

Commodus-Hercules: the people's *princeps**

History has not been kind to Lucius Aurelius Commodus. Cassius Dio mentioned how 'Commodus, taking a respite from his amusement and sports, turned to murder and was killing off the prominent men', before describing the emperor as 'superlatively mad'. The author of the fourth-century *Historia Augusta* continued the negative tradition, and summarised Commodus as being, from his earliest childhood onwards, 'base and dishonourable, and cruel and lewd, and moreover defiled of mouth and debauched'.¹ Gibbon was shocked to find that his perfect *princeps*, Marcus Aurelius, had left his throne to such a debased creature and commented that 'the monstrous vices of the son have cast a shade on the purity of the father's virtues'.² More recently, the latest edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* summarises Commodus as 'dangerously deranged'. Consensus on the emperor's insanity seems universal. According to all the above named authors the clearest signs of that insanity are the facts that Commodus tried to present himself as the demi-god Hercules, that he fought as a gladiator in the amphitheatre, and that he sometimes even combined the two.

However, this article will aim to suggest that, whether or not Commodus may have been a megalomaniac tyrant, his posing as a gladiatorial Hercules cannot be used as evidence

* Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at the 'Bristol Myth Colloquium' (14-16 July 1998) and the seminar *Stadtkultur in der römischen Kaiserzeit* at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Rome (24-1-2000). My gratitude to the organisers for inviting me, and to all participants for their comments. Special thanks go to Professors Fergus Millar, Thomas Wiedemann and Wolf Liebeschuetz, who have kindly read earlier drafts of this article, and to Professor Luuk de Blois and Dr Stephan Mols for their help during the research upon which much of this article is based. Their comments have been of great help, as was the criticism of the editors and readers of *SCI*. This paper will appear, in alternative form, as part of O. Hekster, *Commodus. An emperor at the crossroads* (forthcoming). My research is financially supported by the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO), the *Arts and Humanities Research Board*, and the Dutch Institute in Rome. It goes without saying that I am solely responsible for all remaining mistakes and inconsistencies in the text.

¹ Dio 72.14, 1: 5`:: @*@H *¥ •BĪ Jä< , Ū2L: 4ä< 6"Å B"4*4ä< •<"<, bT< |N`<" 6"Å J@xH |B4N"<, ÅH -<*D"H *4, P, 4D\., J@, HA, *Comm.* 1, 7-8: *turpis, improbus, crudelis, libidinosus, ore quoque pollutus et constupratus*. Throughout the article, translations of the literary texts are based upon the *Loeb Classical Library*.

for this. One should rather try to see both the emperor's deeds in the arena, and his identification with Hercules, as a coherent ideological message that he wanted to have broadcast in order to legitimate his government; a message, furthermore, that was supported by an extensive iconographical programme of self-representation. Of course, one has to be careful in identifying such a coherent ideology. It is only too easy for a historian to read too much into the evidence, and 'discover' a new programme where in reality there was perhaps only a slightly different use of conventional symbols. 'Ideological messages' are, moreover, not simply 'invented' by rulers. As Miriam Griffin recognised: 'Ideology is more a kind of collusion of belief and expression, not altogether conscious, between those above and those below'.³ Still, in the case of Commodus, it was the emperor himself who fought in the arena, and who dressed up like Hercules. However much popular expectation influenced Commodus in doing so, in the end it was his decision, and his alone, to step into the arena in the guise of Hercules. When such particular behaviour was afterwards broadcast through a wide range of visual media, it suggests that here, if nowhere else, 'ideology' originates at the top. Yet even if iconography, inscriptions and narrative sources do cohere, and suggest systematic symbolism, that does not necessarily make Commodus a sane and sound ruler. He may still have been perverse to the point of insanity for a Roman emperor, even if it turns out that portraying himself as Hercules seemed a sensible course of action to himself and the public at large.

It is important not to forget that Commodus' accession to the throne marks a unique moment in the history of imperial Rome. Never before had an emperor's heir been a son born when the father had already come to power. Commodus was the first emperor who had been born 'in the purple'. He had become *Caesar* at the age of five, joint *Augustus* at barely sixteen and sole ruler at only eighteen years of age.⁴ He had not been able to show any qualities as a general yet, nor as an administrator. It has been said that 'Marcus gave ample evidence of his unwavering decision to make Commodus his successor, and we may take this as proof that

² E. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London 1963, I, 83. Cf. already Julian, *Caesars*, 312 A-B: 'his error in judgement in the case of his son'; 'that his son was ruining the empire as well as himself'.

³ M. Griffin, 'Urbs Roma, Plebs and Princeps', in: L. Alexander (ed.), *Images of Empire*, Sheffield 1991, 19-46, 23.

⁴ Herodian, 1.5, 6: HA, *Marc.* 16, 1; 21, 3; HA, *Comm.* 1, 10; 11, 13; Dio 72.33, 4-34,1; Tert. *Apol.* 25; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 16, 12.

Marcus believed his son morally and intellectually capable of carrying on his own work'.⁵ Such a remark fails to take into account the fact that Marcus could not simply disregard Commodus' claim to the throne. Roman imperial succession had, from Augustus onwards, on the whole been a dynastic affair.⁶ The so-called 'adoptive emperors' had almost invariably been somehow related to the reigning emperor, emphasising the need to give an heir as legitimate a claim as possible.⁷ They may have been a choice, but only from an exclusive group of imperial relatives. The lack of children of emperors from Domitian onwards, had, however, led to almost a century of rulers who had already been very experienced before coming to power. This only emphasised the inexperience of the new monarch. Though Marcus Aurelius could not ignore his own son without the severe risk of civil war,⁸ Commodus' suitability for the imperial post was yet to be tested. Marcus may well have realised that, and it is more than likely that when he took Commodus with him to the front in May AD 175, commended him to the armies, and then had him accompany him on his travels through Syria, Palaestina, Egypt and Greece which lasted until the autumn of 176, he was trying to make Commodus a candidate for the throne who could boast more than merely

⁵ J. Traupman, *The life and reign of Commodus*, PhD: Princeton 1957, 38.

⁶ Even an imperial candidate like Galba, whose 'links with the Julio-Claudians were so tenuous as to be worthless in terms of loyalty', tried to make what he could of those links; Th. Wiedemann, 'From Nero to Vespasian', *CAH*² 10 (1996), 256-82; 261.

⁷ Notable exceptions being Hadrian's appointed successor Ceionius Commodus, and his eventual successor Antoninus Pius. On this problem, and on the suggestion that Hadrian might have been trying to appoint a 'stop-gap emperor', so as to make sure that Marcus Aurelius would finally become emperor: A. Birley, *Hadrian: the restless emperor*, London-New York 1997, 289-90. Further bibliography and sources in: idem, *Marcus Aurelius. A biography*, London 1987², appendix 2, 'The Antonine Dynasty', 232-48. J. Carcopino, 'L'hérédité dynastique chez les Antonins', *REA* 51 (1949), 263-321, suggests that Ceionius was Hadrian's illegitimate son (but see the refutation of R. Syme, 'Ummidius Quadratus, *capax imperii*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1979), 287-310 = *Roman Studies* III, Oxford 1984, 1158-1178; 1170-1). Those with stronger dynastic claims than either Ceionius or Antoninus, like Pedanius Fuscus Salinator, the grandson of Hadrian's 90-year-old brother-in-law, Servianus, and Servianus himself, were forced to commit suicide (HA, *Hadrian*, 23.1-3, 7-9; 15.8; 25.8; Dio 69.17.1-3). O. Hekster, '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* (forthcoming).

⁸ As indeed was the result of the succession-arrangements of AD 305, in which a reigning Augustus and Caesar neglected their sons when appointing successors. The effects were disastrous, and the ensuing wars, from AD 306 to 324, would only end with Constantine's final victory.

(crucial) dynastic claims.⁹ Marcus' and Commodus' presence in the East had become necessary as a result of the revolt by Avidius Cassius, who had proclaimed himself emperor after a rumour that Marcus had died. Nothing else could have made the need for a clear successor more obvious. In the end, though, Commodus' military experience was hardly enhanced in this period, as Cassius was slain by one of his centurions before the imperial army had even departed.¹⁰

In his seminal *Le Pain et le Cirque*, Paul Veyne has recognised that of all the forms of leadership, only that of the monarch by absolute right ('de droit subjectif') can be dynastic. Such a monarch, argued Veyne, has to present himself as a divinely chosen ruler, a FTJZD and a , Û, D(XJOH. He mirrors the 'divine father of gods and men', and his private life is of public importance.¹¹ Commodus inherited the throne in a society in which one was officially not allowed to appoint a political successor by testament. He had furthermore not yet been able to prove his qualities in any way.¹² It would have been impossible for him simply to display his sovereignty as the choice of the *SPQR*; his election depended on the status of the dynasty. He had to present himself as the pre-ordained ruler. 'Avec Commode, un pas de plus est franchi: le lien du sang fonde l'hérédité surnaturelle; on naît dieu comme on naît prince, de père en fils'.¹³ One does not become a leader, but is born one. Yet this takes the power to choose a ruler – even at a symbolic level – away not only from the senate and powerful governors (as Avidius Cassius had been) but also from the military.

⁹ HA, *Marc.* 25, 1; HA, *Comm.* 2, 3; K. Strobel, *Das Imperium Romanum im 3. Jahrhundert. Modell einer historischen Krise*, Stuttgart-München 1993, 57.

¹⁰ On the Avidius Cassius revolt: Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 184-92. Of course Commodus had some military experience when his father died, as he was actually accompanying him in the wars against the Jazyges (or the Quadi) at that time. Though these campaigns were rather successful, they hardly established a reputation for Commodus as a successful general; M. P. Speidel, 'Commodus and the king of the Quadi', *Germania* 78 (2000), 193-7; 193-4.

¹¹ P. Veyne, *Le Pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris 1976², 540-589, especially 542, 553-560, 565, 575-580. Cf. L. de Blois, 'De erfenis van de Romeinse burgeroorlogen en de opbouw van de monarchie van Augustus', *Lampas* 13 (1980), 23-39; 24.

¹² Veyne, *Le Pain et le cirque*, 594; 607. Th. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht II*, Berlin 1878, 770.

¹³ J. Beaujeu, *La religion romaine à l'apogée de l'empire I. La politique religieuse des Antonins*, Paris 1955, 383.

At a more practical level, Commodus, at the very beginning of his reign, did not dare to risk his reputation by waging war with some German tribes.¹⁴ The soldiers cannot have been too pleased. He afterwards saw his relationship with the senate rapidly deteriorating – to the point of an actual plot against his life, which only failed because his would-be-murderer Pompeianus cried out, pointing at his dagger: ‘See, this is what the senate has sent you’, giving Commodus’ bodyguards sufficient time to overpower him.¹⁵ With no apparent military glory to point to, and no proper power base in the senate, divine legitimation must have seemed a reasonable alternative.

‘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 Cassius Dio in his highly critical portrait of the last Antonine. The Greek senator presented Commodus as a madman, and makes it hard to believe that anyone might have viewed this ‘insane tyrant’ as introducing a new Golden Age. It was rather an age of iron, Dio commented dryly.¹⁶ But if one looks at the message which these statues must have conveyed, it seems clear that Commodus was presenting a coherent and well-considered image, about which he must have been entirely serious. The best example of this is, of course, the famous bust in the Capitoline Museum (fig.

¹⁴ Dio 72. 2, 3; HA, *Comm.* 3, 5; Herodian 1.6, 8-9. These ancient authors claim that Commodus made a hurried peace in order to enjoy the luxuries of Rome. Modern scholars, like F. Grosso, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo*, Torino 1964, 102, have often agreed with this negative judgement. It seems, however, more likely that Commodus would not risk a failure on the battlefield so soon after his accession. On the risk of serious loss of face after such a defeat: M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies*, Amsterdam 1984, 184, 186. On the peace made by Commodus on the Danube, and the fact that it seems to have lasted quite well: F. Millar, ‘Emperors, Frontiers and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to A.D. 378’, *Britannia* 13 (1982), 1-23; notably 6-7, 15. See also M. Stahl, ‘Zwischen Abgrenzung und Integration: Die Verträge der kaiser Mark Aurel und Commodus mit den Völkern jenseits der Donau’, *Chiron* 19 (1989), 289-317. Commodus did celebrate a triumph over the Germans on his return to Rome: *ILS* 1420; Speidel, ‘Commodus and the king of the Quadi’, 193-4, with emphasis on a celebratory large red agate cameo, now in the Gallo-Roman museum of Biesheim (p. 194 fig. 1).

¹⁵ HA, *Comm.* 4, 1-4; Dio 72.4, 4; Herodian 1.8, 3-6; Grosso, *Commodo*, 149-53.

¹⁶ Dio 72.15, 6: 6" Å •<*D4V<J, H "ÛJ@Ø B": B802, ÅH |< {/D" 68X@LH FPZ: "J4 aFJOF"<. 6" Å JÎ< "Æä<" JÎ< |Bz"ÛJ@Ø PDLF@Ø< J, Î<@: V. , F2"4; 72.36, 4. Cf. Hrd. 1.14, 8-9; HA, *Comm.* 8, 5; 8, 9; 9, 13-18. On Dio’s statement: F. Millar, *A study of Cassius Dio*, Oxford 1964, 123: ‘The metaphor implicitly satirizes elements in Commodus’ imperial propaganda..’.

1).¹⁷ The size of the bust, and, more importantly, the addition of arms, makes the bust unique as a sample of Antonine portrait art. That has been put forward as an argument for seeing the sculpture as a 'posthumous representation of Commodus'.¹⁸ Yet A. Leander-Touati, through analysing a little studied statue of Commodus-Hercules in Stockholm, has convincingly shown that 'at least typologically, the Capitoline bust belongs to an earlier stage of the emperor's Herculean image'.¹⁹

In this extremely well preserved statue, Commodus is depicted with the long beard, deep eyes and open gaze of a philosopher-emperor,²⁰ but he also clearly displays all the attributes of Hercules. The lion skin is draped over the emperor's head, and he holds Hercules' club in his right hand, while holding the apples of the Hesperides in his outstretched left hand. The pedestal of the bust further emphasised the emperor's universal rule. The statue rests on a globe, which is adorned with zodiacal signs that could well refer to important dates in both Commodus' and Hercules' life.²¹ Two adjacent cornucopiae seem to symbolise the peace and abundance that Commodus' reign has brought, with the two statues of kneeling Amazons further strengthening that suggestion.²² The emperor is also flanked by two tritons, emphasising that Commodus ruled the seas as well. Finally, those tritons originally held a *parapetasma* over Commodus' head, a design which was common for sarcophagi of the time,

¹⁷ Palazzo dei Conservatori, inv. 1120; K. Fittschen/ P. Zanker, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den capitolinischen Sammlungen I*, Rome 1985, 85-90.

¹⁸ O.Palagia, 'Imitation of Hercules in ruler portraiture. A survey from Alexander to Maximinus Daza', *Boreas* 9 (1986), 137-151; 149 n. 133.

¹⁹ A. Leander-Touati, 'Commodus wearing the lion skin. A "modern" portrait in Stockholm', *Opuscula Romana* 18 (1990), 115-125; 125. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv. NM SK 100.

²⁰ P. Zanker, *Die Maske des Sokrates. Das Bild des Intellektuellen in der antiken Kunst*, München 1995, 206-221; notably 212.

²¹ R. Hannah, 'The emperor's stars: The Conservatori portrait of Commodus', *AJA* 90 (1986), 337-342.

²² As J. Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, Oxford 1998, 202, recognises: 'the kneeling Amazon is a defeated foe'. It thus shows the peace which Commodus' reign had brought. The presence of the Amazons (the visible remains of a right arm indicate that there must have been two female figures) – symbols of the barbarism which both Hercules and the emperor conquered – is all the more interesting since Commodus apparently renamed one of the months *Amazonius* and wanted also to be so addressed. Dio 72.15, 3-4.

thus suggesting that 'Commodus himself had become immortal'.²³ The message was unavoidable: Commodus was more than a mere mortal.

Slightly more megalomaniac in size (over a hundred feet) was the Colossus that Nero had built representing himself, and which was transformed by Vespasian into a statue of Sol. Commodus changed its features yet again, so that it now resembled himself as Hercules:²⁴

6" Å (•D J@Ø 6@8@FF@Ø J¬< 6, N" 8¬< •B@J, : ā< 6" Å ©J, D" < ©" LJ@Ø •<J42, \H, 6" Å {D` B" 8@< *@xH 8X@<JV JX J4<" P" 86@Ø< βB@2, ÅH ñH {/D" 68, Å |@46X<" 4 |BX(D" R, BDÎH J@ÅH *O8T2, ÅF4< "ÛJ@Ø |BT<b: @4H 6" Å J@ØJ@, "BDTJ` B" 8@H F, 6@LJ` DT<, •D4FJ, DÎH : `<@H <46ZF"H *T*, 6V64H" @É: "4 "P48\@LH" (He actually cut off the head of the Colossus and substituted for it a likeness of his own head; then, having given it a club and placed a bronze lion at his feet, so as to cause it to look like Hercules, he inscribed on it ... these words: 'Champion of *secutores*; only left-handed fighter to conquer twelve times (as I recall the number) one thousand men') [Dio, 72.22, 3].

Herodian confirms this story, although he mentions 'only' one thousand gladiators, while the *Historia Augusta* does not name a number, but relates how, on the inscription, Commodus named himself *Gladiatorius*.²⁵ That Commodus indeed changed the features of the Colossus (though possibly by more minor amendments than an actual replacement of the head) seems to

²³ D. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, New Haven-London 1992, 277.

²⁴ C. Lega, 'Il Colosso di Nerone', *BCAR* 93 (1989-90), 339-78; 364-8 gives exhaustive listings of ancient sources related to the Colossus; eadem, 'Colossus: Nero' *LTUR*, I, 295-298; M. Bergmann, *Der Koloß Neros, die Domus Aurea und der Mentalitätswandel am Rom der frühen Kaiserzeit*, Mainz 1994, 5-11. It could also be argued that the Colossus was a statue of Sol from the very moment of its construction by Nero, and was only slightly altered throughout successive reigns. F. Albertson, 'Der Koloß Neros, die Domus Aurea und der Mentalitätswandel am Rom der frühen Kaiserzeit', *AJA* 100 (1996), 802-3; 803, 'would argue that there never was a 'Neronian' Colossus per se. The statue was never, in fact, completed in Nero's lifetime'. Drastically rearranging the features of statues of such massive proportions to the emperor's whims fits in only too well with the literary *topoi* for 'evil emperors' (e.g. the allegations that Gallienus wanted his own Colossal *Sol*-statue: HA, *Gall.* 16.3-4; 18.2.). Yet this need not mean that Commodus never made the Colossus into a colossal Hercules by more minor amendments: Lega, 'Il Colosso di Nerone', 352.

²⁵ Herodian 1.15, 9: : @<@: VP@LH P48\@LH <46ZF" <J@H; HA, *Comm.* 17, 9-11. HA, *Comm.* 15, 8 confirms the title 'champion of *secutores*' (*Palus Primus Secutorum*).

be further confirmed by a series of coins from AD 192, which have on the obverse the emperor's head covered by a lion skin, and on the reverse a depiction of a standing Hercules, resting his right hand on his club, and dragging a lion by its back paws with his left hand, identified by Marianne Bergmann as the transformed Colossus.²⁶ Standing in the close vicinity of the *amphitheatrum Flavium*, this towering figure must have been unavoidable to anyone passing by or visiting the 'Colosseum'. Those people who did not instantly call to mind the activities in the nearby amphitheatre were rapidly reminded of them through the inscription on the pedestal. Clearly the colossal statue linked the divine emperor Commodus-Hercules to Commodus the gladiator-emperor.

For Commodus had presented himself as a gladiator also. The *Historia Augusta* recounts how the emperor regularly 'engaged in gladiatorial combats and accepted the names usually given to gladiators with as much pleasure as if he had been granted triumphal decorations'. Cassius Dio also records – with horror – how Commodus fought as a gladiator during games that lasted for fourteen days. Aurelius Victor adds that while the emperor himself fought with iron weapons, his opponents were given lead ones.²⁷ There is, however, more than merely literary evidence. The portrait types of the last years of Commodus' reign (in AD 191/2) are characterised by a very short haircut (fig. 2). This is a clear break from all the portrait types from Hadrian onwards, made even more significant by a passage in the *Historia Augusta* which claims that Commodus paid much attention to his hair, which 'was always dyed and made lustrous by the use of gold dust'. Blond (or golden) hair was of course, according to physiognomics, a reference to a person's lion-like qualities: 'brave, a bold hero, angry when hurt, long-suffering, modest, generous, great-hearted and ready to spring'.²⁸ This image Commodus replaced by the short hair that one can see on the portraits. Although Fittschen and Zanker compare the new haircut to that of the more militarily-based third-

²⁶ Bergmann, *Der Koloß Neros*, 12: 'Es ist also durchaus wahrscheinlich daß die Multiplumserie uns auch den Koloß überliefert.'; Pl. 2, 4-5.

²⁷ HA, *Comm.* 11, 10-11: *gladiatorium etiam certamen subiit et nomina gladiatorum recepit eo gaudio quasi acciperet triumphalia*; 15, 5-6; Dio 72.19, 2; 72.20, 1; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 17, 4-6. Cf. Herodian 1.15, 8-9.

²⁸ HA, *Comm.* 17, 3; Polemo, F.1.172, 5-7; H. Bonn (ed.), *Damnatio Memoriae: Das Berliner Nero-Porträt*, Mainz am Rhein 1996, 46; T. Barton, *Power and knowledge: Astrology, physiognomics and medicine under the Roman empire*, Ann Arbor 1994, 127; M. Gleason, *Making Men. Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton 1995, 29-37.

century imperial portraits, it may well be significant that this new short hair type corresponds closely to that of certain athletes that are known to have been Commodus' opponents in the arena.²⁹ On Commodus' coinage, too, which shows the emperor with Hercules' attributes as clearly as the statues do, and in the last year of the reign even mentions Commodus as HERCULES ROMANUS AUGUSTUS, the new 'gladiatorial' hairstyle is distinctly visible.³⁰ The emperor seems to have manifested himself as a member of the *familia gladiatoria*; his health equalled their *felicitas*.³¹

This emphasis on imperial gladiatorial qualities through a short haircut was often combined with the emperor presenting himself as Hercules (fig. 3). Indeed, Commodus 'was also called the Roman Hercules, on the grounds that he had killed wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Lanuvium'.³² Hercules had been famous for the deeds he performed to save

²⁹ Dio 72.19.3; M. Bergmann, 'Zeittypen im Kaiserporträt', in: *Römisches Porträt, WissZeit zu Berlin 2/3* (1982), 143-7; 146; Leander-Touati, 'Commodus wearing the lion skin', 124, consistently mistranslates Bergmann's 'Schwerathleten' as 'sword-athletes'; M. Wegner, *Die Herrscherbildnisse in antoninischer Zeit*, Berlin 1939, 72-73; Fitschen/Zanker, *Katalog I*, 87.

³⁰ M. Kaiser-Raiß, *Die Stadtrömische Münzprägung während der Alleinherrschaft des Commodus*, Frankfurt am Main 1980, 55-56; W. Szaivert, *Die Münzprägung der Kaiser Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus und Commodus*, Wien 1986, nos. 853-9, 1144-5, 1162-70.

³¹ *CIL* 6.632; P. Sabbatini Tumolesi, *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente Romano. I. Roma*, Roma 1988, 55-6, no. 46.

³² HA, *Comm.* 8, 5: *appellatus est etiam Romanus Hercules, quod feras Lanuvii in amphitheatro occidisset*. Of course there are differences between gladiatorial combat (*munera gladiatoria*) and fighting wild beasts in the arena (*venationes*). For the purposes of this article I will, however, not attempt to differentiate between the two. They both incorporated much of the same characteristics and symbolism, noticeably risking one's life through physical danger, being acclaimed by the audience in the arena, and fighting barbarism and chaos. They also often formed part of a single series of spectacles (Th. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, London-New York 1992, 56, 97 n.1), and must have been perceived by the Romans themselves as being strongly related. They are simultaneously represented on the 'Villa di Dar Buc Amméra' mosaic (Zliten, Libya), and the goddess Nemesis 'had a special, if not exclusive, relation to the Roman *munus*, *venatio*, and other related animal controlling displays' (M. Hornum, *Nemesis, the Roman State, and the Games*, Leiden 1993, 56), whilst there is virtually no evidence for a link between Nemesis and other Roman spectacles (Hornum, *Nemesis*, 55). Both *munera* and *venationes* were, finally, strongly tied to the figure of Hercules. His labours with animals naturally suggested a *venator* – e.g. Martial, *De Spec.* 17 (15), 6; 32 (28; 27), 11-2 – but the less 'natural' link to gladiators was not less strong. See p.16 n.62-64.

mankind, and for his crossing the boundary of immortality, thus becoming one of the gods. Commodus seems to have intended to indicate clearly that he was trying to emulate the demi-god's deeds through mythological re-enactment of them in the arena. According to Dio:

... [He] had once 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, had killed them with blows from a club, pretending that they were giants).³³

After thus symbolically rescuing the cosmic order from the attack of fearsome giants, the emperor was apparently planning to enact the story of Hercules and the Stymphalian birds (Dio, 72.20, 2). Dio adds with some relish that many spectators shunned the arena out of fear of being shot in the course of the emperor's masquerade.³⁴ But the arena was a logical choice for a place to imitate Hercules. It was the perfect example of a border-zone between civilisation and barbarism, an area which was simultaneously the centre of one of the Romans' most important social activities and the 'non-Roman space' of the uncivilised earth.³⁵ In the amphitheatre culture and lawless nature met, symbolising the order of the cosmos itself.³⁶ It was also the place in which the emperor's authority over life and death was emphasised through the execution of criminals in 'fatal charades', as Coleman has called them; the re-enactment of fatal myths, often preceding the gladiatorial games proper, in which the criminal played the part of the unfortunate protagonist.³⁷ The amphitheatre symbolised, in

³³ Dio 72.20, 3. Cf. HA, *Comm.* 9, 6, which replaces the club with bow and arrows.

³⁴ But cf. Herodian, 1.15.2: 'At last the day of the show came and the amphitheatre was packed'.

³⁵ E. Gunderson, 'The ideology of the arena', *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996), 113-151; 134.

³⁶ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 179. Cf. M. Clavel-Lèvêque, *L'empire en jeux. Espace symbolique et pratique sociale dans le monde romain*, Paris 1984, 179: '[Les jeux] sont, à tous leurs niveaux, visualisation d'une vision du monde complexe, voire hétérogène, des rapports des hommes entre eux et avec la nature ...'.

³⁷ K. Coleman, 'Fatal charades: Roman executions staged as mythological enactments', *JRS* 80 (1990), 44-73.

either case, the border-zone between normality and abnormality. Those who fought, and died, in the arena represented culture in its constant battle against chaos.

Thomas Wiedemann's book on the topic of gladiatorial games and *venationes* has shed new light on a subject that had been, till then, largely ignored or dismissed. Earlier authors were horrified by the games, often leading to rather extravagant claims. Thus it has been argued that 'extremely few epochs of human history ... have achieved cruelty on a scale as numerically lavish as ancient Rome',³⁸ and that these 'bloodthirsty holocausts in the arena', those 'orgies of cruelty', cannot be sufficiently condemned.³⁹ Similarly, the games have been dismissed as unbecoming for, and incompatible to, the Romans.⁴⁰ Only in the last two decades this negative image of the gladiatorial games has begun to shift, to be replaced by a more sophisticated one. Emphasis was put on the fact that the spectacles formed a platform for institutionalised violence, whilst, at the same time, they reminded spectators that they themselves were unaffected by such horrors.⁴¹ Through 'theatralising' a potentially real danger, that danger was, in a way, overcome. By institutionalising chaos and disorder, the breach of normality was included in the fabric of society.⁴² Wiedemann expanded on such ideas, and combined them with the importance of the element of death, which figured prominently in the gladiatorial games. According to him the games reminded people of their mortality: but whatever happened in the arena, whether a gladiator won or lost, the fact that fights to the death were institutionalised, and to an extent ritualised, made death itself less frightening.⁴³ In the arena, gladiators symbolically challenged death itself. By winning a battle, a gladiator could win back the life that he forfeited at the beginning of the games. Through showing bravery and fighting skill even death itself could be defeated. If he won the battle, he won his life. If he lost, the all-powerful emperor could yet save him, with a mere

³⁸ M. Grant, *Gladiators*, Suffolk 1967, 10.

³⁹ Grant, *Gladiators*, 118.

⁴⁰ R. Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization. The Roman games*, London 1994, 15. (Translation of *Fêtes et spectacles populaires*, Paris 1974).

⁴¹ K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal. Sociological studies in Roman history. Volume 2*, Cambridge 1983, 30.

⁴² P. Plass, *The Game of death in Ancient Rome. Arena Sport and Political Suicide*, Winconsin 1995, 32: 'Real threats cannot be gotten rid of in complete safety, and so the efficacy of ritual depends on how strongly their reality is felt'.

⁴³ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 97. Cf. *Ibidem*, 35, 92, 180.

motion of the hand. The worst that could happen to him was of course dying. But even then he had at least decided the moment of dying himself, and embraced it whilst displaying his *virtus*. ‘In that sense, even the gladiator who died in the arena had overcome death’.⁴⁴

Wiedemann bases his case upon an impressive documentation. He points to the importance, even for a gladiator who had lost, of dying heroically, so as to set a good example.⁴⁵ Such examples were deemed important, as Pliny testifies, when he describes how Trajan’s spectacles: ‘inspire them to face honourable wounds and look with scorn on death’, or as Libanius admits, admiring the bravery of the gladiators who had fought at his uncle’s games.⁴⁶ Wiedemann further shows that the prospects of survival for gladiators were far greater than has often been assumed. Inscriptions from Pompeii, for instance, seem to imply that gladiators could acquire some sort of hero-status. If he fought well enough to survive the first few matches, a gladiator’s popularity became such that the crowd would support him when he finally did lose. In that way, he might well avoid being killed in the arena altogether.⁴⁷ Several inscriptions record men who had died – and not always in the arena – only after several years of gladiatorial fighting.⁴⁸ Not all of them had won all of their fights. One instance even records a man, who died at thirty, and had performed 34 fights, of which he had won 21, ‘drew’ (*stans*) 9, and lost – but was allowed to survive– 4 times (*missus*).⁴⁹ References in the law codes to ex-gladiators furthermore show that those who had been

⁴⁴ Th. Wiedemann, ‘Single combat and being Roman’, *Ancient Society* 27 (1996), 91-103; 103. Cf. L. Robert, ‘Une vision de Perpétue martyre à Carthage en 203’, *Opera Minora Selecta* V, Amsterdam 1989, 791-839, in which Robert emphasised the importance of death and eternity for Christian martyrs who were about to be put to death in the arena. Although ‘conquering death’ had of course entirely different connotations for these Christians, Robert’s article does once more stress how closely activities in the arena and conquering death could be related.

⁴⁵ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 38.

⁴⁶ Plin, *Pan.*, 33.1; Liban, *Orat.* 1.5. On the importance of display of *virtus* in the arena: M. Wistrand, *Entertainment and Violence in Ancient Rome. The attitudes of Roman writers of the first century AD*, Göteborg 1992, 15-29.

⁴⁷ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 120. Cf. Pliny, *Nat Hist.* 35.52, describing how a wall in a portico was covered with ‘life-like portraits of all the gladiators’ in a certain show.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 120-2, referring to: *ILS*, 5086, 5089, 5093-7, 5101-2, 5107, 5109, 5111-2, 5114-5, 5117, 5120, 5125, 6122,.

⁴⁹ *ILS*, 5113: ‘Flamma s[e]c., vix. an. xxx, / pugnat xxxiiii, vicit xxi, / stans viiii, mis. iiii, nat. S[y]rus. / Hui Delicatus coarmio merenti fecit.’

gladiators could sometimes return to civil life.⁵⁰ Rather than seeing gladiatorial games as occasions during which somebody was inevitably going to die, one might regard them as opportunities to socially (and physically) regain a life gone wrong.⁵¹ Finally, the evidence shows that gladiatorial games were associated with the end of the year. 'The year's end is also a new beginning. Death and killing were essential associations of the arena: but so also was rebirth'.⁵²

Not all scholars have agreed with Wiedemann's proposal that gladiatorial shows should be perceived as a medium for defeating death, rather than as a means of killing'. Shelby Brown found that there was too little evidence to support the claim, though she did concede that 'gladiatorial combat undoubtedly brought watchers face to face with death, and the origins of gladiatorial combat and funerals may suggest an element of comfort offered to the dead, the survivors or both ... The acceptance and ritualization of death does take its power to frighten us'.⁵³ David Potter disagrees with Wiedemann on the meaning of *sine missione*. According to him this does not indicate a fight to the death, but one in which *missio* ('release from the authority of the person who was offering the combat to the public') without an obvious winner was not allowed.⁵⁴ If thus, in general, combats were not fought to the death, then surviving such a combat would not be quite the defeating of death, which Wiedemann makes it out to be.⁵⁵ Even though Potter may be right in principle, in case of Commodus we are explicitly told that the games sometimes became 'so serious that great numbers of men were killed'.⁵⁶

Surely the interpretation of the games may have differed from person to person. Some would see them as confirmations of the importance of the warrior ethos at Rome; clear signs of the military foundation of Rome's empire. Others may have thought that the games should

⁵⁰ *Digest*, 38.1.38; Wiedemann *Emperors and Gladiators*, 122.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 120.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 47. Also taken up by P. Plass, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome. Arena Sport and Political Suicide*, Madison 1995, 37, 194 n. 15.

⁵³ S. Brown, 'Explaining the arena: did the Romans "need" gladiators?', *JRA* 8 (1995), 376-86, 383.

⁵⁴ D. Potter, 'Entertainers in the Roman Empire', in: D. Potter / D. J. Mattingly (eds.), *Life, Death and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, Ann Arbor 1999, 256-325; 307.

⁵⁵ This is also one of Potter's major point of criticism on Wiedemann in his review of *Emperors and Gladiators*, in *JRS* 83 (1993), 229-31, especially 231.

⁵⁶ Dio, 72.19. 5: òFJ, BV<L B@88@xH •B@2<ZF6, 4< .

be perceived as a form of *devotio*: a sacrifice in which Roman citizens gave their life for the realm in order to appease the divine.⁵⁷ The latter interpretation suggests that one can perceive gladiatorial games as being given on behalf of the welfare of the emperor.⁵⁸ An emperor fighting for his own welfare would be an interesting enough phenomenon in itself. Yet Wiedemann's model has an added interest in explaining Commodus' behaviour as a gladiator. For if gladiators symbolically conquered death, it would not only be when shooting Stymphalian birds or defeating giants in the arena that Commodus manifested himself as a new Hercules; the very notion of fighting in the amphitheatre in Hercules' garb was a symbolical re-enactment of the deity's triumph over death. The emperor apparently wanted to show his divine immortality to the assembled people.

This would, then, explain some highly enigmatic statements in our literary sources. Dio states:

: X88T< "p24H : @<@: "P-F"4 B"DZ((, 48, < °: Å< a< J, J± FJ@8± J± ÊBBV*4 6"Å |< J"ÅH : "<*b"4H |H JÎ 2X"JD@< , Æ : ¬ Jä< "ÛJ@6D"J`DT< J4H : , J"88V>, 4, , 6"Å ÓJ4 |< J± J, 8, LJ"\ ' °: XD' JÎ 6DV<@H "ÛJ@Ø 6"J• J•H Bb8"H 6"2Z ÿH @Ê J, 8, LJä<J, H |6NXD@<J"4 |>, 6@: \F20 (When he was intending to fight once more as a gladiator, he bade us enter the amphitheatre in the equestrian garb and in our woollen cloaks, a thing that we never do when going to the amphitheatre except when one of the emperors has passed away; and on the last day his helmet was carried out by the gates through which the dead are taken out) [Dio, 72.21, 3].

To which the *Historia Augusta* adds:

ipse autem prodigium non leve sibi fecit; nam cum in gladiatoris occisi vulnus manum misisset, ad caput sibi detersit, et contra consuetudinem paenulatos iussit spectatores non togatos ad munus convenire, quod funeribus solebat, ipse in pullis vestimentis praesidens. Galea eius bis per portam Libitinensem elata est (He was himself responsible for a not inconsiderable omen relating to himself; for after he had plunged his hand in the wound of a slain gladiator he wiped

⁵⁷ H. S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual. Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II* (Leiden-New York- Köln 1993), 224.

⁵⁸ Versnel, *Transition and Reversal*, 222. Cf. Ibidem, 226: 'in *Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant* the *salutatio* regained its etymological connection with *salus* ... The development was, of course, fostered by, and embedded in, the general ritual of the *vota pro salute principis*..'

it on his own head, and again, contrary to custom, he ordered the spectators to attend his gladiatorial shows clad not in togas but in cloaks, a practice used at funerals, while he himself presided in the vestment of a mourner. Twice, moreover, his helmet was borne through the Gate of Libitina) [HA, *Comm.* 16, 6-7].

Commodus made his subjects come to the amphitheatre as if they were already mourning his death. He then wiped the blood of a killed gladiator – blood renowned for its magic value⁵⁹ – on his head, before having his helmet carried off through the gates of the goddess of death and funerals⁶⁰ – gates through which slain gladiators were customarily carried off. All of this took place during a spectacle that was strongly associated with death and rebirth. It seems highly likely that Commodus was here, in terms that were not to be misunderstood, challenging death itself, much like Wiedemann's model presumed gladiators did anyhow. His survival could be presented as a sign of his superhuman status. Only by thus symbolically challenging – and conquering – death, could Commodus, in a way, become the god Hercules by presenting himself as immortal.⁶¹

The connection between gladiators and Hercules was in any case a powerful one. The deity was popular amongst fighting men. When gladiators retired, they dedicated their weaponry to Hercules.⁶² 'Alcides', 'Herakles', and 'Hercules' were popular names amongst

⁵⁹ W. Weismann, 'Gladiator', in: T. Klauser et. al. (eds.), *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum*, Stuttgart 1981, X, 23-45; 33.

⁶⁰ Hor, *Carm.* 3.30, 7; *Epist.* 2.1, 49; G. Radke, *Zur Entwicklung den Gottesvorstellung und der Gottesverehrung in Rome*, Darmstadt 1987, 184-6.

⁶¹ Note how Commodus apparently also 'would enter the arena in the garb of Mercury' and 'carried a herald's staff like that of Mercury' (Dio, 72, 17.4. Cf. 72, 19.4). This should presumably be connected to the deity's role as the *psychopompos*, who carried off slain gladiators (H. S. Versnel, *Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three studies in henotheism. Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion I*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1990, 207-8). Once more the emperor re-enacted the role of a god who was strongly connected to life, death, and the games. Unlike Hercules, Mercury is absent from Commodus' coinage and from other imagery. There is, therefore, not enough evidence to support the notion of Commodus as a *novus Mercurius*, which has been put forward by C. de Ranieri, 'Commodo-Mercurio. Osservazioni sulla politica religiosa Commodiana', *La Parola del Passato* 51 (1996), 422-441; 432.

⁶² Hor, *Epist.* 1.1, 5; Wiedemann, *Emperors and gladiators*, 178.

gladiators.⁶³ Indeed, in Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*, Hercules' last words are those of the gladiator: 'Habet, hoc habet'.⁶⁴ Both gladiators and Hercules fought to protect the order of society against the chaos of nature and barbarism, very much as an emperor defended his realm against the chaos from without. They were the perfect symbols for a ruler who wanted to show his power to his subjects, who tried to rule by general acclamation rather than by trying to persuade traditional institutions like the senate of the legitimacy of his reign; an emperor who chose a new style of government as a god-emperor, as 'the people's *princeps*'.

It is hardly surprising that Cassius Dio in particular, one of the senators who were made almost superfluous in such a new system of government, depicts all of this in extremely negative tones. When introducing Commodus' games into his narrative, he uses a language echoing that used to discuss Gaius – *ἄλλοτε δὲ Πύρρονος, ἄλλοτε δὲ Ἰούλιου Κεραύου*.⁶⁵ He then tries to make Commodus' actions in the arena look ridiculous. Most famously he does so by recounting a now well-known scene in which Commodus approached the senators while holding a freshly severed head of an ostrich in his left hand, and a bloody sword in his right. This implicit threat, according to Dio, only made the emperor look ridiculous, and the senators present had difficulties containing their laughter.⁶⁶ He also uses a more subtle way of making the emperor's action look absurd. Dio (72.19.5) compares the emperor fighting in the arena to child's play: *ὡς παιδικὴν μάχην*. As the emperor was never truly going to be injured, his fighting as a gladiator was merely amphitheatrical pseudo-fighting. Popular with the *plebs* perhaps, but not the real thing.

It is of course impossible to tell whether this was Dio's private opinion, the general perception by senators (or larger sections of society), or a later reflection on how Dio would, in retrospect, have wanted to have interpreted the matter. What one can say is that Commodus presented his behaviour in the arena as more than mere play-acting, and used senatorial acclamation as one of the ways to accomplish this. Senators were to celebrate the emperor's gladiatorial efforts, in prescribed expressions: 'You are the lord; you are the first of all men

⁶³ W. Ameling, 'Maximinus Thrax als Herakles', in: J. Straub (ed.), *Bonner Historia-Augusta Colloquium 1984/5* (1987), 1-12; 6 nn. 29-34.

⁶⁴ Sen, *Herc. Oet.* 1472; Wiedemann, *Emperors and gladiators*, 179.

⁶⁵ Dio, 72.16.1. Noted by Millar, *A study of Cassius Dio*, 132.

⁶⁶ Dio, 72.21.1-2. Laughter can, of course, also be a product of terror and hysteria. That, however, is not the image that Dio wishes to transfer.

and the most fortunate. You conquer; you will conquer, Amazonius; you will conquer for eternity'.⁶⁷ The reference to Commodus as 'Amazonius' once more shows how a connection was presented between Hercules (whose labours had included stealing the girdle of Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons), and the emperor as gladiator. This connection was publicised through senatorial acclamation. Though the senators were not the intended audience, they nevertheless formed part of the spectacle.

One possible audience for such self-presentation has not been mentioned yet. Convincing most people of the known world that the emperor of Rome was their master was difficult enough in itself. But as Mary Beard recently emphasised, understanding quite what such power meant must have been even more difficult for the emperor himself. How does one cope with ruling the world?⁶⁸ In this context she explicitly mentions the above-noted Capitoline bust, which was presumably originally placed within the *horti Lamiani*, and would thus have been as visible to Commodus himself as it was to any possible visitor.⁶⁹ Presenting himself – and being acclaimed by his subjects – as an immortal god-emperor may well have been a way for Commodus to formulate, and understand, the power that he could wield.

The need for such acclamation might also help make Commodus' appearance as a gladiator understandable. It is obvious that the all-powerful emperor could, as *editor* of the games, grant a fighter life or death, by a mere motion of the finger.⁷⁰ Yet that decision was hugely influenced by the public reaction to a fight. The public's approval or disapproval was not to be ignored; not even by the emperor. Such a public reaction could rapidly evolve into a

⁶⁷ Dio, 72.20.2: '6"Å 6bD4@H , É 6"Å BDäJ@H , É 6"Å BV<JT< , ÜJLPXFJ" J@H. <46"H, <46ZF, 4H. •BZ "Æä<@H, Z! : " .`<4, , <46"H. On the role of acclamation during the games: D. Potter: 'Performance, Power, and Justice in the High Empire', in Slater, *Roman Theatre and Society*, 129-59; 132-142.

⁶⁸ M. Beard, 'Imaginary *horti*: or up the garden path', in: E. La Rocca / M. Cima (eds.), *Horti Romani*, Roma 1998, 23-32; 31.

⁶⁹ Beard, 'Imaginary *horti*', 31.

⁷⁰ Coleman, 'Fatal Charades', 73: 'There were people and animals available who, by dying violently, could earn [the emperor] popular acclaim and demonstrate his authority over life and death'. S. Brown, 'Death as Decoration: Scenes from the Arena on Roman Domestic Mosaics', in: A. Richlin (ed.) *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, New York - Oxford 1992, 180-211; 206-7 discusses the importance on mosaics of the, often unseen, *editor*, who alone could intercede in a fight, and to whom requests of *missio* should be directed.

political statement, going far beyond requests regarding the games themselves. For in the amphitheatre people would give their opinion about an emperor and his policies freely; in many ways the assembled masses took over the role of a formal assembly. Moreover, as Alan Cameron realised over twenty years ago (though talking about the Circus Maximus, rather than the Colosseum): ‘any request made publicly in front of up to 250,000 fellow citizens was potentially political, and not easy to resist’.⁷¹ To an emperor who personally fought as a gladiator, requests could not be so easily made; his very actions in the arena protected his people as he (symbolically) risked his life in order to save his subjects. In doing so, he rose far above those subjects, making them more and more his to command, as the *Historia Augusta* seems to confirm: ‘He entitled the Roman people the "people of Commodus", since he had very often fought as a gladiator in their presence’.⁷² The audience had nothing left to do but to acclaim the gladiator-emperor who defended civilisation. Nobody could deny him the position which was rightly his. As the new incarnation of Hercules, Commodus owed nobody an explanation. He was the only one who could bring a new Golden Age for his people.

Also, in choosing to appear as a gladiator, Commodus might have been trying to avoid the mistakes which Nero had previously made. Nero too had used the divine to legitimate himself, having had much the same problems of legitimation that Commodus would have over a century later. He had even presented himself as Hercules, acting the role of ‘Hercules *insanus*’ whilst wearing a mask of the deity, which was fashioned to look like Nero himself. A very interesting form of self-representation, to say the least, which indeed caused one soldier ‘who was posted to guard the entrance’ to run up and ‘rescue’ the emperor when Nero was ‘bound with chains, as the plot demanded’.⁷³ In Shadi Bartsch’s words: ‘Nero’s mask of himself serves as a catalyst of confusion, making it seemingly impossible for the spectator to apply either "representation" or "reality" as a consistent frame for viewing’.⁷⁴ Nero had

⁷¹ A.Cameron, *Circus factions. Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford 1976, 162. Possibly 250,000 is slightly exaggerated, even for the Circus Maximus. The Colosseum would have been able to seat between 40,000 and 45,000 people. R. Rea, ‘Amphitheatrum’, *LTUR* I, 30-35.

⁷² HA, *Comm.* 15, 5: *Commodianum etiam populum Romanum dixit, quo saepissime praesente gladiator pugnavit*

⁷³ Suet, *Nero*, 21.3. Cf. Dio 63.9, 5. On Nero-Hercules: C. Pascal, *Nerone*, Milano 1923, 29, 145-7.; M. Rostovtzeff, ‘Commodus-Hercules in Britain’, *JRS* 13 (1923), 91-109; 102-3.

⁷⁴ S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian*, London - Cambridge [Mass.] 1994, 49.

constantly related himself to such confusion and strangeness, loving the theatre and making a long tour in Greece which ended in his infamous entry into Rome, celebrating his ‘theatrical triumph’.⁷⁵ Commodus, on the other hand, presented himself as thoroughly Roman. There was hardly anything which defined being Roman as much as the gladiatorial games did.⁷⁶ A gladiator displayed proper Roman *virtus*. It is of course true that by performing as a gladiator a citizen risked *infamia*; even the ‘complete deprivation of citizenship rights’.⁷⁷ Still, restrictions on gladiatorial performances by members of the upper class were consistently evaded, leading to ever new bans, which never quite managed to curb public performance by *equites* and senators.⁷⁸ Whatever the legal implications, fighting in the arena remained a popular Roman activity. Nobody could doubt that the gladiator-emperor was utterly Roman.

Hercules, who was amongst the most popular divinities in the Roman world, could of course be equally Roman, having founded the ancient cult-site on the Ara Maxima after defeating the monster Cacus.⁷⁹ The Hercules worshipped at this place in the Forum Boarium, the Hercules *Romanus* (or *Invictus*) with whom Commodus identified so strongly that he styled himself HERCULES ROMANUS AUGUSTUS, was repeatedly represented as having brought peace and order.⁸⁰ Commodus appears to have tried to follow this Hercules as a founder too, naming himself *conditor* and minting coins which depict the legend and iconography of the Hercules *Conditor*. The coins in question show a Hercules who is ploughing, accompanied by two oxen; the standard symbolism for someone founding a new city.⁸¹ That Commodus

⁷⁵ Suet. *Nero*, 25.

⁷⁶ L. Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient grec*, Paris 1940.

⁷⁷ B. Levick, ‘The *Senatus Consultum* from Larinum’, *JRS* 73 (1983), 97-115; 108.

⁷⁸ Levick, ‘The *Senatus Consultum* from Larinum’, 105-10; E. Baltrusch, *Regimen morum. Die Reglementierung des Privatlebens der Senatoren und Ritter in der römischen Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit*, München 1988, 147-9, with references.

⁷⁹ Liv., 34.18-19; Verg., *Aen.* 8, 190-279; Ov., *Fast.* 1, 543-86; Prop. 4. 9; R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, New Haven-London 1981, 6; F. Coarelli, ‘Hercules Invictus, Ara Maxima’, *LTUR*, III, 15-7.

⁸⁰ H. Erkell, ‘L’imperatore Commodo ed Ercole-Melcart’, *Opuscula Romana* 19 (1993), 39-43; 39; A. Breebaart, ‘Rome en de weg van Hercules Romanus’, *Lampas* 8 (1975), 102-114.

⁸¹ *RIC* 3, 394 no. 247, 417 no. 629; P. Martin, ‘Hercules Romanus Conditor’. Ein seltener Aureus des Kaisers Commodo in Karlsruhe und Wien’, *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg* 12 (1975), 51-64; M. Levi, ‘Roma Colonia e Commodo Conditor’, *Atti, Centro ricerche e documentazione sull’antichità classica* 11 (1980/81), 315-20.

wanted to be identified with that particular Hercules seems clear: ‘In his [Commodus’] honour a gold statue was erected of a thousands pounds’ weight, representing him together with a bull and a cow’.⁸² The emperor even went so far as actually to re-found Rome as the *Colonia Antoniniana Commodiana*, the *aeterna felix colonia gentium omnium*, in the latter years of his reign, after already having renamed the fleet, legions and senate after himself.⁸³ This often-ridiculed step fits in well with an attempt to present himself as the ‘religious champion of all his subjects’, and his capital as the ‘common capital of the whole civilised world’. The parallel with the Sun-King’s Versailles, a stage on which a god-emperor could act, is easily drawn.⁸⁴ The new colony of Commodus would be the emperor’s personal stage, the imperial court from which Commodus-Hercules could preside over all his subjects, bringing a Golden Age to all his ‘Commodians’, as a medallion from AD 187 had already anticipated (fig. 4). The double head of Janus was featured on it, one head being Janus himself looking back, the other the emperor Commodus looking forward to the new era which he was to bring about. The reverse further specified that new era, with *Tellus Stabilis* exemplifying the peace and abundance that the emperor was to bring mankind; a Golden Age he was about to bring forth.⁸⁵ Nobody could doubt the position which the immortal gladiator-emperor Commodus-Hercules held.

This immortal god-emperor was killed on New Year’s Eve AD 192. Commodus had planned to enter on the new consular year dressed as Hercules, accompanied by gladiators. It

⁸² Dio 72.15, 3: 6"Å •<*D4VH J, "ÜJè PDLF@ØH P48\T< 84JDä< : , JV J, J"bD@L 6"Å \$@ÎH 208, \ "H
 † (X<, J@.

⁸³ Dio 72.15, 2; HA, *Comm.* 8, 6-9; 17, 8; *CIL* 13.6728; *CIL* 8.3163; M. Speidel, ‘Commodus the god-emperor and the army’, *JRS* 83 (1993), 109-114.

⁸⁴ J. Oliver, ‘The piety of Commodus and Caracalla and the ‘Eis Basilea’’, *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 19 (1978), 375-388; 379. On similar actions by the Sun-King: P. Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, London 1991.

⁸⁵ This medallion was mistakenly identified as a Janus-head portraying Hercules and Commodus by F. Gnechi, *I medaglioni Romani* II, Milano 1912, no. 131. The identification was followed by Grosso, *Commodo*, 239, and Beaujeu, *Religion Romaine*, 376, who saw the medallion as the first step of ‘assimilation de Commode à Hercule –association étroite en 187 sous le signe de l’Age d’or’. H. Chantraine, ‘Zur religionspolitik des Commodus im Spiegel seiner Münzen’, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 70 (1975), 1-31; 23-4 already noted that the identification with Hercules is untenable. Also taken up by Kaiser-Raiß, *Die Stadtrömischen Münzprägung*, 61: ‘Seit Gnechi geistert ein solches Monstrum denn auch durch die Forschung’.

would have been the ultimate display of his god-like power. Instead, he was assassinated.⁸⁶ The senate instantly condemned his memory, and history has judged him accordingly. But the negative image that has accompanied Commodus ever since need not mean that the programme described above was not understood, or accepted by various segments of society. It is hardly surprising that those on whom we rely for the literary accounts of Commodus' life – entrenched as they were in a senatorial tradition – tried to ridicule the emperor's attempts to pass over the senate in legitimating his power.⁸⁷ They seem to have consistently underplayed the coherence of Commodus' actions, and to have mentioned the most extreme examples of his divine claims out of context. But there is some evidence that his attempts to secure divine legitimation may have worked, even if not with the senators.

Only three years after the *damnatio memoriae*, Septimius Severus deified Commodus, and called himself *Divi Commodi Frater*.⁸⁸ He also named Hercules as one of his patron divinities (though originally as Melqart, and together with Liber), and built an enormous temple to the god.⁸⁹ From AD 200 onwards Severus even went so far as repeatedly to depict himself on a coin with the lion skin of Hercules over his head, very much as Commodus had done (fig. 5).⁹⁰ All of this, of course, horrified Cassius Dio and his fellow senators, since such specific references to a connection between Hercules and the emperor so shortly after Commodus' death undoubtedly further strengthened the memory of the last Antonine. Some groups of people will therefore probably still have had positive memories of Commodus-Hercules, for an emperor as practical as Septimius Severus must have had good reasons to relate himself so closely to one of his most immediate predecessors.

Loyalty to Commodus in the armies would have formed such a reason, and there are some literary indications that the soldiers remained loyal to Commodus-Hercules until the

⁸⁶ Dio 72.22, 4-6; Herodian 1.16-17; HA, *Comm.* 17, 1-2.

⁸⁷ Grosso, *Commodo*, 376-7; A. Scheithauer, *Kaiserbild und literarisches Programm. Untersuchungen zur Tendenz der Historia Augusta*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, 39, 52; F. Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta*, Bonn 1972, 25-47.

⁸⁸ *CIL* 8.9317; Dio 76.7, 4; HA, *Sev.* 10, 6; 11, 3-4.

⁸⁹ Dio 76.16.3; R. Santangeli Valenzani, 'Hercules et Dionysos, Templum', in: *LTUR* III, 25-26; W. Derichs, *Herakles, Vorbild des Herrschers in der Antike*, PhD, Köln 1950, 83.

⁹⁰ *RIC* 4, 155a, 161b; P. Bastien, *Le buste monétaire des empereurs romains*, Wetteren 1993-4, II, 376; III, 78.2.

very end, or even after it.⁹¹ More crucial to the argument, though, is an altar that was ‘set up by an under-officer at the frontier fortress of Dura-Europos on the middle Euphrates’ in the main gateway, where the road to Palmyra left the fortress.⁹² The altar was first excavated in 1928, but has only recently been convincingly deciphered by Michael Speidel. According to this latest reconstruction, the text reads:

Pro salu-	
te Com(modi)	
Aug(usti) Pii F(elicis)	
et victo-	
riam d(omini) n(ostris)	5
imp(eratoris), Pac(atoris)	
Orb(is), Invict(i)	
Rom(ani) Her[c(ulis)].	
Ael(ius) Tittia-	
nus, dec(urio) coh(ortis)	10
II Ulp(iae) eq(uitatae) Com(modianae),	
Genio Dura/ votum solv(it)	
(ante diem) XVI Kal(endis) Pii,	
Flacco et Claro	
co(n)s(ulibus) ⁹³	15

For the safety of Com(modus) Aug(ustus) Pius F(elix) and the victory of o(ur) l(ord) the emp(erator), Pac(ifier of the) World, Invincible, the Rom(an) Her[c(ules)]. Ael(ius) Tittianus, dec(urion of the) cav(alry) co(hort) II Ulp(ia) Com(modiana), paid his vow to the Genius of Dura, on the sixteenth (day before) the Kal(ends of the month) Pius, under the co(n)s(uls) Flaccus and Clarus.

⁹¹ Herodian, 2.6.10-11; HA, *Did. Iul.* 2, 6.

⁹² Speidel, ‘Commodus the god emperor’, 109.

⁹³ P. Baur / M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The excavations at Dura-Europos. Preliminary report of the first season of work, Spring 1928* (1929), 20, 42. Line 14 (Flacco) should read Falcone (cos. AD 193). Speidel, ‘Commodus the god emperor’, 110. Instead of II Ulp(iae) eq(uitatae) Com(modianae), it might be possible to expand line 11 as II Ulp(iae) eq(uitatae) Com(magenorum). However as far as I know, the only cohortes with Commagenorum in the name are the I Flavia Commagenorum and the II Flavia Commagenorum. *CIL* 16. 46, 50, 54, 107; *ILS* 9054, 9273.

Not only does the inscription in this remote part of the empire closely follow Commodus' Herculean titles, it also shows that (at least some of) the army units bore the name *Commodiana*.⁹⁴ Furthermore, it is one of only three known occasions in which the emperor's new names for the months were used for dating.⁹⁵ The date on the altar is all the more interesting in that it happens to be 17 March 193, the *dies imperii* of Commodus' reign, thus establishing that (at least in this case) the emperor's anniversary was celebrated in the fort with an altar.⁹⁶ Yet this altar is not the only evidence for the suggestion that the emperor's identification with Hercules was an established public fact, known literally at the furthest corners of the empire. A statue of Commodus-Hercules has been found in the headquarters building of the fort at Königen in Germany,⁹⁷ whilst a centurion dedicated an altar to the Roman Hercules at Volubilis (Mauretania).⁹⁸ A bronze figure of Hercules, wearing a short tunic, a broad belt and a helmet with curved helmline – all features of the gladiatorial dress – has been discovered near Hadrian's Wall. Because of the unusual depiction of Hercules as a gladiator, it has been claimed to represent Commodus.⁹⁹ Finally, the features of a statue of Hercules in the villa of a Roman veteran at Ajka (in Pannonia), bear a striking resemblance to those of Commodus.¹⁰⁰ Apparently at least some of the soldiers supported the idea that their emperor was a divine *victor*.

⁹⁴ Speidel, 'Commodus the god emperor', 110. Cf. *CIL* 13.6728; 8.3163.

⁹⁵ The other examples are a text which can be found on a wall in the house of Jupiter and Ganymede at Ostia, reading: *VII K L COMMODAS* (See also J. R. Clarke, 'The decor of the house of Jupiter and Ganymede at Ostia Antica: Private residence turned gay hotel?', in E. Gazda (ed.), *Roman art in the private sphere. New perspectives on the architecture and decor of the domus, villa and insula*, Ann Arbor 1994, 89-104; 92), and an inscription from Lanuvium referring to the *Idus Commodas*: *CIL* 14.2113.

⁹⁶ P. Herz, 'Kaiserfeste der Prinzipatszeit', *ANRW* 16.2 (1978), 1135-1200; 1175-7. Cf. *PIR*² A 697.

⁹⁷ Württemberg Landesmuseum (Stuttgart): Inv. R 102,2; Speidel, 'Commodus the god emperor', 113; P. Zanker, *Provinzielle Kaiserporträts zur Rezeption der Selbstdarstellung des Princeps*, München 1983, Taf. 25.4.

⁹⁸ Speidel, 'Commodus the god emperor', 113; *IL.Afr.* 612= *IAM* II.363.

⁹⁹ British Museum, inv. 1895.4-8.1; J. C. Coulston / E. J. Phillips, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani. Great Britain* (1988) I.6, 77-8, no. 190.

¹⁰⁰ E. Thomas, *Römische Villen in Pannonien. Beiträge zur pannonischen Siedlungsgeschichte*, Budapest 1964, 14-15, Taf. II, III; E. Bickerman, 'Consecratio', in: W.de Boer (ed.), *Le culte des souverains dans l'empire Romain*, Genève 1973, 1-39; 6.

This makes it all the more interesting that in the struggle for power between Severus and Clodius Albinus both leaders issued coins featuring Hercules (AD 196/7).¹⁰¹ Grosso argued that Pescennius Niger went even further than that, commemorating the *conditor* Commodus-Hercules by issuing a unparalleled coin which renamed Jerusalem COL(ONIA) AEL(IA) CAP(ITOLINA) COMM(ODIANA) P(IA) F(ELIX).¹⁰² This coin, however, appears to be counterfeit.¹⁰³ Still, Jerusalem was renamed after Commodus, though by Septimius Severus. The coinage of the colony makes that abundantly clear. Coins celebrating Septimius Severus and Julia Domna name the city COL(ONIA) AE(LIA) C(APITOLINA) COM(MODIANA) P(IA) F(ELIX).¹⁰⁴ Indeed, from the reign of Severus onwards, this name remains on the coinage of the colony until the reign of Hostilian in AD 251.¹⁰⁵ Yet coins from the reign of Commodus consistently name Jerusalem *Colonia Aelia Capitolina*. Commodus, therefore, did not rename the colony himself.¹⁰⁶ When exactly Septimius Severus renamed the city remains uncertain. Possibly it can be traced back as far as AD 195, when at least one additional name was bestowed on Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷ Quite possibly, however, the full new name of the city was only granted around AD 201, on a visit of the Severan family to the area.¹⁰⁸ In either case, the name itself further showed the extent to which the emperor followed up on his claim to be Commodus' brother. It seems reasonable to assume that at least in some sections of society Commodus was still popular.

¹⁰¹ Severus: Mattingly, *BMC* 5.162; 218-220; 246; 451. Albinus: Mattingly, *BMC* 5. 290.

¹⁰² Grosso, *Commodo*, 581-4, fig. 3.

¹⁰³ L. Kadman, 'When was Aelia Capitolina Named 'Commodiana' and by whom?', *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959), 137-40; 137 n.6.

¹⁰⁴ Y. Meshorer, *The coinage of Aelia Capitolina*, Jerusalem 1989, 62; 88 nos. 81-81a.

¹⁰⁵ Meshorer, *The coinage of Aelia Capitolina*, 60-1; 116 no. 184. The abbreviations used differ considerably in length, ranging from COLACCPF, under Elagabalus and Severus Alexander (p. 104 no. 136; p. 108 nos. 150-1) to COLONIA AELIA CAP COM P FELIX, under Geta (p. 88 no 84-5).

¹⁰⁶ Meshorer, *The coinage of Aelia Capitolina*, 60; 84-6 nos. 66-67.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, 62-3; 88 nos. 78-9.

¹⁰⁸ Kadman, 'When was Aelia Capitolina Named 'Commodiana'', 140; Meshorer, *The coinage of Aelia Capitolina*, 62-3. Cf. H. M. Cotton/ W. Eck, 'Ein Ehrenbogen für Septimius Severus und seine Familie in Jerusalem', *Electrum* 1 (1997), 11-20; 15; 19; taf. 1.

There is even evidence which suggests reception of the emperor's visual programme in the private sphere. A coin from Commodus' reign, minted in AD 184 (fig. 6),¹⁰⁹ is reproduced in detail on a mosaic in a house at Acholla (fig. 7). Close to it, an inscription has been found naming M. Asinius Rufinus as the owner of the house.¹¹⁰ It reads:

M(arco) Asinio Sex(ti)/ fil(io) Hor(atia) Rufino/ Valerio Vero Sa/biniano, ad/lecto inter
praet(orios)/ ab imp(eratore) M. Aurelio/ Commodo Antoni/no Aug(usto) Pio, exorn(ato)/
sacerd(otio) fet(iali), curat(ori)/ Viae App(iae), co(n)s(uli),/ cultores do/mus ob merit(a).

As Commodus is named *Pius*, but not yet *Felix*, one can conclude that the inscription should be dated somewhere between AD 183 and 185.¹¹¹ The mosaic was almost certainly constructed at the same time.¹¹² Rufinus, a suffect consul during Commodus' reign, must have been aware of the emperor's self-representation. It thus becomes highly tempting to see the use of this depiction of Hercules – apparently copied from a contemporary coin – as a reference to the emperor.

Slightly more problematic is another African mosaic showing Hercules (fig. 8). It was found at Oudna (Uthina), and was probably made in the late second or early third century.¹¹³ The figured Hercules is being crowned by Victoria; an unusual image, which begins to be regularly depicted on coins only during the Tetrarchy.¹¹⁴ There are, however, examples of medallions from the reigns of Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Commodus that show the

¹⁰⁹ Szaivert, *Münzprägung*, nr. 600 (= *RIC* III, 427).

¹¹⁰ K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The mosaics of Roman North Africa. Studies in iconography and patronage*, Oxford 1978, 25; 41; 248; G.Ch Picard, 'Deux sénateurs romains inconnus', *Karthago* iv (1953), 121-35.

¹¹¹ Picard, 'Deux sénateurs', 122.

¹¹² Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 25; S. Gozlan, 'Les Mosaïques de la Maison d'Asinius Rufinus' à Acholla (Tunisie)', in: P.Johnson (ed), *Fifth international colloquium on ancient mosaics*, Ann Arbor 1994, 161-173.

¹¹³ Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 266, no. 6a; P. Gauckler, *Inventaire des Mosaïques de la Gaule et de l'Afrique*, Paris 1910, II, 139 no 413.

¹¹⁴ T. Hölscher, *Victoria Romana. Archäologische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Wesenart der Römischen Siegesgöttin von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 3. Jhs.n.Chr.*, Mainz 1967, 20-21; *RIC* V 2, Nos. 565-67.

6"Å {/D" 68-H 6" 8, ÅF2" 4 32, 8, <, z! 8, >V<*D@L J@Ø z! D4FJ@J, 846@Ø J@F@bJ@4H " ßJÎ < •N@: @4@Ø<J@H 2, @ÅH, •J•D 6"Å J± z! DJX: 4*4p (What wonder, then, that the emperor Commodus of our time also had the club of Hercules lying beside him in the chariot, with the lion's skin spread beneath 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?).¹²⁰

The text appears to be neutral, neither mocking the identification nor accepting it. But it forms clear evidence that at least some contemporaries understood the emperor's use of symbolism and its purpose. The contemporaries in question, however, were not totally unrelated to Commodus. The host of the *Deipnosophista*, P. Livius Larensis, was the emperor's *procurator patrimonii*, and in this capacity handed over Commodus' body for burial to the consul-elect Fabius Cilo.¹²¹ Larensis must have been well aware of the emperor's religious measures. He was *pontifex minor* during Commodus' reign and had, according to Athenaeus, been 'placed in charge of temples and sacrifices' by Marcus Aurelius, whilst being 'well versed in religious ceremonies ... and learned in political institutions'.¹²² It is hardly surprising that he, at least, understood Commodus' religious legitimation.

A final source that may imply that Commodus' attempts to present himself as the new incarnation of the mythological figure of Hercules were not perceived as an aberration by those surrounding him, at least after his death, can be found on a sarcophagus which now stands near the entrance of the Villa Borghese (close to the Piazzale Flaminio), in Rome. It is the sarcophagus of Marcus Aurelius Prosenes, Caracalla's chamberlain, who seems to have previously been responsible for Commodus' games as his *procurator munerum*.¹²³ Not only,

¹²⁰ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 12.537f.

¹²¹ HA, *Comm.*, 20.1; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 1.1a; *PIR*² 5.1, L 297. Larensis had earlier been the 'procurator of the Lord Emperor (5LD\@L " ÛJ@6DVJ@D@H) in Moesia' (*Deipnosophistae*, 9.398e).

¹²² *CIL* 6.2126; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 1.2c.

¹²³ *CIL* 6.8498 (= *ILS* 1738). 'M. Aurelio Augg(ustorum) lib(erto) Proseneti a cubiculo Au(gusti), proc(uratori) thesaurorum, proc(uratori) patrimonii, proc(uratori) munerum, proc(uratori) vinorum, ordinato a divo Commodo in kastrense, patrono piissimo liberti bene merenti sarcophagum de suo adornaverunt'; Sabbatini Tumolesi, *Epigrafia anfiteatrale*, I, 19-20 no. 1. For the function of *procurator munerum*: Eadem, *Gladiatorium Paria: Annunci di spettacoli gladiatorii a Pompei*, Roma 1980, 56. In general on Prosenes, and the possibility that he was a Christian: H. U. Instinsky, 'Marcus Aurelius

then, could someone so closely associated with Commodus and his games remain a prominent member of the imperial household, but he was also proud enough of his function under the last Antonine to have it mentioned on his gravestone. If the policies of the gladiator-emperor were such a complete failure as has often been assumed, this pride in his role under Commodus would be difficult to explain. Why would one willingly associate oneself for eternity with an emperor who was universally hated? Apparently a more positive picture of Commodus survived.

Senatorial negativity did not quite manage to suppress that positive picture. The story of the god-emperor Commodus lived on for a long time. A passage in Dracontius from the end of the 5th century describes Commodus in a very different way from Dio's evil tyrant:

Alter ait princeps modico sermone poeta Commodus Augustus, vir pietate bonus:
"Nobile praeceptum, rectores, discite post me: sit bonus in vita qui volet esse deus".¹²⁴

Jordanes' and Malalas' descriptions of Commodus are likewise positive, and though they are not the most trustworthy of sources, they do testify to a tradition in which Commodus was perceived as a good emperor, at least in the provinces.¹²⁵ According to Dracontius' Commodus, then, an emperor should behave properly in life if he wanted to become a god. Surely defending the realm against the forces of chaos might have been deemed good enough behaviour for Commodus to deserve such divinity.

Olivier Hekster

Prosenes – Freigelassener und Christ am Kaiserhof', *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz. Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse* (1964) no. 3, 113-129.

¹²⁴ Dracontius, 187-190; F. Clover, 'Commodus the poet', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988), 19-33; B. Baldwin, 'Commodus the good poet and good emperor', *Gymnasium* 97 (1990), 224-231. Clover and Baldwin both argue strongly against the most commonly used explanation for this passage, *i.e.* that Dracontius got his emperors confused. Baldwin, 'Commodus the good poet', 227: '... Dracontius has made no mistake – he did mean Commodus, son of Marcus Aurelius'.

¹²⁵ Jordanes, *Rom.* 372; Malalas, *Chronografia*, 283-90; Clover, 'Commodus the poet', 29-30; Baldwin, 'Commodus the good poet', 231: '[This passage should be seen] as evidence of the ability of late Roman and Byzantine writers to make up their own minds about earlier history and emperors'. On Jordanes and Malalas: M. von Albrecht, *A History of Roman Literature from Livius Andronicus to Boethius* (Leiden-New York Köln 1997), 1311, 1417.

Figure 1: DAI-Rom, 1938.1321; Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori (Rome), inv. 1120

Figure 2: B. Andreas, /M. Stadler, *Museo Chiaramonti* (Berlin-New York 1995), 551; Musei Vaticani, Museo Chiaramonti, XXVII 8 inv. K. W. 690.

Figure 3: Köln etc. ; Galleria e Museo di Palazzo Ducale (Mantua)

Figure 4: H. Cohen, *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'empire Romain III. Médailles Impériales* (Leipzig 1930), No. 717

Figure 5: P. Bastien, *Le buste monétaire des empereurs Romains* (Wetteren 1993), Pl. 78.2

Figure 6: *BMC IV*, Pl. 104.5

Figure 7: Gozlan, 'Asinius Rufinus'; in situ (Acholla)

Figure 8: Bastien, *Buste monétaire*, Pl. 70.

Figure 9: DAI-Rom, 61.552; Musée National du Bardo (Tunis), inv. 413