



The Emperor Commodus: God and Gladiator

By John S McHugh

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Commodus is synonymous with debauchery and megalomania, best remembered for fighting as a gladiator. Ridiculed and maligned by historians since his own time, modern popular culture knows him as the patricidal villain in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*. Much of his infamy is clearly based on fact, but is this the full story? John McHugh reviews the ancient evidence to present the first full-length biography of Commodus in English. His twelve-year reign is set in its historical context, showing that the 'kingdom of gold' he supposedly inherited was actually an empire devastated by plague and war. Openly autocratic, Commodus compromised the privileges and vested interests of the senatorial clique, who therefore plotted to murder him. Surviving repeated conspiracies only convinced Commodus that he was under divine protection, increasingly identifying himself as Hercules reincarnate. This and his antics in the arena allowed his senatorial enemies to present Commodus as a mad tyrant to justify his murder, which they finally succeeded in arranging by having him strangled by a wrestler.

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Editorial Review

Review

This detailed historical narrative for students and researchers is also designed to be accessible to general readers. It offers a biography of the Roman emperor Commodus, infamous for his debauchery, orgies, and fighting abilities, and for declaring himself the incarnation of Hercules. His reign is evaluated using new insight from recent research into politics in imperial Rome, and his actions are examined in the political, religious, and social context of ancient Rome. While the book features much information on plots to murder Commodus, it also looks at his human side, such as his relationships and his attempt to create a new Rome. The book includes b&w photos of ancient sculptures and coins, plus photos of locations and ruins, for a total of 37 photos. Three b&w maps of the Roman Empire and Imperial Rome are also included. (*PROTOVIEW*)

About the Author

John S McHugh has a BA and MA in Ancient History. His love of the ancient world has led him to travel to many classical sites. He is currently an Assistant Headmaster at a secondary school in Bolton. He is the co-author of a text book on Bolton's connections with the slave trade and is currently assisting Bolton Museum with a project to record the oral history of the local populace with the aim of promoting understanding between people of different generations or ethnic and social backgrounds.

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