



Edward Watts: The Many Murders of Commodus

Life, assassination attempts, death, erasure of memory, rehabilitation

Timeline

August 31, 161 AD—Commodus is born in Lanuvio, Italy. He is the son of the emperor Marcus Aurelius and Faustina, the daughter of Marcus's imperial predecessor Antoninus Pius

165—Commodus's twin brother Titus Aurelius Fulvus Antoninus dies

166—Commodus is made Caesar (imperial successor in waiting) along with his younger brother Marcus Annus Verus

169—Marcus Annus Verus dies. Commodus is now the only surviving Caesar

172—Commodus accompanies his father to campaign along the Danube. On October 5, he is given the title Germanicus

177—Commodus is elevated to the rank of Augustus, serving officially as co-emperor along with his father Marcus Aurelius

March 17, 180—Marcus Aurelius dies. Commodus is now sole emperor

182—Commodus's sister Lucilla conspires with her stepson Appius Claudius Quintianus and her cousin Marcus Ummidius Quadratus Annianus to have Commodus murdered

- The two men were executed
- Lucilla was exiled to Capri and was killed later

187—Commodus survives another assassination attempt

189—A smallpox outbreak kills up to 2000 people a day in Rome

192—A massive fire devastates the center of the city of Rome. Commodus announces the re-founding of Rome and its renaming after him as Colonia Commodiana

- He also renames the months to match 12 names he used for himself and renames the legions after himself as well.
- November 192—Commodus holds games in which he personally shot large numbers of animals and fought in the Colosseum

December 31, 192—Commodus is murdered in a house near the Colosseum

January 1, 193—Pertinax becomes the new emperor. Commodus's death from natural causes is announced. His memory is condemned by the Senate

March 28, 193—Pertinax is killed in the palace by rebellious praetorian guards. The praetorian commander at the time of Commodus's death is also killed for his role in what is now said to have been Commodus's murder

- Didius Julianus becomes emperor and promises to restore Commodus's statues

June 2, 193—Didius Julianus dies as the new emperor Septimius Severus takes Rome. Before his death, Didius tried to rally support for himself by ordering the execution of Commodus's mistress, Marcia, and his chief chamberlain because of their supposed role in Commodus's execution

197—Septimius Severus fully rehabilitates the memory of Commodus, arranges for him to be deified, and orders the arrest and execution of Narcissus, a wrestler who supposedly strangled Commodus to death