

Commodus essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Some claim that Commodus was the worse emperor in the history of Rome.

The fact that his father, Marcus Aurelius, was a popular and successful ruler may have raised the precedent that Commodus had to live up to. But for whatever reason, Commodus proved a disconnected and self indulgent leader. At the age of five Commodus was named Caesar, and at the age of seventeen he became co-Augustus with his father. He spent his childhood accompanying his father Marcus Aurelius on political campaigns, and learned a lot on how to run an empire. However, after the death of his father the people of Rome found that the years under Marcus Aurelius had not impacted Commodus' leadership skills. Commodus' reign was filled with bad decisions, causing the people of Rome to suffer. Commodus' first bad move took place immediately following his father's death.

The new emperor made a treaty with the German tribe of Marcomanni, his father's enemies. From then on Commodus gradually lost favor in the eyes of his people. Commodus thought of himself as equal to the Gods, so he began dressing like Hercules, son of the god Jupiter.

His clothes consisted of lion's skin, and he carried around a club. Commodus appropriated his identification with Hercules by fighting in the arenas as a gladiatorial combatant. This did not impress his people. In fact, they could not believe that their emperor willingly reduced himself to the lowest human being on earth.

Although he claimed to have killed 12, 000 men in his numerous combats, the people of Rome knew it had nothing to do with his skill as a gladiator. The men and beasts Commodus fought were not adequately armed. The

emperor had the most modern weaponry, and his opposition was lucky if they received wooden weapons to fight with. It was even said that some of the spectators had to keep themselves from laughing, under penalty of death, while watching these combats.

As Commodus' reign continued it became clearer that the ruler was mentally unstable. He lived a dark life, one of self indulgence and debauchery. He neglected his political responsibilities and focused more on his desires. Commodus had many concubines, and throughout his reign had flings with about 300 women and boys. While distracted by his lifestyle, the emperor allowed prefects to run the day to day business of the empire.

As the prefects became more and more powerful the king would kill them, making sure that no one threatened his authority. The brutal way in which Commodus ruled created many enemies of the emperor. Even his sister conspired against him. However, when her plan came to Commodus' attention he exiled her to an island, and after a while killed her along with all the others involved. Another instance of Commodus' brutality comes from an event in which the emperor ordered the killing of a whole city.

He did this horrible act because one of its residents looked at him in an “unfriendly” way. This massacre added to the many infamous deeds Commodus performed. In AD 190, Commodus took advantage of the unfortunate circumstance Rome found itself in. A fire had begun and had burned part of the city. The emperor took this opportunity to rebuild the city, and change its name to Colonia Commodiana.

Not only did he rename the city, but he renamed months of the year after himself, and changed the senate's name to Commodian Fortunate Senate. Commodus declared this time of his reign as the "Golden Age". A year after all this took place another conspiracy surfaced, and this time it succeeded. This conspiracy took place in AD 192, and involved Commodus' favorite concubine, Marcia. On the December night Marcia let the emperor's wrestling partner into his chambers.

While in the bath, the wrestler, Narcissus, strangled him. After his death, his body was hooked and dragged into the Tiber, but his successor had him buried promptly. The reign of Commodus disappointed the people of Rome. After enjoying the skillful, generous leadership of Marcus Aurelius, the brutal and humiliating reign of Commodus caught the people by surprise. Though their emperor had been murdered, the city did not mourn. After his death the Senate passed damnatio memoriae. This restored the original names of all the things that Commodus had renamed. From then on the people tried to push Commodus from their memories, and move on to a brighter future.

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