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Jeffrey A. D. Weima

Calvin Theological Seminary

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‘Peace and Security’ (1 Thess 5.3): Prophetic Warning or Political Propaganda?

JEFFREY A. D. WEIMA

*Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton St. S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546, USA.
email: weimje@calvinseminary.edu*

The phrase ‘Peace and security’ in 1 Thess 5.3 has traditionally been understood as an echo of the OT prophetic warnings (Jer 6.14; Ezek 13.10; Mic 3.5) against false claims of peace. Stronger evidence exists, however, that the apostle is making use of a popular theme of the imperial Roman propaganda machine. The Romans vigorously promoted themselves through various public media as those who provided not only ‘peace’ but also ‘security’, thereby providing a closer parallel to Paul’s statement in 5.3 than any OT text. This essay reviews four kinds of evidence—numismatic, monumental, inscriptional and literary—in order to demonstrate in a decisive fashion that the phrase ‘peace and security’ involves an allusion not to prophetic warning but to Roman political propaganda.

Keywords: 1 Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5.3, Thessalonica, *Pax Romana*, peace, security, political propaganda.

1. Introduction

Paul, attempting to comfort the Christians in Thessalonica about their eschatological fate on the coming day of the Lord, states the following in 1 Thess 5.3: ‘Whenever people say, “Peace and security”, then sudden destruction comes upon them, like birth pangs come upon a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape’. All translations place the brief phrase ‘Peace and security’ (εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια) in quotation marks because it is clear from the introductory formula ‘whenever people say’ that the apostle here is not creating but citing these words.¹ This raises the question, then, as to the source or identity of Paul’s quotation.

The traditional answer is that the phrase ‘Peace and security’ echoes the OT prophetic warnings against false claims of peace uttered by wicked leaders or

¹ Two additional factors indicate that this brief phrase stems not from Paul himself but from some other source: first, the word εἰρήνη which, elsewhere in the apostle’s writings always has a religious meaning, has here a secular sense such that it is paralleled with the word ἀσφάλεια; second, the word ἀσφάλεια occurs nowhere else in the apostle’s writings.

pseudo-prophets in Israel. In Jer 6.14 God accuses the spiritual leaders in Jerusalem of treating ‘the wound of my people carelessly, saying “Peace, peace”, when there is no peace’ (so also 8.11 but not in the LXX). Similarly, in Ezek 13.10 God claims that the prophets of Israel are false ‘because they have misled my people, saying, “Peace, peace”, and there is no peace’. And in Micah 3.5 God complains about ‘prophets who lead my people astray: if you feed them, they proclaim “peace”; if you do not, they prepare to wage war against you’. Consequently, commentators throughout the history of the church have almost universally concluded that Paul in 5.3 is alluding to these OT warnings against false claims of peace. Gordon Fee is typical of many commentators in concluding that Paul is ‘borrowing from the prophetic tradition, especially Jeremiah 6:14’.²

It is, of course, entirely feasible that the apostle who received extensive training in the OT and who in his other letters frequently quotes the sacred scriptures is here echoing an OT prophetic warning. Nevertheless, there are at least four considerations that quickly place this conclusion in doubt. First, such a reference to the OT would be an anomaly in the Thessalonian correspondence, since nowhere else in 1 Thessalonians or 2 Thessalonians does Paul explicitly cite the sacred scriptures. Second, the Thessalonian congregation was a predominantly Gentile church for whom the OT was a foreign and unknown text and who thus would be less likely to hear a supposed reference to a prophetic warning. Third, Paul elsewhere never introduces an OT quotation or allusion with the ambiguous expression ‘whenever they say’ (ὅταν λέγωσιν). Fourth, and most significantly, the OT prophetic warnings deal only with the false claim of ‘peace’ and say nothing about the false claim of ‘security’, thereby differing in a significant way from Paul’s joining of these two terms.

These problems with the traditional view that Paul is echoing in 5.3 a prophetic warning raise the possibility that the quoted phrase ‘Peace and security’ stems from a different source, namely, a popular theme or slogan of the imperial Roman propaganda machine. The Romans vigorously promoted themselves as those who secured not only ‘peace’ but also, though to a lesser degree, ‘security’ (either the Greek ἀσφάλεια or the Latin *securitas*).³ In fact, in light of the compelling evidence for the widespread knowledge and promotion of the *Pax Romana*, it is

2 G. D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 189.

3 This portrayal of Roman rule as one characterized by peace and security did not originate *de novo* with the Roman leaders themselves but is a development of political propaganda already present in the Hellenistic period and used by these earlier kings to idealize and justify their rule. The specific benefits of peace and security occur with some frequency in honorary inscriptions to Seleucid and Ptolemaic rulers: e.g., εἰρήνη: OGIS I 56.12; ἀσφάλεια: OGIS I 90.21 (I thank both Lukas Bormann [Universität Erlangen] and Young R. Kim [Calvin College], each of whom independently made this point in email correspondence).

surprising that biblical commentators have not more quickly recognized its connection with Paul’s words in 1 Thess 5.3. As Klaus Wegnst observed some twenty-five years ago: ‘Hardly any of the exegetical literature notes that there is a thesis about the Pax Romana in I Thess 5.3’.⁴ Although some commentators in more recent times have adopted this position, they do not attempt any substantive justification of this connection beyond a few brief references to ancient authors who celebrate the peace that Rome provided.⁵ The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to review carefully four kinds of evidence—numismatic, monumental, inscriptional and literary—all of which reveals the pervasiveness of the *Pax Romana* theme in the first century CE and so demonstrates that this political propaganda is the intended reference of Paul’s phrase ‘Peace and security’.

2. Numismatic Evidence

One of the key means by which Roman leaders attempted to shape public attitude and influence public opinion was through the minting of coins. As Urban Von Wahlde observes: ‘Roman coins served not only as a means of commerce but also as an effective form of political propaganda’.⁶ Beginning in the late Republic and expanding dramatically in early Imperial times, the coinage shifts from long-term designs to constantly changing designs of short duration, executed

4 K. Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 204 n. 42.

5 So, e.g., K. Donfried, ‘The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence’, *NTS* 31 (1984–85) 344, 355 n. 55: ‘a frontal attack on the Pax et Securitas program of the early Principate’; H. Koester, ‘Imperial Ideology and Paul’s Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians’, *Paul and Empire* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997) 161–2; M. W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 167; B. R. Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1998) 70; G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 233–4; P. Oakes, ‘Re-Mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians’, *JSNT* 27 (2005) 317–18; B. Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 146–7. The earliest proposal that 1 Thess 5.3 alludes to Roman propaganda about peace and security is that of E. Bammel, ‘Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Staatsanschauung’, *ThLZ* 85 (1960) 837–40. His suggestion was later picked up by Wengst, *Pax Romana*, esp. 77–9. Other proponents include H. Hendrix (‘Archeology and Eschatology at Thessalonica’, *The Future of Early Christians: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* [ed. B. A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991] 107–18), though he spends only a little over two pages justifying the claim (112–14). The Roman background of 5.3 has been defended more extensively by C. vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki—Stadt des Kassander und Gemeinde des Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 167–85. Vom Brocke advances the argument by dealing with a few ancient sources not cited in previous discussions (e.g., the Pompey statue and inscription from Ilium). Yet he does not survey in a more comprehensive manner, as we do in this essay, the totality of the numismatic, monumental, inscriptional and literary evidence which cumulatively demonstrates in a decisive manner how widespread were the themes of both peace and security in the first century CE.

6 U. C. Von Wahlde, Letter, *BAR* 36 (2010) 10.



Figure 1. *Octavian and Pax*. RIC I 252⁹

in impressive detail. In response to the question why ancient rulers thought it worthwhile to commission such detailed and beautiful coins when simpler and less costly produced coins would do, Michael Grant answers: ‘...because it was first-rate propaganda’.⁷ Coins functioned like portable billboards whose messages were seen over and over again as these monies changed hands and were transported to locations throughout the Roman Empire.

One of the messages that the early Roman emperors aggressively promoted through coinage was the peace that their leadership provided. Numerous coin types were produced which contained either the image of the goddess Pax as the personification of ‘peace’, the word *pax*, or both. In fact, coins promoting the idea of the *Pax Romana* are so frequent that Wengst refers to the numismatic evidence as ‘very eloquent’.⁸

That Octavian was concerned to portray himself as the provider of peace from the very beginning of his rise to power is evident from a series of silver coins he produced to pay his troops already in 32 BCE, prior to his victory over Antony in Actium. One coin in this series (Fig. 1) has on the obverse a fine, stern ‘Roman’ portrait of Octavian as the sole ruler without any text and on the reverse the standing figure of the goddess Pax who is holding a cornucopia in her left hand—an image typically associated with Pax—and an olive branch in her right hand, with the inscription CAESAR DIVI F(ILIVS).¹⁰

Another coin in this series (Fig. 2) has on the obverse the head of Pax with a cornucopia on the left side in the background and an olive branch on the right, and on the reverse has the standing figure of Octavian in military dress with a spear in the one hand and the other hand raised in a gesture of address with

⁷ M. Grant, *Roman History from Coins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1958) 12.

⁸ Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 11.

⁹ All the images of coins in this article (except for Fig. 13) are used by permission from the Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. (www.cngcoins.com).

¹⁰ BMCRE 605; RIC 252. C. H. V. Sutherland, *Roman Coins* (New York: Putman’s Sons, 1974) 119 (nos. 208 and 209).



Figure 2. *Pax and Octavian*. RIC I 253

the same inscription CAESAR DIVI F(ILIVS).¹¹ These two coins, along with the other ones in this series,¹² 'registered no victory, but they promised it, and Peace as well—under the leadership of Octavian'.¹³ The political message conveyed by these coins should not be overlooked. As Paul Zanker notes:

Never before had coins of such beauty been minted in Rome. But it was a case of aesthetics in the service of political ends. In comparison with the crowded and barely legible coins of the Late Republican period these were models of clarity and simplicity ... The images needed no explanatory words and were in fact more effective against a plain background. The minting of related series of coins may have inspired people to form collections and that would also have drawn attention to their message.¹⁴

A coin struck perhaps in Ephesus in 28 BCE a short time after Octavian's victory over Antony (as evidenced in his change in nomenclature from CAESAR DIVI F. to IMP. CAESAR) continues to promote the idea of Octavian as the provider of peace (Fig. 3).¹⁵ The obverse has the head of Octavian, this time crowned with a victory wreath, and the lengthy inscription 'Imperator Caesar, champion of the constitutional liberties of the Roman people'. The reverse consists of several impressively detailed images but it especially stresses the goddess Peace in the center who is explicitly identified as Pax, standing on a sword and holding the caduceus of free commerce. She has a miniature Dionysiac *cista* (sacred wicker

11 BMCRE 612. Sutherland, *Roman Coins*, 119 (nos. 210 and 211).

12 These two coins were part of a set of six, divided into two series of three pairs. In the one set of three, a portrait head of Octavian is on the obverse and a full-length image of the goddesses Pax (Peace), Venus and Victoria (Victory) on the reverse. In the other set of three, the images are reversed: a portrait head of the goddesses Pax, Venus and Victoria is on the obverse and a full-length figure of Octavian is on the reverse. For the image of the series, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988) 54–55, Figs. 41 and 42.

13 Sutherland, *Roman Coins*, 119.

14 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 54.

15 BMCRE 691–3. Sutherland, *Roman Coins*, 125 (nos. 226 and 227)



Figure 3. *Octavian and Pax*. RIC I 476

basket) in the background representing agricultural fertility. All these images are contained within a victory wreath of laurel. The message of the coin is clear: Octavian has emerged as the sole, unchallenged victor in Rome's internal war and his conquest has ushered in a fertile period of productivity and peace.

The numismatic message that Rome provided peace was continued under Tiberius's reign when one of the more common images (Fig. 4) found on the reverse of many coins involved that of a seated woman—the personification of the goddess Pax.¹⁶ She is holding in her right hand a tall scepter (symbolizing Roman military power) and in her left hand an olive branch (symbolizing the peace resulting from Roman military power), and the outside of the coin contains the inscription PONTIF MAXIM referring to the laureate head of Tiberius on the other side.



Figure 4. *Tiberius and Pax*. RIC I 26

16 BMCRE 124, 125, 126, 127. H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 1 (London: Spink & Son, 1923): 'We shall probably be right in identifying the type as a figure of Pax' (1.99). M. Grant (*Roman Imperial Money* [London: Thomas Nelson, 1954] 134) states of this coin image: 'But the olive-branch certainly symbolizes Peace, the unequalled *Pax Romana* which, established by Augustus, Tiberius did a vast amount, by unending labour, to stabilize'. The female figure on these coins was likely identified in Roman times additionally with Livia, the wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius. Although Tiberius, especially in the latter part of his reign, was reticent about granting honors to his ambitious mother, 'others were always ready to propose them and he could not always refuse' (Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 99).



Figure 5. *Claudius and Pax*. RIC I 38

The theme of peace accomplished through military victory was one also promulgated by Claudius in a remarkable coin series (Fig. 5) that he issued.¹⁷ Here one finds the image of a standing Pax who is adorned with the wings of Nike (Victory) and is pointing a caduceus (typically carried by Hermes and thus a symbol of commercial prosperity) at a snake (symbol of Salus) under the inscription *PACI AVGUSTAE*. The message of this coin is again clear. As Sutherland puts it, 'Here was a brave promise of imperial policy. The adjectival *AVGUSTAE*, used in preference to the dependent genitival *AVGVSTI*, deliberately suggested Claudius' inheritance of the tradition and powers of peace-by-victory-in-prosperity which Augustus himself had so majestically established'.¹⁸

The *Pax-Romana* theme continued to be stressed in the coinage of Nero. One series of coins that he produced had the inscription 'universal peace'.¹⁹ Another series of coins that Nero issued often has on the reverse side an image of the *Ara Pacis*²⁰ (see Fig. 13 below)—the impressive 'Altar of Peace' built by Augustus in Rome as a testimony to what he wanted most of all to be remembered about his reign. Still another series of large brass coins also contained important visual reminders that Rome provided its subjects with peace. One issue (Fig. 6) has the emperor

17 BMCEmp. I, Claudius, nos. 3, 16–19; RIC I, Claudius, nos. 19–20. See the discussion of this coin issue by C.H.V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy* (London: Methuen, 1951), 127–28, plate XII.4.

18 Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy*, 127. Sutherland also states: 'But the topical framework within which these ideas were combined adds an even greater interest since, as has been recently demonstrated, this complex coin type was first issued in a year which marked the third centenary of the temple of Janus (so intimately associated with Pax), the bicentenary of the earliest known ceremony of the *augurium Salutis*, and the half-centenary of Augustus' cult-association of Pax, Salus and Janus' (127).

19 BMCRE 321.

20 BMCRE 360, 363, 364; RIC I² 531. Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 139, 143. Note also the comment of Grant, *Roman History from Coins*: 'certain coins, with their usual topical but backward-looking tact, display an Altar of Peace (*ARA PACIS*) imitated from, if not identical with, Augustus' famous altar of the same name at Rome' (34).



Figure 6. Nero and Triumphal Arch. RIC I 433



Figure 7. Nero and Temple of Janus. RIC I 265

Nero in a quadriga on top of a triumphal arch²¹ with a legionary soldier on each side of the arch at a slightly lower level. Three other figures—all of them deities—are seen on the coin. On the left side of Nero is Pax holding her symbols of cornucopia and staff of peace; on the right side of Nero is Nike (Victory) holding a garland and palm branch; and below in the left niche of the triumphal arch is the larger image of Mars, the nude and helmeted god of war.²² This coin series thus speaks of the victory in war that Nero and his troops have achieved, thereby resulting in a time of peace.

Another important issue (Fig. 7) depicts the ceremonial closing of the Janus temple²³—an act that occurred on those rare occasions when Rome was wholly

21 This monumental triumphal arch was erected by Nero to commemorate Roman military campaigns against the Parthians in Mesopotamia and Armenia. Although not very successful in a military sense, the war did end with a peace treaty favorable to Rome that was upheld for nearly fifty years. The arch was later dismantled after Nero's ignominious end in 68 CE and is only known through its depiction on this series of coins.

22 John P. C. Kent, Bernhard Overbeck and Armin U. Stylow, *Die Römische Münze* (Munich: Hirmer, 1973) Table 52, no. 206 (right). Same image on other coins: BMC 183, 184, 187, 188, 329, 333 (RIC I 143, 144, 147, 148, 432, 433, 500). Twelve coins with this image are listed in Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 155 (nos. 147–58).

23 Mattingly and Sydenham (*Roman Imperial Coinage*) list some 45 coins with this image (156–8, nos. 159–204). See also Sutherland, *Roman Coins*, 168 (no. 309).

at peace. The temple of Janus is depicted with its doors closed and covered with garlands, and with a latticed window in the side wall. The specific event that this coin commemorated involved the peace that Nero negotiated with the Parthians and the visit of Tiridates, the brother of the King of Parthia, to Rome in 66 CE. Coins commemorating this event were struck at least a year before the visit happened and continued to be issued to the end of Nero’s reign. The image of the Janus temple with a closed door is a powerful one that reminded people of the peace brought about initially by Augustus who was the only leader in recent times to have also closed the temple door and to have done so an unprecedented three times. In case people missed the not so subtle allusion in the image to the peace that Rome provided, the text on the coin spelled it out for them: ‘The Peace of the Roman People having been established on Land and Sea [or Everywhere], he closed (the Temple of) Janus’.²⁴

Coins produced during the brief civil wars of 68–69 CE continue to emphasize peace—a most powerful enticement used by contenders to Roman leadership to secure the support of citizens given the historical circumstances.²⁵ Of this period Mattingly and Sydenham make the following observation: ‘The coinage is from first to last propagandist; the object of the movement is to restore the liberty of the Roman people, to bring Victory and new life to Rome, *to establish peace*’.²⁶ The fact that coins from this period, like those struck under the reign of Nero, date to after the writing of 1 Thessalonians in 51 CE, might cause some to question their value for understanding the historical context of Paul’s readers in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, the numismatic evidence from a later period shows a trajectory of imperial propaganda begun with Augustus and continued by others not just in the Julio-Claudian line but subsequent emperors as well—a

24 There are two inscriptions seen on Nero’s Temple of Janus coins: PACE P(*opuli*) R(*omani*) VBIQ PARTA IANVM CLVSIT and PACE P(*opuli*) R(*omani*) TERRA MARIQVE PARTA IANVM CLVSIT.

25 Several separate series of coins, although struck under varying circumstances, have in common the fact that none bear the emperor’s portrait or legend but are closely connected with Galba. Some have the goddess Pax standing with a caduceus in one hand and corn-ears and poppies in the other with the inscription identifying her simply as PAX or more fully as PAX P R—‘peace of the people of Rome’ (Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 190, nos. 3 and 4; the obverse of these coins have DIVVS AVGVSTVS). A larger number have the image of clasped hands holding a winged caduceus between either two crossed cornucopiae or two ears of corn along with the inscription PAX or PAX P R (Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 182 (nos. 11–16), 185 (no. 19), 189 (no. 13). Many coins have been found with the laureate head of Galba on the obverse and the goddess Pax in a variety of traditional poses and the inscription PAX AVGVSTVS (Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 203 (nos. 36–37), 205–6 (nos. 61–66), 216 (no. 163). See also the coin series issued by Otho with Pax on the reverse with the inscription PAX ORBIS TERRARVM (‘Peace throughout the World’) (Grant, *Roman History from Coins*, 69, Plate 26, 1).

26 Mattingly and Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, 179 (emphasis added).



Figure 8. Gaius ('Caligula') and his three sisters. RIC I 33

trajectory of imperial propaganda whereby the Roman leaders used coins to market their rule as one that offered its citizens the benefits of peace and security.

It is important to note before leaving the numismatic evidence that coins were used to promote not just 'peace' but also the second term found in Paul's cited phrase: 'security'. For example, Gaius ('Caligula') issued a coin (Fig. 8) containing the image of his three sisters standing and facing each other in which Agrippina, leaning on a column and holding a cornucopia, represents Securitas.²⁷ This coin-type was issued for empire-wide currency and was not only struck in very high numbers²⁸ but also the image of the three sisters, including Agrippina as Securitas, was copied in several places.²⁹

Nero issued the 'Securitas Augusti' type (Fig. 9) which emphasized the universal stability of the empire as a whole.³⁰ This series features Securitas seated on a throne, holding a spear in her left hand (symbolizing security accomplished through military victory), while her right hand rests on her head, a classical posture of repose (symbolizing a secure time of peace during which citizens could relax, having nothing to fear).

Both Otho (Fig. 10) and Vitellius during the internal fights for power in 69 CE following Nero's suicide minted coins with the image of Securitas and the

27 BMCRE I, 152, no. 36; RIC I², 110, no. 33. The three sisters are personified as Securitas, Concordia and Fortuna respectively (so, e.g., Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy*, 113; Grant, *Roman Imperial Money*, 141).

28 Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy*, 114. Drusilla died in 38 CE shortly after the coins were first minted and both Agrippina and Julia were exiled in 39 CE, so that no 'three sisters' coins appeared after this time.

29 So A. A. Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University, 1996) 61 (I owe this reference to J. Gabrielson, 'Paul's Non-violent Gospel: The Theological Politics of Peace in Paul's Life and Letters' [Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 2011] 187 n. 55).

30 BMCemp. I, pl. 44; RIC I, Nero, nos. 284–5. Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy*, 169, plate XVI, 5.



Figure 9. Nero and Securitas. RIC I 406



Figure 10. Otho and Securitas. RIC I 7

inscription 'Security for the Roman People' in the attempt to persuade Romans that their reigns would provide the blessing of security.³¹

3. Monumental Evidence

3.1. Pompey Statue from Ilium

Monuments were another effective way in which the message of Roman peace and security was promulgated. This can be seen, for example, in a statue and accompanying inscription honoring the Roman military and political leader Pompey.³² This inscription was discovered in 1987 in Ilium, the ancient city of Troy, which was captured and renamed by the Romans in 85 BCE. The text was inscribed on the base of a large statue of Pompey which would have been visible from both land and sea. The monument was erected in the middle of the first century BCE by 'the people and the youth' of the city in gratitude to

31 See, e.g., RIC I², 268, no. 12; Kent, Overbeck and Stylow, *Römische Münze*, nos. 216–17; Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy*, 119–20.

32 SEG XLVI 1565. E. Winter, 'Stadt und Herrschaft in spätrepublikanischer Zeit: Eine neue Pompeius-Inschrift aus Ilium', *Die Troas. Neue Forschungen zu Neandria und Alexandria Troas*, vol. 2 (ed. E. Schwertheim and H. Wiegartz; Bonn: R. Habelt, 1996) 175–94.

Pompey for preserving humankind from ‘barbarian wars and the dangers of pirates’, thereby ‘restoring *peace* and *security* on land and sea’ (ἀποκαθεστάκοτα δὲ [τὴν εἰρ]ήνην καὶ τὴν ἀσφάλειαν καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν). Here we find the two benefits of peace and security combined in exactly the same manner as that of Paul’s citation in 1 Thess 5.3.

3.2. *Octavian’s Victory Monument at Nicopolis*

Evidence that Octavian consciously promoted his rule from the very beginning as a new age of peace can be seen in the victory monument he constructed at Nicopolis (‘Victory City’), the new city he established already in 29 BCE at the site of his defeat of Marc Antony at Actium (Dio *Roman History* 51.1.2–3; Suetonius *Augustus* 18.2; Pausanias 7.19.9; 10.3).³³ This monument employed various forms of imagery and symbolism to emphasize not only the universal peace that Octavian’s victory accomplished but also the divine choice of Octavian as the one to bring about this peace. The upper terrace of the monument consisted of an impressive pi-shaped stoa more than 40 meters (130 feet) wide, which housed several statues and spoils from the battle. The lower terrace (Fig. 11) was marked off by a retaining wall socketed with an even more impressive row of 33 to 35 bronze warship rams cut from the prows of Antony’s and Cleopatra’s largest ships, arranged in increasing sizes from right to left. This arrangement functioned to draw the viewer’s attention to the inscription which began over the first and largest ram which was a massive 1.38 meters (4.5 feet) wide and weighed over two tons. The inscription, consisting of 30 centimeters (1 foot) high letters, read as follows:

Imperator Caesar, son of the divine Julius, following the victory in the war which he waged on behalf of the republic in this region, when he was consul for the fifth time and commander-in-chief for the seventh time, after *peace* had been secured on land and sea (*pace parta terra marique*), consecrated to Neptune and Mars the camp from which he set forth to attack the enemy now ornamented with naval spoils.³⁴

This inscription makes explicit the message conveyed implicitly by the monument as a whole, namely, that Octavian, in service not of himself but ‘on behalf of the republic’ and with the divine sanction of Neptune and Mars, brought peace to the Roman Empire despite the actions of a deliberately unnamed ‘enemy’ of the state.

33 For an extensive discussion of the victory monument, see W. M. Murray and P. M. Petsas, *Octavian’s Campsite Memorial for the Actian War* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 79, Part 4; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989). For a much briefer discussion, see W. M. Murray and P. M. Petsas, ‘The Spoils of Actium’, *Archaeology* 41 (1988) 29–35.

34 This is the restored translation proposed by Murray and Petsas, *Octavian’s Campsite Memorial*, 86.

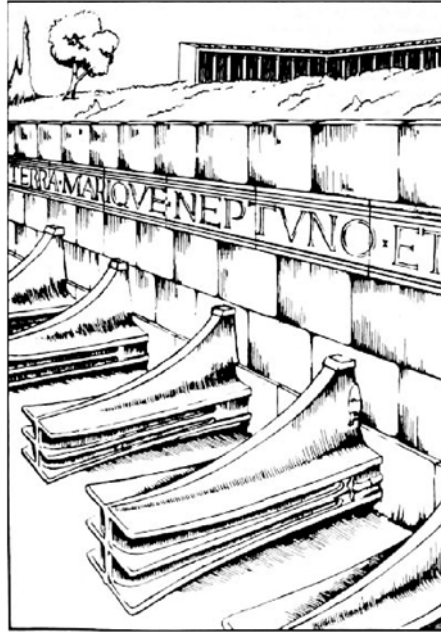


Figure 11. Lower terrace of victory monument at Nicopolis with socketed bronze warship rams and inscription (image courtesy of William M. Murray)

Additionally, the key phrase *pace parta terra marique* suggests that this monument commemorates not merely the peace accomplished in the key battle of Actium but the peace that resulted from Octavian's entire military campaign.³⁵

3.3. *Ara Pacis*

The most significant monument for our thesis may well be the *Ara Pacis* ('Altar of Peace') built by the Roman Senate in 9 BCE in honor of Augustus's successful military campaign to bring peace to the regions of Gaul and Spain. The importance of this monument is indicated by Augustus's decision to refer to it in his *Res Gestae*—the recording of what he considered his most significant lifetime accomplishments. Augustus writes: 'When I returned to Rome from Spain and Gaul, having settled affairs successfully in these provinces...the senate decreed that an altar of Augustan Peace should be consecrated in thanks for my return on the field of Mars, and ordered magistrates and priests and Vestal Virgins to perform an annual sacrifice there' (12.2).³⁶ Augustus's reference to

35 Murray and Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial*, 138.

36 Translation of the *Res Gestae* here and elsewhere in this paper is from Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti. Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009).



Figure 12. Eastern panel of Ara Pacis, Rome (photo by J. A. D. Weima)

the location of this altar accentuates the theme of peace that the monument itself commemorates. As Ludwig Budde observes: ‘Even the field of Mars now gives evidence that the times of war are ended, that the rule of the goddess Pax, the golden age of peace, in which alone wars and dangers find their significance, has begun’.³⁷

Although the altar itself as a whole skillfully conveys the message of peace and tranquility, this message is most clearly proclaimed in the eastern panel (Fig. 12).³⁸ Here is found the idyllic scene of a woman—the personification of a goddess—sitting with two small children in her arms and abundant fruit in her lap. Ears of grain, poppies and reeds are sprouting up next to her, while a cow lies peacefully at her feet and a sheep drinks water flowing from her throne. The identity of the goddess, though greatly debated, is likely Pax, since this would solve the substantial problem of the absence of any personification of Peace on an altar that is explicitly identified by Augustus in his *Res Gestae* as

37 L. Budde, *Ara Pacis Augustae: der Friedensaltar des Augustus* (Hanover: Tauros-Press, 1957) 6 (translation mine: ‘Auch das Marsfeld sollte nun davon zeugen, dass die Kriegszeiten beendet seien, dass die Herrschaft der Göttin Pax, das goldene Zeitalter des Friedens, in dem Kriege und Nöte allein ihren Sinn finden, angebrochen sei’). Cooley (*Res Gestae*, 156): ‘Its location at the point where military power was put aside suited its dedication to Peace’.

38 Karl Galinsky (*Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1996] 106): ‘There is no question that of all the relief panels of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, this is the one most emblematic of peace and tranquility’.



Figure 13. Nero and Altar of Peace. RIC I 461 (American Numismatic Society 1944.100.39794)

'an altar of Augustan Peace'. Furthermore, this identification would account for the presence of the corresponding panel also on the eastern side which depicts the goddess Roma enthroned on a trophy of armor. The two panels were intended to be read together: the blessings of Roman peace have been secured through its military success.³⁹

The images contained in the *Ara Pacis* and thus also their propagandist message were spread well beyond Rome through the many travelers who visited the capital city, the writings of ancient authors and the production of certain coins which display the Altar of Peace (Fig. 13).⁴⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that the same images on the *Ara Pacis* appear in altars and other monuments in various places within the Roman Empire. For example, a marble relief in Carthage is an exact replica of the goddess Pax depicted in the eastern panel of the *Ara Pacis* with slight alterations of the two figures on the furthest sides of the panel.⁴¹

3.4. Twin Altars of Pax Augusta and Securitas in Praeneste

Another important example of the widespread celebration of Roman peace and security lies in the twin altars of Pax and Securitas discovered in Praeneste (modern Palestrina) located some 35 kilometers outside of Rome.⁴² The inscription on these two⁴³ altars reveals that they were erected by the *decuriones* (local senate or town council) and *populus* (people of Praeneste) who wanted to express their

39 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 175; Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 155.

40 See n. 20 for further information about this coin series.

41 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 314–15, fig. 246. See also David Casriota, 'The *Ara Pacis Augustae* and the Imagery of Abundance', *Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1995) 55, fig. 70. The relief is currently located in the Louvre, Paris.

42 CIL 14, 2898–2899; ILS 3787–3788. F. Zevi, 'Proposta per un'interpretazione dei rilievi Grimani', *Prospettiva* 7 (1976) 38–41.

43 John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed (*In Search of Paul* [San Francisco: Harper, 2004] 166) wrongly present the two inscriptions as being located on both sides of a *single* altar.



Figure 14. Octavian and his golden statue atop of columna rostrata. RIC I 271

gratitude for the peace and security that they now enjoyed after years of civil war.⁴⁴ The fact that the one altar is dedicated not merely to Pax but Pax Augusta shows how strongly the emperor was identified as the key person responsible for Roman peace (and security). This also explains why after Augustus's death a third matching altar to the deified emperor was added to the existing two, this one with a portrait of Augustus adorned not only with a bronze crown of rays but also surrounded with cornucopiae—the symbol of peace and prosperity.⁴⁵ What is most significant about these altars for our understanding of the background of 1 Thess 5.3 is the pairing of Pax or peace with Securitas, just as they are also joined together in the quote by Paul.

3.5. Golden Statue of Octavian on a columna rostrata in Rome

Still another public monument that illustrates further how strongly the idea of peace was honored in the Roman world is an inscription on a *columna rostrata* on which stood a golden statue of Octavian. The historian Appian records Octavian's victorious return to Rome after defeating Sextus Pompey (*Civil Wars* 5.130), noting how the young Caesar made speeches to the Senate and the people in which he recounted his military exploits. After observing that Octavian wrote down his speeches and distributed them in pamphlet form, Appian summarizes the emperor's message as follows: 'He proclaimed *peace* and good-will (εἰρήνην καὶ εὐθυμίαν)'. It is clear, therefore, that Octavian actively promoted himself as one who provided peace.

It is also clear that Octavian's advocacy of himself as a securer of peace was made easier by an audience eager not merely to accept but to promote this idea. Appian goes on to speak of how the Senate responded by granting Octavian all kinds of honors, including 'a golden statue to be erected in the Forum, with the clothes he wore when he entered the city' and that this statue was 'to stand on a column decorated with the bows of captured ships'

44 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 307.

45 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 308, fig. 240.

(*columna rostrata*). Significantly, the inscription on the column below the golden statue read: ‘Peace (Εἰρήνην), long disturbed, he reestablished on land and sea’. This image and message of the ‘golden boy’ of Rome who provided peace was not limited to the capital city but was effectively disseminated throughout the empire via a coin series (Fig. 14) which has a portrait of Octavian with laurel wreath on the one side and an image of his golden statue atop of the *columna rostrata* on the other.⁴⁶

3.6. *Augustus’s Erection of a Silver Statue of Pax*

Yet further evidence that Octavian actively promoted the idea that his reign ushered in a new era of peace stems from the testimony of the Roman historian Dio Cassius. Dio records how the Senate and the Roman people contributed silver for the erection of several statues of Octavian but that the Roman emperor instead used these gifts to ‘set up a statue not of himself but rather of *Salus Publica* [the Health of the State] and also to *Concordia* and *Pax*’ (*Roman History* 54.35.2). Such symbolic statuary was intended to communicate the unity and the peace enjoyed by citizens within the Roman Empire.

3.7. *Two Gold Statues Representing ‘Claudian Augustan Peace’*

The idea of Rome as a provider of peace continued to be a strong theme in public consciousness after the time of Augustus. This is clear not only from the numismatic evidence surveyed above but also from a gold statue honoring the emperor Claudius produced by the city of Alexandria. Claudius wrote a letter to the Alexandrians (P. Lond. 1912)⁴⁷ that dates relatively closely to Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians. The emperor’s letter reveals that the Alexandrians had made two gold statues—one significantly identified as ‘Claudian Augustan Peace’ (Κλαυδιανῆς Εἰρήνης Σεβαστῆς), the other not specified but likely the same—and had asked for permission to put one of these gold statues in a public place in the city and the other statue to be housed in a public building and carried out on imperial day processions. Claudius agrees only to the second of the city’s requests and requires instead that they send one of the gold statues to Rome to be erected in the capital city.

3.8. *The Building and Restoration of Temples*

Augustus initiated a massive building program that focused on, among other things, temples. He proudly highlights in his *Res Gestae* not only the several temples in Rome that he built (19.1) but the many more that he repaired: ‘I restored eighty-two temples of the gods in the city...and I neglected none which

46 RIC I 271; BMCRE 633–6.

47 For an English translation of the letter, see K. Chisholm and J. Ferguson, *Rome: The Augustan Age* (New York: Oxford University, 1981) 539–41. For analysis of the letter, see M. Rostovtzeff, ‘Pax Augusta Claudiana’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 12 (1926) 24–9.



Figure 15. Temple of Concordia. RIC I 67

needed repair at this time' (20.4). This agrees with Livy's description of Augustus as 'the founder and restorer of all our temples' (*History of Rome* 4.20.7). It was widely believed in that day that Rome's civil wars were the direct result of its neglect of these temples and that peace could only be accomplished when these temples were restored to their former glory (Horace *Carmina* 3.6.1–8; Livy *History of Rome* 4.20.7; Vitruvius *On Architecture*, preface to Book 1). Thus, the mere existence of Rome's temples in their new or restored state indirectly communicated the idea of Augustus, the one responsible for these building projects, as the provider of peace.

This indirect message was often made more direct through the strategic arrangement of sculptures and statues in these temples. In this way, temples which were not built in honor of Pax but other deities would nevertheless highlight this goddess and the theme of peace. An example of this can be seen in a large brass coin series minted in Rome in 36 CE containing the image of the Temple of Concordia (Fig. 15).⁴⁸ The goddess Concordia is seated within the temple, while on either side of the staircase stand the gods Hercules and Mercury, representing respectively the military power and the commercial prosperity that the new regime, symbolized by Concordia, had brought. Three other figures embracing each other are standing above the temple on the highest point of the pediment. These three figures are likely goddesses closely connected with Concordia, namely, Pax, Securitas and Fortuna,⁴⁹ and the image of these three divinities embracing each other, along with the other carefully arranged figures on the coin, work together to communicate to the viewer the blessings of peace, security, abundance and prosperity made possible through Roman power. As Zanker observes:

In these new sanctuaries the viewer was confronted with something he had never experienced. Never before had he encountered such an extensive, fully

48 RIC I 38, 61, 67; BMCRE 116, 133. For another image of this coin, see Kent, Overbeck and Stylow, *Römische Münze*, Table 42, 164R.

49 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 111.

integrated set of images. Through didactic arrangements and constant repetition and combination of the limited number of new symbols...even the uneducated viewer was indoctrinated in the new visual program. The key messages were quite simple, and they were reiterated on every possible occasion...⁵⁰

One of these key messages being seared into the public consciousness was the idea that Rome provided its subjects with peace and also, though to a lesser extent, with security.

4. Inscriptional Evidence

4.1. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

Evidence for the importance and widespread awareness of Roman peace and security is found not just in the coins and monuments of that day but also in official proclamations that were drafted, adopted and then inscribed for posterity. The most important evidence from this category is the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, since this inscription provides a crucial window into the ideology and aims of the Augustan reign in the words of the emperor himself. It is, therefore, significant, though hardly surprising in light of the evidence surveyed above, that there are sections in this key document where Augustus stresses his deeds of restoring peace and security.

This emphasis first appears in Augustus’s reference to the senate’s decree that ‘an altar of Augustan Peace should be consecrated on the field of Mars in thanks for my return’ (12.2). We have already discussed above the significance of the *Ara Pacis* as an expression of gratitude for Augustus securing peace in Spain and Gaul, and so here we simply note how this reference to the altar of peace provides a logical transition to the next paragraph dealing with the closing of the Janus temple gates—an action only done in rare times of peace. Augustus writes:

Our ancestors wanted Janus Quirinus to be closed when peace had been achieved by victories on land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people; whereas, before I was born, it is recorded as having been closed twice in all from the foundation of the city, the senate decreed it should be closed three times when I was leader. (13)

This section stresses Augustus’s role as a provider of peace in at least two ways. First, although the symbolic act of closing the Janus temple gates in a time of universal peace was a rare act that had occurred only on only two occasions in Rome’s long history and not once since the victory over Carthage in 235 BCE, it happened under Augustus’s reign an unprecedented three times. Second, emphasis on peace is achieved by Augustus explaining to his audience what every

⁵⁰ Zanker, *Power of Images*, 112–13.

Roman already knew about the symbolic act of closing Janus's gates: instead of simply saying 'I closed Janus Quirinius three times' (compare the simple, non-explanatory statements in 4.1 and 8.2),⁵¹ the inscription spells out the meaning of this act, thereby adding emphasis to what is written.

Sections 25–33 have been traditionally viewed as the place where Augustus turns from his *impensae*—the expenses which he has incurred on behalf of the state (sections 15–24)—to his *res gestae* proper—his military exploits. Yet, as E. A. Judge observes, 'Actual warfare plays a very small part in this record, which is far more concerned with political themes such as peace, security and prestige'.⁵² Augustus opens this section with the statement: 'The sea I made peaceful by freeing it from pirates' (25.1). The achievement of bringing peace to the seas was often proclaimed and much celebrated. Horace, for example, writes: 'Sailors fly across the peaceful sea' (*Odes* 4.5.19). Suetonius records how sailors from Alexandria who happened to meet Augustus near the end of his life in the Bay of Naples made offerings to him 'because it was through him that they lived and sailed the sea and enjoyed their freedom and fortunes' (*Augustus* 98.2). Philo similarly acknowledges that Augustus 'rendered the sea free from the vessels of pirates and filled it with merchantmen' (*Embassy to Gaius* 146). And as discussed above, a golden statue of Augustus was placed on a *columna rostrata* in Rome with the inscription: 'Peace, long disturbed, he reestablished on land *and sea*' (*Appian Civil Wars* 5.130).⁵³

The next section shifts from the peace that Augustus secured on sea to that on land: 'The Gallic and Spanish provinces, together with Germany, bounded by the Ocean from Cadiz as far as the mouth of the river Elbe, I pacified. The Alps, from that region which is closest to the Adriatic sea as far as the Tuscan, I had pacified...' (26.2–3). Augustus's double employment of the verb 'I pacified' here leads Alison Cooley to observe: 'The verb *pacare* may almost be regarded as a slogan of the regime'.⁵⁴

The theme of 'security' (*ἀσφάλεια* or *securitas*) does not figure as prominently in the *Res Gestae* as that of 'peace'. Nevertheless, the term is found explicitly once in the Greek version in describing Augustus's treatment of foreign peoples (3.2). Also, as the quote from Judge above points out, the theme of security provided by Roman rule is one that the document intends to emphasize, even when the term does not appear.

It is important to note that the *Res Gestae* inscription (and thus also its political themes of peace and security) was intended for a wider audience beyond Rome.

51 E. A. Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 201.

52 Judge, *First Christians in the Roman World*, 210.

53 See also the inscription from the victory monument of Nicopolis discussed above, which has the key phrase 'after peace had been secured on land *and sea*', as well as the decree from the city council of Halicarnassus discussed below, which opens with the expression: 'Land *and sea* have peace...'

54 Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 222.

This accounts for the fact that it was not only translated into Greek to be read by those in non-Latin speaking locales but also that the translation involves subtle but significant changes aimed at a broader non-Roman audience, softening its imperialistic tone and stressing Augustus's role as a benefactor rather than conqueror.⁵⁵ Copies of the inscription have been found in the faraway (at least from Rome) places of Ancyra, Antioch near Pisidia and Apollonia. The writings of several ancient authors contain clear allusions to the *Res Gestae* (Tacitus, Velleius Paterculus, Suetonius, Seneca) and it seems to have influenced the reliefs carved on Trajan's column and Hadrian's inscription on the Parthenon.⁵⁶

4.2. Decree of the Asian League Regarding Changes to the Provincial Calendar

A second example from the inscriptional evidence involves a decree of the Asian League, tentatively dated to 9 CE, to make two changes to their provincial calendar in honor of the benefactions ushered in by Augustus.⁵⁷ That the provision of peace was preeminent among these benefactions is clear from the opening statement of the decree:

Decree of the Greek Assembly in the province of Asia, on motion of the High Priest Apollonios, son of Menophilos, of Aizanoi: Whereas Providence that orders all our lives has in her display of concern and generosity in our behalf adorned our lives with the highest good: Augustus, whom she has filled with ὄρετή for the benefit of humanity, and has in her beneficence granted to us and those who will come after us a Savior who has made war to cease and who will put everything in *peaceful* order...⁵⁸

The widespread distribution of this decree is spelled out later in the text, which states that the decision of the Asian League shall be inscribed on multiple stelai of white marble and placed in the temples of Caesar and Roma in the various cities of Asia. This stated desire was, in fact, carried out, because the inscription has been discovered in several cities in Asia.⁵⁹

4.3. Decree of Halicarnassus Celebrating Benefactions of Augustus

A third example of how Rome was identified specifically as a provider of peace comes in a Greek inscription from another city in Asia Minor,

55 Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 30.

56 Cooley, *Res Gestae*, 50–1.

57 For a helpful introduction to this inscription, see F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Greco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis: Clayton, 1982) 215–22.

58 Translation from Danker, *Benefactor*, 217.

59 The most complete copy is from Priene (OGIS 458) but fragments have also been discovered in Apameia (CIG 3.3957; CIL 3.12240), Eumeneia (CIG 3.3902b), Dorylaion (CIL 3.13651) and Maioneia (Umberto Laffi, 'Le iscrizioni relative all'introduzione nel 9 a.C. del nuovo calendario della Provincia d'Asia', *Studi Classici e Orientali* 16 [1967] 5–98).

Halicarnassus, and is dated sometime after 2 BCE.⁶⁰ This city praises Augustus as the ‘savior of the whole human race in whom Providence has not only fulfilled but even surpassed the prayers of all’ and who thus is worthy of being honored ‘with public games and with statues, with sacrifices and with hymns’. The specific grounds for attributing such honors to Augustus (they are introduced with the conjunction γάρ) are listed as follows: ‘For land and sea have *peace*, the cities flourish under a good legal system, in harmony and with an abundance of food, there is an abundance of all good things, people are filled with happy hopes for the future and with delight for the present’.

4.4. *Decree of Baetica (Spain) Celebrating the Benefaction of Augustus*

Augustus’s achievement of securing peace is the sole reason listed in a Latin inscription from Baetica (Spain) which pays honor to the emperor.⁶¹ Since this inscription refers to Augustus as the ‘Father of the Fatherland’ (*pater patriae*), a title awarded him on February 5, 2 BCE and one that he considered to be the pinnacle of his achievements (*Res Gestae* 35.1), it must be dated some time after this event. The text honoring the emperor was inscribed on a statue base set up in the Forum of Augustus and apparently supported a golden statue made out of one hundred pounds of gold into the form of either the Spanish province personified or of Augustus himself. This agrees with the comment of Velleius Paterculus, the Roman historian, who writes that the Forum of Augustus was full of such honors from Spain and other countries (*History of Rome* 2.39.2). The text of this important inscription reads as follows: ‘To Emperor Caesar Augustus, Father of the Fatherland. Further Hispania, Baetica, set this up because through his goodwill and constant care the province has been *pacified*’.

4.5. *Inscription from Syria*

The benefits of peace and security were attributed not to Augustus alone but to the broader Roman state and its representatives. This can be seen, for example, in an inscription from Syria in which citizens from this region offer the local Roman general in charge of their region these words of gratitude: ‘The Lord Marcus Flavius Bonus, the most illustrious Comes and Dux of the first legion, has ruled over us in *peace* and given constant *peace* and *security* to travelers and to the people’.⁶²

60 *The Collection of Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum*. Vol. 4, *Knidos, Halikarnassos and Branchidae* (ed. G. Hirschfeld; London: Clarendon, 1893) number 894.

61 ILS 103.

62 OGIS 613.

5. Literary Evidence

If the numismatic evidence supporting the importance and widespread consciousness of Roman peace and security is ‘very eloquent’⁶³ and that of the monumental and inscriptional evidence may be justly judged to be impressive, then the literary evidence is compelling if not decisive. Many ancient authors, even those not particularly sympathetic to the empire, acknowledge the peace and security that Roman rule has provided. Due to space constraints, we will omit those writers and documents that highlight either the theme of peace or that of security individually⁶⁴ and survey only those literary sources where these two benefactions of peace and security provided by Rome are combined, just as they are in Paul’s phrase in 1 Thess 5.3. We have already witnessed above three important examples where the two key terms are linked together: the Pompey inscription from Ilium, the twin altars of Pax Augustus and Securitas discovered in Praeneste and the inscription from Syria. Yet there are a number of other instances where the two benefactions of peace and security are closely linked.

The Jewish historian Josephus records a decree from the citizens of Pergamum that praises the Romans for providing for its subjects precisely these two benefits:

Decree of the people of Pergamum: ‘In the presidency of Cratippus, on the first of the month Daisios, a decree of the magistrates. As the Romans in pursuance of the practices of their ancestors have accepted dangerous risks for the common safety (ἀσφαλείας) of all humankind and strive emulously to place their allies and friends in a state of happiness and lasting peace (εἰρήνη), the Jewish nation and their high priest Hyrcanus have sent as envoys to them...’ (*Ant.* 14.247–248)

Josephus also writes elsewhere in his *Antiquities* how Herod the Great early in his political life gained the favor of the local people by capturing Hezekiah, the leader of a band of robbers who had overrun the area of Syria: ‘So they sung songs in his [Herod’s] commendation in their villages and cities, because he procured for them *peace* (εἰρήνην) and the *secure* enjoyment (ἀσφαλὴ ἀπόλαυσιν) of their possessions’ (14.160).

The two terms of ‘peace’ and ‘security’ also occur together in the first-century historian Velleius Paterculus. He describes how the Roman general Lucius Piso,

⁶³ Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 11.

⁶⁴ On ‘peace’, see, e.g., Virgil *Aeneid* 6.847–853; Seneca *On Mercy* 1.4.1–2; *Epistles* 91.2; *Apocolocyntosis* 10.1; Ovid *Fasti* 1.719; Strabo *Geog.* 6.4.2; Velleius Paterculus *History of Rome* 2.126.3; Philo *Embassy* 147; Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 28.3; Martial *Epigrams* 9.70.7–8; Epictetus *Discourses* 3.13.9; Plutarch *Precepts of Statecraft* 32. On ‘security’, see, e.g., Tacitus *Hist.* 2.21.2; Josephus *J.W.* 4.94; Aelius Aristides *Eulogy of Rome* 104; Pliny *Letters* 10.52–53; *Panegyric to Emperor Hadrian* 80.

on behalf of Tiberius, fought against the Thracians for three years and so restored 'security to Asia and peace to Macedonia' (*Asiae securitatem, Macedoniae pacem*) (*History of Rome* 2.98.2). Velleius combines these two benefactions of Roman rule again when he glowingly describes the start of Tiberius's reign as follows:

The rejoicing of that day, the concourse of the citizens, their vows as they stretched their hands almost to the very heavens, and the hopes which they entertained for the perpetual security (*securitatis*) and the eternal existence of the Roman empire, I shall hardly be able to describe to the full even in my comprehensive work, much less try to do it justice here. I shall content myself with stating what day of good omen it was for all. On that day there sprang up once more in parents the assurance of safety for their children, in husbands for the sanctity of marriage, in owners for the safety of their property, and in all men the assurance of safety, order, peace (*pacis*), and tranquility. (*History of Rome* 2.103.3–5)

Tacitus, describing the turmoil of 69 CE with its competing candidates to lead the empire after the suicide of Nero, refers to one army finding themselves 'surrounded in the midst of the security of peace (*securitate pacis*) with all the horrors of war' (*Hist.* 2.12). The two terms of peace and security are also combined in Tacitus's description of the campaign of Vitellius who is quoted as saying: 'I would not seek to hinder the renown of those who in the meanwhile have reduced Asia to tranquility. They had at heart the peace of Moesia (*Moesiae pacem*), I the safety and security of Italy (*securitatemque Italiae*)' (*Hist.* 3.53). Tacitus combines these concepts yet a third time in a fictitious speech that he has the Roman general Petilius Cerialis give to the Gauls after suppressing their revolt in 70 CE. The logic of the speech reflects the Roman perspective that conquered nations may have lost their freedom but gained in its place something more valuable, namely, peace and security:

Tyranny and war always existed in Gaul until you yielded to our authority. And we, although we have been provoked many times, have imposed upon you by right of conquest only this one demand: that you pay the costs of keeping peace (*pacem*) here. For peace among different peoples cannot be maintained without pay, and pay cannot be found without taxation... But if the Romans are driven out—may the gods forbid!—what situation could exist except wars among all these races?... Therefore, love and cherish peace (*pacem*) and the city of Rome which you and I, conquered and conqueror, hold with equal rights. Let these examples of good fortune and bad fortune warn you not to prefer rebellion and ruin to submission and security (*securitate*). (*Hist.* 4.74)

A striking parallel to Paul's phrase is found in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* where he recounts Mark Antony's unsuccessful Persian campaign to gain the return of the Roman standards and captives taken earlier. When Antony, in trouble deep within Persian territory, was looking for a way to retreat, he was

falsely promised safe passage by the enemy king Phraates. Plutarch writes: 'The Parthian told him not to urge this matter [concerning the return of the standards and the captives], and assured him of *peace and security*' (εἰρήνην καὶ ἀσφάλειαν; *Antony* 40.4). This reference is remarkable because it not only echoes exactly the wording of Paul in 1 Thess 5.3 but also possibly involves a deliberate use of irony by Plutarch: the very benefits that Roman rule was supposed to provide, namely, peace and security, are instead offered to the Roman general Antony by his Parthian enemy. If so, this presupposes a wide-spread awareness of the phrase 'peace and security' such that Plutarch, like the apostle Paul, could assume that his audience would pick up on such a satirical allusion.

6. Thessalonica and Roman Benefaction

The proposal that Paul in the phrase 'Peace and security' is evoking a popular concept or perhaps even a fixed slogan of Roman political propaganda gains further credence from the fact that such an allusion would be especially appropriate for his Thessalonian readers, given the lengthy and close relationship that the city had with Rome and the financial and political benefits that its citizens enjoyed from the Roman state. When the Romans reorganized the four districts of Macedonia into a single province in 146 BCE, Thessalonica was designated the capital city and home base of Rome's representative, the proconsul or governor. Although this situation changed briefly under Tiberius's rule, Claudius annulled that earlier decision so that from 44 CE on Thessalonica continued to enjoy its special role as the provincial capital and seat of the governor. As a reward for helping the victorious Mark Antony and Octavian in the Roman civil war, Thessalonica was granted in 42 BCE the privileged status of a 'free city' (*civitas libera*).⁶⁵ This favored classification meant that the inhabitants enjoyed a measure of autonomy over local affairs, the right to mint their own coins, freedom from military occupation within the city walls and certain tax concessions. The military success of Augustus in the Balkans also meant that Thessalonica 'was relieved of its precarious position at the boundary of the empire and was able to enjoy the advantages of the *Pax Romana*'.⁶⁶

The city's close connection with Rome and especially the benefits that it enjoyed from this connection to the imperial city is evident from a number of inscriptions that honor 'Roman benefactors' (Ρωμαίοι εὐεργέται). These are individuals who financed local cultural institutions (e.g., the gymnasium and its activities), helped protect the city from hostile neighbors and anti-Roman invaders, promoted the interests of Thessalonica in Rome or provided aid in other

65 Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 4.36.

66 R. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 339.

ways. The city's well-being and success 'depended on its ability to attract and sustain influential Romans' commitments and favors' and an 'institution developed by the Thessalonians to attract and regularize such commitment was honors for their "Roman benefactors"'.⁶⁷ So great was Thessalonica's desire to honor those Roman individuals whose good works benefited the city that a new cult and priesthood was established in the first century BCE⁶⁸ to honor not just the human benefactors but also the goddess Roma and the unnamed 'gods'. Several inscriptions are addressed to 'the gods and the Roman benefactors' (IT 4),⁶⁹ 'the priest of the gods...and of the priest of Roma and the Roman benefactors' (IT 31), 'the priest of the gods...of Roma and the Roman benefactors' (IT 133; 226), 'of both Roma and the Roman benefactors' (IT 128) and 'Roma and Romans' (IT 32). Holland Hendrix stresses that this honoring of Roma as a goddess in Thessalonica is different from elsewhere in the ancient world: 'She was not accorded honors as an independent figure, nor was she linked in cult to an individual (e.g., Augustus). Rather she was grafted onto a previously existing object of honor, the Roman benefactors.'⁷⁰

Once the cult to honor Roman benefactors and the goddess Roma was established, it was natural to extend such honors to the most powerful and thus also most important Roman benefactor, the emperor. A temple in honor of Caesar was built in Thessalonica near the end of the first century BCE⁷¹ and a priesthood to service this temple established: an important inscription refers to 'the temple of Caesar' and the 'priest and *agonothetes* ["games superintendent"] of Emperor Caesar Augustus son [of god]' and the 'priest of the gods...and priest of Roma and the Roman benefactors' (IT 31). This inscription, along with others (IT 32, 132, 133), also suggests the preeminence of officials connected with the imperial cult over other priesthoods: 'In every extant instance in which the "priest and *agonothete* of the Emperor" is mentioned he is listed first in what appears to be a strict observance of protocol. The Emperor's priest and *agonothete* assumes priority, the priest of "the gods" is cited next followed by the priest of Roma and Roman benefactors.'⁷²

67 H. L. Hendrix, 'Thessalonians Honor Romans' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1984) 253.

68 C. Edson ('Macedonia, II. State Cults in Thessalonica', *HTR* 41 [1948] 133) argues that the founding of the new cult of Roma and the Roman benefactors dates to 42-41 BCE immediately after the city's support of the victorious Mark Antony and Octavian, while Hendrix ('Thessalonians Honor Romans', 22) dates this event to 95 BCE or earlier.

69 IT = *Inscriptiones graecae Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae, Pars II Inscriptiones Macedoniae, Fasciculus I Inscriptones Thessalonicae et viciniae* (ed. C. Edson; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972).

70 Hendrix, 'Thessalonians Honor Romans', 287.

71 Since the remains of this temple have not yet been uncovered, R. Jewett's statement that 'There are impressive archaeological remains of the large temple of Roma' is puzzling (*The Thessalonian Correspondence* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 126).

72 Hendrix, 'Thessalonians Honor Romans', 312.



Figure 16. Julius Caesar and Octavian. RPC I 5421

Thessalonian coinage reveals that Julius Caesar and his adoptive son, Octavian (Augustus), received divine honors from the city. In one series (Fig. 16) the laureate head of Julius Caesar appears with the inscription 'God'. The reverse side of coins from this series has the bare head of Octavian and, though they do not have the similar inscription 'God' or 'son of god', his divinity is implied by his pairing with the divine Julius and by the title *Sebastos* or 'Augustus' often found.⁷³ It is also significant that in one standard series of coins the head of Zeus was replaced with that of Octavian.⁷⁴ The fact that the number of coin issues honoring Octavian in Thessalonica appears to be 'unusually high'⁷⁵ suggests that the city was especially motivated to demonstrate publicly their support of the emperor and their loyalty to Rome.

A statute of Augustus, found in the city in 1939 just north of the Serapeion, depicts the emperor in a divine posture—he is slightly larger than life-sized, semi-naked, a voluminous robe wraps around his waist and over his left arm; his right is raised with closed fist and finger pointed upward as he strides forward.⁷⁶ It is 'one of the best examples of the imperial propaganda statutes—and is, indeed, one of the first of the series—that the Romans erected in various nerve-centres of their boundless empire'.⁷⁷ Very important for our thesis is the fact that in contrast to the Prima Porta exemplar where Augustus is in full military garb, the Thessalonian statue of him omits these symbols of power and instead conveys the emperor as a man of not war but peace. Another statute—this one

73 RPC I 1554 and 5421. See also the later re-issue of this coin series under Domitian: RPC 1555.

74 Hendrix, 'Thessalonians Honor Romans', 179, 188. Cited also by Donfried, 'Imperial Cults', 218; Green, *Thessalonians*, 40; S. Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writing of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 5.

75 M. Tellbe, *Paul between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians* (CBNTS 34; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001) 84.

76 Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki. Number 1065.

77 Julia Vokotopoulou, *Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Thessalonike* (Athens: Kapon, 1996) 85.

headless but likely that of Claudius—was discovered close to that of Augustus and it also portrays this later emperor in a divine pose clearly intended to imitate the statue of Augustus.⁷⁸ Once again it is significant to note that Claudius too is not dressed in the military garb of a warrior but the simple toga of a statesman of peace.

The evidence presented above strongly suggests that citizens of Thessalonica enjoyed a particularly close relationship with Rome and were engaged in a variety of activities designed to strengthen that relationship because of the financial and political benefits that such a relationship entailed. This social setting provides an especially appropriate context for Paul to cite for his Thessalonian readers not a prophetic warning but a slogan of political propaganda. As Hendrix puts it:

there is significant archaeological evidence of a distinctive sensitivity to propaganda about Roman rule on the part of the Thessalonians. This enhances on circumstantial grounds established through archaeological evidence the plausibility of the following conclusion: Paul's exceptional citation of a slogan associated with Roman beneficence...might have been made in specific reference to the Thessalonian environment and to the experience of the city's inhabitants.⁷⁹

7. Conclusion

The Romans actively and aggressively promoted themselves as those who secured the prized benefit of 'peace' and also, although to a lesser degree, the related blessing of 'security'. This gospel or good news about the *Pax Romana* was spread through a variety of public media. The minting of coins, the building of public monuments, the engraving of official proclamations and the dissemination of literary works all served the common purpose of shaping public opinion and convincing the populace about the peace and security that Roman rule supplied. Given the widespread nature of this propaganda, the predominantly Gentile believers in Thessalonica would have immediately recognized in Paul's brief phrase, 'Peace and security', a clear allusion not to the warning of the OT prophets who spoke only about false claims of 'peace' but the sloganeering of the Roman state and its claim of providing for its citizens the same two benefactions highlighted by the apostle. Furthermore, Paul's citation of such imperial propaganda is especially appropriate for his Thessalonian readers in light of the close relationship between the city and Rome as well as the financial and political benefits that this relationship offered. It may well be that the 'fellow citizens' (1 Thess 2.14) of the believers in Thessalonica responded to Christian claims about 'the day of the Lord' (5.1) and the 'coming wrath' (1.10; also 5.9) by referring to Rome as the

78 Archaeological Museum, Thessaloniki. Numbers 2467, 2468.

79 Hendrix, 'Archeology and Eschatology', 117–18.

protector of their present peace and security. Paul, however, has a stern warning for all those who trust in the political power of Rome: 'Whenever people say, "Peace and security", then sudden destruction comes upon them, like birth pangs come upon a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape' (5.3b). For the apostle, peace and security belong only to those who instead trust in God, who 'did not destine us for wrath but for the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ' (5.9).