CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE DATING OF THE SCENES ON THE COLUMN OF
MARCUS AURELIUS

Based on written sources, the years A.D. 173–174 can be considered as the time of the two miracles. This, however, is by no means confirmed by the internal chronological order of the depictions on the column. An exhaustive examination of the column is necessary.

Up to now some of the most debated research questions about the column are which periods of the war(s) the 116 scenes depict, whether the individual scenes follow each other in chronological order, and whether the individual scenes can be identified with any phases of the war known from ancient sources. When dating, following the footsteps of Domaszewski and Petersen, most researchers have started from the premise that because depictions of Lucius Verus and Commodus are missing from the column, it can only depict the events of the years 169 to 175, beginning from the phase of the war when Roman troops successfully limited military actions to hostile barbarian lands. According to Domaszewski, this was A.D. 171, although most researchers argue for 172, mainly based on the numismatic examinations of Dodd and Dobiáš, according to which the coins from 172, depicting Romans crossing a bridge (RIC III (1930) 270, 1047), are related to a similar opening scene on the column (III).\(^1\) It is also a common opinion that in scene LV, which is similar to Trajan’s column, the Victoria figure between the *tropaea* divides the events. According to Domaszewski and his followers, this refers to the two separate phases of the first war, the *bellum Marcomannicum* and the *bellum Sarmaticum* (A.D. 171–172 and A.D. 173–175). The latter date is groundless; the various *bella* cannot be divided this way; the *bellum Sarmaticum* was in process earlier (see the section discussing the names of the war). According to Mommsen and, in his footsteps, Morris (starting year: A.D. 173) and Wolff (starting year: A.D. 174), the events of the second war are depicted from scene LVI (A.D. 178–180). Based Petersen’s research, I believe it has now become completely clear that the view that the various scenes do not follow in

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\(^1\) Dodd 1913, 193–194, Dobiáš 1932, 128–132.
chronological order is indefensible (Stuart Jones, Strong, Dobiáš, Roos). The various events stand next to each other in an easily followable, consecutive logical order, e.g., the beginning of the campaign at the beginning of the scenes and the dedition following scene XVI (the rain miracle). It is a different question that the choice of subject from among the real-life events is selective; it does not provide an account of events ending unfavourably (see the chapter on the history of research).

All parties to the debate admit that the identification of scenes XI and XVI depicting the rain miracle is certain. As already quoted many times, according to one side of the debate, one must date the scenes of the column according to the date of the miracle provided by Cassius Dio (A.D. 174). The other side emphasises that the chronology of the war (and the scenes) must be set up according to the scenes of the column, and because the miracles are among the first scenes of the column, they must be dated earlier than 174. According to these scholars, the events of the year 174 must appear among the scenes after the Victoria figure following scene LV. That is why the date of the miracle first became 171 (Domaszewski, Weizsäcker), then later 172 (Zwikker, Guey, Birley, etc.), which has been the most accepted date up until today. This apparent contradiction caused the assumption that the scenes are not in chronological order.

Considering this question one must set out from the following principles:

1. Only the identification of scenes XI and XVI is absolutely certain.
2. The scenes are in chronological order.
3. The figures of Lucius Verus and, despite the objections of Morris (cf. scenes LXX and LXVI), Commodus, do not appear on the column. Commodus, however, does appear in the dedition scene on the relief on the footing, along with the figure of Marcus.
4. The war only took place in the Barbaricum; Roman defeat appears nowhere.
5. The Victoria figure with a tropaeum after scene LV divides the row of scenes into separate sections.
6. One can exclude the year 171, suggested by Domaszewski, from among the starting years (see below) as battles were still being fought in the Danubian provinces in that year. The major forces (at least)

\footnote{Cf. Wolff 1989, 28, Anm. 65.}