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### Sol

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## Chapter 3. Description and Discussion of the Iconography of Sol

### Introduction

The Romans had clear and easily recognizable iconographic conventions for what we have termed the three image types [sol]<sup>1</sup> - the youthful radiate bust, the nude standing figure with whip or globe, and the radiate charioteer of a quadriga - which are the ones most commonly used to depict the sun, i.e. s/Sol, in the Roman world. Regional variants exist, as do hybrid depictions, and for the study of solar religion in the Roman world such images are also of interest, but the present study is concerned with the three basic image types [sol] only.

Despite variations in certain aspects, there can rarely be any doubt whether a particular image is based on one of these image types [sol] or not. In this respect, they meet the prime prerequisite of successful visual communication, namely that the image types used be clear and unambiguous. This is in itself an important conclusion. It means that these images depicted concepts that were sufficiently important to command a notable degree of continuity and recognizability in Roman art.

Of course, the fact that the image types [sol] adhere to certain fixed conventions does not imply that every representation of such an image type had the same meanings. These can vary according to context, change over time, differ from region to region and in any case are not fixed, far less immutable. In fact, it is precisely the immutability of the image types, over such a long period of time, that allows them to take on more complex, conventionalized meanings. Hence whereas the images form a distinct group in an iconographical sense, they do not necessarily do so in a semiotic sense. The basic Sol image was not an iconic sign but almost invariably an indexical one or, at a lower level of articulation, a component part of an elaborate indexical or even symbolic sign. In other words, within the Roman visual semiotic system it was bearer of a range of conventionally established rather than intrinsic meanings. I am stressing this point, because I wish to emphasize that defining and studying the three specific image-types [sol] and their attributes iconographically, which is the scope of this chapter, cannot be equated with defining and studying what those images meant. It follows that this chapter is not - indeed, cannot be - a comprehensive discussion of all ways in which Sol or concepts associated with (or represented by) Sol were visualized in the Roman world. The only aim of this chapter is to study the morphology of the main, tripartite image [Sol] as charioteer, standing figure, or bust.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the image types [sol], cf. Chapter two. On the iconographic conventions, cf. LIMC Helios/Sol (C. Letta). Cf. Richter 1909-1915; Bernhard 1933; Schauenburg 1955; Matern 2002, 47. No ancient discussions of the iconography survive, although some sources do provide pertinent information. Cf., e.g., Tert. *De Spect.* 9.3. (quadriga), Verg. *Aen.* 12, 164 (radiate crown).

<sup>2</sup> This tripartite image-type is the prime form by which Sol was visualized by the Romans, but of course regional sun gods, whom the Romans may or may not have considered to be the equivalent of Sol, could have very different iconographies (cf., e.g., the statuettes of Syrian solar deities mentioned below, and, e.g., cat C2i.1), as could Apollo who was often equated with Sol (e.g. cat. C2a.18). In certain contexts - primarily mythological and Mithraic - Sol could also be depicted more freely than the strict lines of the dominant schema. Nor should we forget non-iconic "depictions" of Sol. In architecture, Sol could be integrated in the iconographic and architectural design through

## The basic image types of Sol

In Roman art, Sol's iconography was dominated by the three basic image-types: Sol as charioteer, Sol as standing figure, and busts or heads of Sol. He is invariably a young man, clean-shaven, almost always radiate, and normally carries a whip, a globe, or both. He is usually nude, although he always wears a cloak or chlamys. Sometimes he is represented dressed in a long chiton. In the later Empire he has normally raised his right hand in an arresting gesture. Local variations hardly exist, and all parts of the empire produced numerous representations of Sol which adhere to this standard iconography in every respect. When variations do occur, it is therefore best to assume that these were chosen consciously, to differentiate the depicted figure from canonical Sol-types.<sup>3</sup> Other exceptions include the rather rare depictions of Sol as active participant in mythological and mithraic scenes, of Sol seated,<sup>4</sup> and a very small number of gems possibly depicting Sol on horseback or riding a lion.<sup>5</sup>

The iconography of these image types for Sol is closely related to the Classical and Hellenistic iconography of the Greek Helios, and such differences as there are tend to be matters of emphasis rather than substance.<sup>6</sup> In Greek art, Helios is usually clothed in a chiton of some sort, while in Roman art Sol tends to be represented nude. But the Greek Helios could also appear nude<sup>7</sup> and in Rome Sol was fairly regularly depicted dressed in a chiton of some sort.<sup>8</sup> In Greek and early Roman art the common attribute is a whip. The (celestial) globe was introduced

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careful management of the admission of sunlight, best exemplified by the Serapeum in Alexandria, where rays of light entering through tiny hole uncovered at the right moment would fall precisely on the lips of the cult statue, thus representing Sol kissing Sarapis (Tran Tam Tinh 1984). On the use of light in sacred architecture (Greek), cf. Williamson 1993; cf. Parisinou 2000.

<sup>3</sup> In Syria, for instance, youthful radiate gods who are armed and wear full body armor do not represent Sol, but a local deity such as Malachbel. Cf. Seyrig 1971.

<sup>4</sup> This is notably the case with depictions of Phaethon; cf. cat. C1f.2, C2c.8, C3a1.2-4, 6-7, 10-13, D4.2, E4b.1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Cat. H12

<sup>6</sup> On the iconography of Helios in Greek art, cf. Matern 2002, 47-52, 58-62, 83-87, 166-169.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. LIMC Helios 94.

<sup>8</sup> Sol in chiton (selection): cat. B1.20 (Trier, undated); B1.21 (Laodicea, undated); C1a.6 (Rome, early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C1e.3 (Rome, early 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD); C1f.10-11 (Ephesus, c. AD 170); C1f.13 (Baia, early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C1f.16 (Perge, early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2a.2 (Berenice, 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); C2a.8 (Fano, late 2<sup>nd</sup>- early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2a.14 (Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD); C2c.15 (Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2c.23 (2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2c.74 (Ptuj, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2c.84 (Rome, 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD); C2f.51 (Zagreb, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2g.7 (short chiton, Inönü, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2h.54 (Djemila, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2h.96 (Ksar-Toual-Zammeul, undated); C3a2.3 (Rome, AD 220-250); C3a3.1 (Grottaferrata, mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); C3a3.2 (Rome, early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C3a9.1 (Rome, first half 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); D5.1 (Merida, mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); D5.3 (Rome, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); E1c.1 (Rome, second half 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); E4a.1 (Pompeii, mid 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); F3.1 (environs of Naples? 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); F4.4 (Wettingen, undated); G1a.121 (Porto, undated); G1c.6 (Rome, 2nd-3rd c. AD); G5.1 (Italy, 2nd-3rd c. AD); H3d.1-2 (2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); H3g.1 (2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> c.); H6ad.1-2 (1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> c.); H6o.1-6 (2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD); K2.1 (Herculaneum, late 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC - early 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); K2.2 (Primaporta, after 17 BC); K2.8 (Lecce, ca. AD 100); and others. On coins cf. L1.2 (132 BC); L2.60 (AD 267); L2.163 (AD 310); L2.167-9 (AD 308-11); L2.175 (AD 310); L2.226 (AD 319).

no later than the first century AD, and by the third century it had displaced the whip as Sol's most common attribute on coins, although the whip never disappeared, and remained the more common of the two in non-numismatic depictions. The most striking change in Sol's iconography occurred in the course of the second century AD, when it became increasingly common to represent him with a raised right hand. In other respects, however, Sol's iconography remained constant for half a millennium or more.

In the following paragraphs each aspect of Sol's iconography will be discussed separately, with attention both for the meaning of each element and for the associations it evokes.

### **Youth**

Sol is depicted without exception as young and beardless. A bearded figure cannot be Sol.<sup>9</sup> As a rule he also has an abundance of longish locks of hair, though not quite the shoulder-length hair of Apollo or Dionysus. Sol's hair is not in tresses, but normally takes the form of thick, loose locks framing the face. These locks are generally not groomed, although sometimes there is a suggestion of a parting in the middle. At times the central locks above his forehead are brushed up and back in an *anastole*, and when this is combined with a slightly tilted head, strong brows, slightly opened mouth, and perhaps an upward gaze, the similarities with portraits of Alexander the Great cannot be ignored.<sup>10</sup>

### **Rays**

Rays or a radiate nimbus, symbolizing light, form perhaps the most important element of Sol's iconography, rays being the most common, although the radiate nimbus was also quite popular. The rays are generally depicted as emanating directly from the head of Sol, but in rare cases they may be depicted as if they were attached to a fillet of metal circling the head. In a very few cases, Sol can be depicted on a quadriga that is radiating light, but otherwise Sol is never depicted with rays emanating from any part of his body except his head.

Important though it may be, the representation of emanating light is not an essential element of Sol's iconography, and in rare cases he can appear without any visualized radiance at all. How often this actually happened is now difficult to judge: frequently one may assume that painted rays, now lost, enhanced the original image.<sup>11</sup>

### **Raised right hand**

Particularly in the third and fourth centuries AD, one of the most striking elements in the

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<sup>9</sup> This is true from classical Greek art onwards. In archaic Greek art, Sol is sometimes bearded. Cf. Matern 2002, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Cf., e.g., a denarius minted under Vespasian; *RIC* II 18 no. 28, pl. I.2. For further discussion of the Alexander-like images of Sol, cf. *infra*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., e.g., C1a.6 (Rome, early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2b.2 (Rome, c. AD 150); C2c.3 (Nesce, AD 172); C2c.4 (Rome, mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); C2c.50 (Rome? 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2i.4 (Plumpton, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); C2w.5 (Rome, AD 246); C3b1.6 (Rome, AD 180-90); D5.4 (Rome, 1<sup>st</sup> half 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); F1b.1 (Italy, 20 BC - AD 10); K9.12 (Grand, 1<sup>st</sup> half 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); K9.16 (Mathay, 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD).

iconography of Sol is his raised right hand. In that period he is almost invariably represented with this gesture whenever he is depicted as a full-length figure, standing, walking, running, or driving a chariot. Usually the arm is outstretched, though his elbow is lightly bent. He raises his arm only slightly above the shoulder so that his open hand is at about the same height as his head.<sup>12</sup> The slightly bent elbow and loosely opened hand ensure that the pose is generally fairly relaxed, likening it most to the confident *adlocutio*-gesture of an orator commanding attention, or to a gesture of power, blessing, or salutation, such as that of the emperor in many equestrian statues. Sol certainly never adopts the stiff stance of the fascist salute, nor is his posture threatening or apotropaic.

### **Chlamys and Chiton**

In Greek art, Helios was normally dressed in the long chiton of charioteers, generally with a high belt above the waist, sometimes with cross-belts over the shoulders. In Roman art, Sol tended to be nude, but he is rarely without a cloak. This cloak generally takes the form of a *chlamys* or travelling cloak, and as such is a suitable attribute for Sol. Usually the chlamys is fastened with one fibula and hangs down behind Sol, covering one shoulder and upper arm, but the chlamys can also hang down from both shoulders or be depicted as billowing out behind him. At times it can be quite long.<sup>13</sup>

Sol is not necessarily nude in Roman art. If dressed, he invariably wears a chiton. Usually it is a long one of the type common to Greek charioteers, but on rare occasions it may be a short chiton.

### **Quadriga**

Tertullian writes that Luna drove a *biga*, Sol a *quadriga*, and Jupiter a *seiugis*.<sup>14</sup> It is certainly true that Sol and Luna are invariably depicted with a quadriga and a biga respectively. One simply cannot identify a charioteer as Sol unless his chariot is drawn by four horses. Of course this does not mean that every *quadrigatus* necessarily had solar connections.<sup>15</sup>

In art as well as literature, Sol's horses are generally white. Hyginus names them as Eous, Aethiops, Bronte, and Sterope. In addition to these, he mentions Homeric names, but here the text is corrupt and only the name Abraxas can be salvaged with certainty, along with the probably mangled name Therbeeo. Finally, there are the four names given by Ovid: Pyrois, Eous, Aethon, and Phlegon.<sup>16</sup>

The number of horses yoked to the quadriga invites numerical symbolism connected with the seasons. There was a significant amount of such symbolism connected with the quadriga, the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Plate 7.2-6, plate 8.1, 3-4, cat. L2.19, 26-8, etc.

<sup>13</sup> On the chlamys in Hellenistic art, cf Lattimore 1975.

<sup>14</sup> Tert. *De Spect.* 9.3.

<sup>15</sup> Dunbabin 1982.

<sup>16</sup> Hyg. *Gen.* 183, Cf. Ovid *Met.* 2, 153.

circus, the circus factions, and Sol.<sup>17</sup>

### Whip

From the earliest representations in Roman art, a whip is a frequent attribute of Sol. It generally consists of an arm-length rod to which a cord is attached at one end. It refers to Sol's role as charioteer of the solar chariot, but also occurs when Sol is represented as a standing figure or a bust. The whip is not unique to Sol, as it is also an attribute of Luna, but no other gods have a whip as a standard attribute.<sup>18</sup> Therefore when some other male deity is depicted with a whip, this can be taken as a reference to Sol, unless, of course, the deity is driving a chariot of his own.

### Globe

The globe (*globus*, σφαῖρα) was originally a Greek teaching device for lessons in astronomy and astrology.<sup>19</sup> It represented the cosmos, which was imagined to be round, with earth at its centre.<sup>20</sup> Often a diagonal band with figures of the zodiac crosses the globe, or it may be decorated with other astrological symbols. Painted globes were usually coloured blue, with a red band for the zodiac.

Both in form and function it is a useful iconographical symbol. The globe represented the cosmos, and thus any figure bearing the globe was represented as being a prime mover of (or in) the cosmos.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the Roman republic the globe had become an abstract symbol of (cosmic) power, with Jupiter, Dea Roma, and the Genius Populi Romani regularly represented bearing a globe. From Caesar onwards, all Roman rulers bear the *globus* as a sign of their power. Joint rule can be symbolized by the joint holding of a globe. Often the emperor receives a globe from a god, formerly usually Jupiter or Roma, but in the third century increasingly also Sol or Mars. It has clearly become a conventional sign of supreme power, although that does not mean that its cosmic symbolism had been forgotten.

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<sup>17</sup> The number of gates was 12, equal to the number of months or signs of the zodiac. A race consisted of seven laps (planets, days of the week). There were four teams, with the whites representing winter, the reds summer, the greens spring, and the blues autumn (Tert. *De Spect.* 9.5). For a comprehensive discussion of such symbolism, cf. Humphrey 1986.

<sup>18</sup> For human charioteers with whips of the same type, cf. e.g. Papini (2002, 95) and the references gathered there.

<sup>19</sup> *Kleine Pauly* II, 814-815 s.v. "Globus"; *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* II, 695-700 s.v. "Kugel"; Schramm 1958, 1. Arnaud 1984, 60-3. For a recently discovered Roman celestial globe of the second century AD cf. Künzl 1996, Künzl et al. 2000.

<sup>20</sup> The cosmic globe should not be confused with the earthly globe. In antiquity, the notion that the earth was round was controversial, but there is no agreement on how strong or widespread the opposition to the concept was in the circles of ancient society responsible for developing iconographic conventions. For contrasting views, cf. Arnaud (1994, 63-5) with Schramm (1958, 11). Sol holds a celestial globe, not a terrestrial one, and Arnaud (1984) gives compelling evidence that in Roman art all globes were, in fact, models of the cosmos, not earth.

<sup>21</sup> Alföldi 1935, 77; Brilliant 1963, 75; Kantorowicz 1963; *RAC* 110, 957-959 s.v. "Herrschaftszeichen"; Schneider 1997.

## Other attributes

There are certain other attributes with which the image types [sol] can occasionally be depicted. These are too rare to be termed standard elements of the iconography, but occur regularly enough not to cause confusion.

### 1. torch or torches

There are a fair number of depictions of Sol with one or even two torches.<sup>22</sup> A torch can also be an attribute in images that conflate image types of Sol and Apollo.<sup>23</sup> Matern (2002, 95-8) argues that the torch is an attribute typical of depictions of Sol in the East, but she bases this almost solely on civic coinage. The lack of civic coinage in other parts of the empire largely voids this argument. The torch certainly does occur on a fair number of local coins (*supra*), which indicates that it was deemed a normal attribute for Helios in the East. Of the non-numismatic representations, however, five are from Italy, Gaul, or Germany, and a Western provenance is likely (but not assured) for the gem in Naples which was formerly in the Farnese collection (H4h.1). This number is larger than the number of Eastern non-numismatic depictions, and is too significant to dismiss outright, although it is obviously too meagre to allow firm conclusions. All we can say is that the torch was a relatively rare attribute, but that artists as far afield as Vienne, Rome, or Ephesus felt comfortable depicting Sol with it.

The majority of these representations date to the reign of Septimius Severus or earlier.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the civic coins, the significance of this is difficult to gauge, given the general decline of civic coinage in the <sup>third</sup> century AD. It is noteworthy, however, that the non-numismatic depictions also tend to be earlier rather than later, as the majority date to the first or second century AD.

The torch is far more common as an attribute of Luna than of Sol, and when the two are

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. C1a.4 (Khirbet Tannur, 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD, 2 torches); C1f.3 (Vienne, 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); C1f.7 (Rome, early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); C1f.11 (Ephesus, c. AD 170); C2e.3 (Auxerre, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); C2e.25 (Neckarteilfingen, undated, torch doubtful); C3a1.12 (Rome, ca. AD 300); D1b.2 (Beth Shean, 6th c.); G4.4 (Egypt, undated); H1h.1-2 (1st-2nd c. AD); H1ha.1 (early 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); H4h.1 (Italy? late 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC); H6g.1 (2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); H6k.1 (3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); H15cb.1 (undated). On civic coinage, Sol/Helios is also sometimes depicted with a torch. Cf. BMCGrC XIII, 197 nr. 20 (193-211, Prusa ad Olympum), XX, 20 nr. 13 (161-180, Pessinus), XXI, 83 nrs. 8-9 (161-176, Hierapolis-Castabala, torch on ground next to Helios), 156 nr. 66 (245, Soli-Pompeipolis), XXII, 200 nr. 94 (180-92, Philadelphia in Lydia), XXIII, 351 nr. 151 (161-9, Tralles), XXV, 154-5 nrs. 4-5 (180-92, Colossae, Phrygia; cf. also Matern 2002, 294 M121, fig 110, ca. AD 200, not in BMC), 160-1 nrs. 10-13 (253-9, Cotiaem, Phrygia), as well as coins of Colonia Germa, Galatia (180-192, Matern 2002, 297 M167, fig. 115), Prusias ad Hypios (161-9, Matern 2002, 289 M50), Selge (222-235, Matern 2002, 295 M139), Hypaipa (193-217, Matern 2002, 291-2 M86-7), Ankyra (161-180, Matern 2002, 297 M166), Tavion (193-217, Matern 2002, 298 M169), Hadrianopolis (238-244, Matern 2002, 286 M19), Etenna (244-9, Matern 2002, 295 M136a-b)

<sup>23</sup> Cf. a statue from San Marinella, now in Civitavecchia, Mus. Civ, depicting Apollo/Sol with torch and bow.

<sup>24</sup> Of the coins listed *supra* n. 23, five date to the reign of Septimius Severus, and ten predate his reign, from a total of eleven cities. Five cities minted seven such coins after Septimius Severus.

together, Luna is more likely to hold one than Sol.<sup>25</sup> Likewise Lucifer, preceding Sol, may be depicted with a torch, rather than Sol himself. In general, the torch is associated with night, rather than day - it is a standard attribute for Hecate, for instance - which can explain its rarity as attribute of Sol.

## 2. Staff.

In a small number of cases Sol is depicted with a full-length staff on which he is often leaning.<sup>26</sup> Most are early in date, although on coins the staff can occur as late as the reign of Severus Alexander.<sup>27</sup>

Matern sees the staff as an oriental attribute and suggests that it shows “daß die Vorstellung vom Sonnengott als einer Art himmlischer Herrscher eher im Osten verbreitet war und Rom erst zu einer späteren Zeit erreicht hat.”<sup>28</sup> Matern arrives at this conclusion based on the civic coinage of the East, and by treating what she considers to be a short sceptre (discussed below) and the long staff as attributes with the same force of meaning. This leads her to place much emphasis on a statuette from Laodicea in Leiden, and on a relief from Maonia, also in Leiden. I have excluded the latter because the actual attribute in the left hand has been lost, while the former, I believe, does not belong here because the attribute is significantly different.<sup>29</sup> But even if we were to include those two depictions, their number is far too small to support Matern’s contention, quoted above, the more so because the long staff also occurs twice in the West in

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<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g. cat. C2w.13, G1c.1-2, 5, 10, 17, and K2.2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. cat. C2e.2 (Mainz, last quarter 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); E2.1 (Rome, ca. 20 BC; identity as Sol uncertain); H4e.1 (1<sup>st</sup> half 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD); H6f.1-4 & H6fa.1 (50 BC - 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); H6i.1 (first half 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD). On a small number of local coins, Helios is also depicted with a long staff, either leaning on it, or carrying it over his shoulder: BMCGrC XIV, 167 nr. 67 (222-235, Magnesia on the Maeander), XXII, 199 nr. 73 (180-92, Philadelphia in Lydia; cf. Matern 2002, 292 M94a-b, dating to the reigns of Caracalla and Severus Alexander, not in BMC), XXV 28 nr. 35 (180-92, Aezanis in Phrygia. Matern (2002, 93-4) also mentions two coins from Tralleis, a coin from Nicomedeia in Bithynia, and some Cappadocian coins on which a figure identified as Helios or a solar deity is depicted leaning on or carrying a staff. In some cases, as Matern points out, the deity is not Helios, in others, the staff is difficult to discern.

<sup>27</sup> The Roman Imperial mint issued a number of coins between 199 and 210 which some have deemed depict Sol with globe and long staff or inversed spear. Cf. RIC IV.1, 127 nr. 287, 217 nrs. 30a-b, 218 nrs. 39a-40, 220 nr. 55a, 277-8 nrs. 407, 408a-b, 410, 412, 233 nr. 141, 289 nr. 474, 314 footnote (described as sceptre). Matern (2002, 303 M243) is not certain that these coins depict Sol and Berrens (2004, 43-4) argues that the figure represented is Caracalla. In most cases the postulated radiate crown is indeed difficult to make out - e.g. 39a. The other attributes, globe and spear, are common with many figures (globe) and very rare for Sol (spear). Whether or not the figure is Caracalla, as Berrens claims, or some other *rector orbis* as the legend indicates, it seems unlikely that he is Sol.

<sup>28</sup> Matern 2002, 94.

<sup>29</sup> Matern (2002, 92; she mistakenly refers to G25 of her catalogue, an intaglio in Cambridge, but clearly means G28) presents the statuette as an example of Sol leaning on a scepter or lance, but Sol is holding the short staff in the crook of his arm as a whip, not leaning on it.

non-numismatic representations, and as early as the late first century BC.<sup>30</sup> The real problem is that once again, Matern relies too heavily on the Eastern civic coinage to make her point. As with the torch, so too the occurrence of a sceptre or staff as attribute of Helios on Eastern civic coinage can have no bearing on the question whether this was also an acceptable attribute for Sol in the West, because there was no comparable civic coinage there. Matern's evidence simply confirms that it was known in the East.

What we have then are two early depictions of known provenance - Rome and Germania - a number of civic coins from autonomous mints in the East, and a handful of early imperial intaglios of unknown provenance, documenting Sol with a long staff. This evidence shows that the full-length staff was a rare attribute that occurred primarily in earlier representations. It cannot be connected to a specific region of the Empire, as our evidence is simply too meagre and inconclusive. All that can be said is that the earliest examples are from the West, and that by the second century AD the attribute is documented from Mainz to Asia Minor.

### 3. Other attributes

Inevitably, with such a large collection of images, there are variants. On a few coins in Asia Minor, Helios is depicted with a cornucopia;<sup>31</sup> a coin in Rome minted under Elagabal depicts Sol with a thunderbolt, and one minted under Aurelian has him brandishing a branch.<sup>32</sup> There are other, comparable examples. As a general rule, it is safe to assume that ancient viewers would have noticed these variants as digressions from the norm, and - especially in the case of targeted audiences - would have understood the intended references, which now may no longer be apparent or retrievable. For example, in the case of Elagabal's coin, the reference is to his Emesan god Heliogabalus who, being a Ba'al, could be identified with Jupiter as well as Sol.<sup>33</sup> In the case of the branch, a laurel may have been meant, emphasizing Sol's connections with Apollo (and hence linking Aurelian to Augustus, as both share the "same" patron deity). More remarkable than the variants themselves, however, is the fact that there were so few. Throughout the Roman period the image types [sol] adhered to the established iconographic norms and digressions were rare.

### **The Image-types of Sol: overview and history**

From the previous it follows that the three image-types under consideration in this study can be composed as follows:

#### 1. Standing figure:

The figure is always youthful and beardless, and generally has longish locks of hair. He may be radiate (rays alone, or combined with a nimbus) or, rarely, not. He almost invariably has a

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<sup>30</sup> Matern does not refer to the Farnesina fresco.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Matern 2002, 101

<sup>32</sup> Cat. L2.29 (thunderbolt), 92 (branch).

<sup>33</sup> SHA Elag. 1.5.

chlamys, sometimes long, but generally short, and is otherwise nude, unless he is dressed in a long chiton. There are rare exceptions when the chiton is short. His main attribute is a whip, but a globe is also popular, either together with a whip, or replacing it. Other, rare, attributes are a long sceptre, a lance, and a torch. From the first century AD onwards, he can be depicted with a raised right hand, outstretched in a powerful gesture. This is initially fairly rare, but becomes increasingly popular in the second century AD and in the third and <sup>fourth</sup> centuries is one of his standard features.

Sol is usually depicted standing in a contrapost pose, but on coins in particular he can be depicted walking or running as well, sometimes trampling captives underfoot. On coins he can also crown emperors with crowns, or hand over a globe. Generally speaking, however, it is rare to find Sol - standing or otherwise - engaged in a specific activity.

## 2. Charioteer:

The figure of Sol on a chariot adheres to the same iconographic conventions as the standing figure. Sol invariably drives a *quadriga*, and can be depicted standing on it, or stepping into it. In two dimensional depictions the *quadriga* is usually depicted in profile, but three-quarter representations and frontal *quadrigae* are also frequent. Of the latter there are two types. The horses may be depicted full-frontal, four abreast, but more commonly they are depicted jumping away in pairs to either side, thus framing the central image of Sol.

Many other charioteers are also regularly depicted in Roman art, and to identify a charioteer as Sol a number of his defining attributes - rays, whip/globe, and/or raised right hand - are essential. In the case of small images, such as gems, attributes such as the radiate crown can often be difficult to see, making access to very good photographs, impressions, or the original, essential to confirm published identifications.

## 3. Bust or partial figure:

A great many depictions of Sol are restricted to his head or bust, or more rarely to his upper body. In the latter case, the full range of defining attributes (whip/globe, raised right hand, chlamys, possibly chiton, and of course rays) can be expected. In the case of busts and heads, the range is more limited. Context becomes more important, as does the radiate crown. In most cases the latter is present, but not always. We have examples of busts without rays that were found in mithraea and almost certainly represent Sol.<sup>34</sup> Many busts and heads of Sol are given an additional iconographic feature - a whip behind the shoulder, for example - to further confirm his identity.

Even of the busts with suitable radiance, not all depict Sol. There are various examples of radiate busts with unmistakable portrait features dating to Hellenistic and Roman Imperial date.<sup>35</sup> Certain deities, such as Men, recognizable by their own iconographic conventions, may also be

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *infra*.

<sup>35</sup> For a good example, cf. an intaglio portraying Trajan in Hannover, Kestner Museum, discussed by Bergmann (1998, 243 pl. 45.1).

depicted with rays.<sup>36</sup>

### **Pitfalls, Peculiarities, and Problems in the iconography of the main image types for Sol**

The iconography of Sol is clear and straightforward. Nonetheless, there are certain areas where earlier scholarship has confused the principles of Sol's iconography. The most important problems and issues are reviewed here.

### **Representation of divine radiance in Roman Art**

It is important to keep in mind that not all radiant figures are in some manner "solar" or related to (or reminiscent of) Sol. There were numerous ways to represent symbolic light, and there are numerous examples in Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman art of deities, both astral and non-astral, who are represented as in some way radiant.<sup>37</sup> We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that the depiction of divine radiance and (symbolic) light in Roman art was governed by iconographic conventions which differentiated between types of radiate light, with different forms of symbolized radiance used for different subjects.<sup>38</sup> At what point this differentiation developed is difficult to say, but by the mid first century AD at the latest, the following categories of radiance can be discerned in Roman art:

#### 1. Nimbus.

The nimbus is a circle or disc of symbolic light behind the head; generally blue or white.<sup>39</sup> Nimbi are used primarily in paintings and mosaics, rarely in bas-relief, and virtually never in three-dimensional art. Most gods and goddesses can be represented nimbate, but emperors only from Constantine onwards.<sup>40</sup> The nimbus without rays is *not* an attribute of Sol.<sup>41</sup> I know of only four examples of Sol with a nimbus but no visible rays. In three cases, these are reliefs which were probably painted, suggesting that the rays were perhaps picked out in paint and have hence disappeared. The fourth case is a mosaic in which the head of Sol is too damaged to state

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<sup>36</sup> Bergmann 1998, 70-72

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Bergmann 1998, 41-46. That symbolic radiance does not automatically imbue a figure with astral or solar characteristics is often forgotten, although Stephani (1859, 2) already scathingly dismissed scholars who believe that all forms of radiate light are solar as "Gelehrten (...) denen Nichts unmöglich ist".

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Bergmann 1998, 45-6; Matern 2002, 181-2.

<sup>39</sup> Bergmann 1998, 45; Wallraff 2001, 145-151; Matern 2002, 181.

<sup>40</sup> Wallraff (2001, 147), quoting Keyssner (*PW* s.v. Nimbus, 617) stresses that there are scattered examples of nimbate portraits during the tetrarchy. On Antoninus Pius depicted with the radiate nimbus of the Phoenix, cf. Bergmann 1998, 243-4 pl. 45.3.

<sup>41</sup> As Bergmann (2006, 159) notes, this simple fact is all too often ignored. In archaic and classical Greek art, Helios could be depicted with a nimbus only (Matern 2002, 181 n. 987), but Bergmann (1998, 45) notes that the differentiation between nimbus only and nimbus with rays had already begun in the Hellenistic era and was fully established in Roman art.

conclusively that rays were altogether absent.<sup>42</sup> In any case, even with these four examples, the number of images of Sol with a nimbus-without-rays is significantly lower than depictions of Sol that lack any kind of symbolic light (cf. *supra*, n. 11). This means that a nimbate figure is never Sol unless the full range of other iconographic attributes precludes an alternative identification.<sup>43</sup>

## 2. Rays and radiate nimbus.

Rays emerging from the head are commonly depicted in Roman art and are a standard aspect of Sol's iconography. They are usually shown as lines or pointed spikes, but can also be more triangular in shape. When coloured they are generally yellow or golden. With very rare exceptions (cf. *infra*, n. 46) rays are confined to male deities. In the case of Sol, the number of rays ranges from three to more than thirty, but five, seven, or nine are the most common, especially on frontal figures. This allows for a balanced, symmetrical depiction with one vertical ray emerging from the top of the head and two, three, or four rays to either side. Thus while the presence of seven or twelve rays may have a symbolic meaning as well (referring, e.g., to the seven planets of which Sol is one, or the twelve months and signs of the zodiac), the evidence suggests that the number is often the result of artistic expedience rather than symbolic intent.

In two-dimensional art (mosaics, paintings, low relief) the rays often occur in combination with a nimbus. In three-dimensional art this is understandably rare, and the few examples rather awkward.<sup>44</sup> There appears to be no appreciable functional difference between the representation of rays only and rays with a nimbus. Sol and astral deities are regularly depicted with either but with other deities these two forms of radiance are quite rare.<sup>45</sup> In general,

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<sup>42</sup> The three reliefs are all from Germany: a mithraic relief from Dieburg, (Dieburg, Kreis- und Stadtmuseum 22052; cat. C2c.8); a mithraic relief from Osterburken, (Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum. C 118; cat. C2c.58); and Sol as one of the planetary deities on a Jupiter column, now destroyed, formerly in Hanau (cat. C2e.19). The possible fourth example is a fourth-century mosaic in the house of Aion in Paphos, cat. D5.8. A fresco from the Farnesina (E2.1) may be a depiction of Sol with a nimbus only, but iconographically this figure differs from the norm for Sol in so many ways that his identity is far from certain. In mausoleum B in the Vatican Necropolis Sol may be nimbate only but his head is too poorly preserved to be certain (E1c.1).

<sup>43</sup> The difference between a nimbus with rays and one without is often overlooked, leading many to take the mistaken view the nimbus was a primarily astral or even solar symbol (cf., most recently, Wallraff 2001, 129, 145). See also chapter 6.

<sup>44</sup> Matern (2002, 176-8, 181) distinguishes a separate category of rays, combined with what she describes as a polos-like object, and occurring predominantly in stone sculpture. I believe that Matern is right that this is not really a polos, but rather a three-dimensional "nimbus" with rays in relief on it. This allowed the artist to opt for stone rays rather than metal spikes without the risk that the rays that would easily break off. Cf. the statue of Sol in Copenhagen (cat. A1a.5), and the busts cat. A3.2 and A3.11.

<sup>45</sup> Examples include Men (e.g. RPC IV, 11013, Tabala, AD 147-161) and numerous other local deities of Syria and Asia Minor (Bergmann 1998, 71), Sarapis (commonly radiate on coins of Alexandria), Jupiter (Bergmann 1998, 72 gives examples from the first century AD and later), Poseidon (Sena Chiesa 1966, 105 nr. 49, pl. 3; cf. Bergmann 1998, 72), Dionysus (Rhodian coinage of the first century BC, e.g. RPC 1., 2751), Apollo (e.g. RPC IV, 2819, Blaundus, AD 161-180) and some personifications on Greek coins (Bergmann 1998, pl. 32, 1-3, 8 (Pronoia), pl. 45, 5-6 (Homonoia). Lions (as the zodiac sign Leo) can also be depicted radiate, e.g. RPC IV, 5512, Nicaea, AD 138-161.

therefore, we can follow Bergmann (1998, 72) in assuming that rays and radiate nimbi were more specifically astral in character (though certainly not necessarily solar), and therefore not interchangeable with the less specific, non-radiate nimbi.

### 3. Radiate crown.

Also known as a *Strahlenreif* (Alföldi 1935, 107-8, 139-141), the radiate crown is depicted as if it were an object that actually existed. It has the appearance of a thin band of metal encircling the head just above the ears, to which vertical spikes have been attached as rays.<sup>46</sup> The suggested *reality* of this object is further accentuated in the manner in which the encircling band can disappear under the hair of the bearer.<sup>47</sup> Only Sol is depicted wearing a radiate crown of this type, and that only rarely, predominantly in small-scale profile busts.<sup>48</sup> More often, the rays disappear into a roll of hair and curls along the side of the head, implying (but not depicting) a hidden fillet under those curls to which the rays are attached.<sup>49</sup> The idea that Sol wore a removable crown of rays is voiced repeatedly in antiquity. As early as ca. 600 BC, Mimnermos speaks of the rays of Helios lying in his golden bedroom.<sup>50</sup> In the Aeneid (12, 164), Latinus wears a radiate crown *solis avi specimen*, i.e. of the same type as his forefather Sol.

### 4. Radiate crown or wreath with ribbons.

There is a minor but essential difference between the rare radiate crowns of Sol and the more common radiate crowns or wreaths of Roman art worn primarily (but not exclusively!) by the emperors. The latter type invariably have ribbons or *lemnisci* at the back which hang down in the neck of the bearer.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the nature of the crown or wreath itself, to which the spikes or rays are attached, shows greater variety. It can be depicted as a metal band, similar to that of the radiate crown of Sol discussed above, but it can also be broader and resemble a cloth diadem with rays. Other types include oak- or laurel wreaths with rays.<sup>52</sup> The interpretation of these radiate crowns and wreaths with ribbons is a complex problem to which I return in chapter six.

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<sup>46</sup> E.g. on certain late Republican denarii: Mn. Aquillius (109-8 BC), *RRC* 314 nr. 303; C. Coelius Calvus (61 BC), *RRC* 457 no. 437. 1a.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. certain dies of the obverse of a denarius struck by P. Clodius Turrinus in 42 BC (*RRC* 505 no. 494. 20a, pl. LIX. 494.20a)

<sup>48</sup> The only exception to this rule that I know of is a rare coin of Geta with a radiate crown of this type (plate 77.3), Berrens 2004, 42.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. on coins of Trajan of AD 116, *RIC* II 267 nos. 326-330, 341-342.

<sup>50</sup> Mimn. fr. 10 G-P; cf. Ovid, *Met.* 2, 40-1

<sup>51</sup> Bergmann 1998, 116-117. This is true for all two-dimensional depictions of the radiate wreath. We also have a small number of marble portrait busts with a radiate wreath of some kind, consisting of a rather thick band around the head just above the ears, into which holes were drilled to hold the rays. These appear not to have had *lemnisci*. For a further discussion of these busts see chapter 6.

<sup>52</sup> For radiate laurel wreaths cf. Bastien 1992, 117-8. On radiate oak wreaths cf. chapter 6.

What is important to note at this point is that they are *never* an attribute of Sol or any other traditional deity. At a practical level the *lemnisci* thus immediately inform the viewer that the bearer of the wreath is *not* Sol or some other traditional deity, but a person, usually (but not always!) an emperor, and usually (but not always) alive.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, whereas the nature of the object on Sol's head - a "real" crown, or simply rays of light - is often left unclear by the artist through his use of hair and curls to "hide" the fillet (if there "is" one), the same artists take great care to clearly depict the reality of the radiate crown with ribbons, ensuring in particular that the ribbons themselves are always visible. Radiate crowns and wreaths of this type are worn by men only, not women.

Two basic forms of radiance can thus be discerned in Roman art. On the one hand we have the clearly symbolic depiction of divine radiance in nimbi, radiate nimbi, and rays emanating from the head or the whole body. On the other hand we have the rare radiate "crown" without ribbons of Sol and the radiate crown or wreath with ribbons of (mortal) men, which are both clearly *depicted* as if they were real objects rather than symbolic representations of light only.

The degree to which these forms of radiance have solar connotations varies. Nimbi without rays are suitable to most deities but not to Sol. Rays and radiate nimbi appear to have more specific astral connotations, but are not necessarily solar. The rare metal fillet with rays occurs with Sol only, and conversely the radiate crown or wreath with ribbons is never worn by Sol.

Thus despite an at first glance confusing range of types, and contexts, for the representation of symbolic radiance and the like, there were actually clear rules governing, and limiting, the acceptable usages of the different types of radiance. Given the longevity of these conventions - at least three centuries or more - and the consistency with which artists adhered to them, we cannot doubt that understanding these conventions was a part of normal visual literacy in the Roman Empire. This means that the type of symbolic radiance becomes an important tool in identifying the figure - human or god, solar, astral, or divine. It also means that we must reject the still common tendency to assume automatically that the presence of symbolic light associates a figure with Sol. From the preceding it will be clear that certain forms of symbolic light actually have the opposite effect of precluding solar identification and hence, by extension, solar connotations.

This carefully differentiated series of conventions for the depiction of radiance in Roman art is an excellent example of the sophistication of Rome's visual semiotic system. It corroborates the evidence from ancient sources such as Cicero (quoted in chapter two, n. 55) that iconographic conventions even governed such details as the correct colour for a given deity's eyes. It also shows that we cannot place ourselves in the shoes of Roman viewers and rely on our intuition or common sense to read Rome's carefully coded images. We shall see in chapter six, for example, that the actual nature and meanings of the imperial radiate crown has hitherto eluded us because we have underestimated the fundamental role of these strict, but seemingly minutely detailed conventions. For us the superficial similarity between the rays of the emperor

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. e.g. Bergmann (1998, 278 pl. 53.3) on a coin of Carus depicting the busts of Sol, radiate, and the emperor, radiate, facing each other.

and those of Sol has been the driving force in previous interpretations and the *lemnisci* of the imperial crown have been a minor detail. For the Romans, however, that minor detail was clearly essential. No emperor, from Augustus to Constantine, is ever depicted with a radiate crown without ribbons and, conversely, there is not a single example of Sol or any other deity bearing a radiate crown with ribbons. The ribbons are not an ornamental detail, but a crucial element for the correct depiction of the imperial radiate crown.<sup>54</sup> For the visually literate Roman viewer they confirm at glance, and beyond any doubt, that she is not viewing a depiction of Sol or some other god. In short, the ribbons effectively neutralize any divine or solar connotations the rays of the imperial crown may otherwise have bestowed on the image. That conclusion is inescapable, and forms the basis of our analysis of the meanings of the imperial radiate crown in chapter six.

### **Imitatio Alexandri**

A comparable issue of interpretation has arisen with regards to the youthful features of Sol, which can take on elements of portraits of Alexander to such a degree that many scholars have suggested that in certain cases it is not Sol but Alexander, in the guise of Helios, who is portrayed.<sup>55</sup> This has caused confusion. Numerous images have been interpreted as representations of Helios or Sol by some, but as Alexander-Helios or even as Alexander only, by others, and rarely do scholars agree where to draw the line.<sup>56</sup> The problem can be well illustrated if we consider busts of Sol (cat. A3.1-20), restricting ourselves to the six busts in our catalogue which can be identified as Sol with the greatest degree certainty on the basis of their iconography and/or context (cat. A3.2, 7, 8, 11, 14 & 16). Common elements of all six busts are their hellenistically inspired, idealizing style, their youthful features, and their long, unruly hair, usually springing out wreathlike over the forehead and ears from under a fillet. To a greater or lesser extent they share Alexander-like traits such as the anastole and sometimes the upward tilting of the head and gaze. All but one of these six busts are radiate. There are no distinctive or unique common traits however.

The iconographic elements mentioned do not themselves provide sufficient grounds to identify these as sculptural busts of Sol. The matter is clinched in three cases by the context, as the busts were found in Mithraic shrines.<sup>57</sup> The presence of Sol is mandatory in Mithraic temples,

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<sup>54</sup> On rare occasions, the emperor could be depicted as a full length figure wearing a radiate wreath. On such coins, the scale of the image makes the *lemnisci* a truly minute detail that is nonetheless often still carefully executed. Cf. RPC 14510 (Alexandria, L. Verus), 14128, 16009 (Alexandria, M. Aurelius)

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Blum 1914 (on cat. A3.9); L'Orange 1947, 34; Kleiner 1957, 101; Hölscher 1971, 43-5; Stewart 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Approaches range from Bieber (1964), who ignores the whole concept of Alexander-Helios (barring one short remark on p. 71) to Vermeule (1985), who treats virtually all Roman representations of Sol as manifestations of Alexander-Helios (*passim*, cf., e.g. p. 29). The problem of identification is not, of course, limited to Alexander-Helios but is a general one where Alexander is concerned. As Nielsen (1993, 140) puts it, one gets "the unpleasant feeling that the criteria for identification vary according to individual taste".

<sup>57</sup> A3.7 (Ostia, mitreo degli animali), A3.8 (Ostia, mitreo del palazzo imperiale) and A3.14 (Rome, mithraeum of S. Clemente).

whereas the presence of Alexander would be an anomaly, making it a foregone conclusion that these three busts represented Sol and were viewed as such. In the other three cases it is the iconography itself which is decisive. The radiate bust from Schloss Fasanerie near Fulda (A3.16) rests on four very small horses drawing a chariot of which only the pole is visible. As the *quadriga* is a standard part of the iconography of Sol this additional iconographic element establishes beyond reasonable doubt that this bust too represents Sol. The two busts in Venice and Madrid respectively (A3.2 & 11) have such an elaborate radiate nimbus that their identification as Sol also seems more than likely.

Yet none of this has restrained scholars from recognizing Alexander and others in these busts. Krug (1969) identifies the Venetian Sol as Mithridates VI in an iconography assimilating him to Alexander-Helios.<sup>58</sup> She cites the Lazzeroni-Sol in Schloss Fasanerie as a prime example of the latter. Hannestad (1993, 66-8) discusses our three busts from Mithraic temples, offering a different identification for each. Only the radiate one from the Mitreo degli Animali in Ostia (A3.7) is actually a Sol, according to him. He believes that the S. Clemente Sol (A3.14) is a portrait of Alexander, later reworked to transform it into a bust of Sol, while he interprets the non-radiate bust from the Mitreo del Palazzo Imperiale in Ostia (A3.8) as a mask of Alexander. Hannestad virtually ignores the context of these three busts - Mithraea - and hence does not explain how three superficially similar busts from identical contexts can be interpreted as Sol, Alexander/Sol and Alexander respectively.<sup>59</sup> Can we reasonably suggest that in the third or fourth century AD a Mithraic adept, visiting the three shrines, would identify the bust in the Mitreo degli Animali as the Sol he would expect to see, yet recognize Alexander in the one in the Mitreo del Palazzo Imperiale, and Alexander-Sol in the S. Clemente Mithraeum? Surely he would see Sol in all three, even though the bust from the Mitreo del Palazzo Imperiale was not radiate,<sup>60</sup> rather than stare in surprise at an out-of-place portrait of Alexander the Great.

This may simply mean that the Mithraic context diluted the impact of the Alexander-elements in the iconography of these individual busts to the extent that they could be ignored. It is possible that these busts were initially produced for a different setting in which a portrait of Alexander had a logical place. But even if that were the case, the fact remains that the Alexander-like aspects of the iconography were neither clear-cut nor unambiguous enough to make the identification as Alexander inescapable no matter what the context. This is not surprising, given that recognizing a portrait of Alexander is not straightforward in any case (cf. *supra* n. 56). Smith (1988, 59) is quite clear:

"The Alexander-like appearance of a head, especially one of evident Roman date, is not a sufficient criterion for detecting an Alexander - not even a Roman Alexander, still less a copy of a fourth-century or Hellenistic Alexander. More of its context and function must

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<sup>58</sup> Smith (1988, 182 C8) rejects Krug's suggestion.

<sup>59</sup> In the text, Hannestad (1993, 68) refers to the latter bust merely as Alexander, but in n. 40 he calls it "Sun/Alexander".

<sup>60</sup> One must remember that the bust need not have had metal rays of some sort to "shine"; it could have been placed in front of some hidden source of light coming from behind or above, for instance. On the extensive use of special light-effects in Mithraic shrines see Clauss 2000, 127-130. Cf. cat C2c.62.

be known, but they rarely are. In other words, unless a head has unmistakable portrait features, one can never be sure whether a given Alexander-like head is actually an Alexander or merely a mythological or ideal figure borrowing from the Alexander iconography."

Though useful as a *caveat*, this offers little practical help, for how is one to determine what constitutes "unmistakable portrait features"? Krug (1969) finds the features of Mithridates VI in the Venice-Sol to be very clear; Smith (*supra* n. 58) does not. So how does one go about identifying an Alexander-portrait? Stewart (1993, 44) suggests that "one must take each case on its merits and attempt to plot a given piece's position within widening circles of probability: the probable, the possible, the unlikely, and so on." In other words, there are no clear criteria and it all depends on the individual scholar's taste and intuition.<sup>61</sup> Lauter (1988) argues that we have at best only a handful of real portraits of Alexander, and Nielsen (1993, 137) goes even further, claiming that we have none and stating that we would not recognize Alexander if we came face to face with him.

Of course the existence of recognizable "portraits" that were not actual likenesses was in itself not uncommon. Greek and Hellenistic art developed various distinct and recognizable portrait types for more or less historical figures such as Homer or Socrates of whom actual likenesses had not survived. But these "portraits", despite their fictional origins, maintained a fairly stable recognizability. By contrast the so-called Alexander portraits, especially in the Roman era, do not, as the confusion over what to deem an Alexander image clearly attests. This suggests that (most) Alexander images are not really meant to be portraits (fictional or otherwise) of an individual so much as expressions of, say, youthful power. Alexander had rapidly become the symbol of youthful invincibility *par excellence* standing at least on par with, if not surpassing such other youthful heroes as Achilles, Perseus, Meleager, etc.<sup>62</sup> By Roman times, Alexander-the-myth had become so predominant that specific elements of Alexander's iconography - notably the anastole, the tilt of the head, and the upward gaze - no longer linked an image to Alexander the Great specifically, but had become artistic tools, almost metaphorically imbuing the image with those qualities which the mythical Alexander had come to embody. Indeed, many of these iconographic elements had been drafted into his "portrait" in the first place precisely because they imbued it with a visual embodiment of Alexander's character, without ever becoming exclusively "Alexandrian".

In the eclectic approach so typical of Roman art these were but a few in the wide range of artistic tools or "quotes" the Roman artist could draw upon to compose an image that could be readily understood by a Roman viewer. The extent to which such quotes were meant to recall Alexander specifically varied, of course, and depended to a significant extent on the context, but I would argue that they were rarely used to actually assimilate an image to Alexander. It is an overstatement, therefore, to suggest with Hannestad (1993, 62) that in all such cases the "likeness

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Nielsen 1993, 140. In general on approaches to Alexander-portraits cf. the excellent summary given by Stewart (1993, 56-70); Ridgway 1990, 108-136 (especially 134-136).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Spencer 2002, with the *caveat* that her fascinating study focuses on the reception and interpretation of the historical Alexander by the Roman elite of the later Republic and early Principate, as evidenced by their writings. See also Stewart 2004.

of Alexander" was chosen as the "model". Nielsen (1993, 141) is probably closer to the mark when, in her discussion of the Alexander Rondanini, she suggests that "contemporary viewers were possibly meant to waver among Alexander, Achilles, Perseus, Apollo, Argus etc." - the point being that these supposedly Alexander-like traits were in fact conventional artistic tools that they did not refer to an individual - Alexander - but to an heroic concept.<sup>63</sup>

Seen in this light, the Alexander-like aspects of images of Sol are simply an example of Roman artists deploying elements of Rome's rich visual vocabulary to define Sol, the Roman pantheon's quintessential deity of fiery youth and invincibility - Sol *invictus*. They do not conflate the god with Alexander.

As for Alexander taking on aspects of the sun's iconography, even if we leave aside the problems involved in determining whether an image portrays Alexander in the first place, there is simply no evidence for this.<sup>64</sup> Bergmann has reviewed a number of images of radiate figures who may or may not be Alexander the Great.<sup>65</sup> Her review shows how difficult it can be to find any criteria by which these images can be securely identified as Alexander rather than Sol or some other radiate deity. In fact, what emerges most clearly is that one cannot discriminate successfully between Sol and Alexander unless there are specific iconographical elements pointing away from Sol. Even then, the identity is often far from certain. A bronze statuette in Paris, for example, that depicts a radiate figure with a raised right hand, full body armor, and Alexander-like features is not Sol because of the cuirass (cf. below), but probably also not Alexander, given that - as Seyrig

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<sup>63</sup> As Smith (1988, 59) puts it, "(...) the strongly idealized image of Alexander (especially in the posthumous portraits) became so well known that it entered the common stock of Greek iconography in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and was absorbed into a whole range of other images, divine and mythological". Cf Smith 1991, 22; Vasilieva 2004..

<sup>64</sup> The external evidence for Alexander-Helios, adduced by Stewart (1993, 334) is not convincing. Although Diodorus (17.89.3) and Curtius (9.1.1) state that Alexander offered sacrifice to Helios in thanks for being allowed to conquer the East, this hardly constitutes evidence that Alexander claimed any special bond with Helios (cf. Arrian, V.10, who states simply that Alexander offered to the Gods, without special mention of Helios). The radiate coins of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-222) and his successors, as well as those of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215-163) and his successors are not examples of "fully fledged solar imagery", as Stewart would have it. Smith (1988, 42, 44) rightly rejects the notion that rays on Hellenistic royal portraits referred specifically to Helios, stating rather that they represent "the radiance of royal-divine epiphany". Therefore even if we leave aside the gap of over 80 years between Alexander's death and the first radiate Hellenistic coin-portraits, there is nothing here to suggest an Alexander-Helios prototype for this imagery. *Anth. Gr.* 16.121 (Stewart 1993, Text 117) mentions ἀγαί, but they represent the bright light of Zeus (Δις); Helios is not mentioned, nor is any specific link suggested in the text between Zeus (let alone Helios) and Alexander. The "sunless" lands referred to in Plut. *Mor.* 330D remain so because they cannot "look towards one rule of justice as though toward a common source of light". The point Plutarch makes is that *if* Alexander had not died so young, these lands *would* have been united under one rule of justice, which would have enlightened them. No suggestion here that Alexander was like or akin to the sun. The relevance of Plut. *Alex* 22.9 & 63.4-5, to which Stewart refers in support of the concept of "blazing" Alexander, is not clear to me.

<sup>65</sup> Bergmann 1998, 73-79.

has already noted - the iconography is that of a Syrian solar deity influenced by that of Sol.<sup>66</sup>

There are two issues here. The first is the importance of context, already mentioned. A bust of a youthful, radiate male, displayed prominently in a Mithraeum, will invariably have been recognized as Sol, irrespective of an anastole or Alexander-like features. As this would be true even in the case of the most strikingly Alexander-like radiate busts, the problem of discerning which, if any, of such radiate busts depict Alexander rather than Sol is now to some degree insoluble unless we know the context (which we usually do not). That said, we should note that Alexander-like radiate and non-radiate images of Sol from Mithraea are not uncommon<sup>67</sup> but I am not aware of any radiate busts that can be conclusively identified as Alexander, based on an associated inscription, context or similar factors. Of course this in itself does not mean that such busts did not or could not exist in antiquity.

The second issue is that of *viewing*. How did the Romans view these images and, through their viewing, establish the relationship between meanings and identity in such portrayals? Iconographically, it would not have been enough for a Roman viewer to see more or less generic Alexander-like traits in a radiate image to determine that this is Alexander or Alexander-Sol, rather than simply Sol. Such traits are perfectly compatible with images of Sol alone. A Roman artist wishing to portray Alexander as Sol would have to combine elements of Solar iconography such as rays and generic Alexander-like traits with iconographical elements typical of Alexander (or preferably exclusive to him) and clearly incompatible with Sol.<sup>68</sup> I am not aware of any such image surviving with the possible exception of a small alabaster acrolith from Egypt on which I will comment below.

Hence on the present evidence it seems safest to assume that if an image adheres to the basic iconographic conventions of Sol, then it *is* Sol, and Alexander-like features, no matter how strong, are no more than visual conventions portraying Sol's youth, ardour, and invincibility. Only strong contextual evidence could mandate the identification as Alexander in such cases, but to date there is no conclusive evidence that any of the extant radiate "Alexanders" must be Alexander and cannot be Sol.<sup>69</sup>

If an image does *not* adhere to Sol's iconographic conventions, as in the case of the cuirassed statuettes in Paris and Ankara for instance (*supra*), then he is not Sol, but neither is he then necessarily Alexander. Only closer examination of such radiate, non-solar depictions with

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<sup>66</sup> Paris, Louvre Br 344. Bergmann (1998, 76-7, pl 14.1-3) believes that the possibility that this statuette is Alexander is "fairly strong". Matern (2002, 120-122) argues that it is Helios. Cf. Seyrig 1970, 110. Cf. also a statuette in Ankara (arch. mus. 19332), likewise in the guise of a warrior, and hence likewise not Sol (Bergmann 1998, 79, pl. 14.4).

<sup>67</sup> Besides the busts discussed above one can also think, for example, of the *opus sectile* depiction of Sol from the Mithraeum under the S. Prisca in Rome, cat. D5.4.

<sup>68</sup> One could think of a radiate Alexander on horseback, for instance, modeled perhaps on a famous Hellenistic statue.

<sup>69</sup> It is unfortunate that so often we do not know the intended context. A radiate "Alexander" set up in a villa among the portraits of other rulers may well have been a possibility in antiquity.

Alexander-like features may yet reveal a particular type of radiate or radiant Alexander-portrait (perhaps with a star over his head?), but a closer examination of this problem of Alexander-portraits falls outside the scope of the present study.

It should be noted that the basic principles I have outlined do not provide a clear answer in every instance. I have not taken possible regional variations into account, for instance,<sup>70</sup> and at least one problematic case remains: a late Hellenistic or Roman imperial bust of a statuette in Brooklyn (figure 1.). A short discussion of this piece can well illustrate the intractability of the problems.<sup>71</sup> The alabaster bust, from Egypt, is presumably an acrolith, in which case it is reasonable to assume that where the extant bust ends the clothing of the statuette, in a different material, began. This would mean that the statuette was not clothed in a chiton or chlamys as Sol should be, although an unfastened chlamys hanging over the left shoulder cannot be wholly excluded if the acrolith was part of a bust rather than a full statuette, or a component of some larger, elaborate composition. The head is slightly tilted and the gaze, beneath pronounced brows, is upwards, while the lips are slightly parted. The hair is arranged in rich, deeply carved and drilled curly locks around the face with an *anastole* above the forehead. Set in the hair are seven deep holes, presumably for metal rays. No diadem is visible in the hair, but on the back a ribbon in low relief emerges from below the hair, with one end lying on the shoulder.



**Figure 6.** Alexander the Great, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. Brooklyn Mus. 54.162, Charles Edwin Wilbour fund.

Is this Sol or Alexander-Helios? The apparently non-solar clothing and the *lemnisci* in the nape of the neck suggest the latter. Bergmann also points to the similarities with busts in Paris (from Egypt) and Berlin (from Priene), both with diadem but without rays, and both identified as Alexander.<sup>72</sup> I do not know of any depiction of Sol in the type of dress implied here, although Helios can sometimes be dressed in a *himation* in the Greek world.<sup>73</sup>

As problematic as the lost context is the fact that the two closest parallels adduced by Bergmann are not radiate, an important consideration with regards the seven holes. We cannot be certain that they held rays, although that seems likely. More importantly, we have no way of knowing when they were drilled. Too little is known about the find-circumstances of this bust to

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<sup>70</sup> Bergmann (1998, 67) explores the possibility that Egyptian portraits of Alexander dating to the Roman Imperial era may have depicted him radiate or with a star above his head.

<sup>71</sup> Bergmann 1998, 74-5.

<sup>72</sup> Paris, Louvre N7807; Raeder 1984, 33 nr. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Bergmann (1988, 74 n. 445) cites a small number of Rhodian coins.

determine when it was deposited, but it is perfectly reasonable to assume that it had been around for some centuries by that time. Assuming that the setting into which the bust was inserted was of (precious?) metal, one can easily imagine circumstances - looting, petty theft, penury of the owner - which led the head to become detached and reused. For in the Roman period such a beautifully carved alabaster head would surely not have been blithely discarded after the metal had been sold. With reuse a possibility, why not go one step further and entertain the possibility that the holes were drilled at a time of reuse, transforming a bust of Alexander into one of a new statuette of Sol?

This is rampant speculation, of course, and my point is not to postulate that this is what actually happened. I simply want to stress that we cannot take for granted that the seven holes were part of the bust from the outset, especially because the closest parallels have no such holes. The original non-solar elements of the iconography (lemnisci, type of clothing) could have been neutralized by new solar attributes (rays, aspects of the lost parts of the statuette) as well as a new, explicitly solar context. We have absolutely no way of knowing this, and are hence left with an insoluble problem. One can certainly argue that the bust was originally meant to be an Alexander, but at what point the rays - if any - were added, and whether the bust then retained its identity as Alexander or was transformed into Sol, we do not and cannot know.

Aside from the alabaster bust in Brooklyn, I do not know of any representations which combine Alexander-like features with a conflation of solar and non-solar attributes with equal clarity. The other images adduced by Bergmann are either clearly not Sol, or Sol without any defining characteristic of Alexander, (defining characteristics taken to be those that would be acceptable with Alexander, but not with Sol).<sup>74</sup>

### **Raised Right Hand**

This aspect of Sol's iconography is relatively unremarkable, but requires some attention because in the past much has been made of the presumed origin and meaning of this gesture.<sup>75</sup> It was held that the raised right hand was an iconographic innovation of the third century which differentiated the new Sol *Invictus*, believed to have been an import from the East, from the old Roman Sol.

The raised right hand is certainly characteristic of Sol in the later imperial period, and not in the later Republic and early empire. It is not a sudden change, however, but a gradual development of Sol's iconography which began well before the Severan dynasty of the early third century. Helios as quadrigatus was depicted with a similar gesture occasionally in the last quarter

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Bergmann 1998, 73-9. Not Sol: Cameo, now lost, formerly in the treasury of the Cathedral at Cammin; two bronze busts, one in Boston (inv. 64.316) and one now lost (formerly Fouquet collection), both depicting a youth with an uraeus and a quasi-radiate crown of a type that is quite rare and certainly never sported by Sol; the aforementioned bronze statuette in the Louvre and marble statuette in Ankara, both in Roman armor, and a bronze equestrian statuette sold in Zurich in 1979. Sol, but not Alexander: a bronze statuette from the Forman collection, sold at auction in 1899, which certainly cannot have carried a sword and have held a lance, as Bergmann (1998, 75-6) tentatively suggests (rejected by Matern 2002, 104-5). Whether this bronze, which is known only from an 1899 auction catalogue photograph, is authentic is open to question.

<sup>75</sup> Cumont 1923, 69-72; L'Orange 1935, 93-4; Matern 2002, 129-147.

of the fourth century BC in S. Italy<sup>76</sup> and a few local coins in Bactria, dating to the mid to late second century BC, depict a standing figure, radiate, and with a raised right arm.<sup>77</sup> These are isolated examples, of course, and we should not make too much of them, except to note that they illustrate that the raised right hand was not a very idiosyncratic or unique gesture. More to the point are several pre-Severan examples in the Roman Empire which include a coin minted on Crete under Vespasian,<sup>78</sup> a number of civic coins minted in the second century AD,<sup>79</sup> as well as a number of reliefs, at least two bronze statuettes, and a fair number of intaglios.<sup>80</sup> The actual number of surviving pre-Severan depictions is probably higher, for a large number of images of Sol with a raised right hand are dated rather loosely as “second - third century AD”, and it seems reasonable to assume that at least some of these date to the second, rather than the third century AD.

The fourth year of Septimius Severus’s reign, AD196, is the year in which the first depictions of Sol as a full-length figure appear on Roman Imperial coins, and on these first coins he has a raised right hand.<sup>81</sup> This soon become the norm, not only with Sol as a standing figure, but also for representations of Sol on a quadriga.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Naples Mus. Naz. 82244, from Canosa (Matern 2002, 210 Q21, fig. 4; LIMC Helios 81) and Zurich, Roß collection 66 (Matern 2002, 211 Q28, LIMC Helios 78).

<sup>77</sup> The first is a coin minted by Plato between 145 and 140 BC. A similar coin was minted by Philoxenos between 100 and 95 BC (Matern 2002, 86, 298 M172-3). Reverses of Helios in quadriga (no raised hand) were popular under Plato.

<sup>78</sup> BMCGrC IX 3.13. The figure cannot be securely identified as Sol and could well be Augustus.

<sup>79</sup> Coins of the second century include: Aezanis, Helios standing, with globe (BMCGrC XXV, 28 nrs. 36-8; AD 180-192), Alexandria, Helios on quadriga l. (Geissen 1773, AD 156/7, 2201, AD 178/9), Amaseia (180-192, Waddington 32), Hierapolis Kastabala (BMCGrC XXI, 83 nrs. 8-9, AD 161-180; cf. Matern 2002, 129-30).

<sup>80</sup> One of the statuettes has been dated to the first or second century AD by Kaufmann-Heinimann on stylistic and contextual grounds (cat. B1.1); the other is dated to the Antonine period (cat. B1.2); cf. also two statuettes of the second century AD in private collections (B1.3-4). The reliefs include a fragment of the Parthian relief in Ephesus (C1f.10, AD 166-9; hand and possible attribute lost); a marble relief in Naples, Mus. Naz. 6678 (cat. C2a.5, probably M. Aurelius), possibly an altar in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Black Gate Museum (cat C2j.1, after AD 150), a sarcophagus in Naples, S. Chiara (cat. C3a8.1, AD 160-170), and a small bronze decorative element, now lost (cat. K9.13, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD). Relevant intaglios dated to the first and second century include cat. H1c.1-6, H1d.1-3, H2a.1, H3a.1, H3c.1, H3e.1-3, H4b.1, H4f.1, H6a.1-12, H6aa.1-5, H6ad.1, H6b.1, H6bd.1, H6be.1, H6i.1, H14.1, HA3A.1, HA6a.1-2, HA6aa.1, HA6b.1, HA6bb.1. Cf also the golden earrings from Bolsena (cat. J5.1).

<sup>81</sup> Cat. L2.19 (196-8).

<sup>82</sup> Matern (2002, 124-127) understates the number of numismatic, and other, depictions of Sol with a raised r. hand on a quadriga. On coins depicting profile quadrigas (right or left) of Sol, for example, she claims incorrectly that he is depicted with a raised right hand only rarely, and only from the reign of Probus (276-82). In fact, there were a fair number of issues under Caracalla in the years 215, 216, 217 (cat. L2.27), as well as one under Postumus (cat. L2.65), possibly two under Gallienus (cat. L2.61), and one under Aurelian (cat. L2.79; cf. Göbl 1993, 149; cf 129, in which Sol appears to be holding reins). Florianus (AD 276) also minted a number of coins of this type in his short reign (L2.111). In Alexandria, the type already occurs in the second century AD; cf. Geissen 1974, 1773 (AD

The significance of this gesture has been much debated,<sup>83</sup> but most discussions have proceeded from the faulty premiss that it appeared suddenly in Roman iconography, and was introduced from the East. This is not supported by the evidence, for as we have seen there is a modest but nonetheless significant number of depictions dating to the first and especially second century AD.<sup>84</sup> These clearly suggest that the gesture had very gradually gained favour, rather than suddenly, and that it had certainly become established as a potential aspect of Sol's iconography well before the Severan era. The variety of depictions of Sol on Roman Imperial coinage in the first three decades after AD 196 further supports the conclusion that the raised right arm gradually emerged as a characteristic of Sol, and was not a sudden, radical innovation. There is no indication where this practice originated.

Nonetheless Cumont, L'Orange, and others saw the raised right hand as a new iconographic element which heralded the introduction, in Rome, of the new, oriental cult of Sol Invictus (and because this cult was oriental, they found it logical that the gesture could be found on earlier, local coins of the Roman East). According to L'Orange it was this gesture that was the specific, defining element that allowed viewers to differentiate between the new, oriental sun-god Sol Invictus (with raised hand) and the old Graeco-Roman sun-god Sol Indiges.<sup>85</sup>

This suggestion has been widely repeated, but it cannot stand.<sup>86</sup> I have already set out elsewhere my main reasons for rejecting L'Orange's interpretation of the gesture,<sup>87</sup> and Matern (2002, 129-147) has recently supported those arguments with a significant amount of additional evidence. Therefore it will suffice to give a summary here of the main objections.

L'Orange is certainly correct to point out that the raised right hand, palm outwards, was a common gesture in Middle Eastern art of the Roman period. The gesture he refers to, however, is significantly different from that of Sol Invictus in that the elbow is bent 90° or more, and the

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156-7), 2201 (AD 178-9), as well as 2344 (AD 221-1). Overall, the number of coins that depict Sol as a *quadrigatus* is fairly low, but importantly, the percentage of these that, in third and fourth century AD, depict Sol *with* raised right hand far outweighs the, truly limited, number on which Sol does not raise his r. hand. A similar pattern can be discerned in other representations. As many intaglios are poorly dated, I have tabulated intaglios of *all* dates on which Sol is in a profile quadriga, and found that almost 50% depict Sol with a raised r. hand; in the case of frontal quadrigas - again of all dates - this percentage rises to about 75%. Of the other depictions of Sol on a quadriga that date to the Severan era or later, around two-thirds depict Sol with a raised right hand.

<sup>83</sup> Matern (2002, 129-147) offers the most extensive discussion, with many references to earlier scholarship.

<sup>84</sup> We should exclude from our analysis the four earliest depictions of Helios with a raised right hand - two S. Italian vases and two Bactrian coins - as their number is too small, and the chronological gaps are too big, compounded - in the case of the Bactrian coins - by the issue of geographical isolation.

<sup>85</sup> L'Orange (1935, 93-4) "Da es nun gerade die Severer sind, die den orientalischen Sonnenkult in Rom einführten, da ferner der Gestus an sich dem orientalischen Ritual gehört, ergibt es sich ohne weiteres, daß das Motiv für den (...) Typ des neuen Sol, des Sol Invictus erst verwendet worden ist. Der Sol Invictus stammt demnach nicht nur seinem Begriff und Namen nach aus dem orientalischen Kultus, sondern es sind auch in der bildhaften Vorstellung des Gottes orientalische Elemente bestimmend geworden".

<sup>86</sup> Cf., e.g., K. Gross 1985, 25-6.

<sup>87</sup> Hijmans 1996, 124-5.

lower arm is held stiffly upright with open palm facing outwards.<sup>88</sup> One could, of course, put this down to stylistic differences following from the rigid frontality of Syrian art, but even so, the difference between the Roman and Syrian gestures is striking. More telling, however, is the fact that Shamash and other oriental sun-gods are themselves only rarely represented with this gesture. In fact, we do not find any examples in the East of sun gods with raised right hands until well after the gesture had become canonical in Roman art, indicating that these depictions were influenced by the Roman practice, and not vice versa.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, if Roman artists had wished to establish a clear reference to Syrian sun-gods in the iconography of Sol Invictus, the logical choice would have been to depict him as a warrior-god wearing armor, as this was a characteristic of Eastern sun gods. Depictions of Sol fully armed would have clearly set him apart from the Graeco-Roman tradition, and this was something Roman artists would certainly have wanted to do if they were dealing with a new, Syrian Sol. For we should keep in mind that some distinct, non-Roman iconographic characteristic would not have been merely an option, if Sol Invictus were thought of as Oriental, but would in fact have been essential. In Roman art, "Oriental" gods and mythical figures invariably had some iconographical elements or attributes (trousers, Parthian cap, long-sleeved tunica, some non-Roman object, *vel sim.*) which undisputedly characterized the depicted figure as foreign. None of this is the case with Sol.

Of course, there is nothing exotic or un-Roman in the gesture of a raised right hand *per se*. In fact, the gesture occurs in all cultures and had numerous connotations. To the Nuragic, Etruscan, Punic and Parthian examples illustrated by Brilliant (1963 71-73) one can add countless Roman examples of orators, equestrian statues and others, amply documenting its popularity in Rome and throughout the empire.<sup>90</sup> Right hands, palms facing outward, were depicted on Roman *aes grave* in the <sup>third</sup> century BC, and were placed atop legionary standards from earliest times onwards, according to our sources.<sup>91</sup> The raised right hand, whether as gesture or as independent symbol, can thus be attested in Rome from earliest times, and is clearly neither culture-specific nor chronologically limited.<sup>92</sup>

Nonetheless, even Matern (2002, 129-30, 145-6) places more emphasis on Asia Minor and the Orient in her attempts to trace the origins of the gesture than the evidence warrants. In

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Matern 2002, 134-6

<sup>89</sup> LIMC Helios in *per. or.* 41a-b. These Syrian sun-gods also betray Roman influence in the Roman armor they are wearing. Cf. Matern 2002, 134-7.

<sup>90</sup> Cumont 1923 (useful for the collected evidence, but not for the conclusions Cumont attaches to them); Brilliant 1963, figs. 2.23-2.25, 2.40-2.42, 2.92-93, 2.104-106, 2.120, 3.1, 3.5, 3.12, etc

<sup>91</sup> Corbeill 2004, 21-22, fig. 1 (with references).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Bastien 1992, 560: "En fait la main levée est un geste naturel de menace, d'adoration, de protection ou de bénédiction, qui doit être contemporain des premières sociétés humaines."

particular, she (again) overemphasizes numismatic evidence.<sup>93</sup> It is obviously true that the handful of pre-Severan coins depicting Helios with a raised right hand are all from Eastern civic mints, but this says nothing about other parts of the Empire for the simple reason that over 90 % of all civic mints of the Roman Empire were in the East. All that the coins can document, therefore, is that the gesture was known in the East. They say nothing about its presence, or absence in the West. For that we must turn to the other depictions: the statuettes, the reliefs and the intaglios mentioned above (n. 80). These clearly show that the gesture was well-known in the West as well in the first and second century AD. Of the fairly substantial number of intaglios in the catalogue that date to the first or second century AD and that depict Sol with a raised right hand, 24 have a provenance, and of those over 80% are from the West, rather than the East.<sup>94</sup> As for the other depictions of the second century, their number is too low to have any statistical value, but for what it is worth they display a fairly comparable ratio of “Western” to “Eastern” depictions as the intaglios: two are from Italy, one from Britain, one from France, and two from Asia Minor (cf. *supra* n. 80).

So why does Matern then still tend towards an oriental origin for the gesture? Certainly not to support L’Orange, whose views she rejects, but rather because that would fit her own hypothesis about the first major depiction of the sun god with a raised right hand. Based on a stylistic analysis of bronze statuettes of Sol, many of which display a rather uniform iconography, she argues that the type represented by these statuettes must have been inspired by a famous original of late fourth or early third century BC. Matern tentatively suggests that this prototype may have been the Colossus of Rhodes.<sup>95</sup> This is a tantalizing possibility, but it strikes me as based on (inevitably) tenuous evidence, as well as proceeding from a number of at the very least questionable assumptions. I will return to Matern’s hypothesis below.

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<sup>93</sup> Matern (2002, 129-130) cites coins from Crete, Hierapolis and Bactria as indications “daß es möglicherweise eine Tradition der ausgestreckten Hand gegeben hat, bevor in der Kaiserzeit das Bild des Sol Invictus offiziell in das stadtrömische Repertoire aufgenommen wurde”. Later she repeats “daß der Gestus schon vor der Verwendung in der römischen Kunst im griechischen Kulturkreis bei Helios zu finden ist” (p. 146). While Matern acknowledges that the evidence is too weak to establish with certainty the origin of the gesture, she leaves the reader with the strong, but misleading, impression that what evidence there is points to an eastern, rather than a Roman source. At the same time, Matern (2002, 146-7) is careful to differentiate between origin and perception of the gesture. She argues that it originated in the East, but was not perceived as oriental and did not characterize Sol as “foreign”.

<sup>94</sup> Of the 24 intaglios with a provenance, only four are from the East (three from Gadara, and one from Caesarea Maritima). The other twenty are from N. Africa (one, Tunisia), Italy (four from Rome, five from Aquileia), Spain (one from Itálica and one from the province of Sevilla), Gaul (one each from Mont Beuvray, Montaubon, and Les Souils), and Britain (three from Caerleon, one from Castlesteads, and one from Newstead); cf. n. 80. While these numbers clearly document the presence of the gesture in *all* parts of the Empire well before the Severans, it is more difficult to say how significant they are when it comes to gauging the relative popularity of the gesture in East and West, as the numbers no doubt in part, at least, reflect the state of publication of gems. We have many good corpora for the intaglios in European collections, but few for Eastern and N. African ones.

<sup>95</sup> Matern 2002, 147-154 (analysis of possible date and style of prototype), 155-162 (Colossus), 193-4 (summarizing her suggestion in less tentative terms).

Of greater interest at this point is that Matern has demonstrated that although the gesture of the raised right hand is itself of all cultures, its usage varies widely. She has shown that it is common with deities only in the East (but not solar ones), that in the Greek world, in the Classical and Hellenistic era, it is rare,<sup>96</sup> and that in Italy and Rome it occurs primarily with personifications and people, not gods.<sup>97</sup> Matern sees this as further reason to emphasize the Eastern connections of Sol's gesture, which would support her hypothesis. That argument, however, is based on the assumption that Sol was a god. One could just as well take the opposing view and argue that *if* this image-type first originated in Italy - and I must stress again that the evidence for this is far too meagre to be conclusive - then Matern's overview of Italian and Roman practice may imply that Sol was seen less as a god like Jupiter, and more as a personification like Oceanus. We should not make too much of this, however. Sol and Helios are depicted with a raised right hand throughout the Roman world over an extensive period of time. There is no reason to postulate a single origin for all these images, for it is certainly not unthinkable that the Apulian vase painters conceived of the idea independently from the first century AD gem engravers. And more importantly, irrespective of the origin we must assume that at various times, with different viewers in different parts of the Roman world, the gesture would resonate differently.

Indeed, the wide distribution, chronologically and geographically, of depictions of Sol with a raised right hand should make us hesitant to imbue it with precise or detailed meanings. This is not to say that the gesture is unimportant. By the third century AD all three basic image types [sol] could be depicted with it, somewhat rarely in the case of busts, but very common with charioteers and almost invariably with the standing Sol.<sup>98</sup> The popularity of the gesture with Sol on a quadriga is noteworthy, because it is illogical. One would expect Sol to be holding reins or a whip in his right hand - which he often does. This clearly shows that the gesture was a meaningful new attribute of the iconography, on par with the radiance, the whip or globe, the youthful beardlessness, etc. As iconographic element, the gesture accomplishes a number of things. To begin with it places great focus on the right hand of Sol. The right hand had a wide range of very positive connotations in the Roman world, ranging from power to benediction to greeting.<sup>99</sup> Equally important, I think, is that this gesture invades the space of the audience and draws them in. It literally and figuratively extends the hand of Sol towards the viewer, who is therefore actively engaged by Sol. It thus is a dynamic and interactive gesture which emphasizes Sol's positive power through his right hand. Last, but by no means least, it is an identity prop which helps to identify Sol as Sol. With non-radiate figures in particular, the raised right hand can be a clinching criterium.

To summarize: from no later than the first century AD onwards, the raised right hand

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Matern 2002, 133 n. 718 for examples

<sup>97</sup> Matern 2002, 133-4

<sup>98</sup> The examples are too numerous to list here. Cf. Cat. L2 *passim*.

<sup>99</sup> On the r. hand, cf Corbeill 2004, 20-24. The so-called Mithras liturgy emphasizes the tremendous power of the "incorruptible right hand" in a probable reference to Sol (lines 498 and 519); cf. Meyer 1976.

gradually became an attribute of Sol, gaining such popularity that by the third century AD it was one of his defining aspects. Where the convention originated is not clear, but based on current evidence Italy is the best candidate. It is a powerful gesture, emphasizing Sol's right hand, with all positive associations that evoked, and forging a link between image and viewer. Its generic nature and widespread use preclude too precise a meaning, but its popularity contributed to making it one of the defining attributes of Sol.

### **Sceptre**

Sol is sometimes described as holding a short sceptre (to be distinguished from the full-length sceptre or staff discussed above). The identification of this attribute is problematic, however, because of the close similarity with the short, solid staff of Sol's whip. Two examples can illustrate this. On an altar from the Aventine Dolichenum in Rome (cat. C2b.2), Sol holds a short staff in the crook of his right arm with a slightly globular attachment at the top. The staff is very similar to the one held by Sol on another altar from Rome (cat. C2w.5). On the latter, a thick rope is depicted curling downward over the staff, clearly indicating that it is a whip. On the former no such rope is immediately apparent, but on close inspection a thin ribbon-like string may be discernable just to the left of the top. This "string", if indeed it is that, is all but invisible on the photographs, but if we imagine the relief painted, and this cord in low relief picked out and continued in a sharply contrasting colour against the background, then the effect would be the same. In both cases the viewer would immediately recognize the 'staff' as a whip, the expected attribute of Sol. On a relief in Naples (cat. C2a.5) the cord of the whip is equally invisible on most photographs, but clearly visible upon close inspection. Without the cord, this object in the crook of Sol's left arm also closely resembles a short staff or sceptre. On a statuette in Leiden, from Laodicea (B1.21), Sol also holds a short staff of this type in the crook of his left arm. There is no trace of a cord, but in view of the sketchy nature of the carving, which is very shallow and incised, a painted one cannot be wholly excluded.

The number of depictions of Sol with a short staff without any extant trace of a cord is very low, and the potential for adding the cord in paint is significant. Therefore, in particular when Sol holds a short staff in the crook of his arm, this should be identified as probably a whip, even when no cord is visible.<sup>100</sup>

### **Armor**

There are a number of statuettes, reliefs, and the like that depict a youthful radiate figure in full Roman military attire, and with various attributes of Sol such as the raised right arm, a globe, and the like.<sup>101</sup> These images adhere to one of the three basic image-types - that of the standing figure - inasmuch as they form a variant of the basic, nude, Sol along the same lines as the figure of Sol dressed in a chiton. The difference is that the chiton is an element with a strong Graeco-Roman tradition, and images of Sol dressed in a chiton can occur in all parts of the Empire. The figures in armor, on the other hand, apparently occur only in the Levant, and this suggests that the armor

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<sup>100</sup> Cf., e.g., an intaglio in Berlin, cat. H6g.1.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of such images, cf. Matern 2002, 120-2.

is a conscious, local digression from the Roman model (nude or chiton) to alert the viewer to the fact that this is not Sol/Helios, but a local deity akin to Sol. The fact that Shamash and other local sun gods in the Levant tend to be depicted in armor supports this assumption. I have therefore excluded these images from discussion here.

### **Derivation and evolution of the Roman iconography of Sol: the problem of “copies” and “originals”.**

Of the three basic image types of Sol in Roman art, Sol as charioteer has the longest tradition, this being the most common way to depict Helios in Greek art. The Roman depictions evolved directly out of these Greek ones.

Busts of Sol have an almost equally long tradition, being common throughout the later classical, Hellenistic, Republican and Imperial periods. The first depiction of Sol on a Republican coin is of this type. As Matern notes, the frequent occurrence of busts is noteworthy because in general deities tend not to be depicted in this manner. In part this may be the result of the importance of rays for Sol’s iconography, making his reduction to bust easier to achieve without confusion about the identity. In part, however, this also no doubt reflects on the meaning of Sol in these images.<sup>102</sup>

There are virtually no surviving Greek or Hellenistic depictions of Sol as a standing figure, except on two Bactrian coins discussed below. It seems likely, however, that the Colossus of Rhodes depicted Helios as a standing figure. On a Rhodian amphora stamp dating to about 100 BC, the sun god is depicted standing (K9.6). In Roman art, standing figures of Sol occur from the first century BC, and soon become more common than Sol on a chariot.

Whether any of the Roman depictions are directly derived from lost Greek prototypes is difficult to say. Matern has dedicated a significant portion of her study to attempting to determine this, and has concluded that while in many cases no common prototype can be discerned, an exception must be made for Sol with the raised right hand, which she labels the “*invictus* type”. Based on an analysis of in particular bronze statuettes depicting Sol with a raised right hand, she identifies a main type and two variant types of Sol with this gesture, the prototype of which she dates to the latter part of the fourth century BC, tentatively suggesting that it may have been the Colossus of Rhodes itself.

In terms of Roman viewing many centuries later this issue is of secondary importance. Whether or not these specific subgroups were dependent upon a famous but long-lost original does not affect their recognizability, as they adhere to the standard iconography for this image type [sol] in every important respect. But although Matern’s suggestion may not have significant consequences as far as the viewing, in antiquity, of these statuettes is concerned, it is rooted in an understanding of their production which I must briefly discuss because it differs fundamentally from my own approach.

On stylistic grounds, Matern postulates that statues of the *invictus* type derive from older

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<sup>102</sup> Matern 2002, 181-5.

prototypes that are Greek rather than oriental.<sup>103</sup> She supports this contention with the following considerations:<sup>104</sup>

1. The wide distribution of the “invictus type” throughout the Roman Empire;
2. The in her view remarkable lack of variation (“erstaunlich wenige Abweichungen”) in posture, arm position, and gaze (“Blickrichtung”);
3. The observation that in certain cases the roots of the context of the depiction of Sol can be traced back to Greek art, indicating a Greek prototype for the depiction of Sol himself as well.<sup>105</sup>

4. The general consideration that Roman cult statues were often copies of Greek originals. Matern then proceeds with a lengthy analysis of the stylistic characteristics of, in particular, bronze statuettes of Sol, identifying Polykleitan elements in the stance, a range of potential stylistic prototypes - including pre-Hellenistic ones - for the gesture with the right arm, and forerunners of the late fourth century BC for the hairstyle of these statuettes. She argues that the lack of torsion in the body suggests that the actual prototype of the statuettes cannot have been Hellenistic. This leads her to conclude that the statuettes themselves depended upon a full-scale Roman cult statue which, in turn, was inspired by a Greek statue which, on stylistic grounds, must be dated to the last third of the fourth century BC.<sup>106</sup> In her opinion, the best candidate for that statue is the Colossus of Rhodes, begun around 304 BC and erected 12 years later.<sup>107</sup> Although the Colossus itself collapsed in the 220s BC, Matern believes its iconography may have been preserved in various later cult statues, now lost, in places like Tralleis, Philadelphia, and Rome itself.<sup>108</sup>

Matern does not minimize the gaps in her evidence and the speculative nature of her hypothesis: we don't really know at all what the Colossus looked like, and the chronological hiatus between the surviving statuettes and the postulated original is quite substantial (about 350 years). Nonetheless the obstacles to her hypothesis are greater than she admits. To begin with I simply do not see a sufficiently unified “type” to postulate a single, physical “original”. Matern speaks of a surprising lack of variation where I see quite a broad variety of postures, arm positions and directions of gaze (plate 7.2-6, 8.1-4). Many depictions of Sol without a raised right

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<sup>103</sup> Matern 2002, 147.

<sup>104</sup> Matern 2002, 147-8

<sup>105</sup> Matern (2002, 147-8) gives two examples: the Sarcophagus in the Santa Chiara in Naples, where the depiction of the the myth of Protesilaos is framed by Sol and Luna, both as full-length standing figures (cat. C3a8.1), and the frieze-section from Ostia, now in Berlin, depicting various deities including Sol. She quotes Sichtermann and Koch (1975, 10) to argue that Roman artists closely followed Greek and Hellenistic examples in the depiction of myths, and, quoting Mattusch, postulates late Classical prototypes for individual deities on the Ostian frieze, and a Hellenistic example for the frieze as a whole.

<sup>106</sup> Matern 2002, 148-155.

<sup>107</sup> Matern 2002, 155-162

<sup>108</sup> Matern 2002, 163-5.

hand in other respects are as similar to the examples Matern gives as these are to each other, not because they are dependent upon the same original, but simply because Roman art takes a fairly uniform approach to the depiction of nude, (semi-)divine youths.<sup>109</sup> The only really definitive characteristic is the raised right hand, and this poses a real problem for Matern's hypothesis. For from the outset the raised right hand is not limited to standing figures of Sol, but also occurs with Sol as charioteer and, albeit more rarely, even with busts of Sol.<sup>110</sup> This indicates that in the course of the gradual introduction of the raised right hand as an iconographic characteristic of Sol there was no differentiation between the three basic image types (bust, standing figure, quadriga). Thus the evidence does not support the existence of an iconographically distinct group of the standing "invictus type" postulated by Matern.<sup>111</sup>

In this context it is instructive to look at a number of medallions, a coin, a fragment of a terracotta applique and a *phalera* all dating to the second half of the second century AD. All depict Sol rising up in his quadriga over a series of clouds below which Tellus reclines; above the clouds Lucifer precedes Sol.<sup>112</sup> On most, Sol does not raise his right hand, but on the Severan aureus he does. The iconography of these medallions and the *phalera* is elaborate, and with the exception of the raised right arm on the Severan aureus, noteworthy for its consistency. Clearly, the Severan image is the same as the preceding ones which means that the raised right arm is treated as no more than an iconographic characteristic of Sol which does not differentiate him or

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. the fresco of Sol in Naples (cat. E1a.1, cf. E1a.2) which depicts the deity with the same general pose, gaze and hairstyle as Matern's "invictus type" but lacks the raised right hand.

<sup>110</sup> On provincial coins, Sol is depicted as quadrigatus with a raised right hand a number of times in the second century AD: cf. RPC IV ([www.rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk](http://www.rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk)) 13883, 15089, 15122 (all from Alexandria, AD 156/7 and AD 178/9), 5448 (Amaseia, AD 177-92). On Roman Imperial coinage, cf. n. 82. Cf. also various intaglios, such as a gem in Florence, cat. H1c.1, four in Copenhagen, cat. H1d.1-2, H3e.1 and H4f.1, an agate intaglio in Utrecht (formerly The Hague), cat. H2a.1, a carnelian intaglio in Paris, cat. H3a.1, a heliotrope in a private collection, cat. H4b.1, a heliotrope in Hamburg, cat. HA3a.1, and golden earrings from Bolsena in Paris, cat. J5.1. For busts of Sol with a raised r. hand cf. a sarcophagus from Grave D at the Via Belluzzo in Rome (cat. C3b3.4, mid 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); a lamp in the Mus. Naz. in Rome (cat. G1a.64, 2nd-3rd c. AD); a relief in the Mus. Cap in Rome (cat. C2c.84, 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD), etc.

<sup>111</sup> Matern (2002, 124-127) argues that the depictions of Sol as charioteer with a raised r. hand are late and basically depict the statuary "invictus type" placed in a chariot: "Sie erweisen sich (...) als Umsetzung des Typus des stehenden Invictus (...) der in den Wagenkasten gestellt worden ist" (p. 127). She downplays the number (and the relevance) of "early" depictions of Sol with a raised right hand on a chariot. She mentions no second century AD examples, only a few scattered cases in provincial coinage prior to Aurelian, and claims that on Roman imperial coinage Sol does not appear on a chariot with this gesture prior to Aurelian, which is incorrect (*supra* n. 82, cf. n. 110). Without explanation she also changes the Severan date normally given to the relief in Baia (cat. C1f.13) into "3. Jh. n. Chr.?" (p. 222) and her dates for the intaglios she quotes also tend to be too late.

<sup>112</sup> Phalera: Vatican, medagliere (cat. K9.10); terracotta applique: Lyons, Mus. (cat. F1b.11); medallion of Antoninus Pius (AD 145): Bergmann 1998, 248, pl. 46.1; medallion of M. Aurelius minted in Nicaea: RPC IV, 5913; Bergmann 1998, 248, pl. 46.5; medallion of Commodus: Bergmann 1998, 247-8, pl. 46, 2-3; aureus of Septimius Severus (AD 197): cat. L2.20, Bergmann 1998, 270, pl. 52.3.

set him apart from the previous depictions without the gesture.<sup>113</sup>

Of course, the whole issue of “copies” and “originals” is fraught with difficulties. Too much has been made of Roman “dependence” on (superior) Greek masterpieces, more or less slavishly copied. As a communicative system, Roman art needed consistency in the depiction of key figures and concepts. The “remarkable lack of variation” and wide distribution of the “*invictus* types” are more easily understood as products of this necessary visual consistency than by postulating a long lost original masterpiece. Roman artists did not deviate significantly from the iconographic norm for the given image types because to do so would imply a change of meaning or intention.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The standard iconography for Sol has him either on a quadriga, standing, or as a bust, young and beardless, radiate, holding a whip, a globe, or both, right hand often raised in a characteristic gesture, and nude except for a chlamys or alternatively dressed in chiton (generally long, rarely short) and chlamys. A combination of these basic characteristics is required to identify a figure as Sol, always bearing in mind that the omission of any one of these attributes is possible. As we have seen, for example, a figure can be Sol despite being depicted without any form of radiance. On the other hand, adding other attributes, or replacing one of these basic ones with something else can cast doubt on the identity of the figure. Sol cannot normally be depicted with a sword, for instance, rather than a whip or globe. He cannot have a nimbus without rays, ride a biga rather than a quadriga, be dressed in a toga or cuirass, sit on a throne, recline on a bed, or ride on horseback, and so forth.. This does not mean that such depictions of Sol are intrinsically impossible, but because they digress from the norm the artist must ensure that other elements, such as context, are in place to ensure that the viewer can nonetheless successfully identify the figure. Hence in Mithraic context Sol may be depicted undertaking many activities, such as dining or kneeling, that in isolated images would throw doubt on his identity. We see the same in mythical contexts, as in the case of Phaethon scenes where Sol sits enthroned as he receives his

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<sup>113</sup> Berrens (2004, 41), Bergmann (1998, 247-8) and Kantorowicz (1963, 128-9; cf. Kantorowicz 1961, 382-3), quoting Beaujeu and Alföldi, believe that on the medallions of Commodus and Septimius Severus the charioteer is not Sol but the emperor in the guise of Sol, claiming that he is bearded. A bearded figure certainly cannot be Sol, but the minute traces that they identify as a pointed “beard” are simply not clear enough on the surviving medallions to carry conviction. It seems unlikely that a Roman artist would depict such a significant change of identity only through the addition of what at best could be no more than a minuscule beard on the tiny head of the “emperor-Sol”. Surely for the sake of clarity he would opt for additional iconographic pointers, for instance by clothing the figure in a cuirass to bring home the fact that this is not Sol. It is possible, of course, that the medallions echo some larger image - now lost - which depicted “Sol” not just with the beard, but also with the distinct portrait features of the emperor. A targeted audience, receiving the medallions at a carefully chosen time and place (e.g. in the presence of the hypothetical larger monument) would in that case be left in no doubt as to the identity of the solar charioteer on the medallion. But virtually identical medallions or gold multiples were struck in the names of at least four emperors: Antoninus Pius, M. Aurelius, Commodus and Septimius Severus. One can easily imagine a famous image of *Sol* inspiring these medallions (which is what Guarducci (1983) argues), but obviously cannot postulate a single sol-emperor portrait. That Sol alone is meant is further suggested by the fact that there is no intimation of a beard on the phalera in the Vatican, on the medallions of Antoninus Pius and M. Aurelius, and on at least one of the extant medallions of Commodus (in the latter case, Bergmann suggests that this particular piece was so thoroughly cleaned that the beard was polished away).

son.

Roman image types [sol] were strictly defined and remarkably consistent throughout the imperial era. While shifts in emphasis are discernable - from whip to globe, for example, as well as the gradual adoption of the arresting gesture of the raised right hand - the iconographic tradition is continuous and derives seamlessly from the Hellenistic depictions of Helios. Figures who do not adhere to the rules of Sol's iconography are not Sol, although in some (regional) cases influence of Sol's iconography can be discerned. Within the group of Sol-images, no clearly defined iconographical sub-groups exist linked to a specific aspect or cultic tradition of Sol.

