



On the Early History of the Image of Mithra in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands

FABRIZIO SINISI

ÖSTERREICHISCHES ARCHÄOLOGISCHES INSTITUT
ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

The study of the development of divine iconography has important implications at various levels, from the history of art to that of religions. This is especially true of the ancient Iranian world and the regions that were in contact with some of its areas both in the West and the East, due to the scarcity of written sources. Visual evidence, therefore, plays a crucial role, although it requires an awareness of the problems involved, meaning a specific approach to its study that includes a proper assessment of the contexts as well as of the methodological issues we face.

Needless to say, these considerations cannot be disconnected from the objective limits of the documentary basis nowadays available, even in simple quantitative terms. While these difficulties generally confine our analyses to a merely descriptive or classificatory approach, occasionally the evidence connected to some specific figures allows us to trace, at least in broad terms, a real history of these images, that is to say, it enables us to follow the iconographic development of a given subject over time. One such instance is certainly offered by the figure of Mithra, due to the wide popularity of this god in the entire Iranian or Iranized world, which is visually documented from Commagene to the Indo-Iranian borderlands across a time span extending from the last century before the Common Era to the Sasanian period and beyond. The following note is therefore offered with the aim of sketching a coherent picture of the iconographic history of the figure of Mithra up to the Sasanian period, with a special focus on the areas between ancient Bactria and the Indian Northwest, now conventionally referred to in the literature as the Indo-Iranian borderlands.

In light of the phases of Sasanian dominance in the East, which at times unified important regions in the eastern part of the Iranian world with its westernmost provinces, it is worthwhile to start from the end of the chronological spectrum covered here, and from the West, that is to say, from the Sasanian evidence. For this material, we have no serious problems in the identification of the images for various reasons, and it can therefore provide a firmer point of departure. It is a well-known fact, commonly observed in the scholarly literature,¹ that Sasanian Iran attests to a double tradition in the depiction of Mithra, or, in other words, to the coexistence of two distinct iconographic traditions. While he is always shown with a conspicuous rayed halo around the head, the god may be portrayed either bearded or beardless, with juvenile features.² The first image, that of the official imperial art, is attested by coinage and by a single appearance in rock reliefs. Coins of Öhrmazd I (271/2–273 CE)³ depict the bearded Mithra standing beside a fire altar, offering a ring to the king of kings,⁴ and the same scene was copied from Öhrmazd by his namesake, the kušānšāh Öhrmazd, for coins struck in Marv.⁵ Outside of coinage, the bearded Mithra is notoriously depicted, in an isolated instance, at Tāq-e Bostān, where he appears in a secondary role in a relief, variously attributed to Šābuhr II or Ardashīr II, celebrating the Sasanian victory over the Roman emperor Julian.⁶ In both instances, the image of the god is distinctly Sasanian-looking due to features such as beard and hairstyle, as well as to the clothing, with tunic and long trousers well in evidence.

The other version of Mithra, clearly derived

from the image of Helios, is known from a few seals, which depict the god either as a bust or in a chariot drawn by horses.⁷ Among the former cases, one example is accompanied by an inscription explicitly referring to the image as “Mihr the god.”⁸ In another instance, the deity is shown emerging from a mountain, which is thought to symbolize Mount Harā.⁹

Moving to the East, a comparable dichotomy may be observed in the evidence coming from the region of the so-called Indo-Iranian borderlands, despite the different range of media in which the images that we can consider have reached us. The beardless, juvenile version of the god deriving from the image of Helios is prominent in Kušān imperial art, commonly found on gold and copper coins on which he is explicitly named in Bactrian,¹⁰ and also known from a seal impression discovered in the early 2000s at Kafir Kala, near Samarkand.¹¹ The prehistory of this image of the god is represented by the depiction of Helios on Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins, namely the tetradrachms of the Graeco-Bactrian king Plato, on which Helios appears in two different types, that is, on a quadriga, and simply standing with a scepter,¹² as well as the bronzes of the Indo-Greek king Philoxenus, which redeployed the type introduced by Plato with the standing god.¹³ Helios is also found in a full-length portrait with Selene on Indian drachms of the late Indo-Greek king Telephus.¹⁴ Coinage further attests to a Helios-looking solar deity in a Saka context, with the tetradrachms and drachms of Maues that depict a god on a chariot with a rayed halo around the head.¹⁵

The bearded version of the figure of Mithra is instead attested, after a solitary occurrence on the so-called reliquary of Kaniška,¹⁶ on Kušāno-Sasanian coins. Apart from the already mentioned series of the kušānšāh Ōhrmazd from Marv, the most striking image of the god is certainly that found on bronzes of Ardaxšīr at the beginning of the Kušāno-Sasanian series (fig. 1).¹⁷ On these coins, Mithra is expressly identified according to Kušān practice by the Bactrian legend BAŌ MIYPO, which accompanies the image of the enthroned deity offering a diadem to the ruler portrayed on the obverse.

The god, who sits on an unusually high-backed throne with side arms, is depicted in a nearly frontal three-quarter view, only slightly turned to his left, i.e., the right for the observer. With

his outstretched right arm, he offers the diadem, whose large ties hang from the hand. His left hand rests on the hilt of a sword held vertically before his legs. A conspicuous rayed halo surrounds the diademed head, which is framed on either side by two large hair bunches, while one of the diadem ties, engraved with the typically Sasanian ribbing, is visible falling beside the deity's right shoulder. The figure wears a long-sleeved tunic and a cloak fastened at the shoulder, as well as Sasanian-style trousers, with their peculiar fine lateral pleats visible only on the right side of the legs.¹⁸ Also characteristic of Sasanian imagery are the ribbons tied at the ankles,¹⁹ which are found even in the royal image on the obverse of this series.

No direct antecedent of this image can be found in either the Kušān or Sasanian coin series, but enthroned deities are not unknown in the numismatic repertoire of the region. One of them is a bearded god with a halo of rays that had appeared long before on the coins of the Indo-Greek kings Amyntas and Hermaeus, respectively ruling c. 95–90 and 90–70 BCE.²⁰ Two versions of the image of the god are attested, one depicting only the bust, turned to the right, which is found on coins of both kings;²¹ and one portraying the god full-length, seated on a throne, known only from coins of Hermaeus and their posthumous imitations.²² Yet this deity, who is universally reputed to be Mithra,²³ in addition to the rays around the head, also prominently wears a pointed soft cap with earflaps,²⁴ an iconographic feature that provides an unmistakable key for the identification. This is not the case for other images deemed to render the iconographic assimilation of Mithra to Zeus, such as the figure of Zeus on coins of Heliocles I,²⁵ later re-deployed by his namesake Heliocles II,²⁶ to which a halo of rays is commonly ascribed due to the presence of pointed strokes around the god's head. When other Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek divine figures that clearly display a rayed halo, such as Helios on bronzes of Philoxenus,²⁷ are examined side by side with images of gods that certainly were not rayed, such as Heracles,²⁸ it can be seen that the pointed strokes, when present, are more likely to represent the leaves of the laurel wreaths often worn by various deities.²⁹ Therefore, the only real candidate for identification with Mithra in the East before the Kušān period is the figure with rays and pointed cap on the coins of Amyntas and Hermaeus.³⁰

We owe to Frantz Grenet and Michael Shenkar



Fig. 1a. Göbl 1984 type MK 1114 (reverse), zeno.ru object no. 69915.



Fig. 1b. Graphic reconstruction of Göbl 1984 MK 1114 (reverse). Image: author.

the most recent attempts at providing a real history of the iconographic development of this imagery.³¹ Despite the distinct approaches in their respective studies, both largely focused on the East for various reasons,³² starting with the differences in the available documentary evidence compared to western Iran.³³ I will very briefly summarize their interpretations here, leaving aside, for the most part, the Kušān numismatic evidence,³⁴ since the names that regularly accompany the depictions of gods on the coins of Kaniška and Huviška leave no room for doubt in the identifications.

After drawing attention to the figure of Apollo that appears on bronze coins struck in Susa by the Arsacid king Artabanus (Artabān) in 126/5 BCE,³⁵ and also including in his discussion the Commagenian Mithra-Apollo-Helios-Hermes,³⁶ Grenet mainly focused on the opposition between the Apollonian imagery of Mithra found in both western and eastern Iran³⁷ and that of a different nature attested in the East. He detected a Jovian characterization of the iconography of Mithra in the employment of features normally associated with Zeus – i.e., beard and throne – for the figure of the Iranian god appearing on Indo-Greek coins. This mirrored a process of adaptation of the image of Zeus to that of Mithra, which perhaps could be connected to a particularly high position of

Mithra – indeed, the supreme position normally occupied by Ahura Mazdā in Zoroastrianism – in eastern Iran.³⁸ The combined presence of beard and throne in the image of the Kušāno-Sasanian *Bago Miuro* was therefore interpreted as the identifying mark of a *reappearance*, with the Kušāno-Sasanian figure representing the resurfacing after the Kušān period of the old Jovian Mithra of Indo-Greek derivation.³⁹

These eastern developments had additional relevance in the reconstruction provided by Grenet, due to the impact that, in his view, they had on western Iran, as it is the bearded Jovian Mithra from Bactria that was deemed to represent the possible original source for the bearded Mithra of Sasanian official art.⁴⁰ The Jovian Mithra would have survived, alongside the juvenile version of the god found on Kušān coins, through the entire Kušān epoch up to the third century CE, thanks to cult statues inherited from the Greek period. Then, under the Kušāno-Sasanians, in addition to appearing openly as *Bago Miuro*, Mithra also became involved in a complex process of syncretism that produced the figure of *burzāwand yazad*,⁴¹ in which some of his Jovian iconographic traits were merged with features originating in the imagery of Oesho.⁴²

While Grenet, in any case, ascribed a Greek origin to both the Apollonian solar type and the

Jovian one,⁴³ Shenkar's different approach emphasized other factors.⁴⁴ He first observed that no Parthian image of Mithra is known, in accordance with the "almost complete absence of depictions of Iranian deities in Arsacid Iran".⁴⁵ He then moved to the Sasanian period, first dwelling on the rayed figure in the investiture scene on the coins of Ōhrmazd I, which he considered a borrowing from nearly contemporary Roman coins minted in Samosata that depict Sol.⁴⁶ Shenkar's interpretation reposed on a study by Rika Gyselen concerning the propaganda war between Rome and Sasanian Iran attested by coins of the middle of the third century CE.⁴⁷

Following that, Sasanian glyptic production was examined, with special attention to the motif of Mithra riding in his solar chariot,⁴⁸ for which direct reference was made to Bernard Goldman's proposal that the Sasanians imported this originally Western Asian motif from eastern Roman provinces.⁴⁹ Thus, Shenkar ascribed a crucial role to Roman contributions to the iconography of the western Iranian Mithra – actually meaning the *Sasanian* Mithra, for in his view Parthian images of the god did not exist – as explicitly acknowledged in his discussion of the image of the god on the coinage of Ōhrmazd I, which was said to have been "created in Sasanian official art based on contemporary images of Sol on Roman provincial coins."⁵⁰ In this connection, it is worth noting that Shenkar, in contrast to the seal images, emphasized the presence of the beard in the depiction of Mithra at Tāq-e Bostān.⁵¹

An analogous emphasis on the Roman element in the Graeco-Roman contribution to the iconography of Mithra is found in Shenkar's interpretation of the evidence from the East, in particular with regard to Kušān images. This allowed him to correctly point out, contrary to previous views, that the Kušān Mithra has no resemblance to the Indo-Greek images.⁵² After mentioning the unusual Mithra of the so-called Kaniška reliquary, the discussion of the Kušāno-Sasanian Bago Miuro essentially followed the lines of Grenet's proposals, as the composition with the enthroned deity, altogether absent from Sasanian (official) art, was thought to reflect a local tradition connected to the existence of statues of Mithra kept in Bactrian temples.⁵³ A significant difference, however, is that Shenkar underlined how, while features of Bago Miuro such as the sword belong to the typical attributes of Mithra as found on Kušān coins,

the dress, pose, and hairstyle of the deity are distinctly Sasanian.⁵⁴

My proposal here is to suggest another general reconstruction, with some points of contact with both the interpretations summarized above, as well as some differences. A preliminary question that must be dealt with concerns Parthian Iran, also due to the impact it has on the discussion of the developments during the Sasanian period. While I examine the Parthian evidence in detail elsewhere,⁵⁵ it must be stressed that Shenkar's rejection of a pre-Sasanian history of the image of Mithra – and of any Iranian god⁵⁶ – in western Iran has crucial consequences. In fact, as already observed by Grenet, Parthian images of Apollo/Helios do exist,⁵⁷ and among them we can even find the direct antecedent of the rayed bust attested in Sasanian glyptics.⁵⁸ The approach followed by Shenkar would translate into identifying the nameless Helios bust of the Parthian period as the *Greek* Helios, and the same image of the Sasanian period as Mithra. Now, this is not impossible in theory, but one must then be ready to admit that the Sasanian depictions featuring the rayed figure without a name may also depict Helios instead of Mithra, since they exhibit nothing distinctly Iranian. Yet this possibility is – correctly, in my view – dismissed on account of the very context of these images. Put simply, this means that, since these Helios-looking busts were produced within a Sasanian context, they cannot portray the Greek god and must therefore be identified as depictions of the Iranian deity. It is not difficult to see that this approach might easily be assimilated to circular reasoning: the iconography is interpreted on the basis of the idea that the religious background is Zoroastrian, and the Zoroastrian character of the background is indicated by the presence of images of Iranian gods. However, in our analyses, that of *context* is not merely a theoretical notion, an accessory concept of secondary importance – it is a crucial element. Therefore, the reasoning is in no way circular but, to all intents and purposes, perfectly linear: a Zoroastrian religious context produces images that, in the first instance – that is, in the absence of proof to the contrary – must be interpreted within a Zoroastrian background, regardless of their appearance.⁵⁹ The question is then why, when dealing with Parthian evidence, we cannot consider the context in terms similar to those that we employ for our discussions of Sasanian

images. Actually, Shenkar has an answer for this question: that we do not really know what the Parthian religious tradition was, and that “there is no reason to think that ... Greek deities had not become an integral part of the religious life of the Parthian elite.”⁶⁰ Leaving aside the fact that these statements remain, *de facto*, mere assumptions,⁶¹ which cannot be discussed in detail here, what we shall focus on here are the consequences that this approach has for our topic. Indeed, in Shenkar’s own words, the Sasanian official Mithra was created based on a *Roman* image of Sol from the third century CE, which is a conclusion full of implications, as can be easily understood: one is left to wonder what the image of Mithra in Sasanian official art would have looked like had Gallienus not used that of Sol on the coins he struck in Samosata. It must be stressed here that the reconstruction proposed by Rika Gyselen of a sort of “war of images” between Rome and the Sasanians in the third century is based on the employment of similar depictions on coins from both empires, which is set in the framework of a Sasanian reaction against Roman visual propaganda. Yet this in no way implies that the iconography of the Sasanian deities depicted in the coinage of Ōhrmazd was *invented* in those circumstances on the basis of Roman images.⁶² Actually, all the elements of the images depicted on these coins were already known earlier, starting with the investiture scenes employed in Sasanian art right from the beginning, in essential continuity with Arsacid practices.⁶³ Furthermore, the Sasanians had provided their religious images with a clearly Sasanian appearance since the time of Ardašīr I, i.e., several decades before Ōhrmazd, in a process that essentially meant clothing them *à la sassanide* taking inspiration from the iconography of the king, as Shenkar rightly repeatedly emphasized in his book.⁶⁴ So why revert to a Roman image of Sol when they had in Iran a local tradition of depicting Helios inherited from their Parthian predecessors? Seen from this point of view, what most likely happened is that the Sasanian official iconography “Sasanized” the image of Helios – ultimately Greek in origin – which it inherited from the preceding Parthian period, rather than the image of the Roman Sol.⁶⁵ In light of this, the question that really has to be formulated is if the Sasanians were “Sasanizing” wholly *foreign* gods – although Greek rather than Roman – in order to project them as Iranian gods, or if they were

merely “updating” western Iranian religious iconography, as they did with the royal one to characterize and distinguish their visual communication. Opting for the first solution would mean that a given Helios-looking image from western Iran ought to be identified with the Greek god if dated to 223 CE, and with Mithra if dated to 225 CE or later. In my view, this is hardly tenable, even discounting the evidence that openly runs against this approach.⁶⁶ Therefore, the anthropomorphic rendering of Iranian – in this instance meaning Zoroastrian – gods in western Iranian visual culture, which resulted from the transmission of Greek religious iconography, must be considered an already accomplished fact in Parthian times.

The process of adoption of features of royal iconography by Sasanian divine figures is especially evident in the East, with the “Sasanization” of divine images whose earlier, pre-Sasanian history is well documented. This is eminently exemplified by the Kušāno-Sasanian visual updating of the Kušan Oesho, who acquired trousers, tunic, beard, and hairstyle previously unknown in the originally Indian iconography of this god. Indeed, it is this general process that explains the appearance of the Kušāno-Sasanian enthroned Mithra, i.e., Bago Miuro.⁶⁷ However, the depiction of Bago Miuro is not the result of a simple Sasanian re-clothing of a locally derived image; it is an image imported in its entirety from western Iran, in particular from western Iranian *royal* imagery. The sword held vertically before the legs is a common feature of Sasanian imperial art (fig. 2a), including in depictions of the king of kings, such as that of Sarāb-e Bahrām or Bīšāpūr VI (fig. 2b).

As a matter of fact, this iconographic formula is the product of a longer history that extends well back into the Parthian period, as eminently shown by the early first-century CE standing figure of the Indo-Scythian satrap Zeiōnisēs/Jihonika (fig. 2c)⁶⁸ on some of his coins: he holds his weapon in precisely the same manner later found in countless Sasanian figures.⁶⁹ The debt to the Parthian visual repertoire is made clear by the two secondary human figures symmetrically placed behind the ruler to crown him, in a composition first seen on coins of the Arsacid king of kings Phraataces struck in 2 BCE.⁷⁰ In the coin depiction of Bago Miuro, this manner of holding the sword is combined with a basic image that finds its closest comparison in the figure of the last Arsacid king



Fig. 2, left to right: a. Naqš-e Rājāb I (detail). Photo: author; b. Bīšāpūr VI (detail). After Herrmann 1981, pl. 18; c. Tetradrachm of Zeiōnisēs/Jihonika (reverse), British Museum 1894,0506.1719.



Fig. 3, left to right: a. Göbl 1984 type MK 1114 (reverse), zeno.ru object no. 60558; b. "Husāk/Xwasāk stele" from Susa (detail). Photo: author.

of kings, Artabanus, as portrayed on the stele of the satrap of Susa Husāk/Xwasāk, dated to 215 CE (fig. 3).⁷¹

Indeed, the two images share several features: the three-quarter view employed to depict the enthroned figure; the pose with the outstretched right arm offering the ring or diadem, along with the identically depicted parallel legs; the high-backed throne; and the fact that the throne has side arms,⁷² which is a rare feature in depictions of thrones in both the Arsacid and in the Sasanian repertoire, and that these side arms are shown in perspective on both sides of the figure's legs. Also identical are minor details, such as the diadem ribbons falling behind the figure's back only on the observer's left side, or the ribbons tied at the ankles, a detail that clearly indicates where features commonly thought to be of exclusively Sasanian coining had in all likelihood originated.⁷³

The comparison leaves no doubt that the originally Parthian image was transmitted to the Sasanian repertoire. Therefore, the image of Bago Miuro is an adaptation of compositional schemes coming from Sasanian royal iconography, which, in turn, had been inherited from Arsacid royal iconography,⁷⁴ before being employed within a provincial Sasanian context such as that of Kušāno-Sasanian Bactria. This explains why Bago Miuro has at the same time a clearly Sasanian appearance and a distinct image that cannot be traced to Kusān patterns. In this context, the beard of Bago Miuro is the result of a Sasanian contribution, rather than a feature resurfacing from the older image of the Indo-Greek "Jovian" Mithra. The same holds true also for the throne, which, in any case, is not a primary iconographic mark either for the Kušāno-Sasanian version of the god or for the Indo-Greek one, as confirmed by the appearance of the latter as a simple bust.⁷⁵ The conclusion is that the significance of these "Jovian" features of the Kušāno-Sasanian Mithra must be viewed in quite a different light.⁷⁶

At this point, we are faced with a new question that comes to the fore: once the link between Bago Miuro and the Indo-Greek Mithra is severed, must we imagine that, in the East, the Helios type of the Kušān period completely superseded the ancient Indo-Greek Mithra, condemning him to an utter disappearance? Do we have to revise our understanding of a dichotomy in the depiction of Mithra in the East from the time of the Kušāns onwards? The answer is no, and it is provided by



Fig. 4. "Kaniška reliquary" (detail). After Alram and Klimburg-Salter 1999.

the so-called Kaniška reliquary (fig. 4).⁷⁷

The Kaniška reliquary has had a strange reception in the studies on the iconography of Mithra in the East, which have largely ignored it.⁷⁸ On one side of the casket, the king is flanked by the images of the moon and the sun gods – identified by their primary iconographic attributes of the moon crescent and rayed halo – who offer him their rings of investiture. Both deities are clad in a belted, long-sleeved tunic, with a chlamys clasped at the shoulder. Regardless of some peculiarities, the iconography of the figures is closely reminiscent of Kušān imperial art,⁷⁹ assuring the identification of the two gods as Māh and Mithra. However, for reasons that elude us, Mithra is depicted with beard and pointed cap, contrary to Kušān standard practice, which prefers the Helios version. Now, the pointed cap has been noted by all the authors who have dealt with the casket,⁸⁰ but none of those involved in the discussion on the iconography of the Eastern Mithra has observed that it is precisely the pointed cap that provides a fundamental and exclusive link to the old Mithra of the Indo-Greek coins.⁸¹ In this connection, the fact that the god of the reliquary is clothed like his Helios-looking alter ego

is especially significant,⁸² as it implies that the Kušan-period artist had updated the old image while maintaining its identifying features, even if they were not in line with the depiction of the deity found on coins. The impression that this represents a phenomenon specific to the visual rendering of Mithra is also strengthened by the fact that, on the casket, the moon god is portrayed according to the standard version found on Kušan coins, which is a twin-image of that of Mithra, only made distinct by the moon crescent behind the shoulder, used as the primary identifying attribute in lieu of the rayed halo.

Thus, the Kaniška reliquary attests to the survival of a two-centuries-old local version of the image of Mithra besides the Helios one common in Kušan coin art. We remain in the dark as to the reasons behind this iconographic choice. The same holds true for what concerns the first appearance of Mithra in the region in the coin series of Amyntas and Hermaeus. The inclusion of an Iranian god of primary importance in the “monetary pantheon” of two Indo-Greek kings in the first half of the first century BCE is in itself worthy of note and would require some elaboration on the religious policy of these rulers,⁸³ although this is made extremely difficult by the very limited scope of the evidence at our disposal.

The existence of this second Kušan version of Mithra, with a beard and pointed cap, also calls for a reassessment of the iconography of the Kušāno-Sasanian Bago Miuro. Contrary to previous reconstructions based on the idea of continuity, this figure in fact represents a break with *both* the Kušan Helios-type of Mithra and the god of Indo-Greek derivation. Not only do the beard and throne of Bago Miuro have a Sasanian rather than Indo-Greek origin, but the Kušāno-Sasanian version of the god notably discarded precisely the pointed cap of the ancient local Mithra which had survived up to Kušan times.

Another very significant point concerns the art-historical background to this image, or, in other words, the context of the origin of the bearded Mithra with pointed cap. Did the Indo-Greek coin engravers create this image of Mithra *ex novo*, or were they using a pre-existing one? Fortunately, here we may be able to say more, thanks to evidence from a wholly different region, namely the stone reliefs and colossal statuary associated with the sanctuaries built at several sites for Mithridates I Callinicus (c. 100–69 BCE)

and Antiochus I (c. 69–31 BCE) of Commagene.⁸⁴ These monuments attest to a remarkable coexistence of two different approaches to religious iconography: a western one of Greek derivation, found only in the reliefs, and an oriental one of local coining, which is the only one employed for the colossal figures.⁸⁵ The result is that some of the deities mentioned epigraphically are provided with two distinct images. Thus, at Nemrut Dağı, Artagnes-Heracles-Ares appears in the common image of the nude Heracles on a relief, and as a clearly oriental deity in his depiction among the colossi.⁸⁶ The image of a nude, beardless youth with a halo of rays around his head and a chlamys on his shoulders is instead employed first for a deity named as Apollo Epikoos, later identified as Mithra-Helios-Apollo-Hermes,⁸⁷ a figure otherwise depicted in oriental garb. All the oriental images of the deities share a few common features: they are all fully clothed in a costume based on a belted long robe worn over trousers, with a chlamys clasped at the shoulder, clearly inspired by the royal attire. In addition, they customarily wear conical headgear. Mithra is easily recognizable thanks to the rayed halo. The face is beardless, as in the image of Apollo, but the conical cap with a protruding point and earflaps is conspicuously worn on the head. These latter two features are of particular relevance for us, as Mithra is the only oriental male god among the three depicted who lacks a beard. This partial “contamination” of the orientalizing images by western features is not limited to Mithra; for example, the colossus that portrays Artagnes exhibits Heracles’ club. However, the general appearance of these figures remains unmistakably oriental, with the headgear playing a crucial role in this regard. Now, when the image of the Commagenian Mithra is compared to the Indo-Greek one, the pointed cap stands as a significant common feature,⁸⁸ which is of special interest due to its obvious non-Greek origin. Moreover, the chronological and geographical settings of these two images of Mithra leave no doubt that they developed independently of each other. Thus, in 90–70 BCE the coin engravers of Amyntas and Hermaeus used the same visual device that would be employed only a few decades later in Commagene to mark a divine image as Iranian.⁸⁹ Unless we assume that the craftsmen in Commagene had by mere coincidence the same idea as those working for the Indo-Greek kings, the only plausible explanation

is that the use of the pointed cap as a marker of Iranian identity for divine images was already known earlier, in a context from which it could be transmitted to both the Indo-Greek and the Commagenian visual repertoires. It is precisely this identifying function of the pointed cap that appears to be behind its employment for all the figures of oriental deities in Commagene. Therefore, it seems that by the early first century BCE Iranian deities could already be clearly marked as such through specific iconographic features, in particular the typically Iranian headgear, in regions as far apart as Commagene and north-western India. It remains to be established if that was a solution devised in Greek artistic environments, with the aim of marking the *Other*, the non-Greek – that is, the Persian/Iranian – even when depicting divine images, or if it developed in non-Greek contexts, which in this instance may mean only Iranian, to highlight the Iranian identity of the gods being portrayed. While the new pictorial evidence from the Chorasmian site of Akchakhan Kala,⁹⁰ datable to the first century CE, seems to suggest that Iranian provinces were capable of developing local forms of Zoroastrian art outside the main visual trends of Hellenistic derivation,⁹¹ the broader question concerning the dynamics behind the introduction of anthropomorphic divine imagery into the Iranian world remains largely open.⁹² The Indo-Greek evidence offers some comparative material, though it, too, is difficult to assess. Already in the early second century BCE, coins of Agathocles (c. 190–180 BCE) bear fully Indian images depicting the gods Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa,⁹³ which, however, remained isolated in the Indo-Greek repertoire. On the other hand, coins of Antialcidas (c. 115–95 BCE) show, just shortly before the Indo-Greek Mithra of Amyntas, a perfectly Greek image of Zeus accompanied by an elephant,⁹⁴ which has long been interpreted as a depiction of Indra.⁹⁵ In this case, the image represents a Greek deity adapted to an Indian one with no iconographic modification; indeed, without the elephant, it would be impossible to distinguish the god from a standard *Greek* Zeus. By contrast, on Saka coins the repertoire of Greek derivation is already combined in unprecedented syntheses in order to portray Indian deities under Maues,⁹⁶ a trend that continued to develop under the kings of the Azes dynasty. Remarkably, under these latter kings, the same approach to divine iconography

was employed to create new images of deities that, while superficially appearing Greek, may in fact hide Saka divine figures.⁹⁷

Thus, although mainly limited to coinage and, to a lesser extent, glyptics,⁹⁸ the varied documentary evidence from the Indian Northwest attests to a phase of increasing iconographic experimentation from the beginning of the first century BCE. On a broader scope, however, we are unfortunately not in a position to go beyond the identification of individual similarities, such as the use of the pointed cap discussed above, and thus, for this “initial” phase, we remain unable to reconstruct any link that might have connected different regions. Therefore, the question regarding the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the image of the bearded Mithra with pointed cap is destined to remain unanswered, at least for the time being.

What does appear certain is that, in the East, the bearded Mithra with pointed cap shows a certain degree of resilience against the impact of the god’s visual rendering that derived from the originally Greek image of Helios. This older, eastern version of Mithra was even able to resurface in official art during Kuṣān times, albeit only in a limited way. In western Iran, bearded gods came to dominate the scene only in Sasanian times, and only as a result of the “Sasanizing” of anthropomorphic divine iconography modeled on the image of the king. Thus, the similarity between western and eastern Iran in the coexistence of two images of Mithra is only superficial, as it is the outcome of very different and independent premises: in the West it was due to a process of streamlining of previous images and came into being only much later;⁹⁹ in the East it was the result of the persistence of a more ancient iconographic version of the god.

Notes

1. Grenet 2003: 36; 2006; Shenkar 2014: 102–5.
2. A further version of the image of Mithra may be represented by a deity with purely Apollonian features – that is, without any solar traits – if the identification with Apollo, and thus with Mithra, of a nude male figure on a Sasanian seal now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France is accepted. This non-solar Apollonian Mithra would have antecedents in the Parthian period; see Sinisi 2017a for a full discussion.

3. Alram and Gyselen 2012, hereafter SNS 2: 117–19, 128–30, Types 2a–b of Öhrmazd I.
4. Carter 1985: 242; Callieri 1990: 87; Grenet 2003: 36; 2006; SNS 2: 143–44; Shenkar 2014: 102–3; Farridnejad 2018: 368–70.
5. Göbl 1984: nos. 1026–27 for the type. Schindel 2012: 69; Sinisi 2015: 208. See also Bivar 1979: 745.
6. Carter 1981: 74–76; Azarpay 1982; Callieri 1990: 83–84; Hollard 2010; Shenkar 2014: 104; Aldrych et al. 2017: 81–105; Farridnejad 2018: 366.
7. Callieri 1990: 86–87; Grenet 1991: 149, n. 14; 2001: 36; Shenkar 2014: 103; Farridnejad 2018: 371–72. The bust in a chariot found on Sasanian sealings from Ak Depe (Gubaev, Loginov, and Nikitin 1996: 58, no. 1.3) has been interpreted as showing a bearded portrait of the god (Grenet 2003: 37, n. 3), but this is not necessarily the case and the deity might well be depicted as beardless, see Sinisi 2015: 212, n. 53.
8. *Mīhr yazd* <mtry yzdy> in Middle Persian, see Gignoux 1978: 62 (and pl. 22), no. 6.84. Cf. also Callieri 1990: 87; Grenet 2003: 36; Shenkar 2014: 103; Farridnejad 2018: 368.
9. Callieri 1990, where the possibility of a Kušāno-Sasanian origin of the seal was also considered. See also Grenet 2003: 37–38; Shenkar 2014: 108.
10. Whereas the deity is labeled as Helios in the first series of Kaniška inscribed in Greek (Göbl 1984, nos. 25, 32 for the gold series, and no. 766 for the copper issues). In contrast, the rayed bust found on the obverses of the coins of Soter Megas is unnamed, though it is often identified with Mithra (MacDowall 1978: 310; 2006; Cribb 2015: 97–98, with an explanation of the reasons behind this identification and references to the author's earlier pronouncements on the issue). See Shenkar 2014: 106, for a more nuanced approach to this image (in line with MacDowall 1975: 147), and Sinisi 2017b: 829, 876–79, on the possibility that it does not depict a deity. Bopearachchi 2021b: 14 considers it a portrait of the ruler himself.
11. Preliminarily published in Cazzoli and Cereti 2005, and fully discussed in Sinisi 2019.
12. See Bopearachchi 1991: 220–21, s. 1–3, pl. 24 for the tetradrachms with Helios in the quadriga, and Bopearachchi 1991: 221, s. 4, pl. 24 for the type with the god standing with a scepter.
13. Bopearachchi 1991: 294, s. 12, and pl. 44.
14. Bopearachchi 1991: 344, s. 1, and pl. 60.
15. Senior 2001: 1–2, nos. 2.1–2.6. The deity is accompanied by a charioteer.
16. On the reliquary, see Errington 2002.
17. See Göbl 1984, no. 1114 for the coin type.
18. The presence of these pleats and of the diadem tie only on the right side of the figure is connected to the three-quarter view employed for the image.
19. A detailed description is found in Carter 1985: 227, although flames that emanate from the back of the body are wrongly mentioned (probably due to the misinterpretation of the ribbed diadem tie next to the god's right shoulder).
20. Bopearachchi 1991: 102 and 112–18.
21. See Bopearachchi 1991: 303–4, s. 14–15 (and pl. 47), for Amyntas, and 329–30, s. 9 (and pl. 54), for Hermaeus.
22. See Bopearachchi 1991: 329–30, s. 1–5, 7–8 (and pls. 52–54) for Hermaeus' series, and Bopearachchi 1991: 330–34, s. 1–13 (pls. 54–56) for the (early) imitations.
23. Newell 1938: 89–91; MacDowall 1975: 147; Bivar 1979: 744–45; Bopearachchi 1991: 102, 115; Boyce and Grenet 1991: 163; Grenet 1991: 149; 2003: 37; 2006; Shenkar 2014: 106 (with a somewhat skeptical tune). Bopearachchi 2021a: 942–43 (and 2021b: 13–14) spoke of “a discrete allusion to Mithra by associating him to the Greek god Zeus.”
24. The enthroned Zeus-like figure on a series of Indian drachm of Hermaeus (his series 6 in Bopearachchi 1991: 328, and pl. 53) might be depicted without a beret, perhaps representing a true (Greek?) Zeus. Moreover, both the cap and the rays disappear from the Hermaeus imitation series around the mid-first century BCE (see Bopearachchi 1991: 334–43, Hermaeus posthumous issues, s. 14–22, pls. 54–60, and 122 for the chronology). Adding to the general impression of change conveyed by the disappearance of rays and beret, is the fact that the chest of the god is no longer covered, but depicted bare (as in the original image of Zeus).
25. Grenet 1991: 149; 2006; Shenkar 2014: 106. For the coin type, see Bopearachchi 1991: 222–25, s. 1–4 (and pls. 24–26).
26. See Bopearachchi 1991: 281–82, s. 1–6 (and pl. 42).
27. See n. 13 for the references.
28. Pace Stavisky 1986: 217 (cf. also Shenkar 2014: 106), who ascribed rays to the figure of Heracles on coins of Demetrius – clearly a misinterpreting of the laurel leaves that are visible around Heracles' head.
29. See Sinisi 2015: 213, n. 59. The point was already made by Bernard 1979: 244–45, apparently completely forgotten in the successive discussions on the “rayed Zeus.”
30. Cf. Grenet 2003: 37.
31. Grenet 1991; 2003; 2006; and Shenkar 2014: 102–14. For earlier studies, see MacDowall 1975; Bivar

1979; and, more systematically, Callieri 1990; cf. also Carter 1985, *passim*. Aldrych et al. 2017 gathers various essays on specific themes concerning the development of the cult and iconography of Mithra, from the Mediterranean to the Kušān empire.

32. Both authors extended their inquiries into later periods to include, e.g., the Sogdian evidence.

33. It must be noted, however, that these differences are only partly objective in nature, as they also stem from differing scholarly approaches and the resulting variation in the assessment of the evidence, particularly with regard to the pre-Sasanian period in western Iran (on which see Sinisi, forthcoming).

34. I will return to this topic in a separate article.

35. See Boyce and Grenet 1991: 39, with references to the previous bibliography, as well as Grenet 2006. For the series of Artabanus (variously identified in the literature as the first or the second king with this name), see Sellwood 1980: s. 12.28.

36. Grenet 2006; see also Boyce and Grenet 1991: 324–26.

37. The Kušān occurrences, including the problematic depiction on the coins of Soter Megas, were discussed in this context.

38. Grenet 1991: 149, citing Bivar 1979: 745, who had written of an evident descent of the Kušāno-Sasanian enthroned Mithra from the Indo-Greek depictions (reiterating a proposal already advanced in Bivar 1956: 22), and Carter 1985: 227–29. See also Grenet 2003: 37, 43; 2006. It must be stressed, however, that Grenet had originally and correctly observed that the presence of the beard might simply be explained on the basis of Sasanian iconographic canons. It is the combination with the throne, which he explicitly described as “un siège à la grecque” (Grenet 2003: 43), that led him to somehow follow, at least in part, the same interpretative path as Bivar 1979 and Carter 1985.

39. Grenet 2001: 43; 2006; however, he also suggested that this assimilation of Zeus with Mithra may have resulted simply from a reluctance to depict Ahura Mazdā in anthropomorphic form (see also Boyce and Grenet 1991: 165). It is important to underline that, in any case, Grenet referred only to iconographic features, not to a real syncretistic process centered on an alleged Zeus-Mithra figure, as instead explicitly mentioned by Bivar 1979: 747 and Carter 1985: 228–29. In Grenet’s reconstruction, the supreme eastern Iranian Mithra was merely given an iconographic form incorporating features originally associated with Zeus. Indeed, Grenet consistently regarded the solar character of this eastern Mithra as primary, regardless of his Jovian traits.

40. Grenet 2003: 36–37.

41. As already proposed by Bivar 1979: 746–47; Carter 1981: 96; 1985: 238.

42. Grenet 1991: 149; 2003: 43–44; 2006. However, Grenet has in the meantime changed his views on the last points, and now no longer believes in the resurfacing of the Jovian Mithra in Kušāno-Sasanian times, the god being shown with Jovian features only by Amyntas and Hermaeus. Thus, Mithra is no longer assumed to be in any way involved in the synthesis of *burzāwand yazad* (personal communication from Frantz Grenet). See also Grenet 2022: 1384; 2023: 98.

43. Grenet 2006.

44. See Shenkar 2014: 102–14.

45. A lack that Shenkar (2014: 102) contrasted with the abundance of images of Semitic Sun gods from Parthian Mesopotamia. Shenkar left the Commagenian evidence out of his study (see Shenkar 2014: 2, for the reasons behind his choice).

46. Shenkar 2014: 103. The Roman series was struck by Gallienus, see Gyselen 2010: 77.

47. Gyselen 2010 (in particular p. 78 on coins of Ōhrmazd).

48. Shenkar 2014: 103.

49. Goldman 1988.

50. Shenkar 2014: 113.

51. Shenkar 2014: 104.

52. Shenkar 2014: 107.

53. See the references cited in n. 41 above.

54. Shenkar 2014: 107. See also Carter 1985: 227.

55. Sinisi forthcoming.

56. Varghēn would be the only exception, see n. 61 below.

57. Some of these are discussed in Sinisi 2017a (see also Sinisi 2014: 35), including the figure of Apollo on coins from Susa previously mentioned by Grenet (see above n. 35 for the references). A dedicated discussion of these coin images will appear in Sinisi forthcoming.

58. Sinisi 2017a: 26. Graeco-Bactrian depictions of Helios in a chariot show that this image of the god had spread throughout the Iranian world as far as the Indo-Iranian borderlands beginning with Seleucid times (Sinisi 2017a: 26, n. 74), as indicated also by analogous images on Gandharan toilet trays, on which see Boppearachchi 2021b: 25–29, with references.

59. For a diametrically opposite approach, see Shenkar 2014: 2, and *passim*.

60. Shenkar 2014: 118; see also Shenkar 2017: 7.

61. There is simply no positive evidence of any sort to support these claims, and in the only instance in which a Greek-looking divine image, the so-called Heracles of Seleucia, is named in Parthian, the god is unambiguously identified as a Zoroastrian deity (as

acknowledged by Shenkar himself; see Shenkar 2014: 2, 11, 51 with n. 39, 159; see also Shenkar 2017: 7), to the point that we could call it the Varghn of Seleucia. The topic of Parthian Zoroastrianism is too large to be tackled here, see de Jong 2012; de Jong 2013: 27–36; also, Invernizzi 2005.

62. An implication that is, indeed, absent from Gyselen 2010.

63. See Sinisi 2014: 39. On Parthian tetradrachms, investiture scenes are customary as early as the second quarter of the first century BCE, and they are used regularly in countless variants until the very end of the dynasty. Indeed, the princes of Persis were already imitating Arsacid patterns in this regard in pre-Sasanian times, as shown by the graffiti from Persepolis attributed to the immediate predecessors of the Sasanians, for which see Callieri 2003. On the Parthian inheritance in Sasanian art with regard to the theme of the investiture, see Vanden Berghe 1987: 250–51.

64. See, e.g., Shenkar 2014: 51, 193 (and also Shenkar 2017: 7). The process is not exclusively Sasanian and is already attested in Commagene in the first century BCE, see below. The images of the Kušān Orlagno and Mozdooano were also clearly inspired by that of the Kušān king, see Sinisi 2019: 34, and 41, n. 51 (on Orlagno, see also Shenkar 2014: 161).

65. As indeed, confirmed by the existence in Sasanian non-official art of images of Mithra directly inspired by the iconography of Helios, such as those found on seals. Notable in these images is the apparent importance ascribed to the lack of a beard, which is a feature clearly inherited from Apollo/Helios, contrasting with the “Sasanized” rendering of the hairstyle by means of the characteristic hair bunches, the latter being obviously unknown in the original image of Apollo/Helios.

66. See above n. 61, as well as Sinisi 2017.

67. Sinisi 2015: 212–21.

68. MacDowall 1973: 220; Senior 2001: 119, no. 130.1T. Unfortunately, only a single specimen of this series is known (see Gardner 1886: 174, and pl. 32.11). For the context of Zeiōnisēs, see MacDowall 1973: 228–29, where his rule was dated to c. 30–40 CE.

69. MacDowall 1973: 220, no. 2 wrote of “a club.”

70. Tetradrachms (Sellwood 1980: 186–87, s. 57) as well as drachms and bronzes (Sellwood 1980: 186–90, s. 57–58), where two identical Nikai, one on each side, are depicted crowning the king beside the obverse bust.

71. For the stele, see Kawami 1987: 48–51, 164–67, cat. no. 5; Mathiesen 1992: 168–69, cat. no. 87, with references. The link between the image of Bago Miuro and that of Artabanus on the Husāk/Xwasāk stele was

briefly noted by Martha Carter (1985: 228); however, she did not develop the point and, as a result, the connection has been largely overlooked in subsequent literature.

72. No side arms are found on any throne depicted on Arsacid tetradrachms, where enthroned kings were customarily shown from the early first century BCE until the end of the dynasty.

73. Indeed, analogous ribbons tied at the ankles appear on princely statuary from Hatra; see, for some examples, Safar and Mustafa 1974: 61–72, nos. 2, 5, 8, 13. One may note that even the gesture of Artabanus’ left arm, whose hand holds the sword hilt, is common in Sasanian official imagery, again the result of a long history dating back to the Parthian period (attested from Parthian to Kušān contexts).

74. An alternative that cannot be completely ruled out is that the adaptation of the image to depict religious figures may already have been carried out in Parthian times, meaning that the figure of Mithra seated on a throne inspired by the enthroned king could have existed already under the Parthians. Needless to say, this would not sensibly impact the line of reasoning followed here (actually, it would only strengthen the point).

75. Indeed, it is the bust that clearly shows the primary attributes of this version of Mithra: the halo of rays and the pointed cap. It should be noted that on coins from the region, the throne repeatedly appears in combination with various gods throughout the epochs without serving as a primary, and thus discriminating, iconographic attribute, as shown by several deities known in both enthroned and standing images, starting with Zeus in the Greek period and continuing through, for example, Ardokhsho or Pharro under the Kušāns.

76. Needless to say, this reconstruction only confirms that there could be no contribution of the figure of Mithra to the iconographic synthesis that produced the image(s) associated to the epithet *burzāwand yazad*, see also above n. 42.

77. See above n. 16.

78. Before Shenkar 2014: 107 and Sinisi 2015: 212 it was never referred to in any work specifically discussing Mithra, with the only exception of the brief mentions in Callieri 1990: 92, and Smagur 2012: 208. See now Aldrych et al. 2017: 110–12.

79. Both deities hold the hilt of their sword with the left hand, although this is more immediately clear in the case of the moon god.

80. Errington 2002: 105; Shenkar 2014: 107.

81. Needless to say, the connection is only strengthened by the combined presence of pointed cap and beard.

82. While his bust is not bare, the Indo-Greek Mithra certainly wears no chlamys, which, by contrast, is customary in the image of the god on Kušan coins. The chlamys around Mithra's shoulders is also visible in the seal impression from Kafir Kala, see above, n. 11 for the references.

83. Following the observations of Boyce and Grenet 1991: 163–64. Martinez-Sève 2010: 8–9 discussed the images of the Graeco-Bactrian Helios and Zeus and their possible relationship with Mithra. The recent proposal by Harry Falk (2015–2019: 2) to consider Amyntas and Hermaeus as “adherents of Mithraism,” which is based on the use of images of Mithra on coins of these two kings, is not tenable for reasons of iconography and the history of religions alike.

84. A similar comparison, though with different intents, is already found in Bivar 1979: 748. Cf. also Grenet 1991: 149; Shenkar 2014: 107. On the religious landscape of Commagene and the policy of Antiochus I as seen from the point of view of two specialists on ancient Iran, see Boyce and Grenet 1991: 309–51.

85. The oriental iconography is, however, common also on the reliefs.

86. Cf. Boyce and Grenet 1991: 330.

87. A change that shows the evolution in Antiochus' ruler cult, see Crowther and Facella 2003 (in particular pp. 62–65). For a specific discussion of the Commagenian Mithra, see Aldrych et al. 2017: 129–57 (with references).

88. In addition to the halo of rays, of course.

89. On the hypotheses on the chronology of the Commagenian monuments, see Jacobs and Rollinger 2005.

90. Betts et al. 2016.

91. On Zoroastrian art in Chorasmia, see Grenet 2018.

92. Even in the Chorasmian case, this may still have occurred as a result of contact with religious iconography of Greek derivation, which could have triggered the process, regardless of the largely non-Greek character of the art of Akchakhan Kala. Cf. Minardi 2018.

93. Bopearachchi 1991: 175, s. 9 (and pl. 7). An Indian goddess appears on other coins in bronze of the same king (Bopearachchi 1991: 175, s. 10, and pl. 7), as well as on bronzes of his successor Pantaleon, see Bopearachchi 1991: 182, s. 6 (and pl. 9).

94. Bopearachchi 1991: 273, s. 6–8 (and pl. 39). On other coins of the same king the elephant is depicted paying homage to the enthroned Zeus, see Bopearachchi 1991: 271–72, s. 1–5, and 274–77, s. 9–13 (pls. 39–41).

95. Since at least Banerjea 1956: 162–63.

96. See, e.g., Senior 2001: 5, nos. 20.1, 22.1, 23.1.

97. See Sinisi 2003.

98. See, e.g., Callieri 2006.

99. A process that, as we have seen in examining Sasanian glyptics, was not completely successful.

Bibliography

- Aldrych et al. 2017 P. Aldrych, R. Bracey, D. Dalglish, S. Lenk, and R. P. Wood. *Images of Mithra*. Oxford.
- Alram and Klimburg-Salter 1999 M. Alram and D. E. Klimburg-Salter (eds.). *Coins, Art and Chronology: Essays on the Pre-Islamic History of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands*. Vienna.
- Azarpay 1982 G. Azarpay. “The Role of Mithra in the Investiture and Triumph of Shapur II.” *Iranica Antiqua* 17: 181–87.
- Banerjea 1956 J. N. Banerjea. *The Development of Hindu Iconography*. Calcutta.
- Bernard 1979 P. Bernard. “La Bactriane à l'époque kushane d'après une nouvelle publication soviétique.” *Journal des Savants* 1979: 237–56.
- Betts et al. 2016 A. Betts, V. Yagodin, F. Grenet, F. Kidd, M. Minardi, M. Bonnat, and S. Khashimov. “The Akchakhan-kala Wall Paintings: New Perspectives on Kingship and Religion in Ancient Chorasmia.” *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 7 (2016 [2012]): 121–62.
- Bivar 1956 A. D. H. Bivar. “The Kushano-Sassanian Coin Series.” *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* 18: 13–42.
- Bivar 1979 ———. “Mithraic Images of Bactria: Are they related to Roman Mithraism?” In *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*, ed. U. Bianchi, 741–50. Leiden.

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---------------------------|---|
| Bopearachchi 1991 | O. Bopearachchi. <i>Monnaies gréco-bactriennes et indo-grecques: Catalogue raisonné</i> . Paris. | | <i>compleanno</i> , ed. P. Callieri, 7–16. Rome. |
| Bopearachchi 2021a | ——— “Greek Helios or Indian Sūrya? The Spread of the Sun God Imagery from India to Gandhāra.” In <i>Connecting the Ancient West and East: Studies Presented to Prof. Gocha R. Tsitskhladze</i> , ed. J. Boardman, J. Hargrave, A. Avram and A. Podossinov, 941–54. Leuven. | Carter 1981 | M. L. Carter. “Mithra on the Lotus.” In <i>Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne</i> (Acta Iranica 21), 76–98. Leiden. |
| | | Carter 1985 | ——— “A Numismatic Reconstruction of Kushano-Sasanian History.” <i>American Numismatic Society Museum Notes</i> 30: 215–81. |
| Bopearachchi 2021b | ——— <i>The Greek God Helios & the Indian Deity Sūrya: A Study in the Dissemination of Sun God Imagery</i> . Parganas. | Cazzoli and Cereti 2005 | S. Cazzoli and C. G. Cereti. “The Sealings of Kafir Kala: Preliminary Report.” <i>Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia</i> 11: 133–64. |
| Boyce and Grenet 1991 | M. Boyce and F. Grenet. <i>A History of Zoroastrianism</i> . Vol. 3, <i>Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule</i> . Leiden. | Cribb 2015 | J. Cribb. “The Soter Megas Coins of the First and Second Kushan Kings, Kujula Kadphises and Wima Takto.” <i>Gandharan Studies</i> 8: 79–140. |
| Callieri 1990 | P. Callieri. “On the Diffusion of Mithra Images in Sasanian Iran: New Evidence from a Seal in the British Museum.” <i>East and West</i> 40: 79–98. | Crowther and Facella 2003 | C. Crowther and M. Facella. “New Evidence for the Ruler Cult of Antiochus of Commagene from Zeugma.” In <i>Neue Forschungen zur Religionsgeschichte Kleinasiens: Elmar Schwertheim zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet</i> , ed. G. Heedemann and E. Winter, 41–80. Bonn. |
| Callieri 1997 | ——— <i>Seals and Sealings from the North-West of the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan (4th Century BC–11th Century AD): Local, Indian, Sasanian, Graeco-Persian, Sogdian, Roman</i> . Naples. | Errington 2002 | E. Errington. “Numismatic Evidence for Dating the ‘Kanishka’ Reliquary.” <i>Silk Road Art and Archaeology</i> 8: 101–20. |
| Callieri 2003 | ——— “At the Roots of the Sasanian Royal Imagery: The Persepolis Graffiti.” In <i>Ērān ud Anērān: Studies Presented to Boris Il’ič Maršak on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday</i> , ed. M. Comparesi, P. Raffetta, and G. Scarcia, 129–48. Venice. | Falk 2015–2019 | H. Falk. “Kushan Religion and Politics.” <i>Bulletin of the Asia Institute</i> 29: 1–55. |
| | | Farridnejad 2018 | Sh. Farridnejad. <i>Die Sprache der Bilder: Eine Studie zur ikonographischen Exegese der anthropomorphen Götterbilder im Zoroastrismus</i> . Wiesbaden. |
| Callieri 2006 | ——— “The Activity of Gem and Coin Die Engravers in North-West India between the Indo-Greeks and the Kuṣāṇas.” In <i>Architetti, capomastri, artigiani: L’organizzazione artistica nell’Asia ellenistica. Studi offerti a Domenico Faccenna nel suo ottantesimo</i> | Gardner 1886 | P. Gardner. <i>The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum</i> . London. |
| | | Gignoux 1978 | Ph. Gignoux. <i>Catalogue des sceaux, camées et bulles sasanides de la Bibliothèque Nationale et du Musée du</i> |

- Louvre, II: *Les sceaux et bulles inscrits*. Paris.
- Gnoli 1979 G. Gnoli. "Sol Persice Mithra." In *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*, ed. U. Bianchi, 725–40. Leiden.
- Göbl 1984 R. Göbl. *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kušānreiches*. Vienna.
- Goldman 1988 B. Goldman. "The Celestial Chariot East and West." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 2: 87–105.
- Grenet 1991 F. Grenet. "Mithra au temple principal d'Aï Khanoum?" In *Histoire et cultes de l'Asie centrale préislamique : Sources écrites et documents archéologiques, Actes du colloque international du CNRS, Paris, 22–28 novembre 1988*, ed. P. Bernard and F. Grenet, 147–51. Paris.
- Grenet 2003 ——— "Mithra, dieu iranien: Nouvelles données." *Topoi* 11 (2003 [2001]): 35–58.
- Grenet 2006 ——— "Mithra ii. Iconography in Iran and Central Asia." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*: https://doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_11235.
- Grenet 2018 ——— "Was Zoroastrian Art Invented in Chorasmia?" *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 24: 68–86.
- Grenet 2022 ——— "Pas seulement le bouddhisme... La diversité des religions préislamiques de l'Afghanistan ancien." *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, Nov.–Dec. 2022: 1369–88. <https://ai-bl.fr/seances/2-decembre-2022>.
- Grenet 2023 ——— "Les Sassanides en Asie centrale/The Sasanian expansion in Central Asia." *Anti-quité Tardive* 30 (2023 [2022]): 89–101.
- Gubaev, Loginov, and Nikitin 1996 A. G. Gubaev, S. D. Loginov, and A. B. Nikitin. "Sasanian Bullae from the Excavations of Ak-Depe by the Station of Artyk." *Iran* 34: 55–59.
- Gyselen 2010 R. Gyselen. "Romans and Sasanians in the Third Century: Propaganda Warfare and Ambiguous Imagery." In *Commutatio et contentio: Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Zeev Rubin*, ed. H. Börm and J. Wiesehöfer, 71–87. Düsseldorf.
- Herrmann 1981 G. Herrmann. *The Sasanian Rock Reliefs at Bishapur*. Part 2, *Iranische Denkmäler* 10. Berlin.
- Hollard 2010 D. Hollard. "Julien et Mithra sur le relief de Tāq-i Bostān." *Res Orientales* 19, 147–63. Bures-sur-Yvette.
- Humbach 1975 H. Humbach. "Mithra in the Kušāna Period." In *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 1, ed. J. R. Hinnells, 135–41. Manchester.
- Invernizzi 2005 A. Invernizzi. "Representations of Gods in Parthian Nisa." *Parthica* 7: 71–79.
- Jacobs and Rollinger 2005 B. Jacobs and R. Rollinger. "Die 'himmlischen Hände' der Götter: Zu zwei neuen Datierungsvorschlägen für die kommagenischen Reliefstelen." *Parthica* 7: 137–54.
- de Jong 2012 A. de Jong. "Regional Variation in Zoroastrianism: The Case of the Parthians." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 22 (2012 [2008]): 17–27.
- de Jong 2013 ——— "Religion in Iran: The Parthian and Sasanian Periods (247 BCE–654 CE)." In *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World*.

- | | | | |
|--------------------|---|------------------------|--|
| | Vol. 2, <i>From the Hellenistic Age to Late Antiquity</i> , ed. M. R. Salzman and W. Adler, 23–53. Cambridge. | Safar and Mustafa 1974 | F. Safar and M. A. Mustafa. <i>Hatra: The City of the Sun God</i> . Baghdad. |
| Kawami 1987 | T. Kawami. <i>Monumental Art of the Parthian Period in Iran</i> . Leiden. | Schindel 2012 | N. Schindel. "The Beginning of Kushano-Sasanian Coinage." In M. Alram and R. Gyselen, <i>Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum, Paris-Berlin-Wien</i> , vol. 2, <i>Ohrmazd I.–Ohrmazd II</i> , 65–73. Vienna. |
| MacDowall 1973 | D. MacDowall. "The Azes Hoard from Shaikhan-Dheri: Fresh Evidence for the Context of Jihonika." In <i>South Asian Archaeology: Papers from the First International Conference of South Asian Archaeologists Held in the University of Cambridge</i> , ed. N. Hammond, 215–30. London. | Sellwood 1980 | D. G. Sellwood. <i>An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia</i> . London. |
| MacDowall 1975 | —— "The Role of Mithra among the Deities of the Kuṣāṇa Coinage." In <i>Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies</i> , vol. 1, ed. J. R. Hinnells, 142–50. Manchester. | Senior 2001 | R. C. Senior. <i>Indo-Scythian Coins and History</i> . Vol.1. Lancaster. |
| MacDowall 1978 | —— "Mithra's Planetary Setting in the Coinage of the Great Kushans." In <i>Études mithriaques: Actes du 2^e Congrès international, Téhéran du 1^{er} au 8 septembre 1975</i> , 305–15. Leiden. | Shenkar 2014 | M. Shenkar. <i>Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World</i> . Leiden. |
| | | Shenkar 2017 | —— "The Great Iranian Divide: Between Aniconic West and Anthropomorphic East." <i>Religion</i> 47: 1–21. |
| Martinez-Sève 2010 | L. Martinez-Sève. "Pouvoir et religion dans la Bactriane hellénistique: Recherches sur la politique religieuse des rois séleucides et gréco-bactriens." <i>Chiron</i> 40: 1–27. | Sinisi 2003 | F. Sinisi. "L'eredità iconografica della monetazione ellenistica del Nord-Ovest del subcontinente indiano: un "pantheon monetario" saka?" In <i>Transmarinae imagines: Studi sulla trasmissione di iconografie tra Mediterraneo ed Asia in età classica ed ellenistica</i> , ed. E. Acquaro and P. Callieri, 165–202. Sarzana. |
| Mathiesen 1992 | H. E. Mathiesen. <i>Sculpture in the Parthian Empire: A Study in Chronology</i> I. Text; II. Catalogue. Aarhus. | Sinisi 2014 | —— "Sources for the History of Art of the Parthian Period: Arsacid Coinage as Evidence for Continuity of Imperial art in Iran." <i>Parthica</i> 16: 9–59. |
| Minardi 2018 | M. Minardi. "The Oxus Route toward the South: Persian Legacy and Hellenistic Innovations in Central Asia." <i>Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia</i> 24: 87–154. | Sinisi 2015 | —— "The Deities on the Kushano-Sasanian Coins." <i>Electrum</i> 22: 201–25. |
| | | Sinisi 2017a | —— "A Seal Imprint from Old Nisa and the (Apollonian) Iconography of Mithra." <i>Studia Iranica</i> 46: 9–30. |
| Newell 1938 | T. Newell. "Miscellanea numismatica: Cyrene to India." <i>American Numismatic Society Notes and Monographs</i> 82. New York. | Sinisi 2017b | —— "Royal Imagery on Kushan Coins: Local Tradition and Arsacid Influences." <i>Journal of the Economic and</i> |

- Social History of the Orient
60: 818–927.
- Sinisi 2019 ——— “A Kushan Investiture Scene with Mithra on a Seal Impression from Kafir Qala, Samarkand.” *Inner and Central Asian Art and Archaeology* 2: 31–48.
- Sinisi forthcoming ——— “Parthian Coin Images of ‘Apollo’ and ‘Helios’.” *Parthica*.
- Smagur 2012 E. Smagur. “Mithra on the Coinage of Kanishka and Huvishka.” *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 16: 201–12.
- SNS 2012 M. Alram and R. Gyselen. *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum. Paris-Berlin-Wien. Vol. 2, Ohrmazd I.–Ohrmazd II.* Vienna.
- Stavisky 1986 B. Ja. Stavisky. *La Bactriane sous les Kushans: Problèmes d’histoire et de culture.* Paris.
- Vanden Berghe 1987 L. Vanden Berghe. “L’héritage parthe dans l’art sassanide.” In *Transition Periods in Iranian History: Actes du Symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau (22–24 mai 1985).* *Studia Iranica*, Cahier 5, 241–52. Paris.