



The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition

By Michael Grant

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In this lucid, authoritative survey, Michael Grant re-examines Gibbon's statement, and gives his own magisterial account of how the lives of the emperors and the art, literature, architecture and overall social condition under the Antonines represented an 'age of transition'. *The Antonines* is essential reading for anyone who is interested in ancient history, as well as for all students and teachers of the subject.

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The Antonines: The Roman Empire in Transition By Michael Grant Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

The prolific Grant, from whom last issued *Constantine the Great*, here summarizes the careers of three mid-second century emperors and the surviving works of a dozen contemporary writers. Coming after the active reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, who brought the Roman Empire to its greatest territorial extent and left walls and columns testifying to the apogee of expansion, the Antonines--Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Commodus--projected a policy of stability. Militarily, this involved pulling back from the Euphrates frontier with the Parthians and fixing the Danube line against the German tribes. Socially, the conservative senatorial status quo continued, and Grant accords a similar lack of innovation in the arts (with the exception of sculpture) during the years of the three reigns, 138 to 192. Not uniformly bland, with its share of barbarian invasions and revolts of proconsuls, these years also harbored the earliest Christian apologists alongside defenders of Roman religion (including Marcus Aurelius himself, in his famous *Meditations*). Though not one of Grant's monumental works, this short study should still interest his legion of readers. *Gilbert Taylor*

From Kirkus Reviews

The distinguished, prolific classical historian (Constantine the Great, p. 681, etc.) here critically examines the reigns of the Roman Empire's three Antonine emperors (a.d. 138-192). Eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon considered the reigns of Antoninus Pius (a.d. 138-161) and Marcus Aurelius (a.d. 161-180) the period "during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous." Grant looks carefully at this traditional view of the Antonine Pax Romana and points out that during Antoninus Pius's long rule there were disturbances in Greece, Britain, Dacia, Judaea, and Africa; he also criticizes Pius's administration as static, backward-looking, and uncreative, though competent enough. At his death, in a decision that presaged the disastrous power-sharing arrangements of the later empire, Antoninus Pius bequeathed a shared authority to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (who died a natural death in a.d. 169). Aurelius, author of the Stoic classic *Meditations*, ruled successfully during a turbulent period; he had to stave off challenges to Roman rule in Britain and Gaul, fight wars against the Parthians and on the Danube frontier, and govern an empire riven by a grave pestilence. Weakened by "incessant winter campaigning," he died on the Danube frontier in a.d. 180, leaving the empire in the hands of his son, the cruel megalomaniac Commodus (a.d. 180-192), whose reign is noteworthy mainly for its absolutism and arbitrary violence. Grant reviews Antonine art, architecture, literature, and rhetoric, arguing that thematically (the rejection even by pagan writers of classical paganism) and in style and form (the works of Apuleius presage the modern novel) Antonine culture marks a transition from the ancient to the early medieval world. With characteristic lucidity, Grant shows that Rome during its vaunted "golden age" contained seeds of its future collapse and of the Europe to come. -- Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

"Michael Grant is one of a few historians who keeps the flame of ancient history alive. Grant's books on the Greek and Romans are partly narrative, yet strong with insight, written in a style that has a grandeur to it worthy of the important events described. In this fine new book, he concentrates on the later Roman emperors known as the Antonines, who reigned in the 2nd century after Christ--and he eloquently fixes what was important in the period."

-"Newark Star-Ledger

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"This book will be of greatest value for advanced undergraduates who need a trustworthy guide to a complex range of information. Grant provides a highly selective chronological table of important events, five pages of useful maps, and a separate discussion of several historical sources of the late second and third centuries whose work sheds light on the Antonine Age. A bibliography of more than five pages lists important modern sources in four languages."

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Users Review

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Kimberly Niemeyer:

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