



ALTAR WITH LATIN INSCRIPTION FROM
THE PALMYRENE GATE, DURA-EUROPOS.
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COMMODUS THE GOD-EMPEROR AND THE ARMY

By M. P. SPEIDEL

What historians lack the most are not more revelations of scandals but the bright image the time had of itself.

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In A.D. 192, the last year of his reign, Commodus threw restraint to the winds and had the senate declare him a god. He assumed such titles as Conqueror of the World, Roman Hercules, and All-Surpasser and named the twelve months of the year after himself. Founding Rome anew, he gave it the name *Colonia Commodiana* and ordered the legions likewise to be called *Commodiana*. Before the year was out, on 31 December, he was murdered, his memory cursed.¹

Commodus' god-emperorship, however, was not what he was killed for. Nor was his extravaganza the madness of a sick mind, for the time was seething with religious ferment and yearning for divine help.² Above all, emperor-worship was a well-trying feature of the exchange between subject and ruler, and attributions of divinity to the emperor always allowed experiment and new forms. To the emperor this was a means of lifting his rule above the peaks and troughs of popularity, to the army it was a show of loyalty.³ Commodus' new style, then, merely varied the familiar theme of the emperor favoured by the gods; more or less within the bounds of tradition, it could claim the soldiers' allegiance as a matter of duty.

Since the new cult, the new titles, the new months, and the new Rome were all proclaimed late in 192, in Commodus' last year, very few monuments concerning them can be expected to come to light, either in Rome or in the provinces. This has made it hard to see whether Commodus indeed spread the new style with a will, and how well he succeeded.

All the more telling is an altar set up by an under-officer at the frontier fortress of Dura-Europos on the middle Euphrates. Its inscription, as here newly-read, is full of surprises: it shows not only that Commodus' Herculean titles were widely known and acknowledged and that the army units, including the auxilia, bore the name *Commodiana*, but also that the emperor's anniversary on 17 March was celebrated in the forts with altars, and, above all, that Commodus' new names for the months were really used for dating — indeed, this is the first and, so far, the only monument known to use the Commodian names of the months.

The altar bearing this remarkable inscription stood in the main gateway of Dura-Europos where the road to Palmyra left the fortress and where a guard of soldiers kept watch. Backed up against the wall of the south tower, opposite the seat for the guards, it was the middle one, and, being about 1 m tall, the largest in size of three altars facing the passers-by and honouring the Genius of Dura. In 1928, while clearing the rubble from the passageway, archaeologists found the three altars covered with stucco. They prised the stucco away, to lay free the inscriptions underneath, which was unfortunate, for the stucco also bore inscriptions that went unnoticed and unpublished.⁴

The deciphering of the stone inscription, in M. I. Rostovtzeff's words, 'was not an easy matter'. Even with the help of such experts as R. Cagnat, J. G. C. Anderson, and Th. Reinach, he failed to see that the abbreviation PAC in the sixth line, together with the opening

¹ J. Beaujeu, *La Religion romaine à l'apogée de l'empire* (1955); F. Grosso, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo* (1964); A. Birley, *The African Emperor, Septimius Severus* (2nd edn, 1988). I wish to thank G. Alföldy, A. Birley, H. Nesselhauf, and J. Cooke for their great help with this paper.

² For points of view, see W. Weber, 'The Antonines', *CAH* xi (1936), 386–92; J. Gagé, 'Pouvoir et religion III. Psychologie du culte impérial romain', *Diogenes* (1961), 47–68; Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 631–42; D. Kienast, review of Grosso in *Gnomon* 38 (1966), 596–606.

³ K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (1960), 326; C.-G. Picard, *Les trophées romains* (1957), 45 ff.; see also J. Gagé, *Le paganisme impérial à la recherche d'une théologie vers le milieu du IIIe siècle* (1972); P. Turcan, 'Le culte impérial au IIIe siècle', *ANRW* xvi, 11 (1978), 996–1084.

⁴ P. V. C. Baur and M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary Report of the First Season of Work, Spring 1928* (1929), 20 and 42 ff.; no measurements of the altar are given save for the inscribed front: 62 by 28 cm, with letters 2.5–3 cm. P. 20: 'The two altars had been, at a later time, covered with stucco, and on its removal Rostovtzeff, on April 23, found between them a small limestone incense-burner.' Pl. II, 2 *ibidem*, shows Tittianus' altar, apparently with most of the stucco taken off. Today on Tittianus' altar only the letters S . . PE can still be seen, scratched into the stucco on the left side of the plinth (Pl. I). For the altar on the right, see *ibidem*, 45 and 61 f.; the design and the inscription of the left altar (p. 47) remain unpublished.

letters of the next line, stands for Commodus' title of *Pac(ator) Orb(is)*.⁵ Once this is understood, Commodus' further titles *Invictus* and *Romanus Hercules* leap to the eye and a rich, telling text emerges (Pl. I):⁶

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

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) coh(ort) 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. (17 March 193)

The letters VI of *Invicti* in l. 7 were added afterwards as superscripts in smaller size over the letter C. Although the text is cut in friable limestone, the reading is in doubt only in the middle of ll. 13 and 14, for while our plate shows some damage at the beginning of ll. 9–13, a photograph published in 1929 presents these lines still intact.⁷ As for the language, the phrase *pro...victoriam*, with the accusative case instead of the ablative, repeats a widespread mistake: a year later an *actarius* of the same cohort writes in the same way *pro salutem*.⁸ Less common is the use of the ablative case instead of the accusative in *(ante diem) XVI Kal(endis) Piiis*.

The altar is dedicated to the Genius of Dura like the altars flanking it and like the graffiti covering the wall behind. The genius of a locality was as good a godhead as any to call upon for the well-being of the emperor.⁹ Dedications by the army *pro salute imperatoris* begin under Hadrian,¹⁰ but of those that add *et victoria*, Tittianus' altar is the oldest one known and the head of the series: all others belong to the Severan period.¹¹ The emperor's abbreviated title *d(ominus) n(oster)* likewise makes here its earliest appearance.¹²

Since Commodus' inscriptions crowd more names and titles together than those of other emperors, the dedicant cleverly split the long-winded series in two, so that the more personal names Commodus Augustus Pius Felix go with *Salus*, the emperor's well-being, while the titles describing the scope and achievements of the reign go with *Victoria*.

⁵ Rostovtzeff's reading, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 42 ff., superseding *AE* 1928, 86, ran as follows: 'Pro salute Com(modi) Aug(usti) Pii F(elicis) et Victoria(m) d(omini) n(ostri) imp(eratoris) Pac(-) Nigreinus Tromen(tina) et Ael(ius) Tittianus dec(uriones) coh(ortis) II Ulp(iae) P(aphlagonum) eq(uitatae) Com(modianae) Genio Dura vota s(olverunt) em(eriti) ex v(isu) XV (or XVI) Ka(lendis) Iulis (or Iunis) Prisco et Claro co(n)s(ulibus)'. In the report of the second season 1931, p. 85, n. 1 Rostovtzeff realized that *P(aphlagonum)* was not to be read on the stone. For another superseded reading, see Grosso, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 573 f.

⁶ Picture credit: the Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection. The altar itself was not brought to Yale.

⁷ Photograph: Baur-Rostovtzeff, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 42. The signs in the middle of ll. 6 and 7 seem to be word

separators. The P of *Piiis* in l. 14 is hard to read since its half-circle is as misshapen as that of the R in *Dura* in l. 12. In l. 13 one could read *vota s(olvit) l(ibenter) m(erito)*, *cu(ravit)*; in l. 14, with Rostovtzeff, either *XV* or *XVI*.

⁸ M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Preliminary Report of the Fifth Season of Work* (1934), 227, no. 561, whence *AE* 1934, 280.

⁹ See for example *CIL* VIII. 21567 (El-Agueneb / Mauretania).

¹⁰ M. P. Speidel, *Die Denkmäler der Kaiserreiter* (1993), forthcoming; Y. Le Bohec, *La troisième légion Auguste* (1989), 563 ff.

¹¹ Speidel, *op. cit.* (n. 10), nos 56 and 59; Bohec, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 563 ff.; see also E. Schallmayer, *Der römische Weihebezirk von Osterburken* 1 (1990), 825.

¹² M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies* 11 (= *Mavors* 8) (1992), 370.

Commodus preferred to break off all wars and stay in Rome. He put little weight, therefore, on his victory titles Sarmaticus, Germanicus, Britannicus: they are not very often found on coins¹³ and not at all in his new names of the months. Accordingly, Tittianus left these titles out. The lofty titles *Pacator Orbis*, *Invictus Romanus Hercules* also occur in another inscription, in some papyri, and in the famous letter written by Commodus to the senate preserved by Cassius Dio. Since they all give these titles in the same sequence, it must be the official one, although the reason for the word order *Romanus Hercules* rather than *Hercules Romanus* is still a mystery.¹⁴

Tittianus gives the names *Commodus Augustus Pius Felix* in the same order as Commodus does in his letter. It is the official sequence, established in A.D. 191 as the coins reveal.¹⁵ The even fancier titles *Amazonius* and *Exsuperatorius*, used for the names of the months but not found on inscriptions or papyri, are lacking here as well as in Commodus' letter. Altogether, Tittianus handled the niceties of Commodus' titulature with a sure touch.¹⁶ No doubt he modelled it on the latest version available in his unit's archives at Dura, perhaps the titulature that came with the order to call the unit *Commodiana*.

Of particular interest is the date of the inscription. Rostovtzeff read the consuls' names as *Prisco et Claro*, and ever since the two have led a shadow-life of their own in modern prosopographical research.¹⁷ Gilliam, however, saw that these names should be read *Flacco et Claro*. He took the men for 'unidentified suffect consuls',¹⁸ yet Commodus' Herculean titles show that the year was 192 or early 193, and since the regular consuls of 193 were Falco and Clarus, they must be meant here. Among the consular pair of 193 Falco is more than once mistaken for Flaccus in the manuscripts of both Xiphilinus and Zosimus.¹⁹ The stone-cutter therefore committed a very common mistake in carving *Flacco* for *Falco(ne)*.

The most outstanding phrase on Tittianus' altar is, of course, *Ka(endis) Pius*. Since the P is not carved very well and since the use of the Commodian names of the months is unique, one may wish to challenge the reading, all the more since Rostovtzeff had read *Ka(lendis) Iulis* or *Iunis*. The photograph (Pl. I) shows, however, that there is no space for the first I in *Iulis* and there certainly was no N for reading *Iunis*. Besides, Commodus, who died on 31 December 192, cannot have been honoured, even this far East, later than March 193. Cassius Dio says *Pius* was Commodus' name for April; if so, Tittianus' altar was consecrated on 17 (or 18) March, and since this happens to be the anniversary of Commodus' reign (*dies imperii*), it seems to be the true date of the altar.²⁰

While Commodus was declared Caesar on 27 November 176 and reckoned his rule from that day,²¹ he became sole ruler only on 17 March 180, when Marcus Aurelius died. He therefore established 17 March as a second anniversary day of his reign to be celebrated.²² After Commodus' death, 17 March was abolished as a holiday and, unlike his birthday, not revived when Septimius Severus restored Commodus' good name.²³ Since Commodus' memory was cursed by the senate, few monuments in his honour survive, which is why, so far, Tittianus' altar is the only one known celebrating 17 March. Hitherto celebration of Commodus' second *dies imperii* had to be inferred from *vota* on coins and from the fact that the

¹³ For Commodus' victory titles, see P. Kneissl, *Die Siegestitulatur der römischen Kaiser* (1969), 110-25. Kneissl, however, misrepresents the position of *Invictus* in the inscription *AE* 1920, 48 = *ILAfr.* 612 = *IAM* II, 363 (Volubilis); likewise *Pius*, missing in *CIL* XIV.3449 = Dessau, *ILS* 400.

¹⁴ *CIL* XIV. 3449 = Dessau, *ILS* 400. Dio LXXII. 15.5 (Boissevain). Papyri: P. J. Sijpesteijn, 'Commodus' titulature in Cassius Dio LXXII.15.5', *Mnemosyne* 41 (1988), 123 f. The *unisono* of these documents shows the inscription from Volubilis (*AE* 1920, 48; = *ILAfr.* 612 = *IAM* II. 363) to be he odd one out with its sequence *Invicti Felicis Herculi Romani* etc. For *Romanus Hercules*, see also HA, *Commodus* 8. 5.

¹⁵ *BMC* IV, p. clxvii f.

¹⁶ Compare *CIL* XIV. 3449 = Dessau, *ILS* 400 where *Pius* is missing; or *AE* 1920 = *ILAfr.* 612 = *IAM* II. 363 (Volubilis) where *Felix* and *Romanus* are out of sequence and *Pacator Orbis* is missing.

¹⁷ A. Degrassi, *I fasti consolari dell'impero romano* (1952), 53; Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 574. A. Birley, *The*

Fasti of Roman Britain (1981), 261; P. M. M. Leunissen, *Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander (180-235 n. Chr.)* (1989), 142.

¹⁸ J. F. Gilliam, *Roman Army Papers* (= *Mavors* 2) (1986), 209 f.

¹⁹ U. P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* III (1955), 303 on Dio LXXII. 22. 2.

²⁰ P. Herz, 'Kaiserfeste der Prinzipatszeit', *ANRW* XVI, II (1978), 1135-1200. The fact that the altar, contrary to *AE* 1928, 86, mentions no Roman knight, shows that its purpose was not to celebrate, as has been claimed (*ibid.*, 1180 f.), the *natalis annonae* on 18 May.

²¹ D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle* (1990), 147 ff.

²² 17 March: Dio LXXI. 33. 4. M. Rachtel, 'Decennalia et vicennalia sous la dynastie des Antonins', *REA* 82 (1980), 200-42, esp. 232. Kienast, op. cit. (n. 21).

²³ Not restored, as witnessed by the *Feriale Duranum* col. II, R. O. Fink, *Roman Military Papyri* (1971), 425-7. *Historia Augusta, Commodus* 17. 12: 'Ut natalis eius celebraretur, Severus instituit.'

military festival calendar of the army placed the *dies imperii* of emperors consistently on the day when their predecessors died.²⁴

News of Commodus' murder, the curse of his memory, and Pertinax' accession on 1 January 193 had to be sent to the governors in their provinces for official proclamation. In winter, however, overseas messages travelled slowly as the few ships that dared to set out were often held up by storms. In Egypt the news of Pertinax' accession was issued as late as 6 March. In Syria there was an added complication: Pescennius Niger, the governor, wanted to assure himself that the message was not a trick by Commodus to test him, for his children were kept at Rome as a guarantee of his loyalty.²⁵ And even when the news was officially proclaimed in Antioch — in the early days of March, to judge from the parallel of Egypt — it took another week or so before the furthest-flung frontier posts learned of it.

This is borne out by Tittianus' altar. The decurion had heard nothing yet of Commodus' death when he set up his monument on 17 March (or, less likely, on 14 February). Commodus had been dead for seventy-six days, yet all one knew at Dura-Europos of the goings-on in Rome was that the new consuls for the year were Falco and Clarus, since they, as was customary, had been designated long before. Tittianus was unaware that Pertinax now ruled, and that during the very days when he installed his altar the consul Falco had rebelled and been banished. When the curse on Commodus' memory finally was proclaimed at Dura-Europos, the altar may have been covered with stucco and given a new inscription — the one prised away by the finders in 1928.²⁶

Tittianus' altar is remarkable as the first and only known monument using the Commodian names of the months for dating. And this all the more as it comes from the farthest corner of the Empire. The use of these names had been known only from a passage of Commodus' life in the *Augustan History*, never quite above the suspicion of a hoax. Scholars have long suspected that sentences there, like 'Vota pro eo facta sunt nonis Pii Fusciano iterum consule', are quotations from the *Acta Urbis*, the official journal of the capital.²⁷ The use of the Commodian months in the dating of Tittianus' altar confirms this. It shows how efficient Rome's ideological hold was over the provinces and the armies, and it lends weight to the senate's edict at Commodus' death that the months should have their old names again.²⁸

If the reading XVĪ in l. 14 were certain, the date on Tittianus' altar would settle the dispute over the correct sequence of Commodus' names for the months. The manuscripts of Cassius Dio list them (starting with January) as Amazonius, Invictus, Felix, Pius, Lucius, Aelius, Aurelius, Commodus, Augustus, Hercules, Romanus, Exsuperatorius. Boissevain suggested emending this sequence so that Pius would come before Felix as it does in the emperor's titles on inscriptions.²⁹ If the month of Pius indeed preceded that of Felix, then Tittianus' altar with its XVĪ *Kal. Pii* would date to 14 February, instead of 17 March. However, since 17 March was the anniversary of Commodus' reign, it is very likely the day on which Tittianus fulfilled his vow. If in l. 14 one is to read XV̄, Tittianus fulfilled his vow the day after Commodus' anniversary, still a likely day.³⁰ The sequence of the months given by Dio's manuscripts thus seems to be correct. Commodus had, no doubt, a specific reason why the month of Pius was to follow Felix rather than go before, but so far all one can say is that only the months from Lucius to Augustus (May to September) follow the usual sequence of the emperor's names and titles.³¹

Monuments like this could be either private or set up by units and their commanders.³² Since Tittianus set up his altar to the emperor at such a prominent place in the main gate of the city³³ and without naming any higher officer, he may have been the commander of the guard-post at the gate, perhaps even the ranking under-officer of his cohort at Dura. If there was no more than a detachment (*vexillatio*) of the cohort at Dura, Tittianus may have led it under

²⁴ No epigraphic evidence for 17 March, so far: Rachtel, op. cit. (n. 11), 226; Herz, op. cit. (n. 20), 1176. Predecessors: Fink, op. cit. (n. 23), p. 426.

²⁵ HA, *Severus* 6 and 8; Birley, op. cit. (n. 1), 92.

²⁶ See above, n. 4.

²⁷ H. Nesselhauf, 'Die Vita Commodi und die Acta Urbis', in A. Alföldi (ed.), *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1974-1965*, 3 (1966), 127-38 (which is also the source of the motto above).

²⁸ HA, *Commodus* 20: 'menses his nominibus nuncupandos, quibus nuncupantur, cum primum illud malum in re publica incubuit.'

²⁹ Boissevain, op. cit. (n. 15), 297 on Dio LXXII. 15. 3.

³⁰ For inscriptions set up on such days, see Herz, op. cit. (n. 2); for a delay *ibid.*, 1197.

³¹ For the discussion see Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 374.

³² Compare *IRT* 292; Speidel, op. cit. (n. 10), nos 22; 30; 55; 56.

³³ A small bust of Commodus was found not far from the altar and may have belonged to it (Baur, op. cit. (n. 4), 21 and 48 f. with fig. 3); perhaps it was fastened to the wall above: some altars were dedicated *cum sigillo*, see Schallmayer, op. cit. (n. 11), nos 645; 646.

the command of a legionary centurion who, as *praepositus numerorum*, headed the garrison detachments drawn from several units.³⁴ Tittianus is not known from other sources. He may have risen in the Syrian army to the post of a cavalry squadron-leader (*decurio*). Perhaps, though, Commodus promoted him from his horse guard of the *equites singulares Augusti* to the command at Dura-Europos in order to underpin the soldiers' devotion to their emperor.³⁵ That might also explain Tittianus' familiarity with the imperial titulature.

The fact that *cohors II Ulpia equitata* is honoured with the name *Commodiana* is remarkable, for it is the only known case of an auxiliary unit bearing this name.³⁶ Cassius Dio says Commodus ordered the *stratopeda* to be called *Commodiana*. Usually *stratopedon* is understood to mean a legion, but it is not clear whether Dio indeed meant legions only (perhaps because he did not know that auxiliary units were also given this title), or whether he meant legions as *pars pro toto* for all the armed forces.³⁷ Even for the legions, scholars have doubted the truth of Dio's statement, but if a lowly cohort bore the title *Commodiana*, the legions certainly did so too. One will not go far wrong, then, in stating that towards the end of Commodus' reign all army units were awarded the title *Commodiana*.³⁸ Inscriptions confirm this for two legions, the Twenty-second Primigenia in Mainz, and the Third Augusta in Lambaesis.³⁹ Hence it was Commodus who began a tradition that was to flourish greatly, strengthening and proclaiming for all to see the bond between the emperor and his army.⁴⁰

Though he shrank from taking to the field, Commodus nevertheless saw in the army the main pillar of support for his rule. Thus, in A.D. 180 when he came home from the Marcomannic war, the official *Acta Urbis* proclaimed that the gods had given him to the army and the senate for safeguarding in the palace forever: 'datus in perpetuum ab exercitu et senatu in domo Palatina Commodiana conservandus'. Remarkably, the army is mentioned first, before the senate, a great change from the traditional *senatus populusque Romanus*. Commodus vaunted it as a sign of strength that he need not take to the field.⁴¹ Trusting so much to the army, he is likely to have done what he could to strengthen his bond with the soldiers, and for this Tittianus' altar is our best evidence.

It has been said that Commodus succeeded in Rome, but not across the Empire, in establishing his cult and the statues of himself as Hercules.⁴² Tittianus' altar from Syria now joins a statue of Commodus as Hercules, found in the headquarters building of the fort at Königen in Germany, and a centurion's altar to the Roman Hercules from Volubilis in Mauretania to show that Commodus rooted his cult not only in Rome but also in the forts of the army in the far corners of the Empire.⁴³ And while there is no telling how much anyone's

³⁴ For the cohort and the command at Dura, see Gilliam, op. cit. (n. 18), 209 ff.

³⁵ Promotion of horse guards to decurions in the provinces: *CIL* vi. 228 = Dessau, *ILS* 2187 = Speidel, op. cit. (n. 10), no. 60. Tittianus' name surely is the same as the much more common Titianus; the T was occasionally doubled in the East, see *BGU* 646, 12 on Pertinax' wife Tittiana.

³⁶ G. M. Bersanetti, 'I soprannomi imperiali variabili degli auxilia dell'esercito romano', *Athenaeum* N.S. 18 (1940), 105–35, esp. 112 ff.; J. Fitz, *The Honorific Titles of Roman Military Units in the Third Century* (1983), 31 was wrong to consider the reading uncertain. He may be right, though, in dismissing as doubtful a graffito from Dura-Europos said to call a riverboat *Commodiana* (M. I. Rostovtzeff, F. F. Brown and C. B. Welles, *Dura Rep. VII–VIII* (1939), 375–76, no. 930).

³⁷ Dio LXXII. 15. 2. *Stratopedon*: H. J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions. A Lexicon and Analysis* (1974), 87. See also M. P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies* 1 (1984), 277.

³⁸ Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 574 suggests the cohort won the title in some action, Fitz, op. cit. (n. 36), 31 disputes this.

³⁹ *CIL* XIII. 6728, see E. Ritterling, 'Legio', *RE* XII (1924), 1211–1829, esp. col. 1307f., doubted by Fitz, op. cit. (n. 36), 31; *CIL* VIII. 3163, doubted by Y. LeBohec, 'Les marques sur briques et les surnoms de la IIIème légion Auguste', *Epigraphica* 43 (1981), 127–63, esp. 134. See also H. Pavis, 'Reflexions sur la *Classis Africana Commodiana*', *Mélanges d'histoire ancienne offerts à William Seston* (1974), 397–408. The name *Commoda*,

given to Legion VIII Augusta at an earlier time (see Fitz, op. cit. (n. 36), 30f.) is different. J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army 31 B.C.–A.D. 235* (1984), 90, n. 11, wrongly states: 'inscriptional evidence indicates that the emperor did not systematically name the legions in this way' — there is no such evidence.

⁴⁰ For these titles generally, see Fitz, op. cit. (n. 36); for their continuity under Septimius Severus, see Speidel, op. cit. (n. 12), 198–202.

⁴¹ HA, *Commodus* 12.7. See Nesselhauf, op. cit. (n. 27), 136f. Sign of strength: H. Halfmann, *Itinera principum* (= *Habes* 2) (1986), 49f.; see *Paneg. Lat.* 12 (9), 14.

⁴² Beaujeu, op. cit. (n. 1), 406; Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 631f.

⁴³ Königen: F. Haug and G. Sixt, *Die römischen Inschriften und Bildwerke Württembergs* (2nd edn, 1914, reprint 1970), 314. Volubilis: above, n. 14. A marble relief from Dura-Europos, showing a naked man with a club in his right hand and a lion reaching up to him, differs from the usual images of Hercules and may indeed be Commodus-Hercules as Nero's refurbished Colossus showed him (Dio LXXII. 22. 3; HA, *Commodus* 9: 'acceptis statuas in Herculis habitu, eique immolatum est ut deo'); see Baur, op. cit. (n. 4), 75 ff., with pl. IV, 3, doubted by S. B. Downey, *The Heracles Sculpture (The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report III, Part I, Fascicle I* (1969), no. 28, p. 42, with frontispiece). For a possible Commodus-Hercules from near Birdoswald on Hadrian's Wall, see E. J. Phillips and J. C. Coulston, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Great Britain I, 6, Hadrian's Wall West of North Tyne and Carlisle* (1988), 77 ff.

anyone's participation in the cult was true enthusiasm or mere time-serving, it must be admitted that there were indeed altars and adherents in the forts of Africa, Europe, and Asia.

One explanation for this may be that Commodus had more time to proclaim his god-emperorship than has been thought hitherto.⁴⁴ He must have taken up his Herculean names and titles sometime before mid-September of the year 192, for a papyrus from Egypt's Fayyum records them by 11 October and news from Rome took about thirty days to arrive there.⁴⁵ Further proof that Commodus had begun to identify himself with Hercules not just in the last two months of 192, but earlier in the year, is the famous bust in the Capitoline Museums showing him wearing the lion-skin hood. Such a first-rate work of art cannot have been brought to perfection in just two or three months, hence its concept must date to the first half of 192.⁴⁶

Commodus was held in high esteem by the army. When, upon Pertinax' death on 28 March 193, Didius Iulianus wanted to become emperor, he first had to give written promises to the Praetorians that he would restore the honours and statues of Commodus and allow the soldiers again the freewheeling ways that they had enjoyed under Commodus, including the right to bear axes (with which to batter down the doors of lawless civilians).⁴⁷ What is more, Septimius Severus, heeding the feelings not of the Praetorians but of the Pannonian frontier army, likewise restored Commodus' good name. Clearly, Commodus was widely popular with the frontier armies, although he had not personally called on them nor raised their pay.⁴⁸ There were other ways of winning the soldiers' support, such as slackening the reins of discipline, stepping up promotions, listening to their grievances, personally appointing their officers,⁴⁹ and putting forth a glorious image of oneself. Now, thanks to Tittianus' altar, we learn in what guise Commodus had been known to the soldiers:⁵⁰ as the *Pacator Orbis*, *Invictus Romanus Hercules*, who had bound the units to himself by awarding them the title *Commodiana*, and who had given his name to every month of the year.

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⁴⁴ A date in October 192 is propounded by Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 360 ff. *Terminus post quem* is the diploma from Lyon (*CIL* xvi. 133) of 16 March 192 since it still uses the old style.

⁴⁵ *PSI* ix. 1036, see Sijpesteijn, op. cit. (n. 14), 123 f.

⁴⁶ K. Fittschen and P. Zanker, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom I* (1985), 87, with n. 17a. Contra: Grosso, op. cit. (n. 1), 368.

⁴⁷ Herodian ii.2.5; ii.6.10; HA, *Did. Iul.* 2.6; Herodian ii.4.1.

⁴⁸ Unpopular: M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (2nd edn, 1957), 399, based on Herodian's bias, for which see G. Alföldy, 'Bellum Desertorum', *Bonner Jahrbuch* 171 (1971), 367-76. Pay: M. Alexander Speidel, 'The pay of the auxilia', *JRS* 82 (1992), 87-106. Commodus paid for the weapons of some soldiers, though: H. U. Nuber, 'Zwei bronzene Besitzermarken aus Frankfurt/M.-Hedernheim', *Chiron*

2 (1972), 483-507. Rostovtzeff's article 'Commodus-Hercules in Britain', *JRS* 13 (1923), 91 ff. has been sharply countered by Beaujeu, op. cit. (n. 1), 405.

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* ii. 55: 'largitione, ambitu infimos manipularium iuvando, cum veteres centuriones, severos tribunos demoveret, locaque eorum clientibus suis vel deterrimo cuique attribueret desidiam in castris licentiam in urbibus vagumque lascivientem per agros militem sineret, eo usque corruptionis, proventus est ut sermone vulgi parens legionum haberetur.' Listening: HA, *Com.* 6; Dio LXXII. 9. 2, see P. A. Brunt, 'The fall of Perennis: Dio-Xiphilinus 72.9.2', *CQ* 23 (1973), 172-7; for delegations of soldiers to the emperors, see also Campbell, op. cit. (n. 39), 269. Appointing officers: Speidel, op. cit. (n. 12), 126. Promotions (the new *petitor militiae*): H. Devijver, *The Equestrian Officers of the Roman Imperial Army II* (= *Mavors* 9), 316-38.

⁵⁰ For an earlier view see Campbell, op. cit. (n. 39), 50 f., stressing the fellow-soldier theme.