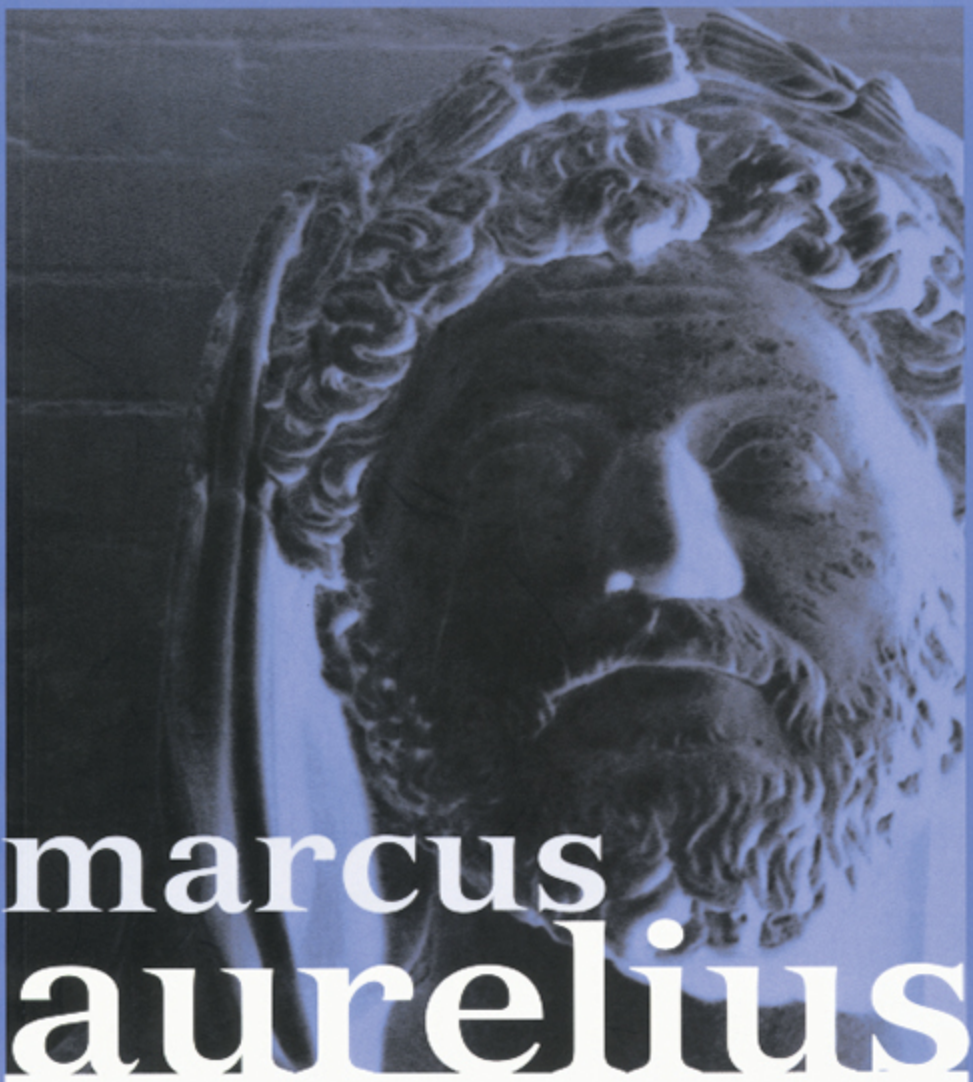

marcus aurelius

A Biography

ANTHONY R. BIRLEY

MARCUS AURELIUS

A BIOGRAPHY

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• A BIOGRAPHY •

REVISED EDITION

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Preface

MARCUS AURELIUS is one of the best recorded individuals from antiquity. Even his face became more than usually familiar: the imperial coinage displayed his portrait for over forty years, from the clean-shaven young heir of Antoninus to the war-weary, heavily bearded ruler who died at his post in his late fifties. For his childhood and early youth we depend largely on anecdote and reconstruction. Then in the correspondence of his tutor Fronto, spanning nearly three decades, we have a series of vivid and revealing glimpses into the family life and preoccupations of Marcus and the court. But what made Marcus Aurelius a household name was the private notebook that he kept in his last ten years, the *Meditations*. The 'philosopher in the purple' has never lacked admirers, ancient or modern. Critics are hard to find – although the author of the *Historia Augusta* was able to invent a notable one, in his fictional life of Avidius Cassius. Gibbon (in 1783) paid sober tribute to a man 'severe to himself, indulgent to the imperfection of others, just and beneficent to all mankind.' Eighty years later, Matthew Arnold – inspired by reading a new English version of the *Meditations* – was unrestrained: 'The acquaintance of a man like Marcus Aurelius is an imperishable benefit'. Marcus was 'perhaps the most beautiful figure in history. . . . Besides him, history presents one or two other sovereigns eminent for their goodness, such as Saint Louis or Alfred. But Marcus Aurelius has, for us moderns, this great superiority in interest over Saint Louis or Alfred, that he lived and acted in a state of society modern by its essential characteristics, in an epoch akin to our own, in a brilliant centre of civilisation. . . . By its accents of emotion . . . the morality of Marcus Aurelius acquires a special character . . . [his] sentences find their way to the soul . . . it is this very admixture of sweetness with his dignity which makes him so beautiful a moralist. It enables him to carry even into his observation of nature a delicate penetration, a sympathetic tenderness, worthy of Wordsworth.' Walter Pater made the hero of his 'novel' *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) – who became the emperor's secretary – a peg on which to hang a set elaborate essays on Antonine Rome, in which the serene Aurelius figures prominently. Meanwhile, Ernest Renan devoted the eighth and last volume of his *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme* to Marcus – 'and the end of the ancient world'. Christianity receives much more attention than the emperor in

his pages; and he was at pains to defend the reputation of the beautiful and fertile Faustina and to discuss the paradox of Marcus' degenerate heir Commodus. Gibbon could not use Fronto's letters, Arnold was interested almost solely in the *Meditations*. But Gibbon, Pater and Renan alike – it is unfortunate – swallowed whole the fictional parts of the *Historia Augusta.* The unmasking of the author of that curious work was to begin with Hermann Dessau in 1889 and the task of decontaminating the source continues – spurious items, notably from the *Aelius* and *Avidius Cassius,* still infect serious scholarship.

My own approach to Marcus began with the Marcomannic wars, under the guidance of Sir Ronald Syme, whose first advice to me was to read Dessau's fundamental study of the *HA*. If Marcus seemed modern to a mid-Victorian, he might seem less so now. Yet the wars – which were the catalyst for the *Meditations* – shattered that charmed, golden, civilised Antonine tranquillity. The invasions of Italy and Greece by northern 'barbarians' marked the end of an era: Marcus' wars in central Europe recall 1914–18, it may be claimed. And, whatever the intentions of the artists who portrayed the campaigns on the Aurelian column, the horror and pathos they evoke match the mood of the *Meditations,* in which war is scarcely mentioned.

I first published a book on Marcus twenty years ago (*Marcus Aurelius:* Eyre & Spottiswoode, London; Little Brown, Boston, 1966), now long out of print. Readers will wish to know its relationship to the present work. I have retained the structure and much of the text. The appendices, notes, bibliography and illustrations are entirely new; considerable parts of each chapter have been amended and enlarged. I have benefited a great deal from the work of others (registered in the Notes and in Appendix 1). The complex web of family connections which formed the Antonine dynasty is now much better understood (although there is room for debate); and the order of birth of the numerous children of Marcus and Faustina – at least fourteen – is now better known (these details are summarised in Appendix 2 and the six stemmata). I have taken into account recent research on the Greek intellectual renaissance, on Fronto, and on the emerging Christians (Appendix 4). There has been some welcome new epigraphic evidence for the wars (Appendix 3). But I must stress that this is a biography, not a 'life and times'. I have seen my task as the simple one of recording Marcus' life as accurately as possible, setting him in his context, and allowing him to speak for himself – especially in Chapter 10. If this helps readers of the *Meditations* to understand their author better I shall be content.

No one can write a book of this kind without incurring a multitude of debts. I hope that what I owe to published work is properly registered in the notes and bibliography; but I should like to pay special tribute to C.R. Haines and A.S.L. Farquharson. Four of those whose help I gratefully acknowledged twenty years back are now gone, but not forgotten: Donald Dudley, John Morris, Hans-Georg

Pflaum, Erich Swoboda. I continue to benefit from the advice and encouragement of Géza Alföldy, Eric Birley, Jaroslav Sasel, Armin Stylow and Ronald Syme.

ANTHONY BIRLEY
Manchester
10 June 1986

NOTE TO PAPERBACK IMPRESSION

I have taken the opportunity afforded by a reprint to add a list of recent publications (p. 296), with brief comment on their relevance in most cases.

ANTHONY BIRLEY
Friedberg
8 January 1993

• I •

THE AGE OF THE ANTONINES

'IF A MAN were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.'

So wrote Edward Gibbon of the 'happy period of more than four-score years,' from AD 96–180, during which the Roman empire was ruled by the 'Five Good Emperors' – Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. Marcus' own life (121–80) spanned almost three-quarters of this epoch while his reign (161–80) occupied its last nineteen years. It was in describing Marcus' death, and the accession of his son Commodus, that Cassius Dio, born soon after Marcus' accession, wrote: 'My history now descends from a kingdom of gold to a kingdom of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans at that time.'[1]

The 'five good emperors' were individuals of widely differing character and training. One factor linked them: none was the son of his predecessor. Hence it seemed to some contemporary observers and to many subsequent commentators, including Gibbon, that a new principle was then governing the imperial succession: 'the adoption of the best man'. In fact there was no principle or conscious policy at work. All but Marcus had no son to succeed him, and in any case kinship linked Trajan and Hadrian, Pius and Marcus.

In his first work, the biography of his father-in-law Agricola, written at the outset of the new era, Tacitus voices the relief of the senate that their time of servitude was over: 'Now at last our spirits revive.' Nerva had succeeded Domitian, assassinated in 96, and had achieved the impossible: the principate and liberty could co-exist. Tacitus' contemporary, Pliny, expatiated at far greater length, a few years later, on the change which had begun that year. It was no longer necessary to flatter the ruler as though he were a god; he contrasted the humanity, frugality, clemency, generosity, kindness, self-restraint, industriousness and bravery of Trajan, who followed Nerva in 98, with the pride, luxury, cruelty, spitefulness, lust, inactivity and cowardice of Domitian. Tacitus and Pliny were speaking for the senate. To the provincial bourgeoisie and peasantry, on the other hand, the personality of the emperor did not perhaps matter very much. The wayward general Petillius Cerialis

is made by Tacitus to remind an assembly of Gallic rebels in AD 70: *saevi proximis ingruunt,* savage emperors vent their spleen on those closest to them – the senators at Rome – and the average inhabitant of the provinces does not suffer. Besides, bad emperors often had good advisers (as Trajan is once supposed to have remarked).

The favourable verdict of history on 'the Golden Century of the Antonines' depends largely on the fact that senators felt more secure when the emperor was 'one of us', as Pliny put it, and behaved as a fellow-senator. This was a kind of safeguard. At any rate, since most Roman historians and biographers were members of the senate or linked with that order in their sympathies, the dominant theme of Roman imperial historical writing was the relationship between the emperor and the senate.[2]

To understand more clearly why this was so, it is worth looking back at the origins of the imperial system. Rome had been dominated by one man before, at various stages in the history of the republic, but autocracy began with the victory of Octavian at Actium in 31 BC. Octavian cunningly and wisely concealed his powers, or at least did not flaunt them. This disarmed opposition and allowed his opponents to preserve a semblance of selfrespect. After years of civil war men were anxious for stability. His remarkable talent for survival (forty-four years' sole rule) allowed the innovations which he had introduced gradually, at every stage appealing to ancient precedent and feeling his way, to harden.

By Augustus' death, Rome was in effect an empire, however much his successor Tiberius tried to disguise it. Exactly when the republic had ceased and the empire had begun was not so obvious. Writing during Tiberius' reign, Velleius Paterculus, one of the 'new men' favoured by the new system, felt able to say complacently that Augustus had merely 'recalled to existence the pristine and ancient constitution of the republic'. Augustus wanted to appear as no more than *primus inter pares*. But the man who began life as plain C. Octavius was much more than that.

He had first changed his name to C. Julius Caesar Octavianus when posthumously adopted by the assassinated dictator Julius Caesar. Through the efforts of Antony and others, Caesar was proclaimed a god, or something very like one, and this enabled Caesar's heir to draw attention to his unique ancestry – 'Imperator Caesar divi filius' (son of the deified). *Imperator,* once a title for all Roman commanders, had become a special title of honour, used after their names by generals whose soldiers had thus hailed them at a victory. Octavian abusively turned the title into a kind of name, giving up Gaius – and Julius too, for Caesar now became his family name. In 27 BC the senate granted him a further name by which he became generally known: Imperator Caesar divi filius *Augustus*. In 23 BC Augustus received the 'tribunician power', which gave him wide powers of interference in a multitude of spheres. Other powers and honours followed at various stages in his long life.[3]

Augustus recognized that he could not survive unless he allowed the senate, once the supreme arbiter of Roman destinies, to participate in his rule – indeed, he could not do without senators. The old magistracies of the republic continued. He himself held the consulship thirteen times, and one or two of his close associates whom he wished to mark out with special honour also became consul more than once. To satisfy the aspirations of ordinary senators, whose ambition remained the tenure of the *fasces,* he regularized the institution of the suffect consulship, established originally to replace consuls who had died or been removed from office. The *consules ordinarii,* who gave their names to the year, now resigned before completing their year of office to make way for *suffecti.* This practice greatly increased in subsequent years.

Entry into the senate (a body nominally 600 strong) was hereditary, but suitable persons with the requisite property qualification of one million sesterces could apply for the *latus clavus*, the broad stripe of the senator's toga. This allowed them to enter the senate through election as quaestor at the age of twenty-four or twenty-five, after preliminary service in minor magistracies (and with the army). Thereafter they could climb the ladder of the senatorial *cursus,* becoming aedile or tribune of the people, praetor, and, finally, consul. Patricians, the hereditary aristocracy (enlarged by Augustus and some of his successors), could move direct from quaestor to praetor and could become consul at thirty-two, ten years earlier than the rest. The patricians had more chance of becoming consul *ordinarius.* But very few were consul more than once.

Alongside the old magistracies a new career developed. If they chose, senators could ignore the emperor's existence, serve only as magistrates at Rome and as proconsuls of provinces administered in the old republican way. But Augustus and his successors governed a vast *provincia,* virtually all the provinces which had armies and many others besides, and could also interfere in the 'senatorial' provinces. The imperial provinces and armies were administered and commanded by the emperor's deputies, *legati,* and a career in the emperor's service formed the real basis of the senatorial hierarchy, with the ancient republican magistracies merely stepping-stones, formal stages of qualification for further advancement. Some provinces were not given to senators to administer, for various reasons, but to knights, members of the next highest order in the state, who had the title of procurator or prefect. Other new offices grew up in Rome – for example, prefectures of the treasuries, and of the city of Rome, for senators: of the corn-supply, the city-police and the praetorian guard for knights.[4]

At Rome, Augustus had to keep up 'republican' appearances. In the provinces, he was worshipped as king and god, and his family were sacred. 'It is not necessary to praise political success or to idealize the men who win wealth and honours through civil war.'[5] At his death in AD 14 almost everyone did – a few through fear, but most inhabitants of the empire from a sense of awe, admiration and gratitude

31 BC	*September 2:* Octavian, great-nephew of Julius Caesar, gains sole power after defeat of Antony at Actium
27 BC	Octavian given name AUGUSTUS
23 BC	Augustus given *tribunicia potestas*
AD 4	Augustus adopts stepson Tiberius Claudius Nero, who becomes Tiberius Julius Caesar
14	TIBERIUS succeeds to Augustus' position on latter's death
37	GAIUS ('CALIGULA'), great-nephew of Tiberius, great-grandson of Augustus, succeeds Tiberius on latter's death
41	Murder of Caligula. His uncle CLAUDIUS proclaimed emperor
54	NERO, stepson of Claudius, nephew of Caligula, great-great-grandson of Augustus, succeeds Claudius on latter's death
68	*June* 6: Suicide of Nero after revolts in western provinces. GALBA recognized as emperor
69	*January* 2–3: VITELLIUS proclaimed emperor by Rhine armies
	January 15: OTHO instigates murder of Galba and is proclaimed emperor at Rome
	April 15: Vitellius' army defeats that of Otho in N. Italy
	July 1–3: VESPASIAN proclaimed emperor by eastern armies
	October 27–28: Defeat of Vitellius' forces in N. Italy
	December 20: Vitellius killed at Rome
79	Death of Vespasian, succeeded by elder son TITUS
81	Death of Titus, succeeded by younger brother DOMITIAN
96	*September* 18: Murder of Domitian at Rome. NER VA made emperor
97	*October:* Nerva adopts Trajan as his son
98	*January* 28: TRAJAN succeeds on death of Nerva
117	HADRIAN, after ostensible death-bed adoption, succeeds his cousin Trajan
136	*Spring or early summer:* Hadrian adopts L. Ceionius Commodus, who becomes L. Aelius Caesar
138	*January* 1: Death of L. Aelius Caesar
	February 25: Hadrian adopts T. Aurelius Antoninus, who becomes T. Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus and adopts Marcus and L. Commodus junior
	July 10: ANTONINUS succeeds on Hadrian's death
161	*March* 7: MARCUS succeeds on death of Antoninus (Pius), jointly with L. Commodus junior who becomes L. VERUS
169	*January:* Death of L. Verus
177	Marcus' only surviving son COMMODUS made joint emperor
180	*March* 17: Death of Marcus, COMMODUS sole emperor
192	*December* 31: Commodus murdered
193	*January* 1: PERTINAX proclaimed emperor
	March 28: Pertinax murdered, DIDIUS JULIANUS proclaimed emperor (Rome)
	April 9: SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS proclaimed emperor (Danube)
	June 1: Julianus killed at Rome
197	*February* 19: Defeat of Severus' last rival, at Lyon
211	*February* 4: Death of Severus at York

TABLE 1 Roman Emperors from Augustus to Severus

for the stability which he had created, or allowed to form. Augustus was deified by decree of the senate. So had Julius Caesar been. But although Augustus had at first used the 'deified Julius' to further his own plans, the memory of the murdered dictator had not been unduly emphasised at a later stage. 'Divus Augustus', with his college of priests, his temple and the festivals to commemorate significant days in his earthly life, played a profound role in the subsequent history of the Roman Empire: his successors were assessed in large measure in comparison with him. All his successors (except Tiberius and Vitellius) used his three names, Imperator Caesar Augustus, as part of their official style, and with some modifications their powers were those which he had gradually built up during his long decades of ascendancy.[6]

Tiberius, thanks to his stepfather Augustus' grudging and unwilling use of him, was by far the most distinguished Roman of his day at his accession: he had been consul more often, had commanded more armies and provinces than his peers, and was son by adoption of Augustus, sharing enough of his special powers to make the succession inevitable. He lacked Augustus' pliable qualities (the qualities of a chameleon, the emperor Julian was to call them), and was never popular with the senate, indeed by the time of his death in 37 he was generally feared and hated; and he was not deified. His successor was his grand-nephew, Augustus' great-grandson, Gaius 'Caligula'. Caligula had no other claim to be *Princeps* except his Julian blood: he was only twenty-four and had no higher rank than that of quaestor. This made the autocracy obvious; and Caligula went on to exaggerate even further the concept of 'divine kingship'.

When Caligula was murdered in 41, there was an abortive attempt to restore the republic, but the imperial bodyguard discovered another member of the 'divine family', Claudius, uncle of Caligula, who was a laughing-stock to the aristocracy through his personal failings and dominated by his wives and freed slaves. Under him the autocracy and the bureaucracy increased their powers. Claudius was succeeded in 54 by his sixteen-year-old stepson Nero, who began his rule with professions of deference to the senate, sedulously instilled into him by his tutor and minister Seneca. But soon his behaviour became intolerable to the senate – *saevi proximis ingruunt.* Eventually Nero took fright at a rebellion in Gaul, and, deserted by the praetorian guards, committed suicide in the summer of 68.[7]

There was no attempt to restore the republic now, some ninety-eight years after the battle of Actium. The aim of all parties in the civil war of 68–69 seems to have been (in principle at least) to return to the harmonious state of affairs that had prevailed under Augustus. In 69, the year of the four emperors, the premium on birth fell sharply with successive occupants of the throne – and the secret had already been revealed 'that emperors could be made elsewhere than at Rome'. Vespasian, the eventual victor, was a parvenu. Paradoxically, his having two sons was regarded by

some of his supporters as a point in his favour: he could found a dynasty which would, it was thought, stabilize the succession. Opposition from senators influenced by the ideals of Stoic philosophy was stifled. Vespasian refused to allow his powers to be limited and was determined that his sons should succeed him. He was duly succeeded by Titus at his death in 79, and Titus two years later by his younger brother Domitian. Vespasian and Titus had been efficient and popular emperors, and they had cultivated the support of the senate. Domitian, who had been a youth in his late teens at his father's accession, had a suspicious and sensitive personality. As he had never been a normal member of the senate, he had little sympathy with senatorial feeling. He was competent, even talented, as a ruler or administrator, but opposition was provoked by his behaviour (for instance, his insistence on being addressed as 'Lord and God', and his holding the consulship ten times as emperor out of a maximum possible of fifteen). His rule ended with a reign of terror, and he was murdered in September 96.[8]

His successor, Nerva, had not had a very creditable past – he had been an agent of Nero, and then had been honoured by Vespasian and Domitian, for no very obvious reason, except that he was well-connected and, surely, a useful counsellor of the Flavian emperors. In 97 opposition to Nerva became open and his position in grave danger. The situation was saved when he adopted as his son and heir the governor of Upper Germany, M. Ulpius Traianus, who became emperor in his own right on Nerva's death early in 98.

Trajan, a provincial, had been made a patrician as a young man by Vespasian in recognition of his father's services to the new dynasty. He had served Domitian loyally, as had others of his class like Agricola, also a neopatrician of provincial extraction, whose biography Tacitus had written to demonstrate that good men could exist and perform worthy deeds even under bad emperors. At the death of Domitian a good deal of cant had been talked about opposition to the tyranny: there had in fact been the Stoic group of senators who had suffered 'martyrdom' under Nero and the Flavians. But most of the senate had knuckled under. Trajan became a hero to virtually everyone – a conqueror abroad, he respected senators at home (for example, he was consul only four times in his reign of twenty years, which was but one of the many studied contrasts to Domitian). The senate gave him the title *Optimus* – best of emperors. His name became a proverb for centuries, for he seemed to fulfil everyone's ideals.

Hadrian, a cousin of Trajan and married to his grand-niece, was the natural choice to succeed, but the succession was not made obvious. Trajan died in the east in August 117 and Hadrian, commanding the Syrian army, had no difficulty whatever in gaining the adherence of the troops. But he did not have time to wait for the senate's approval, and within a short time of his accession a number of leading senators, including some of Trajan's closest collaborators, were put to death. On his

arrival in Rome Hadrian clearly had met some suspicion and hostility, and although he tried hard to regain the senate's favour, the manner in which his reign opened was never forgotten or forgiven.[9]

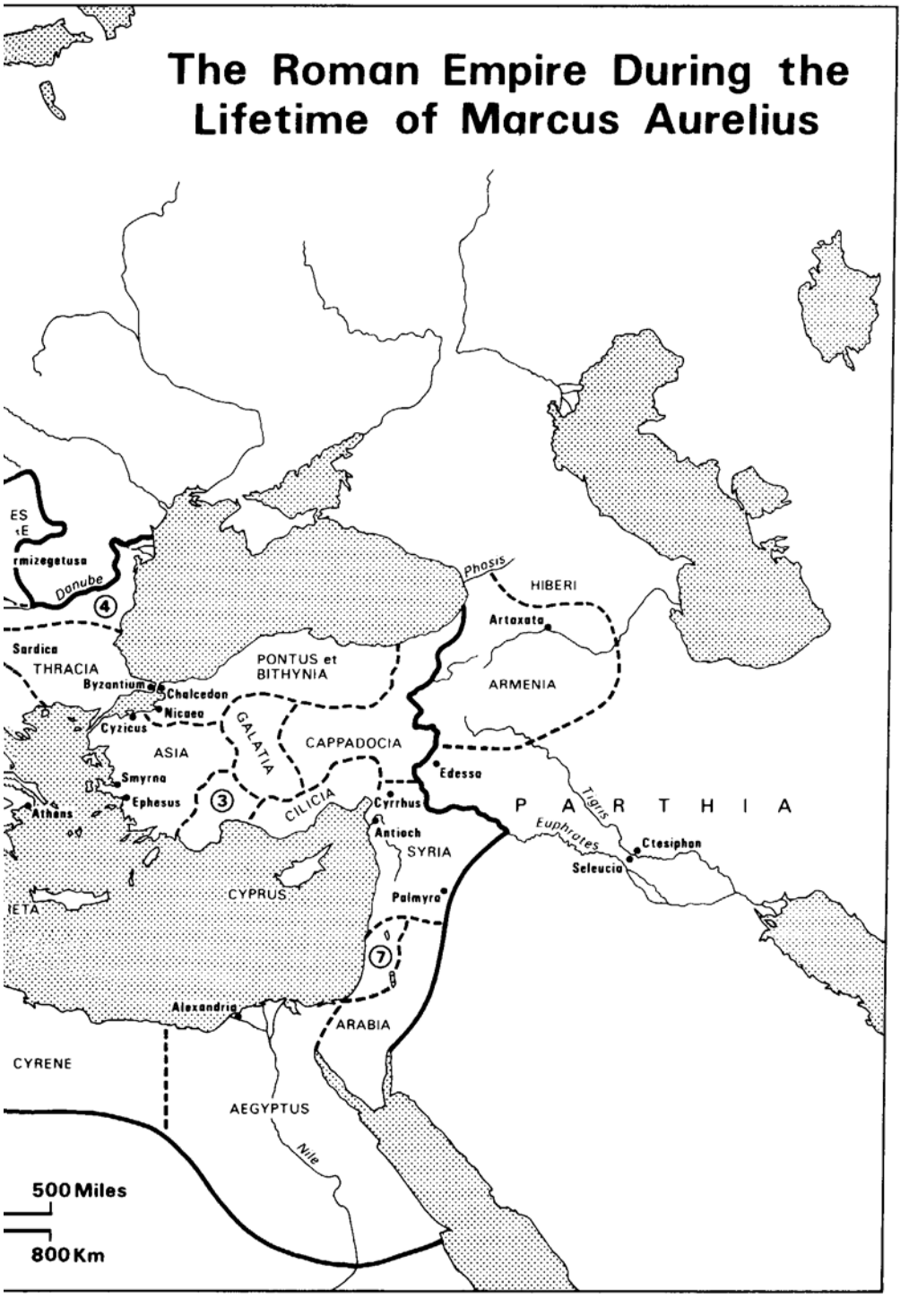
Hadrian was a tremendous organizer and systematizer. Trajan's final conquests (in the east) were abandoned, and he reverted to the ultimate policy of Augustus of avoiding further expansion. He was outside Italy for most of his reign, visiting the provinces and armies and reorganizing the frontier defences of the new empire, one of the most celebrated results of which is the wall that bears his name in Britain.[10]

Hadrian's reign gave the empire a breathing-space. Efficiency was increased. By now the imperial household which had administered so many important departments of state had given way to a regular equestrian 'civil service' in which knights could have as varied and important a career as senators continued to have in their own sphere. For a knight, the summit was still – as it had been for a hundred years – the prefecture of the praetorian guard. Below this were the other great prefectures – of Egypt, of the city-police (the *vigiles*), and of the corn-supply *(annona),* the financial department *(a rationibus),* the Secretariat *(ab epistulis)* and similar offices in Rome itself, and appointments as financial procurator throughout the empire and as presidial procurator (i.e. governor) in a number of provinces. Entry into the service was controlled solely by the emperor, but there seem to have been various standard means of starting on the ladder. Some men obtained commissions as regimental commanders of auxiliary units, others began as praetorian guardsmen, obtained a centurion's commission, and then after further military service became procurators; a few, such as the writer Suetonius (who was *ab epistulis* early in Hadrian's reign), seem to have entered the higher grade directly without prior military service.[11]

The major strength of the army lay in the legions, and these were all commanded by senators, with the exception of the two in Egypt. At any one moment some twenty-eight senators would be legionary legates. Most would be men in their thirties, and some of these would be governing a province simultaneously. In provinces where there was more than one legion, the governor was an ex-consul, hence generally in his forties or older. A few key provinces had as many as three legions – Britain, Syria, Upper Pannonia and Lower Moesia. The British and Syrian commands, in more isolated positions than were the Danubian armies, required a correspondingly greater degree of responsibility. Hence the governors of Britain and Syria were usually the two outstanding generals of their day.[12]

But the military senators – the *viri militares* – were not the only figures of influence. Indeed, as they were away from the centre of affairs for long periods their voice was often not of much weight in imperial councils. For although the emperor


York
BRITANNIA
London
Cologne
Bonn
CHATTI
Elbe
BELGICA
Rhine
MARCOMANNI
LUGDUNENSIS
Danube
QUADI
Carnuntum
NORICUM
RAETIA
Lyon
AQUITANIA
Aquileia
Po
ALPES
Nimes
NARBONENSIS
Sirmium
DALMATIA
Salonae
TARRACONENSIS
LUSITANIA
Tarraco
CORSICA
Rome
MOESIA SUPERIOR
Capua
Canusium
Naples
Brundisium
MACEDONIA
Italica
Corduba
Ucubi
BAETICA
SARDINIA
EPIRUS
SICILIA
ACHAEA
TINGITANA
Iol-Caesarea
Cirta
Carthage
Sicca
CAESARIENSIS
MAURETANIA
NUMIDIA
AFRICA
Lepcis Magna
① GERMANIA INFERIOR
② GERMANIA SUPERIOR
③ LYCIA et PAMPHYLIA
④ MOESIA INFERIOR
⑤ PANNONIA INFERIOR
⑥ PANNONIA SUPERIOR
⑦ SYRIA PALAESTINA
Frontier
Provincial boundary
0
0


The Roman Empire During the Lifetime of Marcus Aurelius
Danube
Phasis
HIBERI
Artaxata
Sardica
THRACIA
PONTUS et BITHYNIA
ARMENIA
Byzantium
Chalcedon
Nicaea
Cyzicus
GALATIA
CAPPADOCIA
ASIA
Smyrna
Ephesus
Athens
CILICIA
Cyrrhus
Edessa
Tigris
P A R T H I A
Euphrates
Antioch
SYRIA
Ctesiphon
Seleucia
CYPRUS
Palmyra
Alexandria
ARABIA
CYRENE
AEGYPTUS
Nile
500 Miles
800 Km

of Rome was still – even increasingly – an autocrat, importance was attached to the opinions of the senate and, by the reign of Hadrian, even more to the emperor's Privy Council – the *consilium principis.* This had grown up gradually (like most Roman institutions) from the time of Augustus, and its members – the emperor's friends, *amici Caesaris* – must have played an important role in influencing policy decisions. Unfortunately, as more than one ancient writer complained, from the end of the republic policy was decided in secret and few significant details are preserved of the discussions where the real business of policy-making was carried on.[13]

The emperor's power rested ultimately on his control of the armies. He also controlled the finances of the state, whatever legal fictions there might have been to assert the senate's share in this. He was the source of rewards both titular and financial. Legates and procurators, legionaries and auxiliaries, were all paid by him. A legionary in the reign of Augustus received 225 denarii a year (it had risen to 300 by Hadrian's day). The senator's property-qualification was more than one thousand times as great as this (one million sesterces or 250,000 denarii). In fact, a procurator eager and able to obtain entry to the senate could soon accumulate the required wealth many times over. The lowest grade of procurators were paid 60,000 sesterces a year, and higher grades were paid at 100,000, 200,000, and – eventually – 300,000. Senatorial salaries in imperial service were higher (and there were many ways of increasing one's earnings). To translate this into modern terms would be meaningless. But the legionaries, on their retirement from the service, were reckoned among the better-off members of society.[14]

The empire ruled by Hadrian was a cosmopolitan world-state, with a varied polyglot population. But there were only two official languages, Latin in the west and Greek in the east. The highest orders in the state were bilingual, and educated Romans of Latin-speaking descent looked increasingly to Greek language and culture. Theorists liked to see the empire as a confederation of city-states, fulfilling the aspirations of the great age of Greek history. This was a myth; but the civilization of the empire was basically urban. The communities of the empire were granted considerable autonomy in local government, although by the second century AD this was coming to be regarded as a burden by the town bourgeoisie and provincial landed gentry who had to reach into their own pockets to support their home towns. In the west city-life was something new, but under Hadrian townbuilding was flourishing even in Britain, and Gaul had for some while been very Romanized. Spain was one of Rome's oldest provinces and, as the home of Trajan and Hadrian, was, not surprisingly, well up to the level of Italy in its social and economic development. The North African provinces had a brilliant city-life along the coast. Morocco was less civilized and the mountains in the south of Mauretania were the home of brigands who constantly disturbed the peace of both Mauretania and Spain. Nevertheless, both the Iberian peninsula and North Africa were deemed sufficiently

protected by the presence of one legion each, stationed in Tarraconensis and Numidia respectively. This garrison was, of course, supplemented by the presence of non-citizen auxiliary regiments in substantial numbers. The Gallic provinces also were undefended by legions. But there were three legions in Britain and four in the two Rhineland provinces of Upper and Lower Germany. In Numidia, Upper Germany and Britain abundant traces of Hadrian's activity as a renovator of imperial frontier-defences have been discovered.

The hinge which bound the western and eastern parts of the empire together was the area north of the Alps, notably the provinces of Upper and Lower Pannonia, with three legions and one legion respectively. The two Moesian provinces formed a military zone right along the Danube to the Black Sea; and from the time of Trajan's conquests the Dacian provinces formed a great bastion to the north of the river. Dalmatia was a province of contrasts: the Adriatic coast, opposite Italy, had a brilliant citylife; inland the country was mountainous and wild. The rest of the empire was Greek in language and culture, but as with Latin in the Celtic, Iberian and Berber lands, this was in many areas merely a superficial veneer. Nevertheless, Achaea and Macedonia and the province of Asia were thoroughly Hellenic, with cities that had flourished when Rome was a village. Thrace and Bithynia, Pontus, Lycia-Pamphylia, Cilicia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Syria, Palestine, Arabia, all had benefited in some degree from the presence, before Rome absorbed them, of Greek and Hellenistic settlers. Egypt was in a special category. Only Alexandria was a true city – the next after Rome itself in size – but it was denied local autonomy, and it and the province of Egypt were ruled as the emperor's personal fief through his Viceroy, the Prefect, and a civil service which followed closely the bureaucratic pattern laid down by the Ptolemies.[15]

The empire had enemies of various kinds. Britain, Spain and Morocco were disturbed by brigands, but the damage they inflicted was essentially local. The long river-frontier in the north was more vulnerable: the 'cordon-system' of frontier control is unsatisfactory in many ways, as Napoleon and others have pointed out.[16] The Teutonic tribes of northern and central Europe were often restless, as were their eastern neighbours, of whom the Sarmatians are the best-known, particularly the Jazyges of the Hungarian Plain. Trajan's creation of a province of Dacia had helped to solve the problem of frontier control in the Lower Danube region, but it had created tensions as well. Rome aimed to stifle possible threats by exercising a protectorate over the peoples which bordered her frontiers. The system of 'client-states' in treaty-relationship with the emperor provided Rome with 'invisible frontiers' which stretched far beyond the tangible barriers of the empire.

In the east, the problem was different. In the Parthian Empire Rome had a potential adversary of apparently much higher calibre than the disunited tribes to her north. The Parthians too were loosely-knit, but the conquests of Alexander had

extended Hellenic civilization far beyond the Tigris, and in any case the Parthian kings were the inheritors of a Mesopotamian civilization stretching back for several millennia. The main bone of contention between Rome and Parthia was the kingdom of Armenia which each wished to dominate. But Mesopotamia too was sometimes coveted by Rome. The client-state system was used extensively on the eastern frontiers: Rome found it profitable to have allies as far away as the Caucasus; and the Black Sea was virtually a Roman preserve, for the Greek cities of its coasts were under careful supervision.[17]

Augustus had apparently expanded the empire to its natural limits. A number of additions had been made by his successors, but Hadrian gave up Trajan's eastern conquests – Armenia, Mesopotamia, Assyria – and concentrated on making the empire a viable, secure and flourishing concern. In this he evidently succeeded, for he was reaping the harvest sown in the first century. The Hellenized provinces of the east, after long decades of civil peace, were richer than ever before. The rougher west, even distant Britain, now began to enjoy the fruits of the Roman peace. The whole world could lay down its arms as if at festival time, the fulsome young East Greek orator Aelius Aristides could proclaim, six years after Hadrian's death. The cities of the empire had no other concern, he said, but to adorn themselves with public buildings – gymnasia, fountains, arches, temples, workshops, schools. They gleamed with radiance and grace. The earth was now indeed the common mother of all men. An encamped army ringed the world like a rampart, from the inhabited part of Ethiopia in the south to the Phasis in the north, from the Euphrates in the east 'to the great outermost island towards the west'. He might equally have said, with more precision, that from the Upper Nile to the Don, from the Euphrates to the Clyde, from the Sahara to the Rhine, the Danube and Transylvania, the Roman law and the Roman peace prevailed. War was a thing of the past. Rome alone of great empires had ruled such a vast area, and she alone ruled with equity and restraint.[18]

Not everyone profited. Aristides spoke for the upper classes. And the economic system was based on slavery. Many, even the better-off, sought escape from a somewhat soulless materialism in exotic new cults. The cultivated Pliny, on his arrival in Pontus-Bithynia, found that the temples of the ancestral gods were becoming deserted and neglected. The reason soon appeared. There was a sect called Christians – sober, decent people, he found, in spite of the monstrous allegations against them – who preferred their own private cult. Trajan told the governor that these people had to be punished, if, after proceedings had been initiated, they were found to be Christians – punished with death. This was not a new ruling. After the great fire at Rome, under Nero, it had probably become imperial policy that to be a confessed Christian was a capital offence. But Trajan told Pliny that these people should not be searched out. They should be left alone. If they were

accused, confessed and refused to recant, the law had to take its course. This is remarkable judicial practice. But it seemed to work.

There were other exotic cults also, Egyptian and Oriental for the most part. Hadrian himself had been initiated into the ancient (and respectably classical) cult of the Mysteries of Eleusis. Others sought consolation in philosophy. What had once been a dangerous and expensive eccentricity or fad – even a deeply believed inner defence against despotism – could now be practised with decorum, publicly. Also, there arose crowds of bogus philosophers.[19]

In the fields of architecture and the plastic arts there was genuine achievement. The gleam of the cities has left its traces. The Hadrianic and Antonine architects and sculptors produced works of considerable grace and beauty, and left a permanent mark on the face of the empire, not least of Rome itself.

There is an air of the eighteenth century about the Antonine Empire. The aristocracy which had been ennobled in the struggles of the previous century wanted now to relax and enjoy their dignity and wealth. The provincial élite and the Italian municipal families had come to the top. Their worth was solid, and their possessions satisfyingly secure. The old aristocracy had almost disappeared. 'Freedom' had long been a catchword under the early principate. It never really denoted what the younger Cato had meant by it. 'Freedom' meant order, stability, regularity. An emperor was a necessity. If he preserved social distinctions and allowed the senate an honoured place in the state, all would be well. The new Roman aristocracy had no disturbing memories of ancient glories under the free republic. But they did prefer an enlightened autocracy to the grim, uneasy and suspicious days of Domitian, The Annii Veri, the Ceionii, the Vettuleni, and their peers, with their riches and their assured place in public life, gained by faithful service even under bad emperors, had come into their own. The virtues which Tacitus had praised in the *Agricola* had gained their reward. Also, it was now safe and fashionable to admire the valiant few who had dared to speak out against tyranny in the past, Thrasea Paetus, Helvidius Priscus – the Stoics. Tacitus had in fact preferred the example of the unrebellious but still untarnished Agricola. But both types could now be admired simultaneously.[20]

The society revealed by the letters of Pliny is contented and industrious, conscious of its own virtues. These men and women, and their imitators in the provinces, provided the gleam of the age of the Antonines. They were, many of them, of provincial origin, as were Trajan and Hadrian. But they did not see themselves as Spaniards or Gauls or Africans, except as an occasional affectation. They were Romans, and the leading Romans of their day. Greek culture was once more on the upsurge. But things Hellenic were permissible, in fact essential (in moderation) to an educated Roman. Hadrian, the restless cosmopolitan, went a little to extremes, in this as in other respects. One may register, for example, the fact that

he sported a beard, thereby causing Roman men to abandon razors for the best part of a century. It was, there can be no doubt, a gesture by which he proclaimed his Hellenic allegiance, showed himself to be an intellectual. Meanwhile, wealthy men from the Greek provinces were themselves entering the senate in increasing numbers, in any case, adapting themselves with varying success or enthusiasm to the manners of Rome.[21]

Some of the friends and correspondents of Pliny undertook arduous work in the service of the emperor, governing his provinces and commanding his armies. Others lived in sedate but cultivated retirement. Others still could confine their public as well as their private life almost entirely to Rome and Italy. Those, in particular, who had the rank of patrician, did not need to do more, for patricians were assured of access at an early age to the ancient magistracies of Rome, which remained the principal aspiration of the upper class. Pliny obviously did not know personally (to his regret, perhaps) all the leading figures of his time. But his correspondence gives a remarkable picture of Roman high society in the last decade of the first and the first decade of the second centuries AD. Its self-satisfied and urbane atmosphere mirrors, more accurately than the sombre pages of Cornelius Tacitus, the world into which Marcus Aurelius was born.

The effect of the new stability on the literary world was not entirely happy. The early second century saw the genius of two of the greatest figures of Latin literature, Tacitus and Juvenal. They were also two of the last great Latin writers, and both were dead before Hadrian. There was also Suetonius, the young friend of Pliny. Pliny and Suetonius wrote unexceptionable prose, and are still widely read. But tastes were changing. There was a move back to the past, back to the days before Caesar Augustus had established his New Order. The emperor Hadrian's own tastes accorded well with this. In Greek literature he preferred Antimachus (of whom scarcely anyone had heard) to Homer. There were writers of some distinction in both Greek and Latin in the age of the Antonines – notably Apuleius and Lucian. Of the rest, what has survived is perhaps judged by unfair standards, but much is incredibly tedious.[22]

A by-product of the literary sterility of the age is that little historical writing has survived on which the modern historian can draw. Certainly there is nothing comparable with Tacitus' account of the Julio-Claudians and of the upheaval which followed them, or with Suetonius' portrayal of the first *Twelve Caesars*. The 'kingdom of rust and iron' which followed the age of the Antonines, was equally barren, in fact more so. Conditions were too disturbed to favour great writing or to ensure the survival of much of what was written. The prime source is the historian Cassius Dio, born in 163 or 164, a native of the Greek city of Nicaea in the province

of Bithynia, who followed his father into the senate early in the reign of Commodus. Dio wrote in Greek a complete history of Rome in eighty books, from the earliest origins to his own day – his account ends with some sombre reflections on the middle years of Severus Alexander, the late 220s. Dio's work is preserved in various forms. Some of the original work survives, but for the life and reign of Marcus Aurelius there are only epitomes and excerpts; and the entire account of the twenty-three years of Antoninus Pius (138–61) is lost. Cassius Dio, like most of his class, idealized Marcus Aurelius and hated Commodus. His outlook is biased therefore; but he does not appear to distort the facts unduly and provides an invaluable chronological framework.

Marcus Aurelius' own writings naturally offer a unique insight into the man. There are the letters to his tutor Fronto which cover his life between the ages of about seventeen and forty-five, with varying completeness. The letters are difficult to date exactly in many cases, but enough clues are provided to give an approximate indication. The *Meditations* were written late in life, and only the first book dwells in any detail on named persons. This provides an invaluable series of character-sketches of his friends and family. Here and there in the later books casual references are historically illuminating. But the *Meditations* as a whole are informative about the inner life of Marcus, rather than his actions.

Marcus' correspondence with Fronto was re-discovered in the early nineteenth century. Cornelius Fronto had been known of as Marcus' tutor; but he had also been spoken of by writers of late antiquity as the second glory of Roman oratory after Cicero, and this judgement was accepted without question – until his letters to Marcus and others were recovered. Then there was amazement and scorn. The letters were full of small-talk and gossip, vignettes of the unpretentious family life of the Antonines, and therefore they disappointed historians who had hoped for light on matters of greater moment. Students of literature were unimpressed with the artificial style. Fronto, a native of Cirta (Constantine) in Numidia and a member of the senate, had been credited with the revitalizing of Latin. From the letters he is seen merely to have been making a self-conscious effort to get away from the purist dictatorship exercised by writers such as Cicero and Seneca, and to enrich or revive the literary language by drawing on authors earlier than Rome's Golden Age of literature and on the language of daily life. The intention was good, though the result seems a little half-baked. But his speeches, which have not survived, were supposedly renowned for the splendour and seriousness of their style, and it is obviously unfair to judge Fronto by his 'off-the-cuff' productions.

In view of the limitations of Dio, Marcus himself and Fronto, much reliance has inevitably to be placed on another work, the mysterious 'Augustan History'. This is a set of biographies of the emperors from Hadrian to Carinus (117–284), with a gap in the third century. It was ostensibly composed in the late third and early fourth

centuries, by six authors. A peculiarity is that biographies are included not only of emperors but of usurpers and Caesars (in effect, heirs to the throne). It has long been recognized that these latter 'minor lives' are worthless and, in particular, that the 'documents' which they and the later lives contain – supposedly original letters, speeches, and the like – are bogus, the work of the authorship rather than of those to whom they are assigned. There is more to the mystery than that, however. It seems clear that the 'authors' – 'Aelius Spartianus', 'Julius Capitolinus', 'Aelius Lampridius', 'Vulcacius Gallicanus', 'Trebellius Pollio' and 'Flavius Vopiscus' – never existed, and that whoever was responsible for the Augustan History was writing later than he pretends. Quite when, why and who remains a mystery. Many attempts have been made to identify the hand behind it, but none has convinced for long. In the present context no attempt need be made. But it is relevant to ask how the work was composed, in other words, from what materials. The work gives every appearance of having been put together in haste – by a hoaxer perhaps, in the late fourth or early fifth century AD, as a literary 'spoof'. But although the 'minor lives' of second-century characters are virtually worthless, and the lives of the third-century figures contain over fifty per cent fiction, the 'major lives' of second-century figures – the emperors from Hadrian to Severus, at least – are full of factual material, put together haphazardly in many cases, but providing irreplaceable information. This must be derived from a sound source, either an unknown biographer or from Marius Maximus, cited occasionally by the Augustan History. Maximus evidently wrote a second *Twelve Caesars* on the model of Suetonius, probably in direct continuation of him, and he is undoubtedly identical with L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus, a contemporary of Cassius Dio, a leading general in the civil wars of Septimius Severus and a very prominent figure in the reigns of Caracalla, Macrinus, and of Severus Alexander, when the opportunity for composing a second *Twelve Caesars* first arose. The lives of all the emperors from Hadrian to Severus, including those of Marcus himself and of Lucius, contain much valuable material, which has to be used, with caution. But items on offer in the second-century 'minor lives', which have been incautiously accepted in some modern studies of Marcus and other second-century figures, are another matter. Almost all must be rejected.

After that, there is little left. Herodian, a mediocre eastern Greek litterateur who was a younger contemporary of Dio and Maximus, wrote a history of the period 180–238. He opened with the death of Marcus, and his account has nothing of value to add (and on some points is demonstrably false). In this context he is of interest solely as representative of the viewpoint of the third century on the passing of the golden age of the second. Much more useful are contemporary non-historical writers who provide background information and occasional historical facts. Aulus Gellius, an earnest hanger-on of the literary circles in the reign of Pius, provides a

number of entertaining accounts of the philological discussions at the salons presided over by Fronto. Philostratus, a Greek intellectual who was a contemporary of Cassius Dio and a protégé of the empress Julia Domna, has left in his *Lives of the Sophists* excellent information on the literary and intellectual life of the age of the Antonines, particularly in his life of Herodes Atticus, one of Marcus' tutors. Other writers such as Lucian, a Greek from Samosata, and Apuleius, a Latin-speaking native of Roman North Africa, are sometimes helpful; and Galen, the great physician who served Marcus Aurelius, mentions in one or two places episodes in the life of Marcus or his family.

Later historians are flimsy. Ammianus Marcellinus began his History with the accession of Nerva, but his account of the late first, second and third centuries is totally lost, and only in occasional flashbacks does he provide information of any value to the study of Marcus Aurelius. The other 'historians' of the fourth century and after are no better than terse chroniclers, often confused and ignorant. Some Christian writers from the second century onwards throw light on the course of events, but their prime interest was naturally the history of the Christian Church and the vicissitudes of individual Christians. The legal sources are in a separate category. Roman jurisprudence was reaching its apogee during Marcus' lifetime, and the compilations of law of the late empire preserve a large number of decisions made by him which illuminate his personality and are informative on social conditions of the age.

Finally there is the evidence of coins, inscriptions and papyri, and of archaeology (including the historical reliefs). Coins can provide a chronological framework, and they can also reveal imperial policy: they certainly expressed in their legends and design imperial attitudes. Inscriptions too are vital for dating purposes. They also reveal the entire careers of individuals otherwise entirely or almost entirely unknown but who played an important historical role. This was a by-product of the Roman love of self-advertisement. Archaeology rarely reveals facts which alter the historical picture at one stroke, but the collation of the results of excavations scattered throughout the empire can and does produce significant changes of outlook. The historical reliefs, notably those on the column of Marcus Aurelius, are tantalizing, as it seems to be impossible to understand the details which they show and to construct a valid narrative history from them. But they do help in our understanding of Marcus and his age by their graphic portrayal of the emperor and his army on campaign.[23]

Thus the sources for the life and reign of Marcus Aurelius are varied and incomplete. But whatever the loopholes in the history of the period, the personality of Marcus himself comes to life more vividly perhaps than that of any other single emperor.

• 2 •

FAMILY AND EARLY YEARS

THE *gens Annia,* INTO WHICH Marcus was born, was not particularly celebrated in the annals of Rome. It had produced two consuls in the second century BC; but the only Annius to have achieved fame – or notoriety – was Milo, the unscrupulous politician whose use of violence helped to destroy the free republic. In fact, Annii were widespread, in the provinces as well as in Italy, and Marcus' family, when it first emerges in the mid-first century AD, was settled in the southern Spanish province of Baetica. Their home was the small town of Ucubi, a few miles south-east of Córdoba. The earliest record of an Annius in this region derives from the period of the civil war between Caesar and the Pompeians. A man called Annius Scapula, 'of the highest rank and influence in the province', was involved in a plot to murder Caesar's governor, the hated Q. Cassius Longinus, and was put to death. About a century later Marcus' greatgrandfather, Annius Verus, became a senator. During the reigns of Claudius and Nero the colonial élites of the west, especially from the provinces of Baetica, Tarraconensis and Narbonensis, began to achieve prominence. The influence of Seneca, a native of Córdoba, and Burrus, from Vaison, undoubtedly assisted in their rise. The first Annius Verus may have been a beneficiary. He may be assumed to have been a wealthy man; and the likely source of his wealth would be olive oil. In the Augustan History he is said to have been 'made a praetorian senator', that is, to have been given the rank of ex-praetor. Presumably this was a reward for services rendered in the civil war of 68–70. The second Annius Verus, grandfather of Marcus, was made a patrician by Vespasian and Titus in their censorship, 73–74. Both promotions may have come at the same time.[1]

It was the start of an extraordinary career, yet most of it is hidden from view. The fact remains that Marcus' year of birth, 121, was to be known in Roman records as the year when his grandfather was consul for the second time. The young neo-patrician had married well, into a family of considerable standing. His bride was Rupilia Faustina, daughter of Libo Rupilius Frugi. No other Rupilii of this period are known, but the names Libo and Frugi must mean that he was a descendant of

Crassus Frugi the consul of 27 and his wife Scribonia, and through them of Pompey, the Calpurnii Pisones, and other houses of the republican nobility. His daughter's name Faustina may even indicate descent from the dictator Sulla. Libo Frugi's wife, the mother of Rupilia Faustina, was no doubt also a woman of standing. Her name is unknown, but it has been conjectured that she was Matidia, mother, by another husband, of the empress Vibia Sabina. If Annius Verus had shared a mother-in-law with Hadrian, this might help to explain his great influence. Matidia died in 119, and the surviving portions of Hadrian's funerary address reveal that he was greatly attached to her.[2]

How Annius Verus had occupied himself under Domitian is unknown. He emerges in the troubled year 97, when an unusually large number of carefully selected persons held office as consul. Annius Verus, now presumably in his early thirties, was of the company. His colleague was the jurist L. Neratius Priscus, from a south Italian family newly prominent under the Flavians. Their tenure of office was remarkable for one item only, a decree of the senate forbidding the castration of slaves. Also consul in 97 was one Arrius Antoninus, holding office for the second time with, as his colleague, L. Vibius Sabinus, the husband of Trajan's niece Matidia. Antoninus had been consul for the first time in another troubled year, 69, the year of the four emperors. He would not congratulate his friend Nerva, when the latter was made emperor in September 96: he congratulated the senate, the people, the provinces, but not the man unlucky enough to be chosen emperor. The younger Pliny was a friend and admirer of this cultivated person, whose grandson was the future emperor Antoninus Pius.[3]

Annius Verus and Rupilia Faustina had three children, two sons, Verus and Libo, and a daughter, Annia Galeria Faustina. The elder son married Domitia Lucilla, daughter of another patrician, P. Calvisius Tullus Ruso, and of the elder Domitia Lucilla. Lucilla the elder had inherited an enormous fortune, the wealth mainly of her maternal grandfather, Curtilius Mancia, and of her paternal grandfather by adoption, the orator Cn. Domitius Afer. The inheritance is described at length in one of Pliny's letters.

The circumstances were that Curtilius Mancia (consul in 55, at the beginning of the reign of Nero) had taken a violent dislike to his son-in-law, Domitius Lucanus. In his will he left Lucilla his fortune, but only on condition that she was released from paternal control – he did not want Lucanus to touch a penny of it. Lucanus complied. But the girl was at once adopted by Lucanus' brother, Tullus. The brothers held their possessions in common, 'and thus the purpose of the will was defeated', Pliny explained. He adds interesting details about the two Domitii brothers, prominent members of the new aristocracy. They had been adopted themselves by Domitius Afer, who had taken steps to ruin their real father, Curvius. The occasion for Pliny's letter was the death of Tullus; 'crippled and deformed in every limb he could only

enjoy his wealth by looking at it, and he could not even turn round in his bed without help. He even – a squalid and miserable detail – had to have his teeth cleaned and brushed for him.' The immense wealth of this decrepit old man had attracted a host of fortune-hunters. As it turned out, 'in death he showed up better than in life', for his family were the principal beneficiaries after all, the main heiress being his adopted daughter Lucilla. Pliny supplies a good deal of the complicated and embarassing family history. 'You now have all the city gossip – for all the gossip is about Tullus.'[4]

It seems that the dispositions of this famous will were inscribed on an imposing marble monument on the Appian Way. The testator, who had drawn up his will in the summer of the year 108, is not named on the portions of the inscription that still survive. From the mention, apparently, of his family, he was assumed to have been called 'Dasumius'. The discovery of a new fragment, and further study, showed that, while a lady called Dasumia Polla was one of the beneficiaries, she was not the testator's daughter, listed as first of four main inheritors. Dasumia may be the widow of Tullus. Lacking a son, the testator asked that 'his very special friend' should bear his name. This man, the second inheritor to be mentioned, may be identified as Lucilla's husband, Tullus' son-in-law, henceforward known as P. Calvisius *Tullus* Ruso. Another close friend mentioned in the document is Julius Servianus, brother-in-law of Hadrian. Servianus was to superintend the funeral, and his freedmen were to carry the bier.

Old Tullus' connections with the Dasumii may explain his instruction that a monument be erected at Córdoba. Half-a-dozen members of this family are recorded in Baetica, at Córdoba itself, at Seville, and nearby Ilipa, and at Cadiz. Marcus himself must have had Dasumii in his ancestry, since the biographer reports the legend that he was descended from 'the Sallentine king Malemmius, son of *Dasummus*, who founded Lupiae'. This is the kind of fictitious origin which Romans loved to concoct on the basis of some family name. Furthermore, Hadrian too had links with the Dasumii: a man called L. Dasumius Hadrianus, suffect consul in 93, may be assumed to have been his cousin. These links help to explain the important role in the testament of Julius Servianus, husband of Hadrian's sister. But, above all, Pliny's letter and the great inscription combine to explain the social eminence and vast wealth of the maternal grandmother of Marcus, the elder Domitia Lucilla.[5]

Lucilla had other children besides the daughter with her own name. But it was the younger Lucilla who acquired much of her fortune, including vast brickworks on the outskirts of Rome. This source of wealth had been founded by Domitius Afer, and since there had been an almost continuous building boom at Rome since the great fire under Nero, it is easy to understand how the family's wealth had increased.[6]

The younger Lucilla and her husband Verus had two children, Marcus, born in 121, and his younger sister, Annia Cornificia Faustina, born probably within the next two years. Marcus' father died young, during his praetorship. As a patrician he should have become consul at thirty-two, the minimum age, two years after his praetorship. His younger brother Annius Libo was consul in 128 and can hardly have been praetor later than 126. Verus must have been praetor earlier than this and 124 is the likeliest year of his death. Thus Marcus can scarcely have known his father, but he was later to say of him: 'From my father's reputation and from my memory of him [I learned] modesty and manliness.' Similar qualities were in fact ascribed to Marcus by the biographer. Lucilla was faithful to her husband's memory and did not remarry. The younger Verus, had he lived, would have been assured of achieving a distinguished place in Roman public life.[7]

In the year 126 Marcus' grandfather Verus was consul again, for the third time, an enormous mark of honour, for Hadrian himself did not hold the office more than three times. Verus was the first man given such a distinction by Hadrian. Yet there were others who had held their second consulship earlier than Verus. One was Catilius Severus, who had held it the year before him. But the emperor's brother-in-law Julius Servianus had been consul for the second time as early as the year 102. Now the well-connected Verus had overtaken him. A curious poem is preserved on an inscription, in which a man called Ursus describes himself as the leading player in 'the glass ball game'. But he concludes by confessing that 'I myself was beaten by the thrice consul Verus, my patron, not once but often'. It was originally supposed that this Ursus was a professional sportsman. But the ingenious explanation has been advanced that the ball-player is none other than Julius Servianus – who had taken the name Ursus many years before. Better still, 'the glass ball game' – otherwise unknown, and, it must be said, implausible as a vigorous sport, although it might conceivably describe a game like marbles – is interpreted as a joking way of referring to the game of politics.[8]

The reasons for the political success of Annius Verus must remain obscure. Neither the prestige of his wife Rupilia Faustina's ancestry, nor the links of his daughter-in-law Lucilla with the Dasumii, seem sufficient. Perhaps the Annii Veri too had some kinship with the Aelii. Cassius Dio evidently believed that Hadrian favoured Marcus because of his 'kinship'. Later he states that Marcus 'while still a boy so pleased all his many powerful and wealthy relations that they all loved him', and that 'Hadrian adopted him chiefly for this reason'.[9]

Marcus was brought up as a boy in his parents' house on the Caelian, one of the seven hills of Rome, which he was later to call, with affection, 'my Caelian'. Under the empire the Caelian was the fashionable district of Rome for the leading families. It had few public buildings, but many splendid aristocratic mansions, of which the most imposing was the Lateran Palace, once the possession, by confiscation, of

Nero, and thenceforward imperial property, on the site where the Basilica of San Giovanni Laterano now stands. In Roman times it was next to the barracks of the Imperial Horse Guards, the *equites singulares.* Also next to the Lateran was the palace of Marcus' grandfather, where Marcus spent much of his childhood. The Caelian was on the southern edge of Rome. From it, to the north, one could look across to the Circus Maximus, to the Palatine with its imperial palaces, the Forum, the Colosseum and the Baths of Trajan. In the foreground was the massive temple of the Divine Claudius, and, straddling the area between the Lateran and the heart of Rome, the great aqueduct which brought the *Aqua Claudia* and part of the *Aqua Marcia* into the city.[10]

If Marcus' parents followed the traditional practice, his father would have had to acknowledge the child as his by lifting him up from the hearth at his feet. On the ninth day after this came the ceremony of purification, at which the child was named. It was then that the *praenomen* Marcus was given him, the only one of his names which he bore for the rest of his life. The child would be given presents at this ceremony, a rattle formed of a string with tinkling objects attached to it *(crepundia)* and an amulet of gold *(bulla),* a charm against the evil eye which he would wear round his neck until he assumed the *toga virilis,* the dress of manhood – in Marcus' case this was to be at the age of 14.[11]

After the birth, Lucilla probably had little to do with her son for some time. The historian Tacitus, who may have been still living when Marcus was born, had written with some bitterness in his *Dialogue on Orators* of the changed habits of the nobility in the upbringing of children: 'In the old days, each Roman child born in wedlock was not brought up in the back-bedroom of some slave-girl nurse, but in its mother's bosom and lap. The mother's especial glory was to keep her house and serve her children. . . . Thus we read how Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi and Aurelia the mother of Julius Caesar were in charge of the upbringing of their sons and brought them up to be leaders. . . . Now the new-born infant is handed over to some little Greek serving-maid, who has the help of some other slave chosen from the rest of the household, usually the most worthless and totally unfitted for an important task. The child's green and untaught mind is filled with their stories and mistakes. No one in the whole household thinks it of any importance what is said and done in the presence of the young master.'[12]

It is recorded that Marcus was in the care of 'nurses'. This would certainly have included, at first, a wet-nurse, who would have the duty of feeding the new-born child. This impression is confirmed by a mention of his nurse in the *Meditations:* 'I follow the way of nature until I lie down and rest, breathing my last breath in the air from which I now breathe, lying down on the earth from which may father drew his vital seed, my mother her blood and my nurse her milk.' The fact that the nurses were usually Greek was no accident. It was essential for an educated Roman to master

Greek, and if the child's nurse spoke Greek, this would be a great help – although there was a slight danger that the child would then speak Latin with a foreign accent.[13]

Not everyone approved of the practice of using wet-nurses, but it was deep-rooted. Aulus Gellius records how he accompanied the philosopher Favorinus to visit one of the latter's pupils, a senator of noble family. The wife had just had a son, and Favorinus wished to bring his congratulations: 'When he had been told how long the birth had taken, and how difficult the labour had been, and that the girl, worn out with her efforts and lack of sleep was now sleeping, he began to talk at some length. "No doubt," he said, "she will feed her son with her own milk?" But the girl's mother said that she had to be spared this, and that wet-nurses had to be provided, so that the tiring and difficult task of breast-feeding need not be added to the pains which she had suffered in labour.' This produced an outburst from Favorinus – '"Do you think that nature provided women with nipples as a kind of beauty-spot",' and so on, for some time. The arguments he used were a little fallacious, for he claimed that '"if she whom you provide to give milk is a slave or of servile background, and, as usually happens, of foreign and barbarous origin, if she is dishonest, ugly, immodest, a drunkard,"' some of her unfortunate qualities would be transferred to the child she fed, through her milk. Modern authorities might agree in principle, although the effect that they would postulate would be psychological rather than physiological. Favorinus, a Hellenized Gaul from Arles, said credibly to have been a hermaphrodite, was a philosopher prominent in the reign of Hadrian and the early part of the reign of Antoninus Pius. He was an intimate of the same circles as the family and friends of Marcus, and the young mother whose conduct occasioned his outburst could well have been Domitia Lucilla. Aulus Gellius gives no names.[14]

At his father's death Marcus was adopted by his grandfather Verus. But in his early years another man played an important role in supervising his upbringing – L. Catilius Severus. Indeed, Marcus bore the names 'Catilius Severus' for some years in addition to his original 'Marcus Annius Verus'. Severus is described as his 'maternal great-grandfather'. It looks as if he had married the widow of old Domitius Tullus, thus becoming the stepfather of the elder Lucilla. Such an alliance would have been valuable to Catilius Severus, a talented man, but with no other known ties to the aristocracy old or new. He was evidently from an Italian family settled in Bithynia. After a slow start to his career he achieved prominence late in Trajan's reign, and had been a key supporter of Hadrian at his stormy accession, when Catilius was commanding one of the eastern armies.[15]

Not much is known about Marcus' uncle Annius Libo, except that he was consul in 128, as junior colleague to one of the old aristocracy. He had a son, also named Libo, who was probably born in about 130, and a daughter named Annia Fundania Faustina. The daughter's second name is a valuable clue to the identity of Libo's