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## APOLLO AS A PRECEDENT TO THE COINAGE OF SOL INVICTUS

**Summary:** The purpose of this paper is to produce an approach to *Sol* through Numismatics. I intend to point out the possible correspondences existing between the god *Sol*, referred to as *Sol Invictus* in historiography,<sup>1</sup> and Apollo. While the solar facet of *Phoebus* Apollo is well known, to what extent he exerted an influence over *Sol Invictus* has yet to be elucidated. Comparing types and chronologies plus describing correspondences between the two gods in an homogenous process may actually constitute a different approach. Three aspects will be taken into consideration: iconography exchange, the chronological relationship and the propagandistic function of coin legends. The aim is to incorporate the knowledge thus gained into a critical analysis of *Sol* in the 3rd century.

**Key words:** *Sol Invictus*, *Apollo*, Numismatics, *conservator*, propaganda

Manders<sup>2</sup> already mentions Apollo acting as an imperial protector in the second half of the 3rd century. Many deities and deified concepts acquired this feature throughout the century, usually connected to militarization and legitimizing propaganda.

Imagery and *formulae* must be perceived as a reflection of imperial policy. A reflection, not a copy, as to defend the existence of direct and exhaustive control over monetary policy would be excessive. From the point of view of iconography, the weight of tradition cannot be underestimated when assessing the message conveyed by coins. Fowden's claim "conservatism modified by pragmatism"<sup>3</sup> could well sum

<sup>1</sup> With this remark I wish to indicate that I share Berrens' view (BERRENS, S.: *Sonnenkult und Kaisertum von den Severern bis zu Constantin I* (193–337 n. Chr.) [Historia Einzelschriften 185]. Stuttgart 2004, 184–198) on the value of the epithet "invictus", not intrinsic to *Sol*. I will not go into the name debate and prefer to simplify the issue by accepting the generally used historiographic term *Sol Invictus*. This one will refer to the solar deity shaped in the second half of the 3rd century with peculiar features different from those of *Sol* in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries.

<sup>2</sup> MANDERS, E.: *Coining Images of Power, Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, AD 193–284*. Leiden–Boston 2012, 132.

<sup>3</sup> FOWDEN, G.: Late Polytheism. In BOWMAN, A. K. – GARNSEY, P. – CAMERON, A.: *The Cambridge Ancient History. Vol. XII: The Crisis of the Empire, AD 193–337*. Cambridge 2005, 557, n. 12.

up how the Roman monetary system operated in the 3rd century. Yet, some objections must be raised. There is ample room between indifference about the content of coins and a deliberate and painstaking control exerted by the emperors. Emperors did unquestionably control coinage and some of them even specifically promoted a certain deity or type. Special commemorations on medallions are a clear example of this, as well as striking varieties or diversity of types: Elagabalus's Sol, Jupiter under Diocletian, Hercules under Maximian, the *saeculum aureum* of Gordian III, Augustus, Aurelian... and for the purposes of this paper, the joint reign of Gallienus and Valerian. Yet, seeking a specific imperial policy in each type and aspect of a coin would be far-fetched. After all, one of the traits of Numismatics is the diversity of legends and images created by small variations.

*Sol* became relatively common only after emperor Gallienus (except for Elagabalus). A central formula cannot be easily established; it is clear that the most common form is ORIENS AVG,<sup>4</sup> but it only accounts for a higher percentage initially. On other occasions, other formulae are more common for specific periods, such as AETERNIT AVG, linked to Sol during the decade of 240. Nonetheless, the most significant instance could be SOLI INVICTO, a predominant formula during the Tetrarchy, the final phase of Sol's formative process on the imperial coin begun in the last third of the 3rd century. Consequently, in spite of the larger tour of Sol's iconography it does not seem reasonable to extend the name *Sol Invictus* beyond this period.

Based on the same legends, the god clearly becomes linked to emperors and the preservation of the State, predictably through victory. This role of preservation, proximity to the ruler and legitimizing victory was increasingly significant throughout the 3rd century AD. Many of the legends referring to the god allude to such a function: *invictus, comes, aeternitas augusti, conservator, providentia*... plenty of formulae, some shared with other Roman public deities although always focused on the same role played by the god. A quite clear instance would be emperor Probus' series dedicated to CONCORDIA AVG, represented by the encounter between the goddess and god Sol.<sup>5</sup>

## CHRONOLOGY

In the timeline from the Severan dynasty to the end of the 3rd century there is a gap in the minting of Sol coins. The absence extends from Severus Alexander to the joint reign of Valerian and Gallienus, with a few exceptions. This fact defines a series of isolated moments whose characteristics allow us to establish a periodization. The following graph (chronologically inverse) based on the *Roman Imperial Coinage* illustrates the period (table 1):<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Most coins from the 2nd century AD contain this formula when depicting Helios-Sol. *Oriens* becomes a "cliché", cf. FERGUSON, J.: *The Religions of the Roman Empire*. London 1982, 49.

<sup>5</sup> *RIC* V-2 Probus, 323–324.

<sup>6</sup> Table based on the series established by *Roman Imperial Coinage*. Only the coins depicting iconographically Sol are considered, those clearly attributable to the god Elagabal under Emperor Elagabalus are therefore excluded. Caesars reigns and regional coins are excluded.

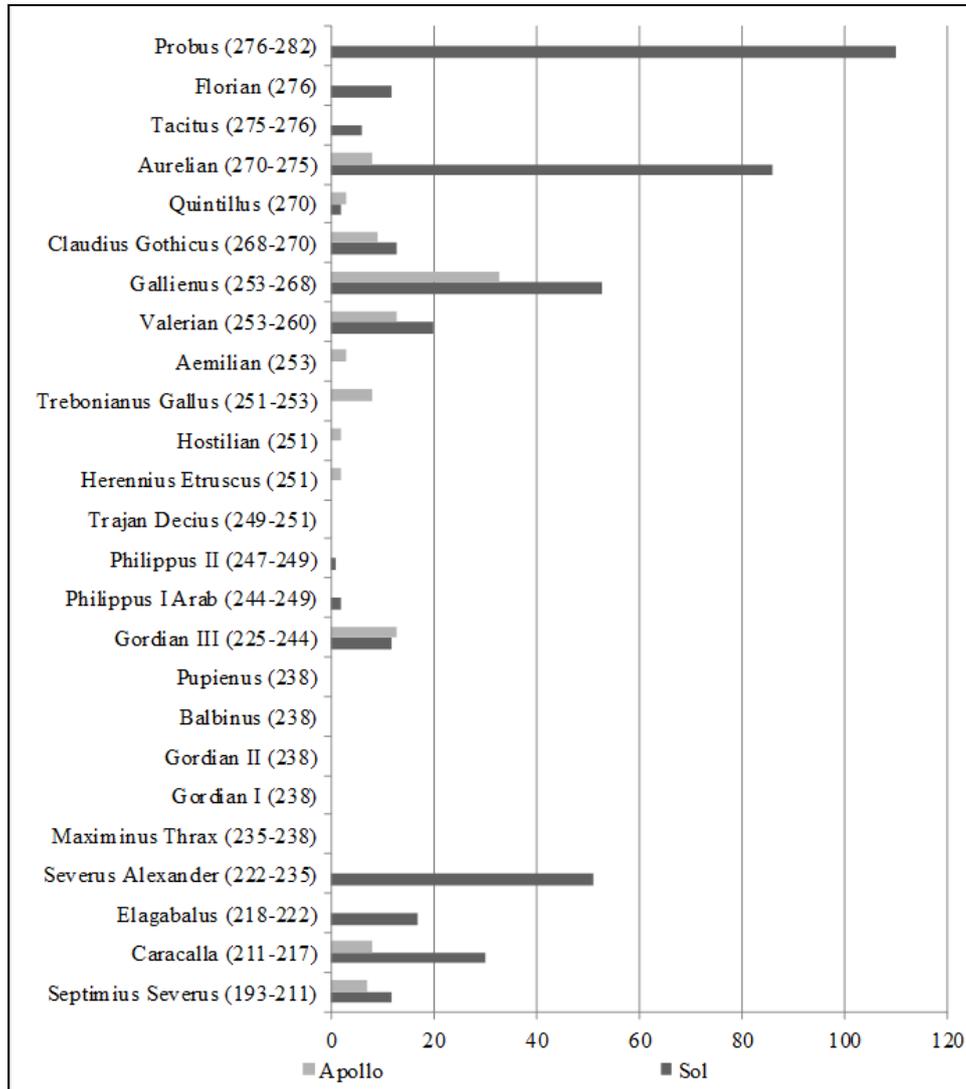


Table 1. Apollo & Sol RIC Coins

Three exceptions can be noted in this “gap”. Firstly, the regional coins which follow their own cycles depicting the god Sol in cities such as Alexandria and Emesa under Verus Maximus (Caesar 236–238 AD).<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the remarkable case of Gordian III (238–244 AD) whose propaganda on the *saeculum aureum* had an influence on later coinage with types referring to the *aeternitas* of Rome alongside Sol. And

<sup>7</sup> MILNE, J. G.: *A Catalogue of Alexandrian Coinage in the Ashmolean Museum*. London 1971, 3219. Actually Milne collects some more: MILNE 3218 and 3220.

thirdly, a few instances exist of Philip I and II revering the concept of *Aeternitas*. They follow Gordian's propaganda, with Sol depicted within the same framework of preservation (and regeneration) of the State.

It should be emphasized that Jupiter, as well as Apollo and Sol,<sup>8</sup> disappeared from imperial coins twice: once just after the reign of Severus Alexander and then after Gordian III (or his most immediate successors). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that this assertion is based on corpora such as the *Roman Imperial Coinage* and does not apply to local mints. At any rate, the disruption may be set in the context of the period after the fall of the Severan dynasty. After the death of Alexander Severus (235 AD) confusion and fratricidal disputes had a negative impact on euergetism and public enterprises, including the minting of coins.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the case of the second interruption, the first involved a radical break in religious monetary tradition after the fall of the Severan dynasty. This indirectly indicates a political change in process and a possible shift in propaganda after Severus Alexander. Three distinct phases can be noted: the Severan dynasty, Gordian III and the second half of the 3rd century. The second phase differs somewhat because of the use of the concept *aeternitas* attached to Sol. Each of these phases places different emphasis on imperial propaganda. The solar deity called *Sol Invictus* seems to refer to the third phase, mixing traditional models, *aeternitas*, the use of *invictus* in Sol coins and martial symbols. [Fig. 1]

Contrary to the representation of Sol during the Severan dynasty, in the second half of the 3rd century the divinity is depicted using a more varied typology. Under the African-Syrian dynasty the god was generally defined in the legend by the traditional *cursus honorum* of the emperor or by the term *Oriens Aug.* As for iconography, the Severans standardized the semi-naked figure of Sol standing in a chlamys or a chiton, bearing a whip (or globe) and with a raised hand.<sup>10</sup> In the Severan dynasty, only emperor Elagabalus used different legends mentioning the god Elagabal or Sol. Apart from Elagabalus few variants exist. One of them is the bust of Sol-Helios under the legend *Pacator Orbis*,<sup>11</sup> a new legend linked to former depictions used during the Antonine dynasty.

From the year 235 AD onwards new forms were gradually incorporated into the god's iconography. In the middle of the century the legend *Aeternitas* appeared with the traditional Roman Sol (standing, radiate, naked, holding globe). Later on,

<sup>8</sup> This may also apply to other deities such as Hercules, MANDERS (n. 2) 56–57.

<sup>9</sup> DE BLOIS, L.: *The Crisis of the Third Century AD in the Roman Empire: a Modern Mith?* In DE BLOIS, L. – RICH, J.: *The Transformation of Economic Life Under the Roman Empire* [Impact of Empire 2]. Leiden 2002, 215–216; FOWDEN (n. 3) 556; STEYN, D.: *Chasing the Sun: Coinage and Solar Worship in the Roman Empire of the Third and Early Fourth Centuries CE*. Records of Canterbury Museum. Canterbury 2014, 37, n. 28.

<sup>10</sup> HIJMANS, S. E.: *Sol: The Sun in the Art and Religions of Rome*. PhD thesis, University of Groningen 2009, 72 and ff.; MANDERS (n. 2) 127; STEYN (n. 9) 41.

<sup>11</sup> *RIC* IV-1 Septimius Severus, 282.



Fig. 1. RIC IV Gordian III 83 (concession from *wildwinds.com*;  
[http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/gordian\\_III/RIC\\_0083.jpg](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/gordian_III/RIC_0083.jpg))

further legends and iconographies were added: a solar frontal *quadriga*<sup>12</sup> (rare in previous imperial iconography); linked to *providentia* bearing the legionary emblems;<sup>13</sup> defeated enemies at the feet of Sol;<sup>14</sup> the god as the emperor's *comes*;<sup>15</sup> as *claritas* of the emperors during the Tetrarchy<sup>16</sup>... The traditional representation of Sol standing, however, continues to be predominant. Most changes consist of a modification of the legend or of the addition of new elements within the field or the exergue. [Fig. 2]

The general trend is that representations correspond to imperial propaganda. Despite certain coinages would deserve specific analysis, the imperial message seems to be a legitimizing one of a martial nature, gradually intensified in the 3rd century. This evolution may be illustrated by the modifications of the military and provincial

<sup>12</sup> COHEN, H.: *Description Historique des Monnaies frappées sous l'Empire Romain, communément appelées Médailles Impériales. Tome I: de Pompée à Domitien (67 avant J.-C. à 96 après J.-C.* Paris 1859, 300 Probus (Siscia); RIC V-2 Probus 101, 776–782, 861–870, 911.

<sup>13</sup> RIC V-1 Tacitus 52, 53, 195–198; Florian 110–113; V-2 Probus 844–850.

<sup>14</sup> RIC V-1 Aurelian 61–66, 134, 135, 137...; RIC V-2 Probus 44 and 45; RIC V-2 Treveri 116 Diocletian; RIC V-2 472–474 Maximilian; RIC VI Aquileia 144 Constantine.

<sup>15</sup> Emperors and some examples of different mints: RIC V-2 Probus 138, 209, 829; Severus, RIC VI Treveri 616, 629; Diocletian RIC VI Carthago 9; Crispus RIC VI Londinum 113–116, RIC VII Trier 106, 136; Constantius II RIC VI Ticinium 99, Londinum 117, 118, RIC VII Trier 107, Siscia 36; Maximinus Daia, RIC VI Nicomedia 73b, Londinum 146, Aquileia 142, Rome 322b, Ostia 84–88, Treveri 628b–632; Licinius, RIC VI Ticinium 131c, Londinum 121c, Aquileia 143, Roma 320, Ostia 84b, and RIC VII Ticinium 4, London 35, Rome 3, 4, 21–24, Arles 46; and Constantine, RIC VI Londinum 113–116, Aquileia 144, Ostia 83, Roma 313–319, Treveri 865–876, Lyons 307–312, and RIC VII Ticinium 1–3, London 5–20, Lyons 1–9, Aquileia 1–5, Rome 1, Trier 39–48, Arles 184, Siscia 31–34, Sirmium 31, Serdica 4, Antioch 49. It must be recalled that most mentions of Licinius with a dedication to Sol Invictus come from mints under Constantine's control. The only clearly different case is that of Serdica, reopened after the victory over Maximinus Daia. It is hardly surprising that some western minting incorporate co-August Licinius before the second war that confronts them in 323 AD.

<sup>16</sup> RIC Treveri 116 Diocletian; RIC VII Treveri 152 Crispus; RIC VII Londinum 102 Constantine.



Fig. 2. RIC V-2 Probus 844 (concession from *wildwinds.com*;  
[http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/probus/RIC\\_0844.jpg](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/probus/RIC_0844.jpg))

model taking place under Gallienus, Aurelian's *manu militari* reunification, the multiple internal wars, or the great reorganization undertaken by the Tetrarchy. Some of Aurelian's coinages may be understood in this context: RESTITUT ORBIS and PACATOR ORBIS.<sup>17</sup> As regards Gallienus (253–268 AD), the connection made by Lukas de Blois<sup>18</sup> between the redistribution of imperial mints and military needs is particularly noteworthy. These changes trigger the decentralization of direct imperial control over coins. This fact could be linked to the subsequent situation of the Roman mint and emperor Aurelian's reaction by taking control over it in the early stages of his reign.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of different mints, reference should be made to the great disparity in the pace of minting between local and imperial centres.<sup>20</sup> Regional minting is clearly more dynamic, or at least varied, and in my opinion better reflects cultural trends than imperial minting. Conversely, imperial mints provide superior information on propaganda policies and seem to be more attached to traditional uses.<sup>21</sup> This can be clearly noted in Sol's imagery through the constant use of the naked ephebic figure bearing either a whip or a globe. In most cases, therefore, variation may be found in the inter-

<sup>17</sup> While the woman depicted under RESTITVT ORBIS (RIC V-1 Aurelian 295 Serdica, 347 Cyzicus, 386 Antioch possibly refers to Oriens and to Victory in the campaigns against Palmyra; PACATOR ORBIS depicts Sol (RIC V-1 Aurelian 6) as Aurelian's protector in Lyons after annexing the Gallic Empire.

<sup>18</sup> DE BLOIS, L.: *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*. Leiden 1976, 93–94.

<sup>19</sup> *Epit.* 35. 4; *SHA Aurelian* 38. 2; *Eutropius* 9. 14. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Always with the understanding that "imperial" coining did not always depend on the ruler's will and that "local" minting was not totally independent from imperial influence.

<sup>21</sup> FOWDEN (n. 3) 555. In the instance presented by the author, Caracalla's particular religious preferences could be subject to imperial numismatic tradition. On Caracalla's coins: ROWAN, C.: *Under Divine Auspices: Divine Ideology and the Visualisation of Imperial Power in the Severan Period*. New York 2012.

action between legends and images within the framework of a specific point in time. Relationships between symbols and titles with chronology are crucial to understanding Sol's evolution in Numismatics.

### LEGENDS OF SOL

Under Gordian III's rule (238–244 AD), coin legends reveal a new commemoration policy. Sol and other deities play a major role in the *saeculum aureum* proclaimed by the State. A rejuvenating Sol is portrayed in two forms: under the legend AETERNITAS or ORIENS AVG. While the latter is the traditional form used for Sol in the previous decades, the former denotes a new and stronger component of institutional propaganda. In the 2nd century the goddess *Aeternitas* accompanied deified empresses and emperors. In relation with other gods, the term *aeternitas* was also usually linked to Rome and Victory,<sup>22</sup> exposing some of the ideology sponsored by the imperial administration. This feature of Gordian's policy made a notable impact on later emperors. The concept thus developed was to become much more common than in previous periods of the Roman Empire.

Legends such as AETERNITAS AVG began to be used under Gordian III as one of Sol's attributes. Save for a few instances where the concept of *aeternitas* is deified (i.e. *RIC* V-2 Carinus 243–249) very seldom this legend is not represented by Rome itself or by Sol.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the new formula becomes one of the defining traits of minting dedicated to the god from Gordian III onwards. This link could also be one of the reasons why other attributions were attached to the god later on. Rome's perpetuity required being associated with concepts such as preservation and protection hence attaching the deity's propaganda ingredient to emperors as the champions of endurance was all that was needed to expedite a relationship of tutelage.

Sol and most gods worshiped by Gordian III disappeared after his reign. Amongst the main gods, only Mars remains on imperial coins. This, however, was not an abrupt break. *Aeternitas* continues to appear briefly next to Sol in Philip I's coins (a hybrid with Gordian's) and Philip II's under the legend AETERNIT IMPERI. Eventually, Sol disappeared until co-emperors Valerian and Gallienus resumed its regular minting in the year 255<sup>24</sup> AD. At that point, a new period began which lasted until the end of the Tetrarchy.

Sol's presence was continuous from 255, rapidly acquiring the attributes defining *Sol Invictus*: stronger emphasis on the martial world, a special relationship with emperors and the very epithet *invictus*. After Valerian's death, the god is portrayed as

<sup>22</sup> In 2nd century *RIC* III Antoninus Pius 351, Diva Faustina obverse. Later also appeared under other forms such as AETERNITAS AVG NN with Castor and Pollux (*RIC* VI Ostia 14) or Fides (*RIC* VI Ostia 43), with Maxentius in both cases.

<sup>23</sup> Some instances: *RIC* IV Gordian III 83 and 97 in Rome, *RIC* V-2 Probus 182 and ff. in Rome, or 592 in Siscia. At times the idea is personified in the scene of the Capitoline she-wolf, thus *RIC* V-2 Probus 638–640.

<sup>24</sup> *RIC* V-1 Gallienus 117.

“*conservator*” in the animal series under the solitary rule of his son Gallienus.<sup>25</sup> In particular, five legends are linked to Sol image under this emperor: ORIENS, AETERNIT AVG, COMITI AVG, CONS AVG and SOLI INVIC. After Valerian’s son, later emperors either followed or changed these criteria at the basis of *Sol Invictus* numismatics. The process was not a uniform one; the variety and quantity of types strongly depended on the different reigns.<sup>26</sup> The singularity of some coin types was combined with a predilection for a pre-existing set of forms by other emperors.

In any event, Sol linked to the emperor may already be noticed in *RIC V-1 Gallienus 296*. In this coin, the legend on the reverse states RESTITVT GENER HVMANI, portraying the emperor in the exact same way as Sol, although dressed.<sup>27</sup> The ruler’s right hand is raised and holds the globe in his left hand. Furthermore, on that coin the emperor is depicted radiate (reverse). The date of *RIC V-1 Gallienus 296* is particularly significant, a year when evidence exists of new coins of Sol. This coin was also referred to by John Yonge Akerman,<sup>28</sup> who described an unidentified radiate man. In particular, this type could be similar to another coin by Valerian (*RIC V-1 Valerian 220*), from the year 254–255. Both emperors are depicted similarly, which constitutes one of the earliest clear integrations of the archetypal model of Sol in the 3rd century by the emperors. [Fig. 3]

The reigns of Gallienus, Aurelian and Probus are the most significant in the god’s evolution. These three emperors account for the minting of a large amount of coins dedicated to Sol (around 55, 90 and 100 respectively).<sup>29</sup> In other words, they defined the imperial position regarding the god during the second half of the 3rd century. Their policies triggered a process which resulted in the birth of a public *Sol Invictus*,<sup>30</sup> whose full name was used for the first time under Gallienus (*RIC V-1 119*<sup>31</sup>).

<sup>25</sup> *RIC V-1 Gallienus 282–285*.

<sup>26</sup> The existence of an erratic presence and of the significant role played by some emperors in defining Sol was already expounded by Dowall, M.: *Sol Invictus and Mithra. Some Evidence from the Mint of Rome*. In BIANCHI, U. (ed.): *Mysteria Mithrae. Proceedings of the International Seminar on the ‘Religio-historical Character of Roman Mithraism with Particular Reference to Roman and Ostian Sources’, Rome and Ostia, 28–31 March 1978*. Leiden 1979, 567–568.

<sup>27</sup> Regarding the relevance of solar iconography in rulers’ ideology, CHIRASSI COLOMBO, I.: *Sol Invictus o Mithra (per una rilettura in chiave ideologica della teologia solare del mitraismo nell’ambito del politeismo romano)*. In *Mysteria Mithrae* (n. 26) 649, 652–659, 663–664, 669–670.

<sup>28</sup> AKERMAN, J. Y.: *A Descriptive Catalogue of Rare and Unedited Roman Coins. From the Earliest Period of the Roman Coinage, to the extinction of the Empire under Constantinus Paleologos*. 2 vols. London 1834, II 30.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that the total number of coins registered with Aurelian and Probus is not the same. Percentages on the total number reveal a sensibly different perspective: from *RIC*, ca. 23% are dedicated to Sol of a total 406 under Aurelian as opposed to 12% of 929 coins under Probus (Manders [n. 2] 124). Constantine is not included in this selection as he chronologically corresponds to the 4th century, thus distant from Apollo and the situation referred to here.

<sup>30</sup> Regarding the vision of *Sol Invictus* as a new official cult within polytheism: WARDMAN, A.: *Religion and Statecraft Among the Romans*. London 1982, 121–123, sees a return of Elagabalus, who is incorporated in the manner of republican generals and emperors; WATSON, A.: *Aurelian and the Third Century*. London – New York 1999, 197–198; HJUMANS (n. 10) 600, refers to “The Myth of a Supreme Solar God”; FORSYTHE, G.: *Time in Roman Religion. One Thousand Years of Religious History*. London – New York 2012, 141–144, a new official cult within pre-existing ones; STEYN (n. 9) 38, *Sol Invictus* as another new official deity.

<sup>31</sup> Also *RIC V-1 Gallienus 286, 611, 620, 658*.



Fig. 3. RIC V-1 Gallienus 296 (concession from *wildwinds.com* and *romanorum.com*; [http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/gallienus/RIC\\_0296\[j\].jpg](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/gallienus/RIC_0296[j].jpg))

The creation of the cult to *Sol Invictus*<sup>32</sup> is generally attributed to Aurelian (270–275). This ruler's proximity to the god Sol is a fact from the point of view of Numismatics; suffice it to quote the renowned coin with the legend SOL DOMINVS IMPERI ROMANI.<sup>33</sup> Alaric Watson<sup>34</sup> even maintains that under Aurelian the legend *Oriens Augusti* refers both to the emperor and to Sol, which would be linked to the aforementioned coins from Gallienus and Valerian.<sup>35</sup> A parallel would thus exist between the triumph of light over darkness on the one side and of the emperor over his enemies on the other. While these claims may seem too bold, the scholar maintains some noteworthy views. Captives on solar-type coins (ORIENS AVG amongst others) are dressed in the oriental fashion, a quite understandable occurrence given the ruler's bellico-political background. It must be taken into account that the display of captives already existed on coins from other emperors, although not so profusely, this being one of Aurelian's – whose reign was defined by wars – most peculiar features. It is, however, more relevant to point out, as Watson does, that the formulae *Restitutor Orbis* and *Restitutor Orientis* demonstrate the role given to the deity in propaganda and the god's close relationship with the emperor.

On the other hand, the case of Probus (276–282) is particularly remarkable. A substantial variety of images linked to the State's protection are deployed under his

<sup>32</sup> The idea of the creation of a solid cult to *Sol Invictus* first defined by Léon Homo in 1904 (HOMO, L.: *Essai sur le Règne de l'Empereur Aurélien (270-275)*. Paris 1904, 184–188) is reshaped by various scholars who tend to different interpretations, thus CIZEK, E.: *L'Empereur Aurélien et son Temps*. Paris 1994, 16 and ff.; or WATSON (n. 30) 196 and ff. Versions stand by the reading of the first mentions of this cult, such as the *pontifices dei Solis* attested to since Probus from *CIL VI 31775*.

<sup>33</sup> RIC V-1 Aurelian 319.

<sup>34</sup> WATSON (n. 30) 195.

<sup>35</sup> RIC V-1 Gallienus 296 and RIC V-1 Valerian 220.

rule. While Jupiter appears with the legend CLEMENTIA TEMP or as *conservator*,<sup>36</sup> Victoria is linked to *Virtus Augusti* and *Restitutio Orbis*.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Sol is sometimes linked to *Providentia*,<sup>38</sup> *Aeternitas*,<sup>39</sup> or is at times referred to as *conservator* or *Sol Invictus*.<sup>40</sup> Both the emperor's policy and the role of Sol amongst public gods are quite obvious: they pursue the preservation of the State and of the emperor himself. Later on, in contrast, the minting of Sol under emperors Carus (282 to 283), Carinus (283 to 285) and Numerianus (283 to 284) was much more modest in terms of number and variety and was recovered under the Tetrarchy playing a secondary role, reaching its final peak under Constantine.

As has been established so far, three phases can be clearly differentiated in the evolution of Sol. The "Severan" phase (from 193 to 235) could be placed in the first place, between the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Under the Severans it was definitively developed the iconographic archetype of Sol walking and bearing a whip or globe is definitively developed. This depiction and the use of traditional legends ("P M TR P COS" formula) constituted a systematic pattern. The little variation shown in the dedications stops during the rule of Gordian III (238–244), when a second phase began. The concept of *aeternitas* is added to the function played by Sol in iconography. Finally, Sol's reappearance after Gallienus (253–268) marked the third phase, when *Sol Invictus* is born. This evolution was made possible for two reasons: the flourishing of legends linked to the solar god and the absorption-replacement of Apollo.

#### APOLLO AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SOL

When considering the characteristics of Sol and his development we must not lose sight of the context. The general trend during the 3rd and early 4th century is the same for all public gods. Jupiter, Juno, Mars, Minerva and Hercules are depicted as protectors of the State or linked to victory and power. Aesculapius<sup>41</sup> and Serapis are also occasionally used with the same role. In 2nd and 3rd century coins these protective roles are reflected in the legends used with the various gods. Jupiter is accompanied by the terms *conservator*, *stator*, *victor* or *ultor* amongst other. Mars appears as *propugnator*, *victor*, *paciferus*, VIRTUS AVG and *conservator*. Juno is *conservatrix* and *martialis*; while Minerva appears as *comes*. Hercules is referred to as *Victor*, *Comes*, VIRTUTI AVG/G.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> CLEMENTIA TEMP, *RIC* V-2 Probus 905; *conservator*, *RIC* V-2 Probus 338.

<sup>37</sup> *Virtus Augusti*, *RIC* V-2 Probus 112; *Restitutio Orbis*, *RIV* V-2 Probus 733.

<sup>38</sup> This deified idea starts to be noticed since Gallienus though not related to Sol. This typology was used under emperors Tacitus, Florianus and Probus, see *supra* n. 17.

<sup>39</sup> *RIC* V-2 Probus (3, 21, 22) 168.

<sup>40</sup> *RIC* V-2 Probus 200.

<sup>41</sup> *RIC* V-1 Gallienus 172: CONSERVATOR AVG.

<sup>42</sup> A few instances suffice: Jupiter: CONSERVATORI (*RIC* IV-3 Aemilian 3–4), STATORI (*RIC* IV-2 Severus Alexander 202), VICTORI (*RIC* V-1 Gallienus 21–22), VLTORI (*RIC* IV-2 Severus Alexander 144). Mars: PAFICERO (*RIC* V-2 Probus 42), VIRTVS AVGVSTI (*RIC* V-2 Probus 57), PROPUGNATOR (*RIC* IV-3 Gordian III 146), VICTOR (*RIC* V-2 Numerianus 386–389), CONSERVATORI

Two facts seem clear: on the one hand, the imperial policy emphasizes the same features in all gods, on the other hand, certain gods play a specific role (Juno as the counterpart of Jupiter in empresses' coins) or follow a similar evolution, though at a different pace (Mars only became *conservator* during the Tetrarchy<sup>43</sup>).

One of these gods is, however, striking. Apollo had not appeared on imperial coins since emperor Geta<sup>44</sup> (209–211) and Caracalla (196–217), though he appeared alongside other main gods during the reign of Gordian III (238–244). Soon after the death of the emperor in 244 AD and a few years before Sol reappeared, the Delphic god was already documented on coins under Herennius Etruscus (251) and Hostilian (251). Apollo started then an uninterrupted phase characterized by the growing use of the epithet *conservator*. The precedent of this attribution originates in the legend on the hybrid coin RIC IV-3 Gordian, 245. Regardless of how the characteristics of this new Apollo may be analysed, it is clear that from Aemilian (253)<sup>45</sup> onwards the god is portrayed in the role of *conservator* even more often than Jupiter. Before Sol reappeared, Artemis' brother had already played a part as a protector of emperors in the period between Herennius Etruscus and Valerian.

Moreover, the god's role becomes apparent during Gallienus' solitary reign (260–268). Apollo is always depicted as *conservator* except for one sole exception.<sup>46</sup> Sol had just reappeared and the propaganda facet of Apollo was paramount in the shaping of future functions of *Sol Invictus*. The Delphic god had been portrayed as APOLLINI CONSERVA (RIC V-1 Gallienus 71), SALVS AVG (RIC V-1 Gallienus), APOLLINI AVG (RIC V-1 Quintilian) or even PROPVGNATOR (RIC V-1 Valerian, 74). [Fig. 4]

Apollo had been previously linked to the Principate during Augustus' reign and Apollonian symbols were used by Vitellius and Vespasian on coins. In the 3rd century, the new and close relationship with the emperor is apparent on coins, especially under Gallienus. The reign of this emperor is particularly noteworthy, more so if we bear in mind that the sole exception to Apollo *conservator* is none other than *Apollō Palatinus*. This could possibly relate to Augustus or the *Ludi Apollinares*; in any event, the god is unquestionably linked to the sphere of imperial rule. This is nothing exceptional as the rest of the Roman pantheon were used in the same way: a remarkably emphatic use of the traditional language focused on the preservation and legitimation of the emperor. Apollo can thus be seen as a *conservator* under emperors Aemilian (253), Macrianus (261), Quietus (260–261), Valerian (253–260) and Gallienus (253–268).

(RIC VI Cartago 8 Maximianus). Juno: *CONSERVATRIX* (RIC IV-3 Philip I 127–128), *MARTIALIS* (RIC IV-3 Trebonianus Gallus 69). Minerva: *COMES AVG* (RIC V-2 Probus 65). Hercules: *VIRTVTI AVGVSTI* (RIC V-2 Probus 12) *COMITI* (RIC VI Roma 147 Maxentius), *COMITI PROBI AVG* (RIC V-2 Probus 70–72), *VICTORI* (RIC VI Alexandria 38 Maximian).

<sup>43</sup> RIC VI Cartago 8 Maximianus; RIC VI Roma 140 Maxentius; RIC VI Roma 366 Licinius; RIC VI Roma 364 Constantine.

<sup>44</sup> RIC IV-1 Geta 155, 184.

<sup>45</sup> RIC V-1 Aemilian 1, 43.

<sup>46</sup> RIC V-1 Gallienus 631: *Apollini Pal.*



Fig. 4. RIC V-1 Gallienus 468 (concession from *wildwinds.com* and *DOC*;  
[http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/gallienus/RIC\\_0468\\_2.jpg](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/gallienus/RIC_0468_2.jpg))

Curiously enough, Sol met a similar fate under the following emperors. The god was also depicted as CONS(ervatori) and COM(i)TI under Gallienus and once under Claudius II<sup>47</sup> (268–270) although always within the animal series.<sup>48</sup> It was not until Apollo disappeared that Sol can be properly seen as *conservator*. This coincidence is particularly striking if we bear in mind that other gods such as Jupiter endured during the entire period, unlike Apollo.

There are sound reasons therefore to view the god of the lyre as the pattern from which Sol was promoted. The formula used here to analyse the relationship between the two deities was not exclusive to them. Emperors promoted in the same manner different deities, and Gallienus is no exception.<sup>49</sup> Rulers emphasized their links with protecting gods probably due to the political context of the second third of the 3rd century. These formulations must be perceived as a form of tackling instability within the government caused by usurpations.

Apollo's features have traditionally been close to Sol's. In this particular case, some of the legends used for the son of Leto precede Sol's. Apollo's presence is also

<sup>47</sup> RIC V-1 Claudius G. 118.

<sup>48</sup> Delving into the specific meaning of Sol and the other deities represented could be the subject of another paper. Regarding Sol's possible role, WEIGEL, R. D.: Gallienus 'Animal Series' Coins and Roman Religion. *The Numismatic Chronicle* 150 (1990) 141–143. I agree with the author on interpreting the use of Sol in minting because of his relationship with Apollo and the Circus Maximus. Following the author, I find it extremely interesting to link these coins to two specific cases (apart from the main use aimed at legionaries). On the one hand are the *ludi* and the growing interest in maintaining ruler's popularity. On the other, the use of gods who were known for having defended Rome and Romans, given the historical context of conflict. Sol would befit this case as he is invoked in the *Aeneid* in Aeneas' oath (*Aen.* 12. 176) and in the third verse of Horatio's *Carmen Saeculare*. Also it's interesting the possible link with the symbols of legions as stated by prof. Mastrocinque in personal communication.

<sup>49</sup> The other great propaganda context for emperor Gallienus was the promotion of peace in the State, DE BLOIS (n. 18) 121.

remarkable up until the appearance of the other god. Afterwards, the number of coins dedicated to Apollo gradually decreases while Sol gains prominence in the space of one generation (Gallienus and Aurelian). The two deities seem to maintain an interchangeable relationship. During the reign of Aurelian (270–275), Apollo finally disappeared and Sol alone remained and began to be depicted as *conservator*.

Furthermore, the parallel Gallic empire (260–274 AD) did also attest to this change. An examination of coins from Postumus to Tetricus II reveals (see table 2)<sup>50</sup> an intermediate step or a different policy from the pre-existing one. Sol has a notable presence in the ensemble but the attribute of *conservator* is linked to Apollo, Mars, Hercules and in the last stage to Sol and even Serapis. On the other hand, *Sol Invictus* is repeatedly depicted alongside emperor Victorinus (269–271) and once under Tetricus II (271–274)<sup>51</sup> (table 2).

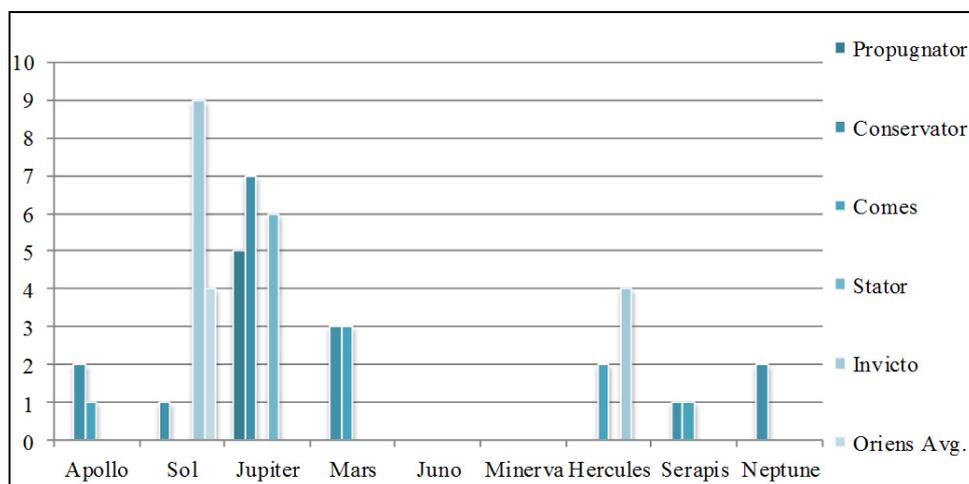


Table 2. From Postumus (260–268) to Tetricus II (271–274)

Scholars such as Erika Manders<sup>52</sup> have striven to explain the peculiarities of Apollo in the 3rd century and his disappearance under Aurelian. Manders claims that the god's evanescence is due to the wane of the Principate model and the emergence of a new one with Diocletian, whose tetrarchic system leaves no room for Apollo. She however fails to explain the events of the first half of the 3rd century, where Apollo only seldom appears. In my opinion, the Delphic god reappeared in the middle of the century for the same reasons as Sol did: a new political volatile framework within the Empire and the need of legitimating the ruler. Many gods and deified conceptions were used in this sense; and these conditions eventually propitiated the surge of *Sol Invictus* to the detriment of Apollo. Thus the appearance of Apollo *conservator* and

<sup>50</sup> Data from *Roman Imperial Coinage*.

<sup>51</sup> *RIC* IV-2 Victorinus 96, 97, 112–114. *RIC* IV-2 Tetricus II 234.

<sup>52</sup> MANDERS (n. 2) 125.



Fig. 5. *RIC* V-2 Probus 45 (concession from *wildwinds.com* and Grzegorz Kryszczuk; [http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/probus/RIC\\_0045.jpg](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/probus/RIC_0045.jpg))

his later replacement by Sol reflect the process of official propaganda and religious evolution leading later to the Tetrarchy.

Another issue to be taken into consideration is the image and representation of the god. Some iconographic elements may on some occasions be exchanged between Apollo and Sol. There are not many instances of this occurring, although several cases exist with certainty in the second half of the 3rd century. Under Gallienus (253–268), Sol's whip is found in the hands of Apollo,<sup>53</sup> and under Claudius Gothicus (268–270), Sol takes Apollo's place next to Diana.<sup>54</sup> Later, during the reign of Probus (276–282), Apollo's bow is found being used by Sol.<sup>55</sup> The switching of symbols or positions demonstrates the proximity between these two gods. The case of Claudius Gothicus may not be particularly striking, although it gains significance within this context. In this sense also *RIC* V-1 Aurelian, 66 should be cited: Sol is portrayed on the coin under the legend *APOL CONS AVG*. Thus, during the years between Gallienus and Aurelian something definitely changed: Apollo had taken on the characteristics of a tutelary god and simultaneously could be exchanged with Sol in official representations. [Fig. 5]

Some scholars, such as Raymond Van Dam,<sup>56</sup> defend the identification of both gods during the reign of Constantine (306–337). The author specifically refers to the

<sup>53</sup> *RIC* V-1 Gallienus 6–7.

<sup>54</sup> *RIC* V-1 Claudius Gothicus 198: *AETER AVG*, Sol (whip) and Diana (torch). It is not unusual to see Diana bearing a torch on coins, as *FELICITAS SAECVLI* from V-1 Gallienus sol. reign 74, where the goddess is depicted walking holding a torch. That luminous object is the common symbol of Diana *Lucifera*, an attribution somehow linked to the light of the Sun. One example of this Artemis is *RIC* Gall V-1 290, under the legend *DIANA LVCIFERA*.

<sup>55</sup> *RIC* V-2 Probus 45.

<sup>56</sup> VAN DAM, R.: *The Roman revolution of Constantine*. Ann Arbor 2007, 84–85.

change in the political propaganda of Constantine after his father-in-law's plot and to the vision of Apollo in Gaul quoted by Latin panegyrics.<sup>57</sup> The Apollo addressing the emperor in panegyrics should be connected as a “Sun-god” to *Sol Invictus*. Namely, the coin which may prove this relationship is *RIC VII Ticinium 56* (316 AD), where *Sol comes*<sup>58</sup> is depicted delivering Victoria to the emperor.

### SPECIFIC CASES

A precedent to this syncretic situation would probably be the Apollo of the *Thyateirenon*. The city of Thyatira in Asia Minor had its own tradition of Apollo Tyrimnos<sup>59</sup> (or Tyrimnaios) a deity depicted bearing a *bipennis*, a double-edged axe. The god is also extensively documented in other mints from Anatolia, and during the second half of the 2nd century AD iconographic correspondences with Sol begin to appear. Not only Romulus, Jupiter and Sol can be associated with the quadriga.<sup>60</sup> In the particular case of Apollo Tyrimneos of Thyateira, deity appeared during the reign of Commodus riding a galloping quadriga like Helios<sup>61</sup> under the legend ΕΠΙ ΤΡΑ ΤΙΤΟΥ ΑΥΦΗ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΟΥ ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΗΝΩΝ (under the strategos Titus Aure(lius) Barbarus. (Coin of) the people of Thyateira) [Fig. 5]

This depiction is certainly so peculiar that Mionnet identified it as Helios despite the *bipennis*. According to some researchers,<sup>62</sup> this Apollo could be equivalent to Sol in this context. More recently, the project *Roman Provincial Coinage Online* has published another coin from Thyatira chronologically close and with a similar representation, where the figure is identified as Helios or the emperor.<sup>63</sup> A more thorough analysis reveals the existence of some very similar coins in terms of iconography depicting Helios in an identical manner (with no axe) in Anatolia during the same period. A good example could be the case of Helios on a quadriga in the nearby city of Tabala.<sup>64</sup> Both cities are in Lydia, far enough from Syria to be considered under

<sup>57</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 6 (7) 21. 4–5. «Vidisti enim, credo, Constantine, Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria coronas tibi laureas offerentem, quae tricenum singulae ferunt omen annorum.»

<sup>58</sup> The legend says: SOLI COMITI CONSTANTINI AVG.

<sup>59</sup> ROBERT, L.: Deux concours grecs à Rome. *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 114.1 (1970) 25.

<sup>60</sup> CHIRASSI COLOMBO (n. 27) 657. Regarding Sol, also in GUARDUCCI, M.: Sol Invictus Augustus. *Rendiconti della Pontif. Acad.* 30–31 (1959) 168.

<sup>61</sup> MIONNET, E.: *Description de Médailles antiques grecques et romaines*. Paris 1806–1838, IV 914, Thyateira.

<sup>62</sup> ICKS, M.: Empire of the Sun? In HEKSTER, O. – SCHMIDT-HOFNER, S. – WITSCHERL, CH.: *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Eighth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire*. Leiden–Boston 2009, 116.

<sup>63</sup> HEUCHERT, V. – Howgego, Ch.: *The Roman Provincial Coinage [RPC]*. Vol. 4: The Antonines (AD 138–192). Oxford 2005, 9946 (temporary), under the legend ΕΠΙ ΤΡΑ [ ] ΔΗΜΟΧΘΗ [ ] ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΗΝΩΝ. It is essential to point out the difficulties in the identification of the object carried by the quadriga rider. It is identified as a “staff(?)” though it could well consist of the handle of a *bipennis*.

<sup>64</sup> WADDINGTON, W. H.: *Mélanges de numismatique*. Paris 1861, 1867, 531, Tabala.



6. MIONNET (n. 61) IV 914 (concession from *wildwinds.com* and *M&M*;  
[http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/commodus/\\_thyateira\\_Mionnet\\_IV\\_914.jpg](http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/commodus/_thyateira_Mionnet_IV_914.jpg))

the same regional influence as Semite solar gods, meanwhile the double axe was an important symbol of some gods in Caria.

Likewise, Sol appeared in the same city of Thyateira<sup>65</sup> on later coins. Moreover, games dedicated to Sol were inaugurated in the city possibly linked to the *Elagabalía* established in the city by the emperor of the same name.<sup>66</sup> During the rule of Severus Alexander (222–235) Helios appears again, radiating and saluting, galloping on a quadriga seen from the front bearing the globe in his left hand. This is the first case of Apollo being replaced by Helios-Sol in the same mint and with similar characteristics. It could possibly constitute a regional trend of limited scope, very different from that which the imperial coin was to have in the second half of the 3rd century.

A similar case is that of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Several depictions of Mount Argaeus exist on coins from this city. One of the main variants shows a figure/statue or a radiating deity with an globe and a sceptre on the mount.<sup>67</sup> The first minting of

<sup>65</sup> MIONNET (n. 61) IV 991–992, Thyateira

<sup>66</sup> HOWGEGO, CH. – HEUCHERT, V. – BURNETT, A.: *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*. Oxford 2005, 131. It could be one of the “*ἱσοπίθιον*” festivals described as “*Ἥλια* and *Πύθια*” (cf. R. S. Poole 1832–1895; B. V. Head [Barclay Vincent] 1844–1914; Percy Gardner 1846–1937, [ed. original 1873–1929, reedition by Forni publisher 1960]: *Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum* London 1832– [BMC], Galatia Syria, Emesa 21).

<sup>67</sup> Plenty of instances exist with variations based on two hardly differentiated types. The naked deity on the summit on the one side and a statue possibly personifying Mount Argaeus with similar attributes on the other. These two indistinguishable coinages produce their own variations (statue on an altar or podium, inside a temple...), but they are just part of the various forms coined in the city of Caesarea with Mount Argaeus (mount with the crater, star, a solitary mountain...). Some instances of the naked figure with the globe and the sceptre could be the following: *Sydenham* 128 Domitian; *Sydenham* 167 Trajan; *Sydenham* 258 Adrian; *Sydenham* 384 Commodus; or *Sydenham* 476, 478 Caracalla. It is practically impossible to elucidate whether they depict Helios, another deity or a statue.

this series goes back to Tiberius.<sup>68</sup> Debate exists on the interpretation of this figure<sup>69</sup> which in my opinion represents Helios or a similar local deity. The radiating crown may be noted on some coins as well as items such as the globe which would support this viewpoint. Two further coins from the same city might also be incorporated. One coin shows the bust of Helios, on the; on the other an uncertain divinity (Apollo or Helios) holds a branch.<sup>70</sup> Independently of concrete interpretations, it is important for the purpose of this paper the fact that the coins minted in Cappadocia either depict a solar type of deity or a strongly syncretic Helios.

Other similar cases are found in Amasya in Pontus (on a chariot facing an eagle on a pyre)<sup>71</sup> under Commodus; or Hypaepa in Lydia (Apollo-Helios radiating with an globe and torch opposite Artemis Anaitis)<sup>72</sup> under Caracalla. In the Anatolian Peninsula syncretic references or elements in common with Apollo are not infrequent.

It is hard to find a relationship comparable to that between Apollo and Sol. Yet, the comparison between the two would be incomplete without a reference to the coins of the god Elagabal, Sun-god from Emesa. The image of the deity followed the pattern of Greco-Roman Helios as can be noted in local coinages from the city of Emesa and the coins of emperor Elagabalus (emperor 218 to 222 AD). In fact, Elagabal can be seen as another sun-god like Helios or roman native Sol. During 2nd and 3rd centuries, Sol's figure was used to depict the Syrian deity, although representations of the Syrian god's black baetylus also existed.<sup>73</sup> The first mentions of *Sol Invictus* on coins and other legends as *conservator* correspond to this god. From an imperial point of view, the last appearance of god Elagabal was in the year 254 AD under the usurper or general Uranius Antoninus. He had coins minted with the baetylus on the quadriga under the legend CONSERVATOR AVG.<sup>74</sup> Uranius had recovered the imagery of the god from Emesa but with this exception the god Elagabal disappeared from imperial sphere after emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, also called Elagabalus. This is the reason why I believe the relevance of this god was limited and was relegated to a second class save for the reigns of Severus Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (Elagabalus) and Uranius Antoninus.

<sup>68</sup> *RPC* (n. 63) 3620.

<sup>69</sup> SYDENHAM, E. A.: *The Coinage of Caesarea in Cappadocia*. New York 1978, 18–20.

<sup>70</sup> Bust of Helios SYDENHAM (n. 69) Hadrian 253. Radiating figure with globe and a branch, Sol or Apollo with a branch SYDENHAM (n. 69) Commodus 384. In MIONNET (n. 61) IV Caesarea, 148149 under Caracalla a deity is depicted on Mount Argaeus with a branch, Mionnet identifies it as Apollo though it actually resembles Helios or the personification of Argaeus.

<sup>71</sup> WADDINGTON, W. H. – BABELON, E. – REINACHT, TH.: *Monnaies Grecques d'Asie mineure*. 2° ed. (repr. Paris 1984) 32 and 33, Amaseia. Note that the same typology (bird on a pyre) without Helios is more regular in the mint (pp. 32–51).

<sup>72</sup> GARTH, R.: *Drewry Collection*. Ex Triton II (1–2 December 1998), lot 631; Sternberg XIV (24–25 May 1984), lot 382, sold in auction on 10 January 2005, reference *Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.* (<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=57695>). For an instance of solitary Apollo-Helios, see LEYPOLD, S.: *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. Österreich. Sammlung Leybold. Kleinasiatische Münzen der Kaiserzeit*. 2 Bde. Wien 2000 and 2004, 995 under Julia Domna.

<sup>73</sup> *RIC* IV-2 Elagabalus 144, 195, 196.

<sup>74</sup> *RIC* IV-3 Uranius Antoninus 2.

In contrast, mention should be made of another “oriental” deity present in imperial minting. This is the case of Serapis, who appears radiating four times as SERAPIDI CONSERV AVG under Commodus<sup>75</sup> (180–192). The Alexandrian god appears again under Postumus<sup>76</sup> (260–268) and Claudius II Gothicus<sup>77</sup> (268–270) also as *conservator*. Serapis was not particularly linked to a controversial emperor (unlike god Elagabalus), played a clear public role and could be associated with Helios-Sol.<sup>78</sup> These characteristics and his expansion throughout the Mediterranean from the Hellenistic period<sup>79</sup> grant Serapis a peculiar position, closer to the general public feature of *Sol Invictus* as opposed to other gods such as Mithras. In any event, there is no continuity in imperial minting maintaining these characteristics, although the mentioned cases under Postumus and Claudius Gothicus are unquestionably close to the development of *Sol Invictus*. Perhaps we are looking at a minor or peripheral factor in the development of the solar divinity.

Serapis appeared again during the Tetrarchy in a different context. Some mints portrayed Helios with Serapis’ head. This type was coined for Maximinus II (305–312) in Antioch, Alexandria, Cyzicus and Heraclea,<sup>80</sup> and also for Licinius (308–324) in Nicomedia, Cyzicus or Antioch.<sup>81</sup> The image was even used under Constantine (306–337), for instance in *RIC* VI Antioch 154d. This process is a common one in some oriental mints during the second half of the Tetrarchy. The previous Serapis *conservator* no longer appeared, though he was still within the sphere of imperial tutelage. This could be a matter of a new ideological language developed in the east of the Empire; we cannot disregard the identical relationship displayed at the time between the *Genius Augusti* and Serapis on Alexandrian coins.<sup>82</sup> This case exists solely in the mint of Egypt, where the emperor’s genius holds in his hand the head of the Alexandrian god. Even more remarkable is the existence of some coins from Antioch depicting *Genius Augusti* with Helios’ head.<sup>83</sup> This, in my opinion, constitutes a shift in imperial policy to reassert the weight of the emperor’s *numen* making use of Sol or Serapis depending on the regional context. Due to this, it can be claimed that both gods do interact at two different times and even become the equivalent of one another with respect to the *Genius Augusti* in imperial propaganda.

A final mention must be made of the identification between *Sol Invictus* and Mithras. There is no clear consensus amongst scholars concerning this. In Numismatics, the only clear reference to Mithras is that from Tarsus under Gordian III (238–

<sup>75</sup> *RIC* III Commodus 261, 601, 605, 607.

<sup>76</sup> *RIC* V-2 Postumus 329.

<sup>77</sup> *RIC* V-1 Claudius Gothicus 201–202

<sup>78</sup> STAMBAUGH, E. J.: *Sarapis Under the Early Ptolemies*. Leiden 1972, 79; TALLET, G.: Zeus Hélios Megas Sarapis, un dieu égyptien ‘pour les Romains’?. In BELAYCHE, N. – DUBOIS, J.-D.: *L’oiseau et le poisson : cohabitations religieuses dans les mondes grec et romain*. Paris 2011, 231 and ff.

<sup>79</sup> SFAMENI GASPARRO, G.: *I Culti Orientali in Sicilia*. Leiden 1973, 3.

<sup>80</sup> *RIC* VI 167b Antioch, 132 Alexandria, 92 Cyzicus, 78 Heraclea.

<sup>81</sup> *RIC* VI 73a Nicomedia, 98 Cyzicus, 154b Antioch.

<sup>82</sup> *RIC* VII Alexandria 2–5 Constantine and Licinius; *RIC* VI Alexandria 160a, 160b and 161, Licinius Maximinus II and Constantine.

<sup>83</sup> *RIC* VI Antioch 164 (a, b and c) and 165, by Licinius, Maximinus and Constantine.

244) (*BMC Cilicia*, Tarsus n. 258), where the god is depicted performing the tauroctony. This coin, however, has little in common with the minting of Sol. Other coins which could possibly be linked to the god were locally issued in Trebizond during the reign of Septimius Severus, his dynasty and ensuing emperors.<sup>84</sup> They depict a rider attired in the Phrygian cap alongside symbols such as a bird (a crow?), a star and a snake.<sup>85</sup> Conversely, other coins from the same city display the bust of a deity in a Phrygian cap and radiating head below Trajan (98–117), Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus and Septimius Severus (193–211).<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, Mithra's role in Roman coins seems dubious,<sup>87</sup> secondary and of a strong regional component.

## CONCLUSION

Several factors did therefore contribute to defining Sol's image. The deity as was known in the 2nd century underwent a transformation owing to the iconography type generalised under the Severans, the Gordian's later notion of the *saeculum aureum* and the new propaganda uses emphasized from Gallienus onwards. On the other hand, secondary links between Serapis and Sol may be traced to some stages during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Based on these instances, it is not my intention to claim that the figure of *Sol Invictus* exclusively derives from Apollo, yet the Delphic god and his development during the 3rd century shaped a decisive point in the evolution of Sol. In Numismatics, Apollo played a part in imperial propaganda to subsequently cede his place to the newly born Sol, *Sol Invictus*.

Given the weight of Roman cultural framework, following the religious evolution in coin minting can be highly complicated. The strength of traditional style may disguise changes in the message conveyed. In such cases, the exceptions of local mints are particularly valuable as they tend to break from the standard more easily. Just as misspelling in epigraphy, irregularities to the norm provide information on the understanding of these processes as they were taking place.

Interchangeable images convey a type of iconographic equivalence between Apollo and Sol. Their direct link may, however, be also observed from other viewpoints. Of all the principal gods, only these two reveal chronological replacement. Moreover, Apollo undertook some functions during the 3rd century which were later assumed by *Sol Invictus*. Thus, under Gallienus there are numerous instances where Sol is deployed under the title *Aeternitas Augusti* or even one where the emperor (with

<sup>84</sup> WADDINGTON (n. 64) Trapezus Septimius Severus 16, 17; Julia Domna 19; Caracalla 20, 21; Macrinus 24; Diadumenian 25; Elagabalus 26, 29, 30, 32; Severus Alexander 33-35, 39; Orbiana 40-41, 44b; Gordian 45, 49, 50; Tranquilliano 53; Philip I 54b; Otacilia 55; and Philip II 56.

<sup>85</sup> WADDINGTON (n. 64) Trapezus 50 Gordian.

<sup>86</sup> WADDINGTON (n. 64) Trapezus Trajan 4, 6; Antoninus Pius 9; M. Aur. 10; Lucius Verus 11; Commodus 12-14; Septimius Severus 18.

<sup>87</sup> An instance of this controversy could be Septimius Severus' aureus in *BMC* (n. 66) 226. It has occasionally been interpreted as Mithras Petrogenitus turned into Lucifer with Sol's quadriga. I, however, adhere to the interpretation of MAC DOWALL (n. 26) 559, footnote 25, that it cannot be interpreted as such but as Aurora. The figure could slightly be differentiated from Lucifer because of the habitual angle, though it is not close to existing relief representations of Mithras Petrogenitus.

Sol's attributes) is depicted as the *restitutor generi humani*.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the image of Sol may not be linked to the legend *conservator* prior to Aurelian. It is possible that the functions performed by *Invictus* began to be shaped before Apollo's disappearance, but they were only complete after assuming the Apollonian figure as *conservator-comes*.

Iconography and legends hardly varied under Aurelian (270–275 AD), precedents existing immediately before his reign. The cult supported by the emperor did not entail changes in how Sol was depicted save for the stronger emphasis made on victory, with defeated enemies at his feet in several series. In addition, the Temple to *Sol Invictus* and the College of *Pontifices Solis* created by the emperor<sup>89</sup> for the new official cult abide by Roman tradition. Due to this, I believe evidence indicates that continuity of the ancestral deity of Sol can be claimed. At any rate, influence from other solar deities may have existed, the god's public image and support from the State could be reinforced after the victory of emperor Aurelian in Palmyra, where divine assistance was claimed by *HA*<sup>90</sup> to have been a decisive factor. Alternative options might contemplate the fusion of Sol prior to Aurelian with a *interpretatio romana* of Bel<sup>91</sup> or another deity from Palmyra<sup>92</sup> or even Emesa.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, in view of numismatic evidence, such alternative visions must always incorporate the active link between the Roman Sol and the god from Delphos.

Apollo had great importance (or visibility) during the Principate and under some emperors in the 3rd century, as has been explained. *Sol Invictus*, however, finally played his part during the last third of the 3rd century. While being the same god in terms of style during the entire century, by the end of the century this god is different from that of previous decades in terms of iconography (symbolism, legend, function). Without disregarding interaction with other divinities, Apollo became the main factor in explaining the emergence of *Sol Invictus* following the numismatic criteria and perspective in the second half of the 3rd century: a victorious deity, a patron god, the guardian of emperors.

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<sup>88</sup> *RIC* V-1 Gallienus joint reign, 296. This coin minted in Mediolanum shows the legend RESTITVT GENER HVMANI, representing the emperor (cf. *RIC* V-1 p. 91) in the manner of Sol though the figure is dressed and walking, with the right hand raised and holding the globe on the left. Plus the figure is radiated. This mint already reveals that the emperor was closely linked to Sol. Contrary to the idea of identifying the figure as the emperor, AKERMAN (n. 28) 30.

<sup>89</sup> See n. 32.

<sup>90</sup> *HA*, *Vita Aureliani* 25. 3: [...]subito vi numinis, quod postea et proditum, hortande quadam divina forma per pedites etiam equites restitui sunt. Although WATSON (n. 30) 194 warns against it as a fabrication of *HA* author identifying Elegabal and *Sol Invictus* in 4th century.

<sup>91</sup> Regarding Zos. *NH* 1. 61. 2.

<sup>92</sup> A viewpoint mainly supported by WATSON (n. 30) 195.

<sup>93</sup> HALSBERGHE, G. H.: *The Cult of Sol Invictus*. Leiden 1972, 105 and 136.