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MARCUS AURELIUS
MEDITATIONS

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The Meditations *of* *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*

Translated by the late

A. S. L. FARQUHARSON

AND A

Selection from the Letters of Marcus and Fronto

Translated by R. B. RUTHERFORD

With Introduction and Notes by

R. B. RUTHERFORD

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INTRODUCTION

'What but the consciousness of duty could induce the aged philosopher to march hour after hour among the forests and swamps of the almost uncivilized Danubian lands?' These admiring words from the greatest ancient historian of the past century[1] capture at least some of the fascination of Marcus Aurelius' career for the modern student. Here if ever in the early empire we meet a philosopher on the throne; a man who took the task of ruling seriously, who tirelessly sacrificed his own comfort and leisure to administration and, for many years of his reign, to unproductive and exhausting defensive campaigns.

The work we call the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius was composed at least partly during the German campaigns, which dominated the last years of Marcus' life. Since he more than once refers to his 'old age' in these pages, and since he was only 59 when he died, it is probably safe to assign the work to his last decade, the 170s AD. But the reader who opens this book with the expectation of finding out what Marcus thought about Roman methods of warfare, about German battlefields, about imperial defence strategy or the structure of the high command, will be disappointed on all counts. The *Meditations* are both more and less revealing than, for instance, the self-exonerating account Julius Caesar wrote of his Gallic campaigns, or the journals of a modern general or statesman writing with an eye on posterity. More revealing, because Marcus was writing for himself, and seems to have had no thought of making his reflections available to a wider audience in his own lifetime or thereafter. Less revealing, because for the most part he rigidly excludes the details of contemporary events, the incidents of politics and warfare, things which must have been in his mind but which were not appropriate to the pages of his philosophic

[1] M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1957), 108.

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journal. A modern reader will want to know, then, what kind of work this is, and what can in fact be learned or deduced from it about the author's beliefs and experiences.

The title *Meditations* is not of ancient origin. Quite probably the work had no title in the author's own mind, any more than it had a fixed shape, length, or plan. We may reasonably guess that it was a sort of cross between a diary and a commonplace-book. At the end of the day, the emperor would record a few reflections and admonish himself to observe certain precepts and ethical rules which he might have neglected in the course of the day. We know that this practice was common among philosophically trained, well-educated men of the early Roman empire: it is in fact recommended by the Stoic teacher Epictetus, whose works were familiar to Marcus.[2] At times the emperor would copy out a few quotations, in poetry or prose, usually of moral import (esp. vii. 38–42, xi. 30–2, 34, 36–9). At other times he would formulate his own versions, often laconic or epigrammatic, of philosophic sentiments. Only occasionally does his writing become more expansive, his style more ambitious; perhaps only occasionally did he have time and enthusiasm enough to develop a topic at greater length, and try his hand at a piece of sustained argument or exposition. For the most part, his thoughts are brief and fragmentary, as though he wrote only three or four lines at a time.

In our modern editions, and in this translation, the work is divided into twelve 'books', and each book into numbered 'chapters'. But this is a purely modern device, intended to make clear to the reader where one reflection ends and another begins. Nor does 'chapter' seem quite the right word for what may in some cases be an epigram only six words long. Comparison with Pascal's *Pensées* or La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* may give a clearer picture of how the work may be read, though both analogies are imprecise. At any rate, it is unlikely that Marcus thought of himself as writing in books and chapters (the obscure

[2] Compare Horace, *Satires* I. iv. 133–9, Seneca, *On anger* iii. 36, Epictetus II. xviii. 12 ff., III. v. 11, IV. iv. 7, IV. vi. 32.

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headings which precede books ii and iii in the manuscripts may only indicate use of a new roll or change of location); but the division is traditional and makes precise reference to a particular 'thought' more straightforward. What does need emphasis, however, is that the individual books (apart from book i, of which more below) have no unity or specific theme; we are not dealing with a work such as Lucretius' *On the Nature of the Universe* or Pliny's *Natural History*, ordered treatises in which a particular topic is discussed in a particular book. The arrangement of the *Meditations* seems almost entirely random: it may follow the order of composition, but this is impossible to prove and probably does not matter very much. On the other hand, Marcus does tend to return again and again to certain favourite themes, and cross-reference from one passage to another can help us understand his views on a given point more clearly. In the notes to this translation I have tried to give some help in this process of cross-reference.

Marcus was a Roman emperor, and readers are often surprised to learn that he wrote the *Meditations* entirely in Greek. Surely at the end of a long day the effort of translating his thoughts into a foreign tongue must have been thoroughly unwelcome? In fact there are a number of factors which make this choice of language less freakish than it seems at first sight. For one thing, Roman intellectuals were educated from an early age in Greek, and often acquired considerable fluency. Cicero peppers his private letters with Greek phrases, and Marcus and Fronto exchange Greek dialogues and letters in the emperor's youth. The older, richer Greek tongue had something of the sophisticated *cachet* at Rome that French possessed in the European capitals during the eighteenth century. Secondly, a ruler and overseer of diplomatic business in the Empire such as Marcus would be constantly dealing with Greek speakers—ambassadors, orators, grandees visiting the imperial court. Greek, far more than Latin, was the *lingua franca*, the *koine* or 'common tongue', of the Mediterranean. Thirdly and most important, Marcus was writing about philosophic subjects, and Greek was the language of philosophy. Stoicism, the doctrines of which permeate the *Meditations*, was

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a Greek school of thought, and most of the philosophers worth reading had written in Greek, including the Stoic Epictetus. Although important work had been done, above all by Cicero, towards the creation of a Latin philosophic vocabulary, many of the technical terms still could not be rendered into Latin with any degree of ease or naturalness.[3] Even Roman philosophic writers often wrote in Greek: a distinguished example is Brutus, the assassin of Julius Caesar. Marcus' choice, therefore, is not so surprising, and although his style may sometimes seem awkward and inelegant, it is certainly not incoherent or ungrammatical.

We may next consider the principles of Stoicism, which so preoccupied Marcus. Only a brief and highly simplified account can be given here.[4] For the Stoics, man was above all else a reasoning animal, and this rationality was the divine spark that elevated him above the beasts. Reason could and should control and discipline the unruly passions; to 'live according to nature', a regular formulation of the Stoic ideal, meant for them not self-indulgence or bestiality, but life according to *reason*. Reason taught man to live a life of virtue, to behave justly, sociably, unselfishly, truthfully. Virtue was its own reward, and was unaffected by external conditions; the virtuous and wise man would be happy and self-sufficient, even if mocked, humiliated, and mistreated by the deluded and ignorant mob. External 'goods' such as wealth, reputation, high office, and even good health, though highly valued by popular opinion, were of no moral value (but the Stoics admitted that they were preferable to their opposites). Stoicism was a stern philosophy, normally allowing no place to ideas such as rewards for the virtuous in the after-life. Most Stoics held that the soul survived the dissolution of the body, but was then resolved into the elements of its being and reunited with the substance of the universe—immortality of

[3] For a very full and helpful account of these questions see Jorma Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language* (Helsinki, 1979). The Prefaces to Cicero's philosophic works are revealing documents, though tinged with a self-defensive attitude to Latin. Lucretius complains of the *patrii sermonis egestas* ('the poverty of our native tongue'), *On the Nature of the Universe*, i. 832.

[4] Works cited in the Bibliography by Sandbach, Long, and Long and Sedley give fuller details on the doctrines and adherents of Stoicism.

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a kind, but with little or no place for personal awareness of continuing existence. As for theology, the Stoics would at once agree that the universe was divine and controlled by divine providence; but they saw this providence not as a benign and watchful deity observing his creation with just or merciful concern, but as a much more impersonal and mechanistic process. God was not transcendent, outside his creation, but immanent in it: Stoicism was ruthlessly materialist. Even the Universe would finally be dissolved in a great conflagration, after which it would eventually be renewed—according to some, taking exactly the form it had had before, with the world and everything in it following exactly the same motions.

With external goods, even others' good opinion, dismissed from consideration, and with no hope of an immortal afterlife, overwhelming importance must be attached to the individual's moral choice. All Stoic writers dwell with special emphasis on the need to train one's responses, so as to respond willingly and correctly, spurning easier but more degenerate impulses. Not everybody could achieve the goal of wisdom, and become a *sapiens* or 'wise man' (an ideal state which many doubted whether anyone in history had ever reached!), but from the second century BC onwards, much attention was paid to the needs of the *proficiens*, the man who is 'making progress' towards virtue. That progress would be a perpetual struggle, a battle within the soul. 'Life is a kind of military service', as the Stoic Seneca put it (*Letters*, xcvi. 5), a war against the rebellious passions and also a defensive campaign to repel external distractions and temptations. In Seneca's letters to the aspiring philosopher Lucilius, we see one Stoic helping another to fight his way towards a virtuous way of life. In Marcus' *Meditations*, the author is reproving, exhorting, criticizing *himself*: he is disturbed if he has fallen short, he warns himself to prepare for the challenges which the next day may bring, and he sets his own trivial activities or concerns in the vaster context of the passing of generations, even the decay and disintegration of the world itself. In his nightly journal the Stoic emperor strives to break free from more petty, everyday anxieties and to turn his mind to eternity.

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If this reading of the *Meditations* is correct, then there is no question of the work setting out a systematic body of doctrine, or even a looser series of principles and precepts (such as we find in Epictetus' *Handbook* or *Manual*). The purpose of Marcus' book is much more therapeutic. The author repeatedly returns to certain topics of particular relevance to his own moral difficulties, but he is not trying to preach to all men. In some passages he makes explicit the moral defect which he needs to combat. In iv. 49 he writes: 'in every event which leads you to sorrow, remember to use this principle . . .'; in x. 34 a quotation from the *Iliad* 'is reminder enough to dispel sorrow and fear'; in xi. 18 he sets out ten prescriptions against anger, which was a central topic in ancient moralistic writing. The soul, he writes elsewhere, is 'dyed' to match the character of its inner thoughts: 'dye it, then, in a succession of imaginations like these . . .' (v. 16); and similarly in iii. 4 he longs to be 'dyed with justice to the core'.

A particularly suggestive passage is iii. 13. 'As doctors have their instruments and scalpels always at hand to meet sudden demands for treatment, so do you have your doctrines ready in order to recognize the divine and human, and so to do everything . . . mindful of the bond which unites the divine and human.' The medical analogy for philosophy, the art which can heal and cure the sicknesses of the soul, is traditional, but this and other passages make clear that Marcus sees his writing as self-therapy. So also in v. 9: 'don't return to Philosophy as to a schoolmaster, but as a man with sore eyes to the sponge and salve, as another to a poultice, another to a fomentation'. The simple and fundamental truths which philosophy provides 'will suffice at once by their presence to wash away all sorrow, and to send you back without repugnance to the life to which you return' (iv. 3).

What topics, then, may the reader expect to find as he or she reads the *Meditations*? Apart from the occasional rash of quotations, there are passages in which the author urges himself to do his duty and to perform social and unselfish acts; passages in which he bitterly rebukes himself for failure to do so, or for paying too much attention to what other people expect or think of him; and passages in which he sourly comments on the

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behaviour of others, who fall short of philosophic virtue—though he never identifies or criticizes them individually. There is contemplation of the physical workings of the universe, reflection on the transience of human life, meditation on the prospect of death. There are also some more intriguing passages in which he alludes to his own rank, to the life of the court, and to the relation between philosophy and power. Thus from viii. 9 ('let no one any longer hear you finding fault with your life in a palace; nay, do not even hear yourself') we may reasonably deduce that the emperor was not always wholly content with his imperial role; and chapters such as ix. 29, x. 27, and x. 36 suggest impatience with some of the flattery and hypocrisy that inevitably surrounded even a good emperor. In xi. 7 he writes that 'no other calling in life is so fitted for the practice of philosophy as this in which you now find yourself'—a view strikingly at variance with that held by many Romans, who felt that philosophy with its idealism and impractical speculations actually unfitted a man for the realities of public life. But elsewhere he seems to take a more pessimistic view himself: his calling may conflict with his philosophic pursuits (vi. 12, viii. 1); he has no time to read and study as he would wish (iii. 3, iii. 14, viii. 8); he refers to regular longings for withdrawal to a country retreat (iv. 3); in his gloomier moods he can question whether even a good man and a philosopher can change men's opinions (ix. 29). There is, of course, no need to reconcile these conflicting attitudes: we can expect the *Meditations*, probably compiled over a period of some years, to reflect the author's shifting moods. But since Marcus never gives the date and circumstances of an entry, it is fruitless to attempt to relate these moods to the changing course of a campaign or to specific political events.

The reader seeking biographical details can derive more information from book i, which has a rather different character from the rest of the collection. Although also composed in Greek and clearly by the same author, it has a more coherent shape and may well have been planned as a unity. Here the emperor goes through a list of his closer relatives and a number of his teachers, recording what he owes to each—in some cases a specific lesson, the loan of a book or an aspect of his upbringing, but more often

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a general moral example. The book is arranged in approximately chronological order (grandfather, father, mother, etc.) and culminates in the two longest and most important entries, in which Marcus recounts what he owes to Antoninus Pius (his predecessor as emperor) and to the gods (i. 16 and 17). But even in these longer chapters there is no rational order to what he records: he seems to be writing things down almost as they come into his head, and some references are completely opaque to us (e.g. in i. 16 'the way he treated the tax-collector who apologized at Tusculum . . .'). But the first book as a whole, just because it is so private and intimate a document, gives us unique access to the mind of an ancient ruler, and there is much to be learned from it about Marcus' attitude and principles. There are even some tantalizing details about his sexual life and his religious experiences: the latter were obviously of importance to him, though the references are frustratingly obscure.

In vi. 48, Marcus seems to set out the programme for book i. 'Whenever you desire to cheer yourself [he writes there], think upon the merits of those who are alive with you: the energy of one, for instance, the modesty of another . . . For nothing is so cheering as the images of the virtues shining in the character of contemporaries and meeting so far as possible in a group. Therefore you should keep them ready to your hand.' This chapter clearly shows what value the catalogue that we call book i must have had for Marcus, and it is probably no accident that a nearby chapter (vi. 30) looks like a preliminary draft of the fuller portrait of Antoninus Pius in i. 16. Book i, therefore, was probably conceived as a whole, and composed independently of the emperor's regular commonplace-book, though preserved with the rest.

It will by now be clear that there are some questions we might like to ask to which the *Meditations* will not give us the answer. We will not learn from this work what Marcus thought of the revolt of Avidius Cassius, or why he chose his son, the deplorable Commodus, to be his successor. Nor can we learn anything about his day-to-day conduct of the task of ruling, though we can obviously deduce a certain amount from the scrupulousness and

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the sense of duty which we can discern throughout his work. Some things we might expect to find are surprisingly absent: no references to the doubts cast on his wife Faustina's fidelity (perhaps because he took it for granted); and only one rather vague allusion to the Christians (perhaps because at this date they did not seem very important). There is a strong tendency to cut out everyday events and trivial incidents: though individual reflections were no doubt often prompted by a specific encounter or some upsetting development, Marcus does not think it necessary to dwell on the events of the day, and outside book i we cannot trace his views on particular contemporaries. He preferred to purge his mind of the day's vexations, to take refuge in more general and more absolute concerns. 'You have the power,' he told himself, 'to strip off many superfluities which trouble you and are wholly in your own judgement; and you will make a large room at once for yourself by embracing in your thought the whole Universe, grasping ever-continuing Time and pondering the rapid change in the parts of each object, how brief the interval from birth to dissolution, and the time before birth a yawning gulf even as the period after dissolution equally boundless' (ix. 32). The trivia of everyday existence are set in a majestic though melancholy perspective.

But if we cannot use the *Meditations* to fill the many gaps in our narrative of Marcus' reign and campaigns, that does not mean that the work's historical value is negligible. In general terms, if not in particular, we can see what kind of monarch Marcus wished to be, for he paints a full and vivid picture of Antoninus Pius, and tells himself to be in all things his pupil. He thanks the gods 'that though I was often angry with Rusticus I never went to extremes for which I should have been sorry' (i. 17), and he frequently insists on the need for self-restraint and patience in dealing with his associates (iv. 28, vii. 62, etc.); from his own words we can deduce that he often found it hard to restrain his temper, and hence that the many references to anger in the *Meditations* are not merely conventional. Again, he quite frequently mentions the emperors who ruled before himself, and although some of his verdicts are unsurprising (as when he con-

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demns Nero in iii. 16), it is striking that he never refers to the more virtuous emperors as divine (see iv. 32; 33; viii. 5, 'in a little while you will be no one and nowhere, even as Hadrian and Augustus are no more'). In his own lifetime Marcus paid little regard to the imperial cult, and through the *Meditations* we can see that this reflected his own sombre convictions: Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus all died at the appointed time, and so will he.

More broadly, the *Meditations* show more clearly than almost any ancient text how important a role philosophy might play in the life of an educated man. Marcus turns naturally to Stoicism as a way of imposing meaning on the chaos of his daily concerns, as a solid structure of truths which provide some stability and consolation in a troubled life. Human beings have been placed in this world with certain duties and obligations; philosophy makes these explicit and excludes the possibility of complaint or resentment. To understand the workings of divine law, or the physical processes of Universal nature, is to become reconciled to one's own place in the ordered structure of human society and the larger order of the cosmos. Ancient thinkers would have felt no sense that some of these questions were more the province of religion than of philosophy: questions of religion and of the relation of man to god had been part of philosophic enquiry from the beginning. The intellectual classes of the Roman republic and early empire had long been conscious of what the Greek schools had to offer, and for many of them philosophy was an important part of their personal and moral lives, a source of inspiration and comfort, and a means of articulating their moral dilemmas. Although not all Romans would have accepted this further point, the Stoics insisted that philosophy was in the full sense a way of life, not something to be treated as a hobby or a purely academic discipline. Marcus agreed: 'put an end once and for all to discussion of what a good man ought to be, and *be* one' (x. 16).

So far we have considered the nature and purpose of the *Meditations*, and some of the historical and biographical interest that the work possesses. In conclusion, something needs to be said about the work's *literary* status, about the qualities which

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make it a classic. Many readers have been intrigued by Marcus' book for reasons related to the points made above: it brings us closer to an unusual figure, a ruler of the Roman empire, and it shows something of the difficulty of combining philosophy and supreme power. These are good and legitimate reasons for reading the *Meditations*, but they do not exhaust their appeal. The fascination of the work lies above all in the language and thought of the author. Marcus' *pensées* are varied and uneven in scale and quality: at one time he may write ten-word aphorisms and biting reflections on human weakness; at another, more extended, elegiac passages on mortality and the limits of human achievement. Vivid epigram and severe eloquence may be juxtaposed within a few pages. The imagery and metaphorical language in which Marcus describes the passage of time or the workings of nature can take the reader aback—on one page we meet wonder and delight at nature's inventiveness or her generosity (iii. 2, x. 26), on another revulsion from the sordid vileness of the material world (iv. 32, viii. 24, ix. 14). Though he is not usually the originator of the images he employs, he often gives them classic expression: the world as a stage (xii. 36, with n.), the virtuous soul as a spring of pure water (viii. 51), the anti-social man as a branch severed from a tree (xi. 8, cf. viii. 34). And some conceptions seem particularly his own: other authors in antiquity wrote of the vastness of the universe, but none expresses so regularly and with such power the claustrophobic sense of man's life as a tiny pinpoint in time, planted on a minute dot in an infinite universe prolonged through eternity (vi. 36, vii. 48–9, viii. 21, etc.).

The essentially pessimistic tone of the *Meditations* makes the work congenial to many contemplative or reflective spirits: it shares something of the gloomy eloquence of that bleakest of all religious texts, the book of Ecclesiastes. But Marcus' writing, while often despondent, is almost never despairing: man has a purpose in the Universe, and he is equipped to fulfil that purpose, if he only has the will to do so. Indeed, in his more positive moods, the language of Marcus' religious devotion and self-surrender seems warmer and more passionate than Stoic

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metaphysics might seem to justify (esp. iv. 23, v. 4).[5] Above all, however, it is the author's fierce moral commitment that can still seem admirable and impressive even to a reader who does not care about Stoic doctrine and may even be repelled by it. 'Suppose the gods take counsel about none of our concerns, I am able to take counsel about myself' (vi. 44). If we accept, however tentatively and unfashionably, that literature can be relevant to life and that readers can learn from and be inspired by the writings of the past, then Marcus Aurelius, whose clear insight into human failings, not least his own, led him not to cynical inertia but to increased resolve, may still have something to teach us today.

[5] Though for the religious note in traditional Stoicism see especially Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim (Stuttgart, 1903–24) i. 527), especially lines 32 ff. It is translated in *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation*, ed. T. F. Higham and C. M. Bowra (Oxford, 1938), 533–7, and in part in Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, i (Cambridge, 1987), 326–7.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Marcus Aurelius, born at Rome in AD 121 as Marcus Annius Verus, was of Spanish extraction, son of an ex-consul who was also brother-in-law of Antoninus Pius. He lost his father in early childhood (cf. *Meditations*, i. 2), but was soon favoured with the patronage of the emperor Hadrian, who had assumed the throne in 117. Hadrian gave him the nickname Verissimus ('most truthful' or 'most sincere of men'), and in 136 betrothed him to the daughter of L. Ceionius Commodus, consul of that year, Hadrian's proposed successor. Ceionius died in 138, whereupon Hadrian turned to the sober and trustworthy Antoninus Pius, adopting him and requiring him to adopt both Marcus and Ceionius' son Lucius Verus.

Pius' reign was untroubled, and he governed responsibly and well from 138 to 161, a period of prosperity, senatorial freedom, and relative peace on the frontiers. Meanwhile, Marcus was educated by the most eminent rhetorical and philosophical teachers of his day, and at an early age began to serve under Pius. He was quaestor in 139, consul together with Pius in 140, consul for the second time in 145, and received the tribunician power and proconsular *imperium* (traditional marks of the prospective heir) in 146. In 145 he married Pius' daughter Faustina, and a daughter was born in the following year. Marcus was clearly senior to Lucius Verus (consul only in 154), but upon his accession insisted that they should reign as colleagues, Verus' powers and titles being immediately augmented. Verus' reputation has suffered from much gossip reported in the unreliable *Historia Augusta*, which paints him as a playboy; yet his ties with Marcus were close, and he seems to have been a satisfactory administrator and an adequate general. Verus died in 169.

Marcus himself reigned from 161 to 180. Frontier problems and indeed invasions occupied his attention for many of those twenty years. Britain, Parthia, and especially the many tribes of

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the German provinces and the free Germans north of the Danube all caused recurrent problems, and Marcus campaigned himself in North Italy and Germany in 168, 170–5 (against the Marcomanni, the Quadi, and the Sarmatii), and again in Pannonia and Germany from 177 until his death by illness, on campaign near Vienna, in March 180. In 175 he was also hampered by civil disorder in the empire, following the revolt of Avidius Cassius, governor of Egypt and Syria. Avidius claimed that news had reached him of the emperor's death, and the full extent of his guilt remains doubtful. Scandal implicated Faustina, the emperor's wife, as Avidius' lover and fellow-conspirator. The rebellion failed and Avidius was murdered by a centurion; the historian Dio Cassius presents Marcus' reaction to the revolt as one of pity, sorrow, and readiness to forgive. Modern readers have sometimes attempted to find references to this affair, and to Faustina's supposed infidelities, in the *Meditations*. All such enquiries remain speculative, however intriguing. Of Faustina, as of Verus, he says nothing but good in book i.

Another disaster of Marcus' reign was the plague of 166–7 and later, apparently brought back from Parthia by Verus' armies. It is not clear how far this affected the population. Meanwhile, wars and generous donations of largesse diminished the treasury's resources dangerously. Bureaucracy and busy officialdom flourished, but no strong threads of long-term policy can be readily discerned. Nevertheless, Marcus' lifetime was soon idealized as a Golden Age, partly because of the violent contrast provided by the disastrous reign of his son Commodus (born 161, reigned 180–92), who was eventually assassinated and execrated as a tyrant.

In retrospect, Marcus' reign also arouses interest in modern readers because of the continuing growth of Christianity (already familiar and persecuted in the time of Nero, and judiciously controlled by Trajan). The emperor must have known of the existence of the cult, but it may still have seemed of little importance at this early date. In the *Meditations* he mentions its adherents by name only once, with disapproval (xi. 3, in a phrase which has been doubted as possibly a later gloss); his teacher

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Fronto denounced them with the ignorant clichés of polemic; and two episodes of persecution occurred under Marcus' authority and presumably with his knowledge: the martyrdom of the apologist Justin (AD 167?), after a trial conducted by Marcus' close friend Rusticus, and the executions at Lyons in response to a public outcry in 177 (though the date has been questioned).

The *Meditations*, unknown to the authors who describe his reign, were probably written in his last decade. As explained in the main Introduction, they offer exceptional access to the mind of a Roman emperor in a period which is, even by ancient standards, very ill-documented. For narrative accounts of Marcus' life and reign we have to turn to an epitomized portion of Dio Cassius' monumental history of Rome, written in Greek between AD 197 and *c.*225, and to a sketchy biography included in the notoriously unreliable *Historia Augusta* (probably compiled in the late fourth century). The most important contemporary evidence for Marcus' life and character outside the *Meditations* is the fragmentary collection of letters between Marcus and his tutor, Cornelius Fronto (see the Appendix to this volume): these are valuable but badly preserved, and often hard to date. The social, political, and economic background can be further illuminated by public monuments and inscriptions, but it is only in a very few cases that we have reason to suppose that such documents bear much relation to Marcus' own views and words.

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FURTHER READING

Texts

C. R. Haines (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard, 1916, with facing translation and useful notes); A. S. L. Farquharson (Oxford, 2 volumes, 1944, with translation and commentary); W. Theiler (Zurich, 1951, with German translation and notes); J. Dalfen (Teubner, Leipzig, 1979, useful for its complete index of words).

Translations

Apart from Haines, Farquharson (used in this volume), and Theiler, the following are worth notice: Meric Casaubon (London, 1634, dedicated to Archbishop Laud; reprinted in Everyman's Library, London, 1906); George Long (London, 1862), singled out for praise by Matthew Arnold in his essay on Marcus; J. Jackson (World's Classics, Oxford, 1906); G. M. A. Grube (Hackett, USA, 1983).

Biography and history

Anthony Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1966; revised edition, Batsford, London, 1987) is the standard biography. E. Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome* (Cambridge Mass., 1980) is important for the emperor's upbringing and for the life of the court.

Three outstanding works on the intellectual and religious background are: E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965); P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1971, with fascinating illustrations); A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford, 1933). Longer and more demanding, but very stimulating, is Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, 1986; Penguin edition, 1988). All of these range well beyond Marcus Aurelius' life and writings; a superb modern article on Marcus himself, which has

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greatly influenced my own approach, is by P. A. Brunt, 'Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 64 (1974), 1–20. My own book *The* Meditations *of Marcus Aurelius: a Study* (Oxford, 1989) is an attempt to combine literary and stylistic criticism of the work with consideration of Marcus' ideas and outlook; whatever its deficiencies, it remains, as far as I know, the only book that does attempt this.

Stoicism

A straightforward guide to the whole history of the school is F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975). More advanced is A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Duckworth, London, 1974), ch. 4. A detailed sourcebook with philosophic commentary on translated passages is now available: A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1987), vol. i, of which pp. 158–437 deal with Stoicism in depth. The second volume of this work contains the Greek and Latin texts of the sources.

For the non-philosopher a much more direct introduction to Roman Stoicism may be had through reading parts of Seneca (especially the *Moral Epistles* and the *On Anger*) and Epictetus (especially the *Handbook* or *Manual*); both these authors are available in the Loeb Classical Library, and there is also a selection from Seneca's *Epistles* in the Penguin Classics, entitled *Seneca: Letters from a Stoic*.

Full details of works cited above are normally not repeated in the notes to the Introduction and Translation.

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

No ancient writer survives in his own original handwriting; in all cases we are dealing with a tradition which transmits the original by one route or many, one stage or many, and in all traditions errors are introduced, either (more commonly) by miscopying, or by deliberate abbreviation, expansion, and 'improvements'. The tradition of the *Meditations* presumably goes back to a single autograph, perhaps preserved by the emperor's family or a faithful secretary. The work seems to have been very little known in later antiquity; the first references to it date from the fourth and the tenth centuries. The lexicon known as the Suda, probably compiled *c.* AD 950, quotes a number of extracts and uses the twelve-book division. But although scholarly interest awakened, it seems that readers were often content with excerpts and selections—not surprisingly, since the author is often repetitive. Knowledge of the *Meditations* was limited until in 1559 Xylander published the first printed edition, using a manuscript (usually called P) which is now lost. Another manuscript of the whole work, known as A, still survives and is to be found in the Vatican; this dates from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Xylander did not know A; the central issue in the textual criticism of Marcus is thus to weigh Xylander (=?P) against the extant A. There are also a number of manuscripts containing extracts only (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries). This slender tradition makes it unlikely in many passages that we can ever certainly restore Marcus' authentic text; the brevity and allusiveness of his language, and the likelihood that he was writing for himself only, compound the problems. But by the labours of generations of scholars much has been done; in particular, study of Epictetus and other philosophic authors has served to elucidate Marcus' thought and often to confirm and correct his text. The reader of Farquharson's translation can feel fairly confident of finding there, if not a faithful reproduction, at least a fair reflection, of the actual words of Marcus Aurelius.

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THE *MEDITATIONS* OF MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS

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BOOK I

1. From* my grandfather Verus:* the lessons of noble character and even temper.

2. From my father's reputation and my memory of him:* modesty and manliness.

3. From my mother:* piety and bountifulness, to keep myself not only from doing evil but even from dwelling on evil thoughts, simplicity too in diet and to be far removed from the ways of the rich.

4. From my mother's grandfather:* not to have attended public schools but enjoyed good teachers at home,* and to have learned the lesson that on things like these it is a duty to spend liberally.

5. From my tutor:* not to become a partisan of the Green jacket or the Blue in the races, nor of Thracian or Samnite gladiators;* to bear pain and be content with little; to work with my own hands, to mind my own business, and to be slow to listen to slander.

6. From Diognetus:* to avoid idle enthusiasms; to disbelieve the professions of sorcerers and impostors about incantations and exorcism of spirits and the like;* not to cock-fight* or to be excited about such sports; to put up with plain-speaking and to become familiar with philosophy; to hear the lectures first of Baccheius, then of Tandasis and Marcian, in boyhood to write essays and to aspire to the camp-bed and skin coverlet and the other things which are part of the Greek training.

7. From Rusticus:* to get an impression of need for reform and treatment of character; not to run off into zeal for rhetoric, writing on speculative themes, discoursing on edifying texts, exhibiting in fanciful colours the ascetic or the philanthropist. To avoid oratory, poetry, and preciosity; not to parade at home in

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ceremonial costume or to do things of that kind; to write letters in the simple style, like his own from Sinuessa to my mother. To be easily recalled to myself* and easily reconciled with those who provoke and offend, as soon as they are willing to meet me. To read books accurately and not be satisfied with superficial thinking about things or agree hurriedly with those who talk round a subject. To have made the acquaintance of the *Discourses* of Epictetus,* of which he allowed me to share a copy of his own.

8. From Apollonius:* moral freedom, not to expose oneself to the insecurity of fortune; to look to nothing else, even for a little while, except to reason. To be always the same, in sharp attacks of pain, in the loss of a child, in long illnesses. To see clearly in a living example that a man can be at once very much in earnest and yet able to relax.

Not to be censorious in exposition; and to see a man who plainly considered technical knowledge and ease in communicating general truths as the least of his good gifts. The lesson how one ought to receive from friends what are esteemed favours, neither lowering oneself on their account, nor returning them tactlessly.

9. From Sextus:* graciousness, and the pattern of a household governed by its head, and the notion of life according to Nature. Dignity without pretence, solicitous consideration for friends, tolerance of amateurs and of those whose opinions have no ground in science.

A happy accommodation to every man, so that not only was his conversation more agreeable than any flattery, but he excited the greatest reverence at that very time in the very persons about him. Certainty of grasp, and method in the discovery and arrangement of the principles necessary to human life.

Never to give the impression of anger or of any other passion, but to be at once entirely passionless and yet full of natural affection. To praise without noise, to be widely learned without display.

10. From Alexander the grammarian:* to avoid fault-finding and not to censure in a carping spirit any who employ an exotic phrase, a solecism, or harsh expression, but oneself to use, neatly

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and precisely, the correct phrase, by way of answer or confirmation or handling of the actual question—the thing, not its verbal expression—or by some other equally happy reminder.

11. From Fronto:* to observe how vile a thing is the malice and caprice and hypocrisy of absolutism; and generally speaking that those whom we entitle 'Patricians' are somehow rather wanting in the natural affections.

12. From Alexander the Platonist:* seldom and only when absolutely necessary to say to anyone or write in a letter: 'I am too busy'; nor by such a turn of phrase to evade continually the duties incident to our relations to those who live with us, on the plea of 'present circumstances'.

13. From Catulus:* not to neglect a friend's remonstrance, even if he may be unreasonable in his remonstrance, but to endeavour to restore him to his usual temper. Hearty praise, too, of teachers, like what is recorded of Athenodotus and Domitius,* and genuine love towards children.

14. From Severus:* love of family, love of truth, and love of justice. To have got by his help to understand Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dio, Brutus,* and to conceive the idea of a commonwealth based on equity and freedom of speech,* and of a monarchy cherishing above all the liberty of the subject. From him, too, consistency and uniformity in regard for philosophy; to do good, to communicate liberally, to be hopeful; to believe in the affection of friends and to use no concealment towards those who incurred his censure, and that his friends had no necessity to conjecture his wishes or the reverse, but he was open with them.

15. From Maximus:* mastery of self and vacillation in nothing; cheerfulness in all circumstances and especially in illness. A happy blend of character, mildness with dignity, readiness to do without complaining what is given to be done. To see how in his case everyone believed 'he really thinks what he says, and what he does, he does without evil intent'; not to be surprised or alarmed; nowhere to be in a hurry or to procrastinate, not to lack resource or to be depressed or cringing or

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on the other hand angered or suspicious. To be generous, forgiving, void of deceit. To give the impression of inflexible rectitude rather than of one who is corrected. The fact, too, that no one would ever have dreamt that he was looked down on by him or would have endured to conceive himself to be his superior. To be agreeable also (in social life).

16.* From my father (by adoption): gentleness and unshaken resolution in judgements taken after full examination; no vainglory about external honours; love of work and perseverance; readiness to hear those who had anything to contribute to the public advantage; the desire to award to every man according to desert without partiality; the experience that knew where to tighten the rein, where to relax. Prohibition of unnatural practices,* social tact and permission to his suite not invariably to be present at his banquets nor to attend his progress from Rome, as a matter of obligation, and always to be found the same by those who had failed to attend him through engagements. Exact scrutiny in council and patience; not that he was avoiding investigation, satisfied with first impressions. An inclination to keep his friends, and nowhere fastidious or the victim of manias but his own master in everything, and his outward mien cheerful. His long foresight and ordering of the merest trifle without making scenes. The check in his reign put upon organized applause and every form of lip-service; his unceasing watch over the needs of the empire and his stewardship of its resources; his patience under criticism by individuals of such conduct. No superstitious fear of divine powers or with man any courting of the public or obsequiousness or cultivation of popular favour, but temperance in all things and firmness; nowhere want of taste or search for novelty.

In the things which contribute to life's comfort, where Fortune was lavish to him, use without display and at the same time without apology, so as to take them when they were there quite simply and not to require them when they were absent. The fact that no one would have said that he was a sophist, an impostor, or a pedant, but a ripe man, an entire man, above flattery, able to preside over his own and his subjects' business.

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whole universe, whereof you are a part. Now to every part of Nature that is good which the nature of the Whole brings, and which preserves that nature; and the whole world is preserved as much by the changes of the compound bodies as by the changes of the elements which compose those bodies. Let this be sufficient for you, these be continually your doctrines. But put away your thirst for books,* that so you may not die murmuring, but truly reconciled and grateful from your heart to the gods.

4. Remember how long you have been putting off these things, and how many times the gods have given you days of grace, and yet you do not use them. Now is it high time to perceive the kind of Universe whereof you are a part and the nature of the governor of the Universe from whom you subsist as an effluence, and that the term of your time is circumscribed, and that unless you use it to attain calm of mind, time will be gone and you will be gone and the opportunity to use it will not be yours again.

5. Each hour be minded, valiantly as becomes a Roman and a man, to do what is to your hand, with precise . . . and unaffected dignity, natural love, freedom and justice; and to give yourself repose from every other imagination. And so you will, if only you do each act as though it were your last, freed from every random aim, from wilful turning away from the directing Reason, from pretence, self-love and displeasure with what is allotted to you. You see how few things a man need master in order to live a smooth and god-fearing life; for the gods themselves will require nothing more of him who keeps these precepts.

6. You are doing yourself violence,* violence, my soul; and you will have no second occasion to do yourself honour. Brief is the life of each of us, and this of yours is nearly ended, and yet you do not reverence yourself, but commit your well-being to the charge of other men's souls.*

7. Do things from outside break in to distract you? Give yourself a time of quiet to learn some new good thing and cease to wander out of your course. But, when you have done that, be on your guard against a second kind of wandering. For those who are sick to death in life, with no mark on which they direct every

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OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

MARCUS AURELIUS

MEDITATIONS

Translated by A. S. L. Farquharson

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by R. B. Rutherford

Marcus Aurelius is one of the few rulers of empire whose writings have outlasted his practical achievements.

His reign as Emperor of the Roman world (AD 161 to 180) was long remembered as a golden age in which the citizens enjoyed the gentle rule of a philosophic sage. The truth was not so simple. The *Meditations* of Marcus' old age, composed while on campaign, give us exceptional access to his mind. Although not generally concerned with the day-to-day business of warfare and administration, they do reveal, however elusively, the personality of the writer: clear-headed, serious, often disillusioned with his own status and with human activities in general. The work can be read as a historical document and as a spiritual diary. Its vivid imagery and pungent epigrams have prompted comparisons with Pascal's *Pensées* and the book of Ecclesiastes.

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Cover illustration: detail from a portrait by Rubens of the scholar Gaspard Gervatius (who at one time contemplated an edition of the *Meditations*), with a bust of Marcus Aurelius on his desk (*c.*1627). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

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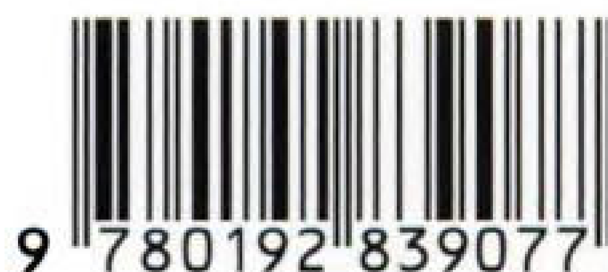

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