



Sestertius depicting the head of Elagabalus and Pax, the goddess of peace (218-222 CE)

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[1]

Denomination:

Sestertius

Date: 218 CE to 222 CE

Material:

Bronze

Mint:

Rome

Name of Ruler:

Elagabalus

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Elagabalus looking right

Inscription: IMP CAES M AUR ANTONINUS PIUS AUG

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Pax advancing left, holding branch and sceptre

Inscription: PAX AUGUSTI - SC

Commentary:

RIC IV/2, Elagabalus, no. 366d, p. 58.

This sestertius, minted at an undetermined date between 218 and 222 CE, depicts on the obverse the head of Elagabalus, and on the reverse Pax, the goddess of peace. The inscription on the obverse refers to Elagabalus as *imperator*, Caesar, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Pius, Augustus. Elagabalus thus highlights the most important titles of power. He appears as *imperator*, acknowledging the military power conferred to him by the army as commander in chief. In addition, he makes use of the titles Caesar and Augustus. From the Flavian period onwards, while Caesar designated the heir to the throne, Augustus designated the reigning sovereign. As the young emperor had yet to name an heir, he used both titles. Last but not least, Elagabalus had also assumed the dynastic name Antoninus, to highlight his association with Caracalla, whose name was Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Augustus, and thus enhance his legitimacy. Just like the previous Severan rulers, Elagabalus wished to present himself as the political heir to the Antonine dynasty.

On the reverse, the initials SC, standing for *senatus consultum* ("by the decision of the Senate"), indicate that the minting of this numismatic issue had been made under the supervision of the Roman Senate. From 19 BCE onwards, the Roman Senate was responsible for bronze issues, whereas gold and silver issues depended on the emperor. Such a situation explains why from Augustus's principate onwards a large majority of the coins bearing the initials SC are bronze issues.



The inscription on the reverse refers to Pax as *Pax Augusti*. The goddess is depicted dressed in a tunic, draped in a stola, holding in her left hand a branch and in her right hand a sceptre, the symbol of her authority and power. Pax, who was identified with the Greek goddess Eirene, was the goddess of peace. Pax, or peace, was one of the most important benefits that the emperor could bestow on his subjects. Therefore, the inscription on the reverse, *Pax Augusti* emphasizes that the granting of peace to the empire's citizens and subjects was the result of the personal power of the emperor. Carlos Noreña emphasizes that *pax* had a dual meaning for the Romans. Pax could refer to the absence of civil wars as well as to the *Pax Romana*, or the peace imposed by the Romans on conquered peoples. Pax forwarded the ideals of *securitas*, which indicated favorable circumstances and the absence of dangers, of *tranquillitas*, the peaceful political conditions within the borders of the empire, and, last but not least, *concordia*, an ideal of concord and harmony within society as a whole. Pax was seen as generating prosperity. Thus, she is often depicted as bearing a cornucopia, an attribute which emphasized abundance. Here, however, she holds a branch and a sceptre, probably to emphasize the connection between peace and a stable rule. Even if the dating of the minting of this type remains uncertain, it is possible to put it in relation to the fact that at the beginning of Elagabalus's reign Rome had just ended a disastrous and humiliating campaign against Parthia, which resulted in the payment of an important tribute to the Eastern monarchy. Peace may thus be clearly understood as the absence of war or of external threats; this coins may have thus advertised a future of peace.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Augustus](#) [2]
- [Pius](#) [3]
- [pax Augusti](#) [4]
- [senatus consultum](#) [5]

Thematic keywords:

- [Elagabalus](#) [6]
- [branch](#) [7]
- [sceptre](#) [8]
- [concord](#) [9]
- [harmony](#) [10]
- [Parthia](#) [11]
- [Roman defeat](#) [12]
- [stability](#) [13]
- [peace](#) [14]

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Southern, Patricia, [The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine](#) [17] (London: Routledge, 2001)
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