Twitter Thread by Dr Rob Cromarty



Dr Rob Cromarty
@DocCrom

Ancient Coin of the Day: Just got Hercules on my mind today, so the thread is going to look at the connection which Commodus forged with Hercules, starting with this aureus of AD 190. #ACOTD #Commodus #Hercules

Image: RIC III Commodus 221d. Link - https://t.co/NAOQJI8y21

The connection between the Emperor and the gods was one that had a long history, with Augustus being worshipped at Narbonne alongside the goddess Roma, but few emperors went as far as Commodus in explicitly associating themselves with a particular deity.

Dio (73.15.6) tells us that during Commodus' reign "vast numbers of statues were erected representing him in the garb of Hercules. And it was voted that his age should be named the 'Golden Age', and that this should be recorded in all the records without exception."

This culminated in AD 192, when Commodus had the Senate declare him a deity, assuming such titles as 'Roman Hercules' and re-founding Rome under the name of Colonia Commodiana. While Commodus himself did not see out AD 192, being assassinated on 31 December, his coins endure.

The Obverse of this coin shows a laureate and cuirassed bust of Commodus, with the Legend M COMM ANT P FEL AVG BRIT P P - 'Emperor Marcus Commodus Antoninus, Pious and Felix, Britannicus, Father of the Fatherland'. The addition of 'Britannicus' to his imperial titles can be...

...traced back to AD 184 (Dio 72.8; Historia Augusta, Commodus 6.2), as the Britons north of the frontier invaded the province, eventually being defeated by Ulpius Marcellus, with Commodus taking the title as he was also acclaimed Imperator for the seventh time.

The Reverse of the coin shows a nude Hercules, carrying a cornucopia, making an offering at a small altar, as his lion-skin hangs on a nearby tree.

The Legend HERC COM P M TR P XVI COS VI - 'For Hercules Commodianus, Pontifex Maximus, in the 16th year of Tribunician Power, Consul six times' - makes clear the equivalency between Emperor and Deity, one that would become

only more overt in later issues.

Here on an aureus of AD 191-2, we see the explicit use of the term 'Hercules Romanus' in the Reverse Legend. While the Historia Augusta (Commodus 8.5) tells us that he took the title...

Image: RIC III Commodus 254D; British Museum (1844,1015.97). Link - https://t.co/BK2eRZZhxL

...because he has killed wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Lanuvium, the association ran much deeper, with Dio (72.17.4) telling us that Commodus had the attributes of Hercules - the club and lion-skin - carried ahead of him in the streets.

There is also - of course - the (in)famous bust of Commodus as Hercules, the survival of which perhaps speaks volumes of just how hard Commodus pushed the association of himself with Hercules.

Image: Musei Capitolini (MC 1120)

For more on this, see:

Speidel, M. P. “Commodus the God-Emperor and the Army.” The Journal of Roman Studies, vol. 83, 1993, pp. 109–114.

https://t.co/uwB3mP9X4S

#ACOTD #Commodus #Hercules