

The Pax Romana

When Augustus (Octavian) began his rule over Rome in 29 B.C., he publicly announced his intention to restore the Roman Republic to power. However, this was a vow he never fulfilled. At the same time, he never made a monarchy for himself. Instead, he gave the Senate greater power. (In return, the Senate gave him the title Augustus.)

Yet Augustus did not make himself any less powerful in this arrangement. In reality, Augustus's power was based in the military. The imperial armies were loyal to him and paid allegiance only to him.

As the leader of the Roman army, Augustus held an additional title—*imperator*. (The word *emperor* comes from this word.) This title allowed him to still think of the Republic as if it really existed and, at the same time, hold great power over all the people under Roman domination.

He also referred to himself as *princeps*, meaning “first among equals.” This title cleverly placed all citizens of Rome on the same level, while elevating Octavian to the status of Rome’s “Number One.” With this title, the government Octavian ruled over was referred to as a principate.

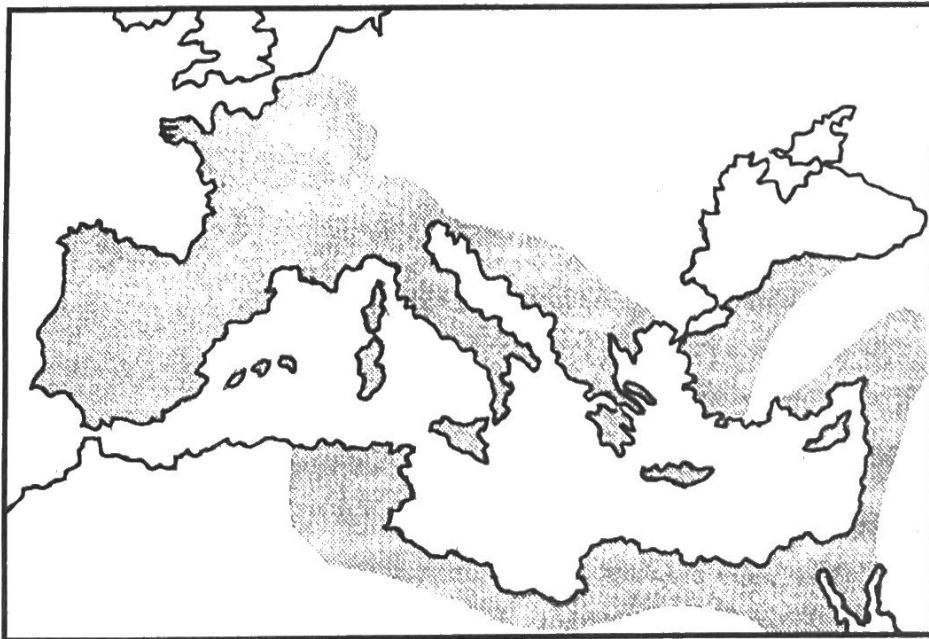
For the next 200 years, from the rise of Augustus in 29 B.C. through the reign of Emperor Marcus

Aurelius in A.D. 180, the principate form of government prevailed. This period is commonly referred to as the Pax Romana, which translates as “Roman Peace.” Throughout these two centuries, Rome was in control of the entire Mediterranean region. Its lands were equal in size to the present United States. Its army provided security within the Empire. The economy prospered. It was a time of peace and security.

This centralized control which existed during the reign of Augustus created a rich world for the Empire. Trade took place in every province while goods passed freely throughout the Mediterranean world.

With Augustus's control of Egypt, great amounts of grain poured into Rome, making bread cheap or even free. When Augustus brought the riches of Egypt to Rome, it affected the economy so greatly that interest rates (the money charged by those who make loans) dropped from 12 to 4 percent. Real estate values rose higher. Banking houses prospered. Superb communications on land and by sea kept all corners of the Empire informed.

Augustus also created an effective system of government officials, tax collectors, and financial officers. In short, with the reign of Augustus, Rome moved into a period of expansion, comfort, and peace.



Map Exercise

The shaded areas show the extent of the Roman Empire. Locate on the map all of the following: Rome, Italy, Spain, Gaul, Egypt, Greece, Sicily, Palestine, Syria, Macedonia, Cyrenaica, Numidia, Illyricum, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean.

Good and Bad Emperors

As a ruler of the Roman Empire, Augustus was a brilliant leader. His reforms of the Roman bureaucracy were extensive. While he took on great power for himself, he was not corrupted by it. Concerning his personal life, Augustus was a moderate man. He helped pass laws within the Empire designed to discourage such vices as gambling, drinking, idleness, and sexual irregularities, as well as divorce and luxury.

However, upon his death in A.D. 14, he was followed by a series of emperors who often brought limited skills and a mixed ethos to the leadership of Rome.

Augustus was followed by four descendants of his family line, the Julio-Claudians, who ruled over the Empire from A.D. 14 to 68. His stepson, Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) was a capable and conscientious ruler who balanced the imperial budget during his reign. His grandnephew, Caligula (A.D. 37–41) was a vicious young man who was probably insane. Caligula once made one of his special horses a consul of Rome. He was assassinated by his own palace guard.

A nephew of Tiberius, Claudius (A.D. 41–54) was a fairly capable ruler. He extended Roman power into Britain beginning in A.D. 43, after a Roman army defeated the Celts. He also extended Roman citizenship to more people.

Unfortunately, Claudius married his own niece Agrippina who conspired against him and had him murdered, which allowed the Empire to pass to her 16-year-old son, Nero.



Nero

His legacy is one of good and bad. To maintain power, he ordered his mother killed and murdered his wife, and he was known for persecuting Christians. However, Nero did reduce taxes, built up the economy, and was generally kind to the people within the Empire. He did not waste money on expensive military campaigns.

In A.D. 64, a great fire broke out in Rome. Although some Roman historians blame Nero for

setting the fire, which destroyed much of the city, he was not responsible. In fact, he was at his villa outside the city when the fire occurred.

In the final years of his reign, Nero became personally licentious. His reputation for gross sexuality and drunkenness became commonplace. He spent needless sums on extravagant banquets and orgies. His enemies—including the Senate—turned on him in A.D. 68. A death warrant was issued by leading senators. Nero, however, committed suicide. With his death, the Julio-Claudian line came to an end.

After a power struggle between four men seeking the throne, Flavius Vespasianus (A.D. 69–79) (known as Vespasian) rose to power. He established a new line, the Flavian dynasty, which ruled over Rome from A.D. 69–96. During Vespasian's reign, the great Coliseum, a massive sports arena, underwent construction. Also, the Romans campaigned against a Jewish revolt, destroying the city of Jerusalem.

Following Vespasian, his two sons—Titus (A.D. 79–81) and Domitian (A.D. 81–96) ruled, followed by the reigns of the men known as the Five Good Emperors. This new dynasty—the Antonine line—brought the Roman Empire to new heights.

Two of the five emperors were extraordinary. Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) established new towns in the Empire and restored old ones. Many public works projects were built. Hadrian also reformed the slavery system, making it illegal for a master to put his own slave to death.

Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180) was the last of the “good” emperors. He was a remarkable administrator, chief executive, and scholar. He loved philosophy, and wrote a book titled *Meditations*. He was extremely devoted to the Empire and served it well.

Review and Write

What do you think it required to be considered a “good” emperor of the Roman Empire? From what you have read here, what made some emperors “good” and some “bad”?

The Coliseum: Arena of Blood

Today, near the center of the city of Rome, stand the ruins of a great amphitheater dating from the 1st century A.D. It was known as the Coliseum or the Flavian Amphitheater, since it was constructed during the reigns of two Flavian emperors, Vespasian and his son, Titus. The Coliseum is considered one of the best examples of Roman architecture. It was also the scene of many horrific sporting events, which often resulted in death.

The Coliseum was built to seat 45,000 spectators. There was also room among the stadium's four levels to accommodate an additional 5000. The seating was tiered, set on sloping concrete columns, similar to the way modern sports complexes are constructed today. Spectators could enter the Coliseum through 80 different entrances, which allowed the stadium to be filled and emptied without too much delay or crush.

This immense building stands 161 feet high, is 600 feet long (as long as two football fields), and 500 feet wide. The stadium consists of many half-columns which form arches running along the exterior. Huge canvas awnings shaded the crowd; sometimes a giant canvas was stretched over the top of the facility to block the midday sun.

Inside the Coliseum, where the sporting events took place, is a great oval-shaped arena. Although the floor is no longer in place today, originally the stadium could be flooded to allow for water events, such as mock sea battles, held for the amusement of the crowd. Later, facilities were constructed beneath the Coliseum floor, including cages for wild animals and other victims, as well as "locker rooms" for gladiatorial contestants.

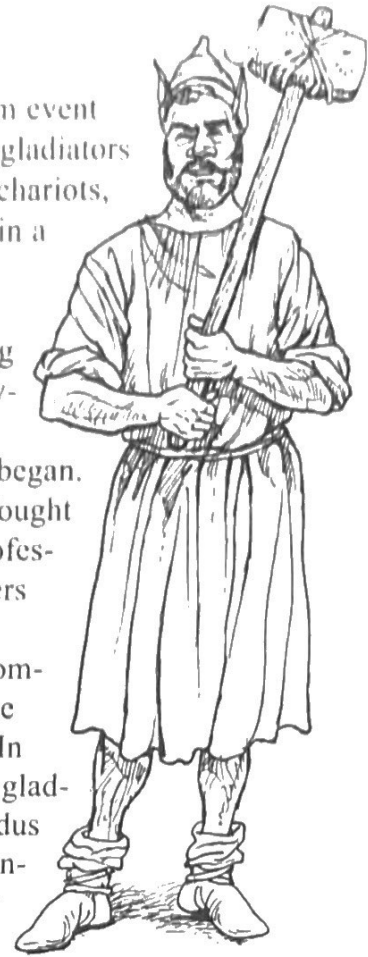
Anyone wanting to watch the games held in the Coliseum had plenty of opportunities during the year. The Roman calendar was full of official, state-sanctioned holidays. During the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41–54), 93 days were established as game days. By the second half of the 4th century A.D., the number of game days had been increased to 175, nearly half of the year!

A typical Coliseum event might begin with the gladiators entering the arena in chariots, each warrior dressed in a purple and gold robe. Gladiators were then paired off after casting lots (the Roman equivalent of flipping a coin), and the games began.

Often those who fought in the games were professionally-trained fighters who attended special schools to learn the combative arts. Life for the gladiators was harsh. In the 2nd century A.D., gladiators attended the Ludus Magnus, a Roman training school. There they slept in rough barracks with no comforts. Because many gladiators were slaves, sold

for just such a purpose, guards were posted to keep the trainees from escaping. During training sessions, any combatant who tried to stay out of the fight was whipped or burned with a red-hot iron to force him into the fight.

The weapons used by the gladiators included swords, spears, tridents, nets, and shields. If a combatant was wounded, the crowd often had the power to call for his death if it suited them. A gladiator whose wounds were considered mortal was approached by someone dressed as Charon, ferryman of the underworld, who, wielding a huge mallet, smashed the head of the dying fighter.



Charon of the underworld

Review and Write

What is the most brutal sport held in modern arenas today? Why do you think the Roman games were so harsh, even to the point of killing?

Daily Life in Rome

During the era of the Pax Romana, two centuries of powerful Roman control and peace, the city of Rome became the great urban centerpiece of the Empire. People came from every corner of the sprawling Roman state. Approximately one million people lived in Rome by the reign of Augustus.

In the middle of this urban melting pot was the Forum. This "downtown" section of the city was the hub of public urban life. Its streets were lined with shops, temples, and theaters. Writers of the day boasted that anyone could find anything he or she might want in the Forum.



As a result of its rapid population growth by the 1st century B.C., the city developed in two very different ways.

Emperors spent large sums ordering the building of great temples, parks, arenas, and government houses. However, the poorer class of people lived in wooden

shanties, closely packed together in neighborhoods we would consider slums today.

Life in Rome could be difficult. Fire was a constant problem for those living in wooden apartments. Also, the night life in Rome was dangerous. Although the city had a large police force, few people ventured out at night. Gangs roamed the streets.

Rome was home to several classes of people. At the top were the aristocrats, who were often the most wealthy citizens. Their homes were large and often featured open courtyards. Here the upper class entertained their friends, reclining at their meals, sometimes eating until full, then visiting a special room where they forced themselves to vomit, making room for another meal.

Many of Rome's populace lived as artisans. They produced trade goods, such as clothes, shoes, household items, and tools. Such workers usually belonged to a guild called a *collegia*, which was made up of workers who produced similar trade

goods. Often a *collegia* provided a common hall for its members, where dinners were held. *Collegia* helped organize artisans, allowing them to get better prices for their goods.

At the bottom of the social ladder were the many slaves found in Rome. By the 2nd century A.D., perhaps as many as one-third of Rome's population were slaves. Slaves were treated differently from one master to the next. Some might be treated humanely and fairly. Others were treated cruelly.

To keep the masses in Rome entertained and happy, the local authorities provided the citizenry with free public baths. In the early years of the Empire, one could find as many as 800 public baths in Rome. Some baths were quite elaborate facilities, including gymnasiums, gardens, libraries, and many works of art.

Games and contests of skill were important to life in Rome, too. Many people in the city participated in boxing, wrestling, foot races, and other sporting events. Chariot racing and the fighting games carried out by professional warriors called *gladiators* were favorites.

The largest chariot racing track was called the Circus Maximus, a great marble arena measuring 600 yards by 200 yards. This popular stadium could hold 150,000 people who could watch upward of 24 chariot races a day, some with the emperor present presiding over the events.

But the greatest and most popular sports arena built in Rome was the Coliseum, completed in A.D. 80. Here, gladiators, many of them slaves sold for the purpose, performed in combat against wild animals or other gladiators—sometimes to the death.

Review and Write

Most large cities today have immense arenas which are capable of seating tens of thousands of people. What are some of the events held in such arenas today? Are there any modern sporting events which you think are similar to the Roman chariot races or the gladiator matches?

The Life of Jesus Christ

During the centuries of Roman domination in the Mediterranean region and beyond, many religious practices existed within the Republic and later the Empire. A new religion was created after the death of a man in A.D. 29 who lived in ancient Palestine, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. His name was Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus the Christ (from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning "savior") was the founder of a religion which became known as Christianity.

Today, Christians are found all over the world. Hundreds of millions of people claim to follow the teachings of Jesus. Long after many of the religions founded in the Roman Empire died out, Christianity thrived.

Jesus of Nazareth was born, perhaps, as early as 4 B.C. and died in A.D. 29. This may seem odd when you consider that we have been using the initials B.C. in this study to refer to the years and centuries prior to Jesus' birth. That might suggest that Jesus was born in the year 0, but those who created the modern calendar miscalculated the years, accidentally placing Jesus' birth four years later than it probably was.

Born during the reign of Augustus Caesar, Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a town in the Galilean region of Judea. He began his career as a teacher and healer. We know only a few events in the life of Jesus prior to his death through a series of four short books known as the Four Gospels.

According to tradition, these books were written by four of Jesus' followers. Jesus had 12 men called *apostles* who served him during his three-year preaching ministry. Four of them—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—wrote about their experiences with Jesus. Historians date the Four Gospels between A.D. 70 and 90.

Jesus began his preaching ministry at about age 30. For three years, he preached all over Judea, including in the city of Jerusalem. Not only did he preach a simple message, Jesus also healed the sick and cast out evil spirits from possessed victims.

Jesus often spoke to large crowds of poor people, many of whom were illiterate. Perhaps for this reason, he often used short stories, called *parables*, to get his message across. Such stories humanized his message and gave the people simple structures explaining his purpose.

Basically, Jesus' message incorporated all of the following themes: 1) God (the Hebrew Yahweh) is the father of all humankind; 2) forgiveness and love should be expressed even to one's enemies; 3) "do unto others as you would have others do unto you"; 4) pay back evil with good; 5) avoid all hypocrisy; 6) forego religious ceremony, ritual, and meaningless tradition; 7) believe in the coming of God's kingdom; and 8) believe in the final Judgment when all the dead will be brought back to life and be rewarded or punished with either Heaven or Hell.

Some of these messages were often veiled by Jesus, which led some people to misunderstand his message. Certain of his followers and his enemies thought that when he spoke of the "kingdom of God," Jesus meant an earthly political kingdom. His enemies used these words against him, causing him to be arrested in Jerusalem, tried by a Jewish court, and sentenced by a Roman leader to be executed by crucifixion—the common means of state execution carried out by Rome in A.D. 29 or perhaps 30.

According to the Gospels, after Jesus' death, he arose and lived again. Those who followed him in life continued to preach his message, leading to the establishment of a new faith based on his life, his example, and his claim to have been the Son of God. Before the end of the 1st century A.D., Christians could be found all over the Roman Empire. By the 300s A.D., Christianity became the official state religion of Rome.



Review and Write

What significant impact do you think the life of Jesus had or continues to have on world history?

The Spread of Christianity

With the death of Jesus of Nazareth, his critics and enemies believed they had destroyed his message for all time. However, they were mistaken. His followers continued preaching his message. Reports began to circulate that Jesus had been seen after his crucifixion and that he had spoken to his followers.

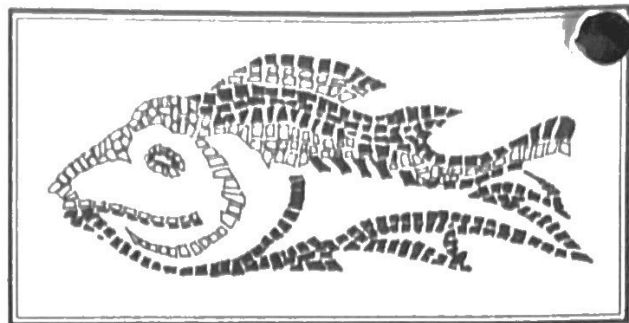
However, there were not many converts to the new religion based on Jesus' ministry immediately after his death. Palestine was the center of the Jewish religion known as Judaism, and many Jews did not believe Jesus to be their savior, the Messiah spoken of by their early prophets.

Early Christianity did take root elsewhere among Hellenistic Jews living outside of Palestine. They were more open to new ideas and less committed to the traditional teachings of Judaism. As a result, early Christians found converts in the Jewish communities of such cities as Athens, Antioch, Corinth, and even Rome.

Although Jesus had limited his message to the Jewish people, in a short time, others were preaching his themes to non-Jews. According to Christian scripture, the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus' 12 immediate followers, began this process.

But another man, known as Saul of Tarsus, was also instrumental in taking the Christian message to non-Jews. Later known as Paul, he was raised in a Hellenistic city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and was well-versed in the Jewish faith, Greek thought, and Hellenistic literature. Paul had first fought against the spread of Jesus' followers after his death, but was later converted to Christianity himself.

Paul took Jesus' message out of Palestine through well-organized missionary trips throughout the eastern portion of the Roman Empire. He preached to and converted Hellenistic Jews and many non-Jews, called Gentiles, who were themselves disenchanted with pagan cults and the state religion of the Empire, which required the worship of the emperor as a deity. Paul was also the writer of many of the books or letters which make up the modern New Testament. His ministry was crucial to the spread of Christianity. After preaching for several decades, Paul was eventually condemned by the Roman state,



and was executed around the year A.D. 65.

Rome came to take a hard line toward the early Church because Roman leaders believed it threatened the power of the Empire. Emperor worship was considered an essential act of patriotism for all Roman citizens. Christians, however, refused to take part in such ceremonies. Therefore, to the Romans, Christians were traitors. In addition, many Christians refused to serve in the Roman army.

Despite their dislike for Christianity, Roman officials did not pass a single law specifically forbidding it. Christians were persecuted periodically by Imperial decree, however. Such persecutions sometimes led to Christians being killed during Roman sporting events.

By the end of the 3rd century A.D., such persecutions came to an end, having failed to destroy the Christian faith. In A.D. 313, Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity throughout the Empire. By 395, Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be the sole religion of the Roman Empire.

Review and Write

1. Why was the Apostle Paul so important in the spread of early Christianity?
2. From where did early Christianity find its first followers?
3. What cities became important centers of early Christianity?

The Dividing of the Roman Empire

Many problems continued to plague the Roman Empire throughout the decades of the 3rd and 4th centuries. In A.D. 285, however, one emperor, Diocletian (die o KLEE shum) helped to bring the long decline nearly to a halt.

Diocletian ruled for 30 years, from 285 to 305. Diocletian brought civil war to an end and worked hard to reorganize the Empire into a well-run, effective state. He did not restore the power of the Senate, however. Instead he completed the process of reducing the power of the long-standing body to that of a town council. Diocletian created a splendid court for himself, ordering all to refer to him as "the most sacred lord."

In reorganizing the Empire, Diocletian decided that one problem in providing security and stability within the state was that it was far too large and unwieldy. No one man could rule efficiently. So he divided it into two halves. The eastern half he kept for his own rule. In the western half, he established a co-ruler called an *Augustus*. Both men were to rule together.

Next, Diocletian ordered each of the two co-rulers to select his own fellow ruler, a number-two-man, called a *Caesar*. This step made certain that a successor for every Augustus was always there to take over, which would, hopefully, bring all power struggles to an end.

His next step in reorganizing the Empire was to establish an administrative system throughout the regions under Roman domination. These 13 regional units were called dioceses (see page 25). Each diocese was to be headed by a vicar. These dioceses were grouped into four prefectures, each under a prefect. While this entire system brought political stability to Rome, it also created divisions within the Empire, which eventually became institutionalized.

Diocletian also reorganized the military. He

divided the army's administration, creating provincial commands in the hands of generals called *duces*. (This word later developed into the aristocratic title of duke.)

Diocletian also worked hard to stabilize prices and encourage trade. All these changes were sweeping and designed to stabilize the destructive trends which had developed in the Empire for over a century. In creating a co-ruler, an additional capital was also created in the Empire. Diocletian established himself in the eastern half of the Empire at a city called Nicomedia, located along the Sea of Marmora.

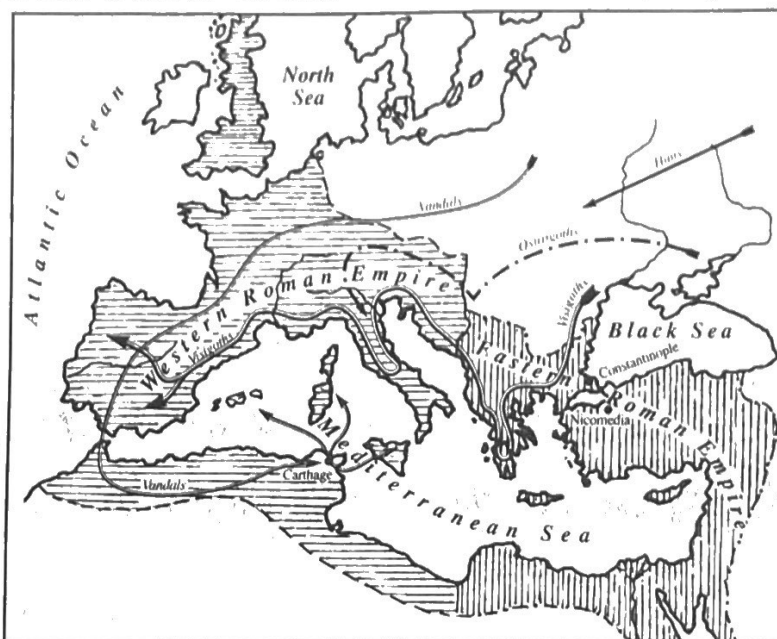
Despite his best efforts, after Diocletian's retirement in A.D. 305, many of his reforms fell apart,

followed by civil war. For several years, five men contended for the throne. One of them, known as Constantine (A.D. 306–337), ultimately came to the front, becoming the sole ruler of the Empire in 324.

During his reign, Constantine moved the eastern capital to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium, located at the entrance to the Black Sea. He called

his capital New Rome or Constantinople. (Today it is Istanbul, Turkey.)

This new eastern capital signaled a permanent split between the two halves of the Empire. During his reign, Constantine maintained rule through himself and a joint ruler in the west. But a later ruler, Theodosius (A.D. 379–395) officially divided the Empire into two halves between his two sons upon his death. After this, the 400-year-old Roman Empire was never governed as a single state again.



Review and Write

Although Diocletian's divisions of the Empire were meant to provide stability, they ultimately caused the Empire to split forever in two. How?