

## Propagating power: Hercules as an example for second-century emperors

Olivier Hekster

And even to this day Heracles continues this work and you have in him a helper and protector of your government (Dio Chrysostom, *On Kingship A*, 84).

The emperor Trajan carefully cultivated a close association between himself and Hercules. He encouraged orators like Dio Chrysostom and Pliny to compare him repeatedly to the strongest of the gods, depicted the deity on a multitude of coins, and perhaps even appeared as Hercules on a statue which is now on display at the Palazzo Massimo in Rome (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Pliny had Trajan's Herculean qualities antedate the emperor's reign. His actions as a general under Domitian were like Hercules' labours: 'You must have caused him as much admiration – mixed with fear – as that great son of Jupiter caused his king by remaining unconquered and inexhaustible after those cruel works'.<sup>2</sup> The direct praise of the *princeps bonus* – Trajan – is emphasised by reproaching the *princeps malus* for whom he had to fight; for by identifying the general Trajan with Hercules, his employer inevitably became a contemporary Eurystheus.

This form of criticism of Domitian is all the more striking when one considers the extent to which the last Flavian had tried to construct a connection between himself and Hercules. A statue which might show Domitian as Hercules, a Herakliskos that is prominently depicted on the armour of cuirassed Domitian statue, and some coins and medallions testified to his purpose,<sup>3</sup> as did repeated flattery:

Caesar deigning to descend to the features of Great Hercules, gives a new temple to the Latin way ... Before Alcides was worshipped with prayer and the full blood of the victims; now he, the lesser, himself worships a greater Alcides.<sup>4</sup>

The deity's deeds were as nothing compared to Domitian's gladiators, it was said, and more than Hercules, Domitian deserved deification – though only after the longest possible life.<sup>5</sup> Martial was not the only author who tried to please Domitian by referring to the emperor's preference for the deity; Statius compared the two as well, in a poem written in the context of imperial dining: 'So grim Alcides, returning after his dread missions, delighted to prop his flank upon the out-stretched lion skin', he writes whilst describing his dinner at the palace.<sup>6</sup> In the next poem – which celebrates the opening of the Via Domitiana – Statius continues the

comparison between Domitian and Hercules, in a direct reference to *Aeneid*, 6.791-801, which heralds Augustus as the bringer of a new Golden Age: ‘Where roving Hercules went, and Bacchus, will you go, beyond the stars and the flaming sun, the source of the Nile and the snows of Atlas’.<sup>7</sup>

Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica* may also have alluded to Domitian’s Herculean grandeur.<sup>8</sup> Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, furthermore, incorporates several references to Hercules. Although they cannot be shown to refer directly to Domitian, one would do well to point to the fact that the hero of the poem, Scipio Africanus, is a son of Jupiter whose mother has ‘a place of equal honour in [Elysium], where Leda and the mother of the great Alcides are permitted by the god to dwell’, as he finds out in his visit to the underworld.<sup>9</sup> He is furthermore afterwards tempted by Virtus and Voluptas, in a passage which is not only a direct echo of the famous choice of Hercules as told by Prodicus, but one which Dio Chrysostom would later use to praise the ‘good ruler’ Trajan and condemn the ‘evil tyrant’ Domitian.<sup>10</sup> It would be a brilliant display of oratory if Dio Chrysostom’s condemnation of Domitian alluded to the very passage that had earlier been used to praise Domitianic self-representation.

Yet showing himself a good and just ruler, ‘a ΦΤΩΖΔ of men and earth’, who, like Hercules, ‘struck down presumptuous tyrants and destroyed them’,<sup>11</sup> will not have been Trajan’s sole motive for emphasising his connection to the godhead. There might be other possible insights into what the emperor was trying to accomplish. When, in AD 102/4 Trajan raised two new legions, he gave one of them, the *Legio Secunda Traiana*, the emblem of Hercules as a regimental standard.<sup>12</sup> Some connection between the military, the emperor, and Hercules was probably also emphasised through two interesting coin types.<sup>13</sup> One shows the emperor’s face on the obverse, and a boar – an animal apt as an emblem for legions – on the reverse.<sup>14</sup> The other type has an almost identical reverse, but on the obverse the portrait of Hercules. Surrounding the divinity’s head is the legend IMP CAES TRAIAN AUG GERM. Hercules’ head is in all respects in the place where one would expect to see the emperor. On yet another reverse, Trajan’s column, ‘itself a record of the Dacian victories’, appears in the form of a club, while lion-skins are draped over the pedestal.<sup>15</sup> The references to Trajan’s Herculean qualities in defeating the Dacians are obvious. The fact that the Acts of the Arval Brothers, in January AD 101, for the only time in their long history, named Hercules *Victor* amongst the gods that were invoked for the safety of the emperor, could be seen as further evidence for the emphasis Trajan put on this divine conqueror.<sup>16</sup> The strong warrior, and

philosophical ruler,<sup>17</sup> could be put to good use as a paradigm for the proven general who had come to the throne.

Hadrian seems to have understood the message. He too issued a massive number of coins depicting Hercules, but his god was very different from Trajan's. Where Trajan had, unsurprisingly, emphasised the quality of Hercules as a fighter, Hadrian depicted the god as more of a traveller. Tellingly, Hadrian brought the Hercules *Gaditanus* to Rome.<sup>18</sup> The mythological narrative connected to this Hercules fitted in well with the imperial ‘persona’ that Hadrian enacted. The deity derived from the same province as the emperor, and even from the same settlement (Gades, modern-day Cadiz) as Domitia Paulina, Hadrian’s mother. The parallel went further. The two Herculian labours most often connected to the temple at Gades both had (relatively) peaceful travelling as their motive. On the one hand, there was the perception that Gades was the most Western place of the world, and thus the place where Hercules collected the apples of the Hesperides – the apples of eternal youth, which one can indeed recognise on some of the Hadrianic coinage.<sup>19</sup> It hardly needs explaining why Hadrian wanted to stress the aspects of a deity that showed obtaining immortality through travel to the furthest parts of the world. On the other hand, some authors perceived Gades as the area explicitly connected to the capturing of Geryon’s cattle. Hercules afterwards led the cattle along the shores of the Mediterranean, where they were, in the area that was to become Rome, stolen by the monster Cacus. This led to the famous fight between Cacus and Hercules, ending with the latter’s victory and founding of the Ara Maxima at the Forum Boarium.<sup>20</sup> In this story, then, a clear connection was laid down between the travelling deity and the city of Rome. Emphasising how Rome benefited from the travels of a Spanish god seems anything but surprising for a much-travelling Spanish emperor.

The message, yet again, was clear. Hadrian’s ‘imperial, untraditional goal – the unification of all nations in the empire as equal partners’, was not unlike Hercules’ actions.<sup>21</sup> Hercules had been universally praised for them, so who could blame the emperor for doing the same? It will come as no great surprise that Antoninus Pius’ Hercules was thoroughly Roman, and that he travelled a lot less than under Antoninus’ predecessor.<sup>22</sup> Like the emperor, who, as Aristides emphasised, did not need to travel far and wide, since letters from all over the realm kept him informed,<sup>23</sup> Hercules too stayed in Rome. No longer did the ‘foreign temples’ of the Hadrianic coinage form the background to reverse-types that featured Hercules.<sup>24</sup> The more traditionally Roman Hercules *Invictus* replaced the Hercules *Gaditanus*. Once more, the emperor was

carefully following in the god's footsteps. Once more, those footsteps were carefully constructed to reflect the emperor's favourite style of government.

Only the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius put this use of Hercules aside. He all but ignored the special deity of the Stoic school. Unlike the emperorship of the 'provincial' Trajan, the 'untraditional' Hadrian and the 'undynastic' Antoninus Pius, Marcus' position was indisputable.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Marcus' reign was sufficiently accepted not to have to hide behind someone else's divine example.

The power base of Commodus' rule was not as all-embracing. On the one hand he had the best possible legitimation. He was a royal son in a society in which succession was, though not officially, in practice a dynastic affair.<sup>26</sup> There could have been no doubt whatsoever that Commodus would reign after his father had died. No other choice was thinkable. That was also the problem. Marcus did not *choose* Commodus as his successor. Commodus was born an emperor.<sup>27</sup> Appointing another successor might well have led to civil war. This shows the strength of blood relationships, but equally indicates that Commodus could hardly present himself as the choice of the *SPQR*. Even if the *princeps* knew his only son to be a liability, there was precious little he could do to promote someone else – except by killing his son, which seems to have been practice at the Ottoman court, where Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-66) killed two of his sons to make succession easier for his remaining child Selim II (1566-74), even employing the services of an official court-strangler.<sup>28</sup>

For well over eighty years Roman successors had been, to an extent, chosen. The 'system' had not been a positive choice (four successive emperors, from Nerva to Antoninus Pius, simply happened to have no children), and candidates were picked from an exclusive group of imperial relatives, but a choice they still were. All the emperors succeeding Domitian had experience as a general and/or administrator. Commodus lacked that experience. He needed to show that he was able to perform the task that his dynastic background automatically set him.

Commodus turned to Hercules as a legitimating paradigm, as numerous emperors had done before him. Commodus' Hercules, unsurprisingly, was shown to be a ruler through divine birth – though his godly powers were strongly emphasised as well. A Herakliskos-statue in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, (probably) depicting Commodus, strengthens this suggestion (fig.2). The statue seems to have made late in Commodus' reign.<sup>29</sup> Commodus, as we shall discuss shortly, eventually attempted to present himself as a 'new

Hercules'. Suggesting that he had been the 'god incarnate' from infancy onwards, and that his youthful ascent derived from his god-like qualities, seems to be consistent with such a divine presentation. To an extent, this can be compared to the legitimating strategy of reification: 'A transitory, historical state of affairs is presented as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time'.<sup>30</sup> Commodus may have been 'just' an emperor; as the new Hercules he had always been, and would be eternal.

When Trajan used Hercules as a 'legitimising paradigm', speeches, and statues and coins, were employed to get the message broadcast. In doing so, two of the four 'vehicles for propaganda and legitimisation' that were at imperial disposal were used.<sup>31</sup> For there are four such vehicles recognised in some recent studies on the dissemination of ideology in pre-industrial states: literary and rhetorical, iconographical, symbolic, and ceremonial.<sup>32</sup> 'Iconographical' is differentiated from 'symbolic', since the first denotes a more narrative 'iconographical programme', whereas the second points at the use of actual loose (religious) symbols for political use – ensuring 'the potential for impersonalized representations of the Crown'.<sup>33</sup> These material symbols were – as far as is known – not carried round by Trajan, nor often independently depicted on coins or monuments. There is no surviving evidence that hints at Trajan wielding the club in public. Only some coins might constitute the use of the 'symbolic'. Three uncommon *Quadrans*-types show Hercules' club on the reverse. Their obverses, however, show Hercules himself, with the lion's skin.<sup>34</sup> The emperor himself is conspicuously absent, though of course a connection between the emperor and the divinity is made through the legend surrounding Hercules' head. As for the use of ceremonies in proclaiming the emperor's connection to Hercules, nothing is mentioned.

Commodus, on the other hand, mobilised all possible means to portray himself as the new Hercules. Coins depicting the emperor with, or as, Hercules were abundantly minted. Others merely depicted a club, making clear that the attribute symbolised the emperor and his reign.<sup>35</sup> 'Vast numbers of statues were erected representing him in the garb of Hercules. And it was voted that this age should be named the *Golden Age*', stated Dio (72.15.6: 6&R □<\*Δ4ζ<9,H ∀⇒9≡¬ B∀:B802, φH f< {/Δ∀68Ξ≡ΛH ΦΠZ:∀94 ♠Φ90Φ∀<. 6&R 9<< ∀Ø™<∀ 9<< fBζ∀⇒9≡¬ ΠΔΛΦ≡¬< 9, ≠<≡:ζ.,Φ2∀4). Some of these statues have survived, most famously the so-called Capitoline Bust (fig. 3).<sup>36</sup> This statue clearly displays all the attributes of Hercules; lion skin, club, and the apples of the Hesperides are prominent. The emperor's supreme powers are further stressed through symbols on the pedestal. Zodiacal

signs which enliven the globe that supports the statue might well refer to important dates in both Commodus' and Hercules' lives,<sup>37</sup> and adjacent cornucopias and Victories seem to symbolise the peace and abundance that Commodus' reign has brought. The statue was also flanked by two tritons, emphasising rule over the seas, and holding a *parapetasma* over Commodus' head; a design which was common for sarcophagi of the time. It thus suggested that 'Commodus himself had become immortal'.<sup>38</sup> The message was unavoidable: Commodus was more than a mere mortal.

A colossal statue of the Lysippean 'weary-Hercules', now in a niche next to the courtyard of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, further shows the extent of identification (fig. 4). This resting giant had its head actually replaced by that of Commodus, who thus presented himself as the deity. The hairstyle, however – normally the strongest characteristic for recognising an emperor – is not that of Commodus, but of Hercules. Lysippus was, of course, the court-artist of Alexander the Great, and copies of his statues undoubtedly made reference to that famous Hellenistic leader, a link that Commodus' contemporary Athenaeus also made:

What wonder, then, that the emperor Commodus of our time also had the club of Hercules lying beside him, and desired to be called Hercules, seeing that Alexander, Aristotle's pupil, got himself up like so many gods, to say nothing of the goddess Artemis.<sup>39</sup>

Ceremonies, too, were exploited as a 'vehicle' to propagate the new god-emperor, and through this means yet another facet of Commodus' Hercules becomes discernible. When Commodus showed himself to the public, dressed as Hercules, he often did so at the gladiatorial games, or even fighting as a gladiator.<sup>40</sup> These actions have, even more than Commodus' identification with Hercules, led to severe criticism by both ancients and moderns. Dio mockingly recounts how

[Commodus] got together all the men in the city who had lost their feet as the result of a disease or some accident, and then, after fastening about their knees some likenesses of serpents, and giving them some sponges to throw instead of stones, killed them with blows from a club, pretending that they were giants.<sup>41</sup>

Dio also tells how, after so saving the world, the emperor planned to treat his subjects to a performance of the story of Hercules and the Stymphalian birds. He happily adds that many

spectators shunned the arena out of fear of being shot in the course of the emperor's masquerade. But this gladiatorial display need not necessarily have been so ridiculous as some historians (especially Dio) have led us to believe – even if they, perhaps, perceived it as absurd, grotesque, or threatening.

In recent years, gladiatorial games have been re-examined, with more emphasis on their symbolic meaning than Michael Grant allowed for when describing them, over twenty years ago, as 'bloodthirsty holocausts in the arena' and 'orgies of cruelty'.<sup>42</sup> New studies clearly connect the amphitheatre with the conflict between nature and culture. The arena is a liminal zone in which order and civilisation constantly do battle with chaos and barbarism, in which *virtus* is shown, mythology re-enacted, and even death symbolically challenged – and conquered. 'Everyone had been reminded of their mortality: but whether a particular gladiator had won or lost, had fought bravely enough to be reprieved or had met the death that everyone had to face, the ritualisation of the encounter with death had put death in its place'.<sup>43</sup>

Hercules obviously formed an apt divinity to evoke in this context. Not only had he eventually conquered death on Mount Oetaeus (and kidnapped Cerberus himself out of the underworld), he had, during his lifetime, perpetually fought against the barbarism, symbolised by the monsters that he defeated. When Commodus, dressed like Hercules, fought as a gladiator, he showed his assembled people how he defended the world against chaos, like the hero with whom he identified had done before him. Like that hero, he too would rise to immortality, becoming the immortal Commodus-Hercules that the Capitoline bust showed. In doing so, he rose far above the people that he ruled: 'He entitled the Roman people the "people of Commodus", since he had very often fought as a gladiator in their presence'.<sup>44</sup>

This ceremonial display was broadcast to those who were not physically present in the amphitheatre as well. From about AD 190 onwards, Commodus' (and Commodus-Hercules') portraits on both coins and statues show a very short haircut<sup>45</sup> – known also to have been characteristic of a class of gladiators.<sup>46</sup> The use of such a short crop is especially remarkable when one notices that Commodus' hair was previously 'always dyed and made lustrous by the use of gold dust', thus creating a colour of hair that according to Polemo's physiognomics showed remarkable and laudable character-traits.<sup>47</sup> The change to a gladiatorial representation must have been noticeable.

Another attempt to use ceremony as a way to show the power and the glory of the god-emperor Commodus-Hercules failed spectacularly. Commodus had planned to enter the new consular year of AD 193 dressed as Hercules, accompanied by gladiators. He even wanted to

spend the night at the gladiatorial barracks, rather than on the Palatine. This would have shown the divine emperor-gladiator in command at an important transition. The ceremony would have portrayed Commodus' quasi-omnipotence, as imperial monuments transmitted the emperor's dazzling power – ‘the emperor, as reflected in the monuments, took on the qualities of time associated with ritual landscape’.<sup>48</sup> Instead, on New Year’s Eve AD 192, he was killed.<sup>49</sup>

The Senate rapidly condemned his memory, unsurprisingly for a body that had been consistently ignored for most of Commodus’ reign. The sheer vehemence of the condemnation is wonderfully illustrated by a passage from the *Historia Augusta*, which claims to go back to Marius Maximus:

From him who was a foe of his fatherland let his honours be taken away! Let the honours of the murderer be taken away, let the murderer be dragged in the dust! The foe of his fatherland, the murderer, the gladiator, in the charnel-house let him be mangled! He is foe to the gods, slayer of the senate, foe to the gods, murderer of the senate, foe of the gods, foe of the senate! Cast the gladiator into the charnel house!<sup>50</sup>

This ‘acclamation’ goes on for well over twenty lines, ‘a foe, a murderer, verily, verily’ (18.5), ‘let the statues of the murderer and the gladiator be overthrown’ (19.1). If these were the sentiments of the majority of senators, it seems hardly surprising that our senatorial sources paint a negative picture of the last Antonine – nor does that picture appear terribly trustworthy.<sup>51</sup> Literary texts consistently ignore the possibility that what Commodus was doing when presenting himself as a gladiatorial Hercules formed part of a coherent programme. That does not mean that the possibility should remain ignored.

Rhetoric, iconography, symbols, and ceremony; all of them showed Commodus as the god-emperor Commodus-Hercules. Of course one should be wary not to read too much into the evidence, and the presence of a coherent programme does not necessarily make Commodus a sane and sound ruler. But one should not trust the literary sources at face value either.<sup>52</sup> Especially not when the material evidence suggests something altogether different. Commodus seems to have wanted to broadcast the message that he was the new Hercules, and that he ruled through his divine abilities.

This message seems to only have developed after AD 183, to grow stronger around AD 185. Coins demonstrate as much.<sup>53</sup> It seems hardly rash to assume that the strengthening of the programme of religious legitimisation can be associated with contemporary political context. Especially since AD 183 saw a failed plot to assassinate Commodus, instigated by his sister Lucilla, and AD 185 was characterised by a rebellion by Maternus and the fall of Commodus' 'second-in-command', Perennis.<sup>54</sup> It is likely that the loss of parts of his power base – first his family, then his staunchest supporter – led Commodus to a different form of legitimisation. In AD 190, shortly before Commodus started his activities in the arena, the 'regent' Cleander fell during a popular uprising. Unpopularity with the 'people' would be dangerous for Commodus, who had already alienated most senators. Strong emphasis on divine provenance and power, and the peace which the emperor had brought, would be a way to keep the *populus* on the emperor's side. Particularly if that message was presented directly to the assembled people in the amphitheatre.

Possibly 'legitimisation' is also too narrow a term to capture Commodus' purposes. As Mary Beard argued: 'However hard it may have been to convince the population of the empire, from Rome to London, that the emperor ruled the planet ... it was always more difficult for the emperor himself to make that leap of faith ... self-representation must, in other words, be always on top of the monarch's agenda'.<sup>55</sup> Commodus surely tried to convince the empire of the justness of his position. But he may have tried to explain to himself what being an emperor meant as well. As 'helper and protector' of his government, there were worse examples to choose from than Hercules.

### **Acknowledgements:**

Alternative versions of this paper were read in Cardiff and Bristol (at the Bristol Myth Colloquium, 14-16 July 1998). My gratitude goes to the audiences in both places for their reactions. Fergus Millar and Jas' Elsner kindly commented on earlier drafts. Their comments have been of great help, as were substantial grants from the *Arts and Humanities Research Board*, and the *Dutch Foundation for Pure Research* (NWO). Translations of the literary sources are based upon the *Loeb Classical Library*. I am, of course, responsible for all remaining flaws and inconsistencies in the text.

## Addendum

Since this paper was originally written, Hekster 2001(a), 2001(b) and 2002 have been published, dealing with similar topics, and partly using similar arguments. References have been added where relevant. Further literature which appeared after 1998 has not been incorporated systematically. A Dutch version of this article was published as ‘Hele keizers en een halve god. Hercules en de representatie van de macht’, *Lampas* 35.2, 2002, 152-167.

## Bibliography

Ando, C.

2000, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley – Los Angeles).

Alföldi, G.

1989. ‘Bellum desertorum’, in: idem, *Die Krise des römischen Reiches. Geschichte, Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbetrachtung*, Stuttgart, 69-80.

Barton, T.

1994, *Power and knowledge: Astrology, physiognomics and medicine under the Roman empire*, Ann Arbor.

Bayet, J.

1926, *Les origines de l'Hercule romain*, Paris.

Beard, M.

1998, ‘Imaginary Horti: or up the garden path’, in E. La Rocca / M. Cima (eds.), *Horti Romani*, Rome, 23-32

Bennet, J.

2001<sup>2</sup>, *Trajan. Optimus Princeps*, London – New York.

Bergmann, M.

1994, *Der Koloß Neros, die Domus Aurea und der Mentalitätswandel im Rom der frühen Kaiserzeit*, Mainz.

Birley, A.

1969, ‘The coups d’état of the year AD 193’, *BJ* 169, 247-80.

Bonn, H. (ed.)

1996, *Damnatio Memoriae: Das Berliner Nero-Porträt*, Mainz am Rhein.

Chantraine, H.

- 1975, ‘Zur *Religionspolitik* des Commodus im spiegel seiner Münzen’, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 70, 1-31.
- Chartier, R.
- 1985, ‘Construction de l’État moderne et formes culturelles: perspective et questions’, in J. Vigeur and C. Pietri (eds.), *Culture et idéologie dans la genèse de l’État moderne*, Rome, 491-503.
- Clavel-Lévêque, M.
- 1984, *L’empire en jeux. Espace symbolique et pratique sociale dans le monde romain*, Paris.
- Coarelli, F.
- 1996, ‘Hercules, Aedes Aemiliana’, *LTUR* 3, 11-12.
- Coleman, K.
- 1988, *Statius. Silvae IV*, Oxford.
- Coleman, K.
- 1990, ‘Fatal charades: Roman executions staged as mythological enactments’, *JRS* 80, 44-73.
- Darwall-Smith, R. H.
- 1996, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome*, Brussels.
- De Ranieri, C.
- 1998, ‘La gestione politica di età Commodiana e la parabola di Tigidio Perenne’, *Athenaeum* 86, 397-417.
- Derichs, W.
1950. *Herakles, Vorbild des Herrschers in der Antike*, PhD-diss., Köln
- Elsner, J. /Masters, J.
- 1994, *Reflections of Nero. Culture, history and representation*, Chapel Hill – London.
- Fittschen, K. /Zanker, P.
- 1985, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den capitolinischen Sammlungen I*, Rome.
- Fittschen, K. 1999, *Prinzenbildnisse antoninischer Zeit*, Mainz.
- Galinsky, C. G.
- 1972, *The Herakles Theme. The adaptions of the hero in literature from Homer to the 20th century*, Oxford.
- Gleason, M.
- 1995, *Making Men. Sophists and self-presentation in ancient Rome*, Princeton.
- Grant, M.
- 1967, *Gladiators*, Suffolk.

- Griffin, M.  
1976, *Seneca. A philosopher in politics*, Oxford.
- Gross, W. H.  
1973, ‘Herakliskos Commodus’, *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen I. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 4, 83-105.
- Grosso, F.  
1964, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo*, Turin
- Gunderson, E.  
1996, ‘The ideology of the arena’, *Classical Antiquity* 15, 113-151.
- Hannah, R.  
1986, ‘The emperor’s stars: The Conservatori portrait of Commodus’, *AJA* 90, 337-342.
- Hannestad, N.  
1986, *Roman art and imperial policy*, Aarhus.
- Hekster, O.  
2001(a), ‘Commodus-Hercules: the people’s *princeps*’, *SCI* 20, 51-83.
- Hekster, O.  
2001(b), ‘All in the family. The appointment of emperors designate in the second century AD’, in L. de Blois (ed.), *Administration, Prosopography and Appointment Policies in the Roman Empire [= Impact of Empire 1]*, Amsterdam, 35-49.
- Hekster, O.  
2002, *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads*, Amsterdam.
- Höistad, R.  
1948, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King: Studies in the Cynic Conception of Man*, Uppsala.
- Hopkins, K.,  
1983, *Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman history. Volume 2*, Cambridge.
- Kaiser-Raiß, M.  
1980, *Die Stadtrömische Münzprägung während der Alleinherrschaft des Commodus*, Frankfurt am Main.
- Kleiner, D.  
1992, *Roman Sculpture*, New Haven – London.
- Kolb, F.  
1972, *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta*, Bonn.

- Laubscher, H. P.
- 1997, 'Der schlängenwürgende Herakles. Seine Bedeutung in der Herrscherikonologie', *JdAI* 112, 159-166.
- Laurence, R.
- 1993, 'Emperors, nature and the city: Rome's ritual landscape', *The Accordia research papers* 4, 79-87.
- Leander-Touati, A.
1990. 'Commodus wearing the lion skin. A "modern" portrait in Stockholm', *Opuscula Romana* 18, 115-125.
- Levi, M. A.
- 1993, *Adriano Augusto. Studi e ricerche*, Rome.
- Manuel Nieto Soría, J.
- 1998, 'Propaganda and legitimization in Castile. Religion and Church, 1250-1500', in: A. Ellenius (ed.), *Iconography, Propaganda, and Legitimation*, Oxford, 105-119.
- Malamud, M. / McGuire, Jr., D.
- 1993, 'Flavian variant: myth. Valerius' *Argonautica*', in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic*, London-New York, 192-217.
- Matuz, J.
- 1996<sup>3</sup>, *Das Osmanische Reich. Grundlinien seiner Geschichte*, Darmstadt.
- Mommsen, Th.
- 1878, *Römisches Staatsrecht* II, Berlin.
- Morgan, L.
- 1998, 'Assimilation and Civil War: Hercules and Cacus. *Aeneid* 8', in H.-P. Stahl (ed.), *Vergil's Aeneid Augustan Epic and Political Context*, London, 175-97.
- Palagia, O.
- 1986, 'Imitation of Hercules in ruler portraiture. A survey from Alexander to Maximinus Dara', *Boreas* 9, 137-151.
- Rostovtzeff, M.
- 1923, 'Commodus-Hercules in Britain', *JRS* 14, 91-109.
- Scheid, J.
- 1998, *Recherches Archéologiques à la Magliana. Commentarii Fratrvm Arvalivm qvi svpervnt. Les copies epigraphiques des protocols annuels de la confrérie Arvale (21 Av. - 304 Ap. J.-C.)* [Roma Antica 4], Rome.

- Scheiper, R.
- 1982, *Bildpropaganda der Römischen Kaiserzeit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Trajans-säule in Rom und korrespondierender Münzen*, Bonn, 23.
- Scheithauer, A.
- 1987, *Kaiserbild und literarisches Programm. Untersuchungen zur Tendenz der Historia Augusta*, Frankfurt am Main.
- Shotter, D.
- 1979, ‘Gods, emperors, and coins’, *G&R* 26, 48-57.
- Smith, R. R. R.
- 1988, ‘The Ethne from the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias’, *JRS* 78, 50-77.
- Speidel, M. P.
- 1984, *Roman Army Studies I*, Amsterdam.
- Strack, P.
- 1931, *Untersuchungen zur römischen Reichsprägung des zweiten Jahrhunderts. I. Die Reichsprägung des Trajan*, Stuttgart.
- Szaivert, W.
- 1986, *Die Münzprägung der Kaiser Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus und Commodus*, Wien.
- Thompson, J. B.
- 1990, *Ideology and Modern Culture. Critical social theory in the era of mass communication*, Stanford.
- Thornton, M. K.
- 1975, ‘Hadrian and his reign’, *ANRW* II.2, 432-476.
- Traupman, J. C
- 1956, *The life and reign of Commodus*, PhD-diss., Princeton.
- Veyne, P.
- 1976<sup>2</sup>, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d’un pluralisme politique*, Paris.
- Vermeule, C. C.
- 1977, ‘Commodus, Caracalla and the Tetrarchs. Roman Emperors as Hercules’, in: U. Höckmann and A. Krug (eds.), *Festschrift für Frank Brommer*, Mainz, 289-294.
- Wiedemann, Th.
- 1992, *Emperors and Gladiators*, London-New York.
- Wiedemann, Th.
- 1996(a), ‘Tiberius to Nero’, *CAH<sup>2</sup>* 10, 198-255.

Wiedemann, Th.

1996(b), ‘Single combat and being Roman’, *Ancient Society* 27, 91-103.

<sup>1</sup> Roma, Museo Nazionale delle Terme, inv. 124481; Strack 1931, 95-104; *RIC* III, Trajan, nos. 37, 49-51, 112, 689-90, 699-702, 773, 802.

<sup>2</sup> Plinius, *Panegyricus*, 14.5: ... *tantam admirationem tui non sine quodam timore conceperit, quantum ille genitus Iove post saevos labores duraque imperia regi suo indomitus semper indefessusque referebat.*

<sup>3</sup> *Albertini Hercules*, Parma, Museo Nazionale; Carnelian ringstone, Munich, Staatliche Münzsammlungen A2222; Palagia 1986, 145; Laubscher, 1997, fig. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.64, 1-6: *Herculis in magni vultus descendere Caesar/ dignatus Latiae dat nova templa viae,../ ante colebatur votis et sanguine largo,/ maiorem Alcidem nunc minor ipse colit.* On the existence of a cult statue of Domitian-Hercules on the Via Appia: Darwall-Smith, 1996, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Mart. *Epiogr.* 5.65.

<sup>6</sup> *Silvae*, 4.2, 50-51: *sic gravis Alcides post horrida iussa reversus/ gaudebat strato latus acclinare leoni.*

<sup>7</sup> Statius, *Silvae*, 4.3, 155-7: *Ibi qua uagus Hercules et Euhan/ ultra sidera flammeumque solem/ et Nili caput et niues Atlantis;* Coleman 1988, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Val., *Arg.* 4.2; Malamud / McGuire Jr. 1993, 210-11.

<sup>9</sup> Sil., *Pun.*, 13, 632-3: *Attribuitque paris sedes, ubi magna moratur Alcidae genetrix, ubi sacro munere ledā.* Scipio was strongly associated to Hercules anyhow. He built, for instance, a temple to the god on the Forum Boarium; Coarelli 1996, 11-12; Galinsky 1972, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Sil., *Pun.*, 15, 18-129; Dio Chrys., *Peri Basileia A*, 58-84; Xen., *Mem.* 2.1, 21; Cic., *De Officiis*, I.32 (=118).

<sup>11</sup> Dio Chrys., *Peri Basileias A*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> R. Ritterling, *RE XII*, 1376; 1384-5; Bennet 2001, 72 n. 82.

<sup>13</sup> *RIC* III, no 695; no 702.

<sup>14</sup> Legio I *Italica*: Ritterling, *RE XII*, 1374; Legio II *Adiutrix*: Speidel 1984, 19. The animal could also (as the Erymanthic Boar) refer to Hercules.

<sup>15</sup> *RIC*, III, Trajan, no. 581; Shotter 1979, 51.

<sup>16</sup> *CIL* 6. 2074, 67; Scheid 1998, 177-80; 179, no. 62a, line 67.

<sup>17</sup> For interpretations of Hercules as a philosophical example: Seneca, *Ben*, 1.13.3; *Herc. Oet.* 1946; Griffin 1976, 238.

<sup>18</sup> Trajan is often said to have started the use of the Hercules *Gaditanus* in Rome. This follows from an argument set out by Strack 1931, 95-105, who attributed as a cult statue to Hercules *Gaditanus* a depiction of a Herculean statue (the pedestal is visible) on the reverse of a series of Trajanic coins dated AD101-104 (*RIC* 3, 247, nos. 37, 49-51). Literary sources, however, make clear that no such cult statue existed (Sil. *Pun.* 3.30.1: *nulla effigies simulacrae*; Philostr. VA. 5.5). It may, instead, be the case that the reverses depict a Herculean statue from the Ara Maxima on the Forum Boarium. Between AD100-4 Trajan restored this area, which had been heavily damaged in the fire of AD64. Furthermore, the Acts of

---

the Arval Brothers, as mentioned above, named Hercules Victor, the Hercules worshipped at the Ara Maxima, in January 101 amongst the gods that were invoked for the safety of the emperor (*CIL* 6. 2074, 69). The attribution is of course conjectural, but certainly more plausible than a statue of Hercules *Gaditanus*, which is wholly based on Hadrian's use of the deity.

<sup>19</sup> *RIC III*, Hadrian, nos. 57-8.

<sup>20</sup> Liv., 1.7; 34.18-19; Verg., *Aen.* 8, 190-279; Ov., *Fast.* 1, 543-86; Prop. 4. 9; Dion. Hal. 1.39f.; Bayet 1926, 203-233; Hannestad 1986, 175-176; Morgan 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Thornton 1975, 433; *BMC III*, cxxix; Levi 1993, 621; Ando 2000, 330-5. Cf. Smith 1988, 75.

<sup>22</sup> Derichs 1950, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Aristides, *Or. Rom.*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> *BMC*, IV, nos. 552, 1616, 1954, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> On the importance of dynastic considerations by accessions to the throne: Hekster 2001(b), 43-4.

<sup>26</sup> In the Roman empire it was officially not allowed to appoint a political successor by testament; Veyne 1976<sup>2</sup>, 594; 607; Mommsen 1878, 770. Also Hekster 2001(b), 35-7, 45-9.

<sup>27</sup> Herodian, 1.5.5-6. *Contra Traupman* 1956, 38: ‘Marcus gave ample evidence of his unwavering decision to make Commodus his successor, and we may take this as proof that Marcus believed his son morally and intellectually capable of carrying on his own work’

<sup>28</sup> Matuz 1996<sup>3</sup>, 128, 138, 140. Cf. Matuz' remark on the accession of Mehmet III (1595-1603), 142: ‘Nach dem obligaten Brudermord...’.

<sup>29</sup> Museum of Fine Arts (Boston): Inv. 1971.394. *Contra Gross* 1973, who dated the statue AD 166. That notion cannot be maintained for stylistic and historical reasons. Stylistic arguments: Fittschen 1999, 61-2; Vermeule 1977, 291-2. Historical arguments, with further references: Hekster 2002, 117-120.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson 1990, 65-6.

<sup>31</sup> Manuel Nieto Soría 1998, 107.

<sup>32</sup> Manuel Nieto Soría 1998, 107-17; Chartier 1985, 497-501. Both authors define these vehicles in the context of the origins of the modern state, but give conditions that can equally well apply to the Roman empire.

<sup>33</sup> Manuel Nieto Soría 1998, 110-1.

<sup>34</sup> *RIC III*, Trajan, nos. 699-701.

<sup>35</sup> Szaivert 1986, nos. 853-859; 1144-5; 1162-70; Chantraine 1975, 29. Cf. Scheiper 1982, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Palazzo dei Conservatori, inv. 1120; Fittschen/ Zanker 1985, 85-90; Hekster 2002, 121-22.

<sup>37</sup> Hannah 1986, 337-342.

<sup>38</sup> Kleiner 1992, 277.

<sup>39</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XII.537f: 9..:  $\equiv \Rightarrow < 2 \forall \Lambda : \forall \Phi 9 \in <, \emptyset 6 \forall \Re 6 \forall 2 \zeta \equiv : \forall H 5 \bar{\equiv} \equiv \equiv H$  ®  $\forall \Leftrightarrow 9 \equiv 6 \Delta \zeta 9 T \Delta f B \Re 9^{\text{TM}} < \notin \Pi 0 : \zeta 9 T < B \forall \Delta \forall 6, : . . : \leq <, \supset \Pi, < 9 \in \{/ \Delta \zeta 68, 4 \equiv < \{ \Delta \bar{B} \forall 8 \equiv < \Downarrow B, \Phi 9 \Delta T : \exists < 0 H \forall \Downarrow 9 \Downarrow 8, \leq < 9 \uparrow H 6 \forall \Re \{/ \Delta \forall 68 \uparrow H 6 \forall 8, \varphi \Phi 2 \forall 4 \geq 2, 8, <, \zeta ! 8, > \zeta < * \Delta \equiv \Lambda 9 \equiv - \zeta ! \Delta 4 \Phi 9 \equiv 9, 846 \equiv - 9 \equiv \Phi \equiv \beta 9 \equiv 4 H \forall \Downarrow 9 \in < \square N \equiv : \equiv 4 \equiv - < 9 \equiv H 2, \equiv \varphi H, \square 9 \square \Delta 6 \forall \Re 9 \pm \zeta ! \Delta 9 \Xi : 4 * 4 \pi$  Also Hekster 2001(a), 80-1; Hekster 2002, 126-128.

<sup>40</sup> Dio, 73.19, 2; 73.20, 1; Herodian 1.15, 8-9; HA, *Comm.*, 11, 10-11; 15, 5-6; Aur. Vict. *Caes.*, 17, 4-6.

- 
- <sup>41</sup> Dio, 73.20, 3: *fB,4\*Z B $\cong$ 9, B $\zeta$ <9 $\forall$ H 9 $\equiv$ ·H 9 $^{\text{TM}}$ < B $\equiv$ \* $^{\text{TM}}$ < f< 9± B 8,4 ↓B $\in$  <  $\bar{\Phi}$  $\equiv$ Λ × 6 $\forall$ R ♥ 9 $\exists$ Δ $\forall$ H 9 $\in$ εH  $\Phi\Lambda$ :N $\equiv$ Δ□H  $f\Phi$ 9,Δ0:Ξ $\equiv$ ΔH □9Δ $\equiv$ :.Φ $\forall$ H \*Δ $\forall$ 6  $\bar{<}9T<$  9Ξ 94< $\forall$   $\forall\leftrightarrow$ 9 $\equiv$ φH , $\cap$ \*0 B,ΔR 9□ (  $\bar{<}9\forall$  B,Δ4ΞB8,>, 6 $\forall$ R ΦB  $\bar{(\equiv}$ ΔH □<9R 8.:2T<  $\exists$ 88,4< \* $\equiv$ ·H □BΞ69,4<Ξ ΦN $\forall$ H {Δ $\equiv$ B $\zeta$ 8Σ B $\forall$  :. T< }H ( .:( $\forall$ <9 $\forall$ H. Cf. HA, *Comm.* 9, 6, which replaces the club with bow and arrows.*
- <sup>42</sup> Grant 1967, 118
- <sup>43</sup> Wiedemann 1992, 97; Hopkins 1983, 30; Clavel-Lèvèque 1984, 179; Coleman 1990, 44-73; Gunderson 1996, 113-151; Wiedemann 1996(b), 91-103.
- <sup>44</sup> HA, *Comm.*, 15.5: *Commodianum etiam populum Romanum dixit, quo saepissime praesente gladiator pugnavit.* For the specific role of the gladiatorial games in the self-representation of Commodus, and a more thorough discussion of recent literature on the subject, see Hekster 2001(a); Hekster 2002, 137-62.
- <sup>45</sup> Gallery and museum of the *Palazzo Ducale* of Mantua (Fig.5); Vatican Museum: *Museo Chiaramonti*, XXVII 8, inv. K.W.690 (Fig. 6); Kaiser-Raiß 1980, 55-56; Szaivert 1986, nos. 853-9, 1144-5, 1162-70.
- <sup>46</sup> Leander-Touati 1990, 115-125; 124; Bergmann 1994, 11.
- <sup>47</sup> HA, *Comm.*, 17, 3; Polemo, F.1.172, 5-7; Bonn 1996, 46; Barton 1994, 127; Gleason 1995, 29-37.
- <sup>48</sup> Laurence 1993, 83.
- <sup>49</sup> Dio, 73.22, 4-6; Herodian 1.16-17; HA, *Comm.* 17, 1-2. Further Birley 1969 ; Hekster 2002, 79-83.
- <sup>50</sup> HA, *Comm.*, 18.3-5: *Hosti patriae honores detrahantur. Parricidae honores detrahantur. Parricidae honores detrahantur. Parricida trahatur. Hostis patriae, parricida, gladiator in spoliario lanietur. Hostis deorum, carnifex senatus, hostis deorum, parricida senatus; hostis deorum, hostis senatus. Gladiatorem in spoliario.*
- <sup>51</sup> Gross 1964, 376-7; Scheithauer 1987, 39, 52; Kolb 1972, 25-47.
- <sup>52</sup> On the problematic nature of literary sources surrounding an imperial life, and for an attempt to re-examine the image of an emperor through a range of different methodological approaches, see: Elsner / Masters 1994.
- <sup>53</sup> AD 183: Szaivert 1986, nos. 585, 600, 615-6; Gross 1964, 146. AD 185: Rostovtzeff 1923, 91 ff.
- <sup>54</sup> Lucilla's conspiracy: HA, *Comm.*, 4.1-4; Dio 72.4.4; Herodian, 1.8.3-6. Maternus' revolt: Alföldi 1989, 69-80; Perennis: De Ranieri 1998, 397-417 (with references).
- <sup>55</sup> Beard 1998, 31.