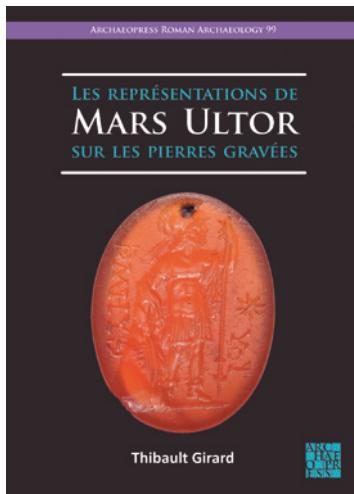


## LES REPRÉSENTATIONS DE MARS ULTOR SUR LES PIERRES GRAVÉES



GIRARD, THIBAULT (2023).  
*Les représentations de Mars Ultor sur les pierres gravées*. Archaeopress Roman Archaeology, 99. Oxford: Archaeopress. 170 pp., 34.00 £ [ISBN 978-1-80327-509-3]

HANNAH CORNWELL  
 University of Birmingham  
 h.e.cornwell@bham.ac.uk – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9172-6418>

Images are adaptable and need to be understood within the wider context of their use and function, sometimes spanning a broad chronological and geographical scope, reflecting attitudes or personal tastes of those commissioning and producing art. As Thibault Girard succinctly demonstrates in this short volume, the iconography of Mars *Ultor*, while identifiable and unequivocal as a “type” in terms of stance and attributes, was adapted from the specific cult statue in the *Forum Augustum* and spread to the edges of Empire in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE. This volume offers

a concise yet detailed examination of the representations of the god Mars *Ultor* on gemstones, which have frequently been overlooked in discussions of iconography. Girard has identified over 240 intaglios, which more than doubles representations previously studied and underlines the diffusion of the image of Mars *Ultor*.

As Girard stresses in the *avertissement*, this is a short iconographic essay on a topic which has a vast bibliography. Yet, there is not the need or necessity to provide lengthy discussions on the historiography of each topic and theme addressed in the chapters of the book. The footnotes hold ample discussion and presentation of scholarship and materials. With good humour, Girard also foregoes the need for a conclusion drawing together the main points of each of the chapters: “*mais (...) fallait-il condenser encore les observations faites dans des chapitres déjà courts?*” (p.3). This study is impressive for the depth and breadth of analysis given that it covers less than 100 pages (including the category). Girard provides meaningful discussion on representations of Mars *Ultor*, from the original cult image, through variations over time and in relation to personal, individualised objects across the breadth of the Empire, to the resurgence of fascination and repurposing of ancient iconography and thought in the Renaissance.

The iconography of Mars *Ultor* has long been recognised, thanks to Wilhelm Furtwängler’s 1897 study of the collection de Somzée and the bronze statuette of the god in comparison with an inscribed gemstone from the Marlborough collection (identifiable by its inscription: *MARS VLTOR*), and a sestertius of Antonius Pius (again identifying Mars *Ultor* through the legend). While Girard considers the gemstone images in relation to such well-known representations, his main argument is that the real value of examining the collection of these “*« petites » images*” is in the evident popularity of the image across the Empire until late Antiquity, its longevity, and the appropriation and transformation of an iconography originally associated with vengeance exacted by Caesar Octavianus at Philippi into an expression of personal identity and concerns (p. 8). Throughout this study, Girard draws on a range of comparative material including bronze statuettes, relief sculpture, and coinage, as well as skilfully incorporating literary evidence for thorough and detailed analyses of the meaning behind the iconography of Mars *Ultor*.

The catalogue (Chapter I) is clearly set out, although there are a few minor incorrect figure references or assigning of descriptions. For example, there seems to be confusion between Cat. 72 and Cat. 73 (both from the National Museum of Kraków), with the description of Cat. 73 matching the gemstone in figure 47 (assigned to Cat. 72), rather than its assigned figure reference (figure 34). Cat. 110 is crossed-referenced with figure 29 in the catalogue, although this is a Neo-Attic stone relief (discussed on p. 48); however, all references in the text to Cat. 110

correctly cite figure 27, which itself is appropriately linked to Cat. 110 on plate IX. In the catalogue, figure 27 is cross-referenced to Cat. 111, although in the discussion this is correctly assigned figure 39 (p. 54). Cross-referencing to the discussion and figures is otherwise clearly set out and helpful guidance for the reader. The images in the volume are well produced.

Following the catalogue, chapter II (“*Le type Mars Ultor*”) examines the posture of Mars *Ultor*. Girard emphasises uniformity and consistency of this (standing with the weight on the right leg, the left leg slightly moved to the side, holding a spear in the right hand and a shield in the left), diffuse across the Empire. In reflecting on this, he stresses the small size and intimacy of these objects, which must reflect “above all the personality and the preoccupations of those who carry them” and the numerous Mars *Ultor* intaglios found in Roman military colonies, emphasising the likely appeal of the representation to soldiers (p. 43). Nevertheless, Girard sensibly questions whether such depictions should be understood as Mars *Ultor* (in relation to the cult statue), or a more generic Mars, interpreting the recognisable posture as a “canonic attitude” of the god, which thanks to the diffusion of the image on gemstones had lost its origin meaning and connection to the Augustan cult statue (pp. 44-47).

In chapter III (“*La panoplie de Mars Ultor*”), Girard outlines through a close examination of the catalogue the typical attributes which must have accompanied the original cult statue and recur consistently on the gemstones (helmet, shield, greaves, and spear). The addition of a sword is presented as a “slow evolution” of the image as a response to those appropriating and personalising the image (p. 59). A considerable amount of the chapter is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the mantel. This is depicted consistently as fabric “snaking” (Girard even makes a visual comparison of the Laocoön statue group) around both arms and passing around the back. It is this winding or interlacing of the fabric which he then considers in the light of Stoic thinking, where the ideas of weaving express the interconnectivity of things, include ideas of destiny and fate (pp. 54-58). This is a fairly dense argument, and perhaps at times seems a tenuous interpretation of draped fabric; Girard acknowledges the seeming incompatibility of associating a god of war and fighting with Stoic thought, though also highlights the causal relationship of war to peace. His analysis emphasises the possible interpretations and ideas which can emerge through a detailed and close reading of iconography.

In chapter IV, Girard examines 15 “magic” gemstones depicting the god of War, providing a thoughtful discussion as to the relevance and connection of the

Mars *Ultor* type with objects of healing, notably in relation to blood. The links between vengeance and blood are well illustrated in relation to Augustan literature (pp. 64-65). Nevertheless, as Girard has articulated earlier, the image of Mars *Ultor* is used more as a means of convention to represent the god than due to a specific desire to call for vengeance.

A few gemstones bear inscriptions: some of these are discussed in relation to “magic” gemstones, in chapter IV, the rest are treated in chapter V. Besides the inscription on the Marlborough imprint, which identifies *MARS VLTOR* in the nominative, a small number of inscribed gemstones offer potential insights to the identities of the owners and engravers (pp. 69-71). Several pages are then devoted to the discussion of a Greek inscription, which Girard reads as *TOY / EYHME(ROU)* and through comparison with another gemstone with *EVH/ME/PI* inscribed upon an altar with a griffon seated atop draws associations with Nemesis. He interprets the association of *εὐήμερος* with Mars *Ultor* as a means of communicating ideas of military success and glory (pp. 71-75).

In place of a formal conclusion, Girard offers an analysis of two statuettes of Mars *Ultor*: a bronze from the Eskenazi Museum of Art (University of Indiana) and that of the Fondation Gandur pour l’Art, in order to reflect on relative dating for the image of Mars *Ultor*, based on style. Despite the Eskenzai example previously being assigned to 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries and the Gandur example to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Girard argues for their similarity in date, with both works reflecting the style of the Flavian period.

By way of two appendices, Girard offers further reflections on his study of the iconography of Mars *Ultor* in relation to the iconography of Jupiter and the lightning bolt (Appendix I) and the presence of Mars *Ultor* on modern gemstones (Appendix II). While distinct from his analysis of his main data set, these studies nevertheless contribute to the wider explanation of Mars *Ultor*’s representation in art and underline the detailed research Girard has conducted. Notably of interest in his discussion of Mars *Ultor* and the lightning bolt are references to Mars *Ultor* which pre-date the Augustan dedication: namely sling bullets from the Social War (91-88 BCE) and from the siege of Perusia (41-40 BCE). The wider association of sling bullets to the speed and force of lightning is well articulated, offering an early insight into the association of the lightning bolt and the god of Vengeance. Gemstones produced in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate a clear interest in a composition of an enthroned Jupiter, with Mercury and Mars *Ultor* standing either side, and Neptune or Atlas in a lower semi-circular register, all surrounded in a circle by the signs of the zodiac. Girard argues for these works

being a means of demonstratable erudition of ancient cultures together with the most recent scientific thinking of the day.

In short, Girard cogently articulates the value of studying art in miniature and replicated on a large scale. He reminds us of the power of an image beyond its original purpose and context, even if it remains consistent in type and attributes.