998, pl. 47.1-3 & pl. 48.1-3).

of one of the contentions of this study, namely that Sol and “solarity” cannot be postulated on the basis of rays alone. Depending on their iconography, rays and nimbi had a broad range of different specific meanings and usages, all well-defined, carefully maintained over a period of centuries, and not interchangeable. These conventions were understood by artist and viewer alike. It is only in modern scholarship that the strength and nature of these conventions has been insufficiently acknowledged, leading to confused and confusing interpretations of essentially straightforward images.

The Colossus of Nero is one such image. As we have already seen, it does not resemble Sol in any way, assuming that the reconstruction of Bergmann is accurate. This is especially true if the statue depicted Nero with a radiate crown with ribbons, in which case there was absolutely nothing in this statue that suggested to the ancient viewer that this was Sol, or Nero assimilated to Sol. Likewise is unproblematic, if it depicted him with a radiate crown with ribbons.

Constantine-Sol or Constantine-Augustus on the porphyry column in Constantinople?

The radiate statue of Constantine on the porphyry column in Constantinople (cat. A2f.1) is a similar case.¹³⁷ Like the Colossus of Nero it too should be understood as a statue with the Augustan radiate crown with *lemnisci*, not a solar crown without. Malalas reports that the statue had stood in Ilium prior to its erection in Constantinople in AD 330.¹³⁸ The presence of a statue of Constantine at Ilium is not unexpected, for according to some sources, Ilium had initially been chosen as the site of Constantine’s “New Rome”, before he changed his mind and decided on Byzantium instead.¹³⁹ Indeed, given that original location, the fact that the statue was radiate is suggestive. The initial choice of Ilium as the site for Constantine’s new city is obviously fraught with references to old Rome and its Trojan links exemplified by Aeneas.¹⁴⁰ Within this quintessentially Roman tradition, Constantine could image himself as one who had, like Augustus, successfully ended civil war and reunited East and West, and one who brought the wanderings of Aeneas full-circle by refounding Rome on its original soil, at Troy - indeed, as Sozomen says, on the very tomb of Ajax, symbol of those who had destroyed the old Ilium. To erect, in that “New Rome” at Ilium, a statue of Constantine crowned with the Augustan radiate crown, symbol of unifying, peace-bringing victory and rule, would make eminent sense. This is speculation, of course. Our sources are scant, and written quite long after the fact. But Sozomen does clearly link the decision to switch from Ilium to Byzantium to a vision from God, implying that pagan connotations made Ilium unacceptable to the Church. In general, it cannot be that Constantine chose Ilium as a site without intending the obvious references to Troy, Aeneas, and

¹³⁷ Bergmann 1998, 284-287; Fowden 1992; Philostorgius (HE II.17); Malalas (XIII.320).

¹³⁸ All that Malalas states is that the statue was moved from Ilium to Constantinople. His statement offers no grounds for the suggestion this was first a statue of a different person or god, transformed into one of Constantine after its arrival in Constantinople (*pace* Fowden 1992, 126).

¹³⁹ Sozom. *Hist. Eccl.* 2.3; Zos. 2.30.

¹⁴⁰ On the enduring vigour of these associations, cf. Sage 2000.

Augustus.¹⁴¹

In Constantine's day, a statue of the emperor wearing the imperial radiate crown with *lemnisci* would have been unremarkable. It is only in later sources that we find increasing confusion about the nature of the statue, and notably its rays. The suggestion that the statue was originally one of Apollo, changed into Constantine, is first made in the 10th century¹⁴², and can easily be explained as the result of Byzantine ignorance Roman iconographic conventions. We must keep in mind that after Constantine the radiate crown with ribbons was abandoned in Roman art, and the carefully differentiated Roman practices for the depiction of symbolic and divine light soon followed, replaced by new, Christian iconographic rules. It is more than likely that within a few centuries Byzantine authors were no longer well enough versed in pagan iconography to recognize the significance of the ribbons of imperial radiate crowns. Like their modern counterparts, they wrongly assumed a direct link between rays and the sun.¹⁴³

Evoking Sol with the imperial radiate crown.

Once we abandon the notion that the radiate crown with ribbons was a solar attribute - and I believe that the preceding has shown conclusively that we must do so - little evidence remains for overt solar assimilation by any emperor. I am not suggesting that Sol was absent from imperial religion and ideology. On the contrary: from Augustus and his Apollo-Sol to Constantine prior to his abandonment of paganism, there are significant examples of emperors who showed a particular interest in Sol. Nor am I suggesting that the emperors rejected divine

¹⁴¹ Sage (2000, 217-8), following Ceașescu (1976) toys with potential connections to Caesar and his rumored plans to move to Troy (Suet. *Div.Iul.* 97.3), but in general is skeptical about the reported plans of Constantine at Ilium. According to him the Constantinian walls there, quoted by both Zosimus and Sozomen as still visible testimony of Constantine's building activities (cf. Cook 1973, 158), were probably not part of urban construction but of a monument commemorating Crispus' naval victory over Licinius. It is certainly conceivable that a statue of Constantine would adorn such a monument - even though the actual battle was fought by his son - and Sage sketches vague but tantalizing parallels with Nicopolis. But his proposal cannot account for the removal of Constantine's statue from Ilium (not mentioned by Sage). If we accept both Sage's suggestion and the passage in Malalas, then we must assume that Constantine gutted a newly erected monument at Ilium to obtain a statue of himself for Constantinople. This would imply that Constantine somehow lacked the resources to produce a new statue of himself in Constantinople, which seems highly unlikely. Even Rome had numerous statues of the emperor, including the colossal figure in his basilica, the statues from his baths (one now on the balustrade of the Campidoglio, another in the narthex of S. John Lateran), etc. This means that we must either reject Malalas' testimony, or, taking it together with the evidence of Zosimus and Sozomen, conclude that Constantine initially planned to build a new imperial city at Ilium, then abandoned those plans and transferred them - and his statue - to Constantinople.

¹⁴² Cf. Fowden (1992, 125-128), who argues plausibly that there is evidence this story was already circulating some centuries earlier.

¹⁴³ Other examples of the emperor "as Sol" are also less than conclusive, the identification often based on circular arguments. A marble head in the Museo Nazionale Romano, for example, has been plausibly identified as a portrait of Commodus (Bergmann 1998, 248-252; Cioffarelli 1988, R 225, 300). A groove and holes suggest some metal object, possibly a radiate crown, adorned the head. Here the same principles apply as with the statue in N. Carolina, discussed supra. We know neither the context of the head nor the nature of the adornment with certainty. A radiate crown with ribbons would be perfectly feasible, and would not suggest any connection with Sol, and the holes need not have held rays at all. Therefore there are no grounds to adduce this head, or others like it, as examples of assimilation of the emperor to the sun.

status for themselves.¹⁴⁴ But the radiate crown was not an emblem of that status, nor were solar connotations of any kind integral to imperial divinity. There are at best some scattered references to Sol, mostly in literature, a few in extant images. According to Dio, Nero was depicted as a charioteer in a field of golden stars on the *velum* covering the theatre of Pompey for the ceremonial crowning of Tiridates as king of Armenia, and this is taken by some as a clear solar reference.¹⁴⁵ But they refer to Nero's adoption of the radiate crown, the Colossus, and other such cases as providing the contextual evidence for a Neronian policy of self-representation in solar guise,¹⁴⁶ and as all these examples rely on the radiate crown as solar symbol, that argument is flawed.¹⁴⁷ This does not affect the solar connotations implied, I think, by Dio, and if we accept the source at accurate, there is at least some suggestion that the sun - kept out by the *velum* - has been replaced by Nero driving a chariot between scattered stars. But even such an image itself would not amount to evidence for a concerted assimilation of Nero to Sol, far less these few words in Dio, vaguely describing it.

Two extremely rare *aurei* may depict the youthful Caracalla and Geta with traits of Sol, as both are radiate and have a raised right hand, and interestingly the radiate crowns of the youths lack *lemnisci* (plate 77.3). That, and the raised right hand, suggest that an echo of Sol is meant here, but as these coins are iconographically unique, and extremely rare, it is difficult to gage their meaning or impact.¹⁴⁸ I know of no other imperial images that sport two distinctly solar iconographic elements in this manner.¹⁴⁹ All told, visual references to other gods, notably Jupiter and Hercules, far outweigh any references to Sol in imperial iconography.

Very different are the fairly common acclamations of the emperor as *neos Helios* in the East, and comparisons to Sol in panegyrics and the like. Here the sun is used as a metaphor for the emperor, evoking august qualities that are "sun-like". Adjectives like *neos*, as well as the general build-up of the text, allow the orator close control over the understanding the audience has of who is meant (the emperor) and what the role is of the solar imagery (metaphor for

¹⁴⁴ On the divine status of living emperors, cf. in particular Claus 1999.

¹⁴⁵ Dio Cass. 62 (63), 6,2: Τά γε μὲν παραπετάσματα τῶν διὰ τὸ ἥλιος διαταθέντα, πῶς τὸν ἥλιον περὶ οἱ, λουργὴν, ἀνὰ μέσον αὐτῶν ῥαμὰ λαύνων Νέρωνος νέσσει το, περίξ δὲ στέρεις χρυσοπέλαμνον. Cf. Bergmann 1998, 181.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Bergmann 1998, 181 n. 1084.

¹⁴⁷ Moormann 1998. As Bergmann (1998, 133-230) has shown in her careful analysis of the evidence, many examples of supposed solar (and orientalized) imagery connected with Nero, as put forward by Cumont, L'Orange, and others - such cases as the Domus Aurea as "Solar Palace", or the Mithraic imagery supposedly deployed in the crowning of Tiridates - do not stand up to scrutiny. In fact, if we take away the radiate crown, no clear examples remain at all.

¹⁴⁸ Berrens 2003, 41-2. The aureus of Caracalla was discovered only recently, but its existence was previously conjectured. Cf. Bergmann 1998, 270.

¹⁴⁹ In HA Gall. 16.4, the claim is made that Gallienus scattered gold dust in his hair, and often went forth radiate. Although some conclude that this indicates that Gallienus styled himself as Sol, the passage is rightly rejected as unreliable by Bergmann (1998, 121), and is in any case hardly firm evidence that Gallienus presented himself as Sol.

imperial virtues). It is important to keep in mind that only verbal texts have the prerequisite paradigmatic and syntagmatic tools necessary for such metaphorical imagery. Visual texts do not. In particular, visual texts lack the syntagmatic ability to gradually, over time, create a clear understanding in the audience of the primary subject of the text - the emperor - and secondary elements, such as the references to the sun, that are metaphorically related to that subject. Verbal texts can develop a distance between subject and metaphor, created in the chronological progression through the text and explicated with appropriate words, such as the adjective *neos*, at the right moment, that allows the speaker or writer to construct a clear hierarchy of meanings between the different components of the text - the emperor as primary component, for example, and the solar metaphor as secondary and subsidiary. It is far more difficult to establish such a hierarchy of components in visual texts. There are certainly tools available to the artist - relative size for instance, with secondary elements depicted on a much smaller scale than the primary ones - but none subtle enough to allow for the type of differentiation within one figure of which verbal texts routinely avail themselves.

This brings us back to a central point argued in chapter 2, that one can never turn to verbal metaphors to elucidate images. It does not mean that the concepts behind such verbal metaphors were not visualized. The relief from Ephesus (cat. C1f.11), now in Vienna, which depicts Sol (among others) walking by the horses of the chariot of Lucius Verus' apotheosis, comes close to evoking the same types of concepts as *neos helios* would in a panegyric. But this is not a visual *translation* of the words *neos helios*. It is merely the use of conventions specific to the Roman visual semiotic system to express related concepts. We must stress again that to understand Roman art we must view it on its own terms, as an independently constituted semiotic system fully equipped to communicate concepts without recourse to texts. Roman art gave shape to concepts in a uniquely visual way, just as Roman texts did verbally, but art never directly visualized words any more than texts - even ephraseis - could fully verbalize images.

This fundamental principle is of importance if we are to understand the concepts depicted by the final group of images I wish to discuss in this chapter. Around AD 200, Septimius Severus minted an aureus with on the reverse the jugate busts of himself and his wife, Julia Domna in a design that was repeated on a number of issues.¹⁵⁰ Septimius Severus wears a radiate crown with *lemnisci*, and the bust of Julia Domna rests on a crescent. In Roman imperial coinage, this is the first time that the radiate crown of the emperor is balanced in this manner by a crescent of the empress.¹⁵¹ The references to Sol and Luna are unmistakable, but we must take care not to misinterpret the jugate busts separately as Septimius-Sol and Julia-Luna respectively. Within the Roman visual semiotic system, the juxtaposition of Sol and Luna created a new, indexical sign, with the *joint* images of Sol and Luna as the signifier, and concepts of cosmic eternity as the signified. This sol-and-luna sign is irreducible. It is true that the component parts, respectively Sol and Luna, are themselves signs, but taken independently their respective meanings are very different, and at best only distantly related to the significance they take on when represented as a pair. One could compare this to the words "day" and "sun", each signs in their own right with

¹⁵⁰ RIC IV.1, 162 nr. 522, 218 nr. 36, 220 nr. 52, 221 nr. 59, 231 nr. 125, 315 nr. 7; Berrens 2005, 42-3; Bergmann 1998, 271, pl. 52.4.

¹⁵¹ The practice has precedents in local coinage as far back as Augustus. Cf. Bergmann 1998, 271.

their own meanings, which take on a very new and specific sense when combined to form “Sunday”. Just as Sunday does not signify “sun” or even “day” (think of “Sunday night”) the sol-and-luna sign does not signify the Roman deities Sol and Luna, or even cosmic bodies sun and moon, but an abstract concept - eternity - to which the actual sun and moon (whatever their nature) have only a metaphorical connection.

At issue here is the realization that a viewer seeing Sol and Luna together did not read the image as [Sol] and [Luna], but as [sol-and-luna], a unified signifier with its own specific signified. Hence this Severan aureus likewise does not depict [Severus-Sol] and [Julia Domna-Luna] as individual signs, but [Severus/Sol-Julia/Luna] as an irreducible, individual sign. This sign does not imbue the empress and emperor with any particular divine status, but presents them as joint symbols (and guarantors) of earthly imperial *aeternitas*. Hence the legend: CONCORDIAE AETERNAE.

What we have, then, is a subtle visual metaphor. The radiate crown of the emperor, itself not a symbol of solar divinity, has attained a secondary meaning through the context - provided by the crescent below the bust of Julia Domna - supported by its obvious similarity to the radiance of Sol. Together with the lunar crescent it has turned the jugate busts of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna into a new, indexical sign: that of the imperial *concordia aeterna*, in which the emperor and empress jointly take on a metaphorical meaning derived from that of the image type [sol-luna]. They not only symbolize but are also the guarantors of the *aeternitas* of their domain, the Roman Empire, standing to it as the image type [sol-luna] stands to the cosmos and its stable eternity.

Conclusion

What these coins show is that under certain circumstances the obvious similarity between the imperial radiate crown and solar radiance could be exploited, enabling the artist to imbue the imperial portrait with new and different symbolic meanings derived directly from the image type [sol]. Such secondary, metaphorical usages of the imperial radiate crown bring us to a new level of meaning and visual communication, and full circle in this chapter. What we have established, first of all, is that the imperial radiate crown is not a solar or divine symbol. This has confirmed the basic principle that care must be taken not to assume automatically that rays of any sort indicate a reference to Sol. The imperial radiate crown was real object, carefully and consistently differentiated from visual conventions for symbolic or divine light. It had its own meanings and connotations unconnected with Sol. For the first fifty years of its use it was an honorary crown associated exclusively with Augustus. From Nero onwards it evolved fairly rapidly into an honorary crown associated with the Augustus (or Augusti) of the day. That is the primary nature, the dictionary definition if you will, of the imperial radiate crown, and that meaning was maintained throughout its three centuries of use.

But Romans were clearly well-attuned to the potential metaphorical meanings of the imperial radiate crown as well, as we have seen with the jugate busts of Septimius Severus and Julia Domna. The exploitation of those potential secondary meanings was possible at any time and in any context. This means that the nature of the radiate crown itself, and what the Roman viewer saw in a radiate portrait on coins, for example, can be two separate issues. Coins are small, but their visual messages nonetheless complex, and a degree of controlled ambiguity was therefore desirable as the artists strove to achieve maximum effect within the strict limitations

imposed by the medium. The radiate crown, I believe, is a prime example of such controlled ambiguity. If we take the radiate portraits of Augustus, for instance, the first thing to keep in mind is that Augustus was divine, and that every Roman knew that. Hence every Roman viewing any posthumous coin portrait of Augustus saw a god, whether he was radiate or not. It is quite likely that the radiate crown reinforced this in the way that, for example, an oak wreath could not, and that at various levels of viewing, it achieved this reinforcement in different ways. For those glancing at the coins, as well as for uninformed viewers, the rays would probably intuitively suggest radiant light and hence divinity. The more informed viewer studying the coin closely would see an attribute worn only by Augustus, and hence uniquely divine by virtue of association. She would also, presumably, know or learn that it was a specific honour awarded to Augustus in commemoration of his crowning achievement in ending about a century of civil strife with his victory at Actium. This realization that the depicted object was a real crown rather than a symbol of godhead would not diminish Augustus in the viewer's mind - Augustus did not need rays to be a god - but would simply add further levels of meaning to a significant image.

That Nero deemed this attribute especially appropriate for himself was no doubt not just for its associations with Augustus, but in part also because of the associations it evoked with Apollo, and contemporary viewers will not have missed that. This does not change the fact that for Vespasian, as we have seen, the radiate crown was the perfect attribute to link him to Augustus *and* contrast him with Nero at the same time. Nor does it change the fact that the radiate crown of the emperors was a real object, honorary in nature, but not a symbol of divinity.

Thus while the evidence clearly points towards the reality of the imperial radiate crown as an Actian and quintessentially Augustan honour, I believe that it was its inherent ambiguity, so easily exploited, that made it a particularly useful attribute for such restricted images as coin portraits. Any iconographical analysis of such images will therefore ultimately be successful only if it teases out such ambiguities, rooted in secondary and metaphorical meanings of the radiate crown, and recognizes their value and power within the overall intended message. That, however, is a task that falls well beyond the scope of this study.