# Pax Romana

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**Pax Romana** (Latin for "Roman Peace") was the long period of relative peacefulness and minimal expansion by the Roman military force experienced by the Roman Empire after the end of the Final War of the Roman Republic and before the beginning of the Crisis of the Third Century. Since it was established by Augustus, it is sometimes called **Pax Augusta**. Its span was approximately 206 years (27 BC to 180 AD) according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*.[1]

Extent of the Roman Empire under Augustus. Yellow represents the extent of the Republic in 31 BC, while green represents gradually conquered territories under the reign of Augustus, and pink areas represent client states.

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AR Antoninianus of Gordian III, struck Antioch 243-244 AD with Pax Augusta on the reverse.

## Overview

The Pax Romana is said to have been a "miracle" because prior to it there had never been peace for so many centuries in a given period of history. However, Walter Goffart wrote: "The volume of the *Cambridge Ancient History* for the years A.D. 70-192 is called 'The Imperial Peace', but peace is not what one finds in its pages".[2] Arthur M. Eckstein writes that the period needs to be seen in contrast with the much more frequent warfare that occurred in the Roman Republic in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. Eckstein also notes that the incipient Pax Romana appeared during the Republic and that its temporal span varied with geographical region as well: "Although the standard textbook dates for the Pax Romana, the famous “Roman Peace” in the Mediterranean, are 31 BC to AD 250, the fact is that the Roman Peace was emerging in large regions of the Mediterranean at a much earlier date: Sicily after 210 [BC]; peninsular Italy after 200 [BC]; the Po Valley after 190 [BC]; most of Spain after 133 [BC]; North Africa after 100 [BC]; and for ever longer stretches of time in the Greek East".[3]

The first historical record of the term *Pax Romana* appears to be in a writing of Seneca the Younger in 55 AD.[4] The concept was highly influential, being theorized upon and attempted to be copied in subsequent ages. Arnaldo Momigliano noted that "*Pax Romana* is a simple formula for propaganda, but a difficult subject for research."[5] In

fact, the "Pax Romana" was broken by the First Jewish-Roman War, the Kitos War (also in Judea, 115-117), the Bar Kokhba Revolt (also known as the Third Jewish-Roman War), the Roman-Parthian War of 58-63, Trajan's Roman-Parthian War of 113, and Boudica's war in Britain in AD 60 or 61.

The Pax Romana started after Octavian (Augustus) defeated Marc Antony in the Battle of Actium on 2 September 31 BC. He became princeps, or "first citizen". Lacking a good precedent of successful one-man rule, Augustus created a junta of the greatest military magnates and stood as the front man. By binding together these leading magnates in a coalition, he eliminated the prospect of civil war. The Pax Romana was not immediate, despite the end of the civil wars, because fighting continued in Hispania and in the Alps. Nevertheless, Augustus closed the Gates of Janus (the Roman ceremony to mark world Peace) three times,[6] first in 29 BC and again in 25 BC. The third closure is undocumented, but Inez Scott Ryberg (1949) and Gaius Stern (2006) have persuasively dated the third closure to 13 BC with the Ara Pacis ceremony.[7][8][9] At the time of the Ludi Saeculares in 17 BC the concept of Peace was publicized, and in 13 BC was proclaimed when Augustus and Agrippa jointly returned from pacifying the provinces. The Ara Pacis ceremony was no doubt part of this announcement.

Augustus faced a problem making peace an acceptable mode of life for the Romans, who had been at war with one power or another continuously for 200 years.[8] Romans regarded peace not as an absence of war, but the rare situation that existed when all opponents had been beaten down and lost the ability to resist.[5] Augustus' challenge was to persuade Romans that the prosperity they could achieve in the absence of warfare was better for the Empire than the potential wealth and honor acquired when fighting a risky war. Augustus succeeded by means of skillful propaganda. Subsequent emperors followed his lead, sometimes producing lavish ceremonies to close the Gates of Janus, issuing coins with Pax on the reverse, and patronizing literature extolling the benefits of the Pax Romana.[8]

# Similar terms generic notion

Given the prominence of the concept of the *Pax Romana*, historians have coined variants of the term to describe systems of relative peace that have been established, attempted or argued to have existed. Such times have been credited to the British Empire during the 19th century. Some variants include:

- Pax Britannica
- Pax Americana
- Pax Europaea
- Pax Hispanica
- Pax Mongolica
- Pax Ottomana
- Pax Sinica
- Pax Khazarica
- Pax Syriana
- Pax Islamica
- Pax Sovietica
- Pax Russica
- Pax Mafiosa

More generically, the concept has been referred to as **pax imperia**,[10][11] (sometimes spelled as **pax imperium**[12]) meaning **imperial peace**,[13][14] or—less literally—**hegemonic peace**.[14][15] Raymond Aron notes that imperial peace—peace achieved through hegemony—sometimes, but not always—can become civil peace. As an example, the German Empire's imperial peace of 1871 (over its internal components like Saxony) slowly evolved into the later German state. As a counter-example, the imperial peace of Alexander the Great's empire dissolved because the Greek city states maintained their political identity and more importantly, embrios of their own armed forces. Aron notes that during the Pax Romana, the Jewish war was a reminder that the overlapping of the imperial

institutions over the local ones did not erase them and the overlap was a source of tension and flare-ups. Aron summarizes that "In other words, *imperial peace* becomes civil peace insofar as the memory of the previously independent political units are effaced, insofar as individuals within a pacified zone feel themselves less united to the traditional or local community and more to the conquering state.'[13]

The concept of Pax Romana was highly influential, and attempted to be imitated in the Byzantine Empire as well as in the Christian West, where it morphed into the Peace and Truce of God (*pax Dei* and *treuga Dei*).[14] A theoretician of the imperial peace during the Middle Ages was Dante Aligheri. Dante's works on the topic were analyzed at the beginning of the 20th century by William Mitchell Ramsay in the book *The Imperial Peace; An Ideal in European History* (1913).[16][17]

### In fiction

- Isaac Asimov's fictional *Galactic Empire* and *Foundation* series refer to *Pax Trantorica* and *Pax Imperium*.
- *Pax Soprana* is the sixth episode of the HBO original series *The Sopranos*.
- In *Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic*, *Reim's Peace* is the Reim Empire's version of Pax Romana, established about 200 years prior to the series by Empress Scherazade. Reim is a nation based on the Roman Empire.
- In Halo the Forerunner Civilization use of the philosophy of the Mantle of Responsibility as an imperial peace over the entire galaxy that lasted thousands of years.

## References


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4. Ali Parchami (2009). *Hegemonic Peace and Empire: The Pax Romana, Britannica and Americana*. Routledge. p. 25. ISBN 978-1-134-00704-2.
5. Momigliano, Arnaldo (1942). "The Peace of the Ara Pacis". *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. **5**: 228–231.
6. Augustus states in *Res Gestae* 13 that he closed the Gates three times, a fact documented by many other historians (See Gates of Janus).
7. Scott Ryberg, Inez (1949). "The Procession of the Ara Pacis". *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*. **19**: 79–101. doi:10.2307/4238621.
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16. James Brown Scott (2002) [1939]. *Law, the State, and the International Community*. The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd. pp. 223–224. ISBN 978-1-58477-178-4.
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## External links

- United Nations of Roma Victrix History: Pax Romana (http://www.unrv.com/early-empire/pax-romana.php)
- Pax Romana Discussion group (http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Group/139585)

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