

## SUMMARIES

### A REALISTIC VIEW OF THE MARCOMANNI WARS, 164—180 AD

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Projecting the methods, living conditions, and institutions of the historical present into the prehistoric and protohistoric past is usually a risky business. This is demonstrated by what has been written thus far about the Marcomanni wars under Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Pursuing the hints found in a very late Roman source, the *Historia Augusta*, most historians have viewed overpopulation, the pressure of tribes living to their rear, and the need to win new arable land as reason enough for attacking the Romans along the middle Danube. This was, however, not the case. The Parthian war in the East had caused sizable military units to be withdrawn from the Danube border; when they returned they carried with them the *pestilentia* which decimated army and population. The Marcomanni, Quadi and other Danube Germans exploited this opportunity to invade the border provinces of Rhaetia, Noricum and Pannonia, cross the Alps, and even plunder northern Italy. They could have advanced unhindered as far as Rome, but chose to return home with their booty. For these were not people's armies out to conquer new arable land, as the Romans would have had it, but groups of followers (or combined groups of followers) assembled around princes and kings; as Tacitus put it, they could only support themselves by wars and predatory raids. They thus made incursions into the border provinces and northern Italy and then returned home once they had secured the spoils. This can also be gleaned not only from a number of sources — provided one reads them dispassionately — but also from the course of the war itself. The Romans managed only under great difficulties to gain a hold on these mobile bands of followers who fought in partisan fashion, and ultimately to carry the war into the living areas of the Marcomanni and Quadi, where small units could inflict the severest retaliation. Still, they managed only temporarily to fortify the Danube border securely against predatory raids.