



ANCIENTS

161-180 AD MARCUS AURELIUS AS AUGUSTUS AV AUREUS NGC MS 5/5 - 4/5



Marcus Aurelius was Roman emperor from 161 to 180 and a Stoic philosopher. He was the last of the rulers known as the Five Good Emperors (a term coined some 13 centuries later by Niccolò Machiavelli), and the last emperor of the Pax Romana, an age of relative peace and stability for the Roman Empire. The reign of Marcus Aurelius was marked by military conflict. Marcus defeated the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatian Iazyges in the Marcomannic Wars; however, these and other Germanic peoples began to represent a troubling reality for the Empire. He modified the silver purity of the Roman currency, the denarius. The persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire appears to have increased during his reign.

The 'Victory' celebrated on this aureus, over the Parthians in a long and difficult war AD 161-163, ended up being a Pyrrhic one for the Romans, as the returning Legions brought with them a virulent plague which quickly spread through most of the Roman Empire and devastated its population. The "Antonine Plague," also called the "Plague of Galen" after the famous physician who strove mightily against it, is now thought to have been smallpox or possibly measles. Europeans seemingly had no exposure to the illness before and died in enormous numbers. While not as devastating as the later Plague of Justinian or the Black Death of the 14th century, it seems to have severely depopulated vast regions and helped bring about the economic stagnation and external invasion that eventually brought down the Western Roman Empire.

AVREL • ANTO-NINVS • AVG, laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Marcus Aurelius right TR P XXXII • IMP VIII COS III P P, Annona standing left, holding two ears of grain in right hand and cradling cornucopia in left, modius of grain to left, ship's stern to right. RIC 389. BMCRE 771. Cohen --. Calicó 1996. Struck from fine style, high-relief dies on shimmering flan. **Among the finest known.**

