

The Reign of Marcus Aurelius

Source: Eutropius, *Compendium of Roman History* VIII.12-14. William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: *Rome and the West*. Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

Marcus Aurelius was Emperor from 161 to 180 CE. No ruler ever came to power with higher ideals and purposes, but the reign was not a very prosperous one. The philosopher in the purple was afflicted by the widespread pestilences in the Empire, and by the dangerous wars on the frontiers. He struggled against the difficulties manfully, and overcame most of them; but his reign marks the beginning of the long slow decline of the Empire.

Marcus Aurelius was trained in philosophy by Apollonius of Chalcedon: in the Greek language by Sextus of Chaeronea, the grandson of Plutarch, while the eminent orator Fronto instructed him in Latin literature. He conducted himself towards all men at Rome, as if he had been their equal, being moved by no arrogance by his elevation to the Empire. He exercised prompt liberality, and managed the provinces with the utmost kindness and indulgence.

Under his rule affairs were successfully conducted against the Germans. He himself carried on a war with the Marcomanni, which was greater than any in the memory of man (in the way of wars with the Germans)---so that it was compared to the Punic Wars, for it was exceedingly formidable, and in it whole armies were lost; especially as in this reign, after the victory over the Parthians there occurred a great pestilence so that at Rome, and throughout Italy and the provinces a large fraction of the population, and actually the bulk of the regular troops perished from the plague.

With the greatest labor and patience he persevered for three whole years at Carnutum [a strategically located fortress town in Pannonia], and brought the Marcomannic war to an end; a war in which the Quadi, Vandals, Sarmatians, Suevi and all the barbarians in that region, had joined the outbreak of the Marcomanni. He slew several thousand men, and having delivered the Pannonians from bondage held a triumph at Rome. As the treasury was drained by the war, and he had no money to give his soldiers; and as he would not lay any extra tax on the provinces or Senate, he sold off all his imperial furniture and decorations by an auction held in the Forum of Trajan, consisting of gold and cups of crystal and precious stone, silk garments belonging to his wife and to himself, embroidered---as they were---with gold, and numbers of jeweled ornaments. This sale was kept up through two successive months and a great deal of money was raised by it. After his victory, however, he refunded the money to such purchasers as were willing to restore what they had bought, but was by no means troublesome to those who wished to keep their purchase.

After his victory he was so magnificent in his display of games he is said to have exhibited in the arena one hundred lions at once. Having then at last rendered the state happy by his excellent management and gentleness of character, he died in the eighteenth year of his reign, in the sixty-first of his life. He was enrolled among the gods, all the Senate voting unanimously that he should have such honor.