



## Pax Romana

*Adrian Goldsworthy*

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Best-selling author Adrian Goldsworthy turns his attention to the Pax Romana, the famous peace and prosperity brought by the Roman Empire at its height in the first and second centuries AD. Yet the Romans were conquerors, imperialists who took by force a vast empire stretching from the Euphrates to the Atlantic coast. Ruthless, Romans won peace not through coexistence but through dominance; millions died and were enslaved during the creation of their empire.

*Pax Romana* examines how the Romans came to control so much of the world and asks whether traditionally favorable images of the Roman peace are true. Goldsworthy vividly recounts the rebellions of the conquered, examines why they broke out, why most failed, and how they became exceedingly rare. He reveals that hostility was just one reaction to the arrival of Rome and that from the outset, conquered peoples collaborated, formed alliances, and joined invaders, causing resistance movements to fade away.

## Pax Romana Details

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Author : Adrian Goldsworthy

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## From Reader Review Pax Romana for online ebook

### Katie Bayford says

I really liked this book. Adrian Goldsworthy barrels through a few hundred years of Rome gaining its Empire during the Republic, and a few more hundred of it having, expanding, feeding, spying on, defending and consolidating it following the ascension of Augustus. Whilst I thought that the author did an incredible job of describing and detailing Pax Romana (*Roman Peace*) over a huge period of time, I wished at times he might have been more descriptive, so that the book was less analytical (this is, of course, incredibly picky). Never was the book difficult to understand or to follow, and the author was careful to dissuade the reader from making uninformed comparisons with other empires - as well as taking extreme care to evaluate the Roman Empire within its context in time, and within the context of the actions of fellow states.

A great read for anyone interested Rome, and its relations with its friends and foes.

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### Bonnie\_blu says

This is another excellent volume on ancient Rome by Adrian Goldsworthy. His vast knowledge is put to work here examining the Pax Romana. He clearly shows that the Pax Romana was very real and long lasting. Some highlights:

1. Rome was an aggressive, warrior society, but it only differed from other ancient societies in its level of success and its unique "philosophy" of how it managed conquered peoples.
2. The overwhelming majority of people conquered by Rome did not rebel, even during those times when Rome was weakened by foreign wars or by civil wars brought on by men competing to rule the empire.
3. The majority of people under Roman rule experienced hundreds of years of unprecedented peace and greater economic prosperity. Granted, this "greater economic prosperity" meant vastly different things to the poor and the rich, but most benefited.

One point that cannot be stressed strongly enough is that the ancient world was a horrendously brutal place where raiding was endemic, people were enslaved, women raped, and violent death was a constant possibility. The Pax Romana made the world a much safer place for most of its people.

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### Ana says

A well paced and clearly written piece on the existence of such a thing as Pax Romana - Roman Peace - under the rule of the Empire. Filled with many bits of interesting information and painting at times a detailed picture of the lives of Roman citizens (or not so citizens), it's a worthy read for anyone interested in the period.

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### Shoshana says

Adrian Goldsworthy's new book, "Pax Romana," is about the long period of Rome's republican and imperial

imposition of its power on other peoples, both near and far from the Eternal City. As with his other books Goldsworthy steers a middle course of scholarship neither embracing the faddish and often ahistorical theories of foolish academics, nor stuck in the facile and unenlightened dicta of what has sometimes passed as proper historical study.

“Pax Romana” looks at how Rome dealt with both defeated people and allies and how it enforced “peace,” throughout its world. There were rebellions and wars fought against Rome, and Rome did not win every battle. But it won enough to be successful both at warfare and at the politics of domination. Mostly, for a long period, these wars were on the periphery of the empire of the time, allowing those within its borders to flourish and prosper.

To the Romans, “peace” did not mean the absence of war by itself as a positive good. There were always wars and fighting somewhere. Peace meant the ability of localities to thrive economically without war on their particular doorsteps. But the peace was not absolute; there were rebellions and resistance from time to time, more in some places than others. And there were crimes of violence; banditry, for example, was rife in Judea throughout the Roman period.

An interesting aspect of the book is how local leaders dealt with the Romans. Goldsworthy shows that the advent of the Romans was but one factor among many in their calculations, whether these leaders accommodated Roman rule or fought against it. All politics is local, after all.

Goldsworthy, at the beginning of the book and the end, stresses that “Pax Romana” is not a blueprint for other empires nor an example for the modern world. Things are too different, even if people are essentially the same. The Roman empire was a monumental achievement, but it took a long time to secure, and the Roman way of doing things would not be acceptable today.

This was a very interesting book to read, and I can recommend it wholeheartedly.

I was given an ARC from the publisher and NetGalley for my honest opinion.

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### **Anne Martin says**

I cannot give less than four stars to this book. The amount of research and thus knowledge it holds is huge. I studied latin for seven years at school and most of the names mentioned by the author ring a bell. But while Caesar is associated with clear memories, some other ones belong to the half-forgotten realm of long lost memories. I still know that Verres was corrupted and was governor of Sicily; I did not associate him with Asia Minor (understand Turkey in today's words). Mithridates in my mind was the weirdo who, for fear of being poisoned, absorbed regularly smidgens of dangerous substances to acclimate his body to them, the way we try today to desensitize allergic kids with microscopic amounts of the product creating hives on their skin. But I never knew he was involved in a big rebellion against Rome.

So, I learned a lot through this book and regretted it was written with the seriousness historians use. It is lacking the sociological anecdotes many would use to make such matters more fun. I know, history cannot be re-written. But some have tried to write it differently, so that people would be enthused by their description of ancient battles, old lifestyles or mores long extinct.

In other words, a very good book which would have been great with a touch of humor. It is just missing what

Alain Decaux or Andre Castelot added on their television shows -the capacity of making people feel with their heroes of one night, laugh with them, fear with them, learn about the events but cheer with the characters, get acquainted with them, know the heroes as if they were your friends.

I understand it is getting out of the historian's work and gets closer to the tabloids. But for the reader, it is fun and enjoyable, and helps memorize the events better. Obviously, the book insists on the conquest of England about which I know very little.

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### **Nikki says**

Reviewed for The Bibliophilian.

Pax Romana is a popular history style examination of the peace imposed by the Roman Empire, and how peaceful it actually was, as well as how it benefitted or oppressed the lands and peoples that fell under Roman sway. Although I called it popular history, it's not super popularised: the evidence is meticulous, and the pace slow. It's popular history in the sense of being perfectly comprehensible to the interested outsider to the field, rather than being simplistic.

The overall theory of the book is that the Pax Romana really was, in general, beneficial — and that Rome's rule really was relatively peaceful and benign, with exceptions being just that rather than the overall rule. A lot of the time the evidence suggests that benignity was due to basically ignoring local squabbles and leaving places to govern themselves with minimal interference, while the legions only marched in for serious matters.

How far do I agree with Goldsworthy's views, based on the evidence presented? Well, he definitely makes a good case for it, though I think he takes the long view to a great degree and I think there were likely people within the Roman Empire who felt oppressed by it, as well as people who were relatively unaffected by it. I do agree with his view that the Roman Empire wasn't ruled simply through brutality: it certainly wouldn't have had the longevity it did, if that were the sole basis, and it wouldn't have been something people actively wanted to be part of — and it was something people wanted to be part of, more often than not.

It's definitely a worthwhile look at whether the Roman Empire is really so degenerate as its painted.

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### **Emma says**

Once again Goldsworthy reveals the incredible depth and breadth of his knowledge, focusing this time on the theme of Roman Peace. It is a fascinating book, on a theme I have not seen addressed in this manner before. Perhaps this is because the idea of Empire continues to hold negative connotations and Goldsworthy instead aims to show that a system based on simple brutality could never have retained control of such vast areas, varied peoples, and over such a long amount of time.

Peace here is not quite as we imagine it to be, full of qualifications and more than a few skirmishes. Yet Goldsworthy makes clear that the Romans did create a system of mutual benefit, of alliances, and of balance that allowed peace and prosperity to a greater extent than could otherwise have existed. The most important factor seems to be the multitude of different types of relationships between Rome and its subject

territories-Rome did not have the desire or the manpower to permanently garrison each and every controlled area-so it was in those connections that peace was maintained, or otherwise. Even within the ruling elites, the network of friendships and debts formed a real part of how the system of government was run. Many people wanted to become Roman citizens, it was an avenue of opportunity that offered numerous benefits. It is significant that Rome offered this to some, unlike the more insular Greece, and part of why, in the end, Rome was destroyed by outside forces rather than overwhelming internal revolt.

That is not to say the power politics based on fear were absent. Indeed, one significant factor in peaceful relations within the empire and around it seemed to be that Rome held the biggest stick, and could use that position as a deterrent or to broker relationships between other warring territories. Roman soldiers were not idle and violence remained a useful tool.

Overall, a genuinely compelling, well researched, and well argued book, a great addition to Goldsworthy's Roman series.

Many thanks to Adrian Goldsworthy, Yale University Press, and Netgalley for this copy in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Jennifer says**

I received an ARC of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. I enjoyed reading *Pax Romana*. It brought me back to my classics classes I took during my BA and it re-taught me about a lot of events and people from Roman times( with a focus on the Roman Peace). Goldsworthy's approach is fair and balanced. he does not simply view the Romans as evil conquerors but also intelligent and well planned. He discusses that not all peoples they conquered suffered under them and in fact some prospered. This book is an interesting read for fans of Ancient History and would be a great textbook in any ancient roman history or classics class.

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### **Peter McLoughlin says**

A solid history that takes a more geographic look at the Roman Empire at its height. It surveys the empire and its impact all around the Mediterranean and beyond. It discusses how it grew and how it operated and what it accomplished both good and bad.

Update. History spends most of its time on maintenance of the provinces and the garrisons and proconsuls who administered the territories of the expanse of the Roman Empire. Read a lot of the goings on in the provinces rather than palace intrigue in Rome. More of what a man in the street in the Roman Empire would see as well as middle management.

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## **Andrew Tollemache says**

"Pax Romana" was an interesting read into how the Romans were able to maintain a fairly stable empire for so many centuries with only a handful of notable rebellions. While the dust over suggested Goldsworthy had written a revisionist treatise on how the Romans did not actually maintain the peace well, the actual bulk of the book serves to document that the "Pax Romana" was very real for at least several centuries.

Goldsworthy details the general template for Roman imperial expansion was for the Legions to arrive in force and demonstrate a new force to be reckoned with was in town, but then the Romans would use a divide and conquer approach to buy off and co-opt some of the major tribal chieftains in the area. Those who did not get with the program would be decisively defeated in battle. The professional Roman army could leverage its discipline to defeat much larger, but clumsy tribal armies. The Romans would also make sure to steal the crops and livestock leaving the defeated foes to starve. Julius Caesar used this to great effect in his conquest of Gaul (France). It was a harsh and brutal approach that today would find one on trial in The Hague, but for the Romans it meant they seldom saw much rebellion in conquered areas. Occasionally a generation after their initial conquest a new cohort of tribal leaders would chafe under Roman rule and try to fight back. In those cases the Romans would return and re-teach those harsh lessons.

Actual cases of sustained and determined resistance were rare. Boudica, the Celtic Queen in England won numerous victories in what is now Essex. Arminius (Herman the German) was able to lure 3 Roman legions to their destruction in the Teutoburg Forest and end Roman dreams of ever regaining control of Germania and in doing so created a permanent cultural fault line in Europe. Lastly there was rebellion in Judea in late 1st century AD that ended with the epic last stand at Masada and the dispersal of Judea's Jewish problem through out the Old World.

Very good read, as always I have to reference the current place name of the Roman place name mentioned so they stick in my head.

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## **Ray says**

I liked this book. It seeks to get beyond the headlines of war and conquest, emperors and usurper, to understand what life was like in Rome and how it became perhaps the greatest empire the world has ever seen. It does this by exploring the themes of Roman life and the conditions which led a small hill town in central Italy to rule much of the world.

The basic idea is that the progressive extension of Roman citizenship allowed adjacent elites a stake in a successful state and provided an ideal than even the lowliest could aspire to, the Roman dream if you like. Combined with a refusal to admit defeat in war and a ruthless Darwinian political system this made Rome unbeatable for centuries.

I liked the idea that someone like Septimius Severus could rise from being minor African nobility to become ruler of a massive empire, dying in far away York on the fringes of the known world. And in all the vast distance between these two places there was a recognisable Roman culture and identity, albeit with local nuances.

Ultimately the power of Rome became its undoing, as the extreme bounty available to the victors caused interminable civil wars over the spoils of empire, fatally weakening Rome from within. Failure to maintain static borders allowed outsiders to progressively raid, settle and usurp formerly peaceful provinces.

Rome fell, but it will always be a subject of wonder and fascination.

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### **Carlos says**

I loved this book, be aware tough it is not the most fast paced book, it deals with the daily goings of the running of the Roman Empire. In it you will learn that while the Roman Empire provided peace to the regions it conquered, it wasn't always permanent and while the term "Pax romana "calls to the time after Augustus , those years were not always free of conflict , the only difference was that the Roman Empire was strong enough to contain the threat and amortize the effects , this would change in the future .. highly recommend this book to anyone interested in classical history and anyone with an interest in the Roman Empire!

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### **Hadrian says**

Balanced study of the Roman administration of the peoples it conquered, while appearing a tad defensive on their behalf.

The authors treatment of the peoples living under the Romans during the republican and imperial eras is informative. *Most of the time*, the locals were allowed to keep their local elite systems and maintain their religious practices. There were some serious rebellions (e.g. the Iceni and the multiple Roman-Jewish wars), and they were bloodily suppressed, but this was not the case most of the time, at least until the end of the second century. These territories were acquired over the course of centuries - sometimes for resources, sometimes as hedges against more difficult military opponents. Over time, some of these populations had even started to take on Roman customs.

In terms of how long the empire lasted, or how bad the revolts were, it could have been a lot worse. What I take is no ringing endorsement, but a tacit recognition of how they were doing *something* right for having lasted so long.

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### **Chris Jaffe says**

Arrggh. Adrian Goldsworthy.

This is the third book of his I've read, which normally would indicate that I think rather well of the author. Yeah, normally that's the case. But it's not the case with Goldsworthy. I mean, I liked the first book of his I read - The Punic Wars. His tome on the Fall of the Roman Empire was .... well, it was informative, but it was less than the sum of its parts.

But this one? Notice how the first word in the review is "Arrggh"? Yeah.

Here's what separates a Goldsworthy book from one I'd normally appreciate. Take the other book, and throw out its intro and conclusion. Then go to each chapter, and throw out the intro and summary sections of each chapter. Then go to each part of the chapter, and get rid of anything which makes the key point for each portion. What's left is just a giant pile of info, without any real context or clear point it's making. It's just

information. That's a Goldsworthy book.

And there's value in knowing about stuff. Clearly, that's the foundation upon which we build all other knowledge. But it's just the foundation. Most books worth a damn realize you build on that foundation and make a point out of it. You have a central idea you try to convey. Not our man Goldsworthy. He just piles shovel-ful after shovel-ful of stuff at you.

For much of the book, I found myself wondering - "OK, that's nice, but why is that important? What's your point? Why is that worth noting?" And ..... (cricket sounds). This wasn't a big deal with the Punic Wars book because that had a clear narrative which the stuff centered around. The Decline book also had a narrative (though it wasn't very clear until the end why he thought Rome fell). Here? Nah, there really isn't any narrative at all. And with neither a clear narrative nor a clear point, it's hard to really give a damn.

Also, it takes soooooo long for this damn book to even get to the Pax. I've traditionally heard of the Pax Romana being from when Augustus took power (ending the era of Roman civil wars) until the death of Marcus Aurelius. This book is 40% of the way in before Augustus shows up. So, it's stuff without a narrative or point that isn't even about the Pax.

As for Goldsworthy's points, to the extent they even exist, he is pro-Rome. He thinks they ushered in an era of unparalleled peace in the Mediterranean world. Sure, they were ruthless and bloody in conquering it, but Goldsworthy contends that didn't separate the Romans from everyone else. They were just better at it. Other groups constantly fought and did atrocities, and no one was really bothered by Rome doing it because they all did. Early on there were revolts and rebellions. Usually a big one happened a generation after an area's conquest. But then people got used to it. Things settled down. There would be banditry in the outlying, mountainous areas, but that was about it. The Jews had the longest tradition of resistance (in the 60s, then again from 115-117, and 132-135), but even they settled down. And because the Pax lasted so damn long - everyone got acclimated to Rome. In fact, when Rome had its problems in the 3rd century, it's worthy noting there were virtually no rebellions breaking out against them.

Under Augustus, there was constant war. More territory was taken by him than by anyone else: he finished up Iberia, took to the Alpa, and in the Balkans went up the Danube. His forces crossed the Rhine (it didn't take), and went down the Nile (to minimal gains). The Druids were disliked because they had an alternate judicial system in which locals saw legitimacy. Often the rebellions against Rome were led by Rome's allies during the wars of conquest. (Those allies didn't expect conquest. They expected Rome to help them beat their old traditional enemies, but ended up hoisted by their own petard). The provinces rarely thought of themselves as a singular people in that province. Governors were supposed to look for Christians - but if they didn't want to, no one worried about it. The local elite were gradually given citizenship. The pace of change was slower in the countryside. Rome had the biggest professional army in European history until the French Revolution. It gained this size under Augustus. The merchants would often follow the army on its campaigns. There was a deep longing to be Roman across much of the empire into the 5th century.

So, yeah, there is information here. But it's often frustrating to figure out what point (if any) Goldsworthy is trying to make.

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**Steven Peterson says**

The book concludes with a few reflections on the "pax Romana," Roman peace as it existed over centuries. The author, Goldsworthy, says that "it took the domination of an empire like Rome to establish peace over such a wide area." He follows up: ". . .this was a remarkable achievement and one deserving admiration, whether or not it balances distaste for the savagery of Roman conquest."

Goldsworthy has written other magisterial works. I have read two of those--biographies of Julius Caesar and Augustus. The works are exemplary and give us much detail and reflections on the outcomes of rule by both. This, too, is not just a rendering of what happened and when. There is that, but more as well. Goldsworthy steps back from time to time and reflects on the Pax Romana.

Some of the more interesting findings:

- a. The Empire would leave a fair amount of administration of a newly conquered area to local rulers--if they were willing to submit to Rome and perform in accordance with the Empire's dictates and interest. It is interesting to see how many conquered peoples were willing to accept this state of affairs.
- b. The Empire could also decide to "cut and run" if the cost-benefit calculus was not attractive. For instance, withdrawing from some Germanic lands, because of the difficulty of subduing these people.
- c. A willingness to be savage of an opponent resisted and the Romans had the strength to overcome them.
- d. Many of the subject nations were willing to work within the Roman parameters, because they received benefits, such as better communication and economic health.
- e. The surprisingly thin administrative resources of Rome. Governors were sent from Rome to exercise authority in the various parts of the Empire. But they did not have much Roman bureaucratic infrastructure.

Goldsworthy can also assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Pax Romana. All in all, a really fine work. If you want to understand the nature of Pax Romana, this is a very fine resource.

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