

PAX ROMANA, WAR, PEACE AND CONQUEST IN THE ROMAN WORLD, BY
ADRIAN GOLDSWORTHY. NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. PP. 513.
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In his most well-known oration, the skilled rhetorician Aelius Aristides (d. 181) spoke of Rome as the pinnacle of civilization, defender of the righteous and bringer of peace. This is a peace that was won at great cost, defended by the emperor and his legions, and supported by the columns of Roman government. It is a prize whose worth is all but impossible to quantify. It is not just a good thing; but the defining victory of the Roman world order. In contrast, in a speech within his *Agricola*, Tacitus (d. 117) introduced us to Calgacus, leader of the Caledonians. This barbarian spoke of Rome, and of the peace they brought. It was a peace won through slaughter and slavery, a manifestation of an unquenchable greed that would never be satisfied. The notion of the Roman peace is a complex topic for us to decipher, as it was for contemporaries. It has both positive and negative consequences, depending when we are looking, and what we are looking for. There is a danger here in oversimplifying what is a nuanced and shifting sense of political order. It can invite a simplistic and rather unhelpful dichotomy; that Rome was a depriver of liberty and consequently peace was achieved at the expense of freedom (e.g. Tacitus), or more worrying for modern commentators, that imperialism is a good thing (e.g. Aristides). A full discussion of the reality of Roman imperial power, and the creation and maintenance of peace, is needed, perhaps now more than ever, as the ancient world begins once more to be drawn upon to defend the realities of modern political rule.

The volume by Goldsworthy is a fluently written and in parts persuasive interpretation of the *Pax Romana*. The great strength of this work is the confident portrayal of the Roman and barbarian characters that shape the narrative of the late Republic and the early Empire. Cicero, Caesar, Pliny, Boudicca and Arminius appear as dynamic historical actors, fully realised and presented as genuine people belonging to specific circumstances. The book is also successful in navigating a line between celebration and castigation, and demonstrates throughout an excellent understanding of the importance of peace to the Roman political order, as well as the constant threat of violence at the hands of the legions and their enemies beyond their borders. This is then a good historical analysis, with much to praise. There is however a single crucial weakness. The argument is at no point presented as strongly as needed, and this becomes more apparent as the book proceeds, when some of the points would have benefitted from a much tighter sense of argument, and exploration of the recent

scholarly perspectives. This is a strange omission, as in the introduction Goldsworthy does stress quite strongly how '[d]islike of empire tends to encourage scepticism over its achievements' (14), and presents the hints of an important revaluation of the *Pax Romana*.

The book is set out in two broad chronological sweeps, looking first to the Republic, and then to the Principate. Each contains thematic chapters that dip into different areas and different characters of the Roman world (e.g. provincial government, benefits of empire, political institutions). There is much to praise here. The first tranche on the Republic (21-160) is insightful, and students would gain much by reading Goldsworthy's account of the rise of Rome (21-36), the role of war (37-62) and the political value of friendship and enmity (63-86). Each of these chapters provide a good balance between narrative flair and clear historical analysis. Although the argument only appears sporadically, these are amongst the strongest elements of the book. The sections on Roman mercantile efforts and the governing of provinces remind the reader to recognise the different manifestations of Roman power, but in truth these become rather too descriptive, as indeed does the final chapter on the Republic that looks to Roman diplomacy in the provinces (133-160). The second tranche (161-408) dips into an impressive variety of topics, but here the lack of the argument becomes more noticeable, and the depth of analysis somewhat inconsistent. There are some excellent moments, with Goldsworthy's discussion of Arminius and rebellion against Rome explored with precision and good analysis (198-212). This book is best when the chapters turn to retelling the narrative, and providing windows into the lives and minds of those who lived in the ancient world. Goldsworthy has a talent for biography and bringing the past to life.

There are the normal run-of-the-mill criticisms to level against a large book such as this. Goldsworthy moves very quickly through each topic and section. There are some moments where greater discussion would have allowed for rather more nuanced insights. The first section would have benefitted from a greater examination of peace and how Romans understood this at different points in the long narrative of their dominance, and then supported by a fuller examination of the relationship between peace and conquest. The great weakness, however, that holds this work back is that the argument is not really presented as strongly as needed at any point. Strongly hinted at in the introduction it becomes a mute phantom for the rest of the work, with only brief moments where we are reminded what Goldsworthy is seeking to do. This is frustrating as the argument hinted at would provide an important revaluation of the Roman peace and the realities of life within the Roman Empire. The *Pax Romana*, against the odds, did exist for some, and did mean something beyond the

hyperbolic panegyrics directed at the imperial household. Rome did manage to maintain a remarkable level of stability within its borders, outstripping what we might expect of modern nation states and their legal apparatus. A fuller reassessment of this is needed. This book, fluent and enjoyable, perceptive and entertaining, is not the one to open this door. But it is a door that should be opened, to allow for a fuller and more complete picture of Rome and the realities of ancient imperial rule.

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