Ara Pacis (13-9 BCE) Architecture

Reconstruction of the Ara Pacis

[1]

Ara Pacis: frontal view [2]

[2]

Ara Pacis: side view [4]

[4]

Ara Pacis: side view [6]

[6]

Patron/Sponsor: Senate
Original Location/Place: Rome: Campus Martius

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): In loco

Date: 9 BCE
Material: Marble
Measurements:
11.6 m by 10.6 m by 3.6 m

Building Typology:
Altar

Description:
The *Ara Pacis Augustae* is a monumental altar. The altar, which is set on a four steps base, was sculpted in marble from Luna. The altar is surrounded by walls. There are two gates, the first located on the eastern wall and the other on the western one. Four Corinthian pilasters are set at the corners and at the doorways. The decoration on the exterior of the precinct walls is characterized by reliefs set on two registers. The lower register of the frieze consists in acanthus scrolls filled by small animals and birds. The upper part of the altar is decorated with garlands of fruits and leaves suspended between *bucrania*, or decorations shaped as oxen's skulls, from fluttering ribbons. The loops made by the garlands are filled with free-floating *paterae*, or metal libation bowls. On the northern and southern walls, the upper register depicts the sacrificial procession of members of the imperial household, together with priests and lictors. Augustus is portrayed together with his *gens*, his political allies, including Agrippa and Maecenas, his *clientes*, and the main priesthoods of Rome, including the *Septemviri*, the *Augures*, and the *Quindecimviri*. On the eastern and western walls, various allegorical panels flanking the doorways depict themes connected with peace and Roman civic rituals. Although some identifications are debated, on the eastern wall one may identify the allegories of Italia – Tellus and Roma, together with the figures of the *Genii*, the personifications of the Senate and the Roman people, while on the western side one sees Aeneas sacrificing a white sow to the *penates* (according to the most probable interpretation) and Faustolus discovering the twins Romulus and Remus at the Lupercal.

Commentary:
The *Ara Pacis Augustae* was dedicated to Pax, the Roman goddess of Peace. The monument was commissioned by the Roman Senate on July 4, 13 BCE to honor the return of Augustus to Rome after three years in Hispania and Gaul. The altar was consecrated on January 30, 9 BCE. The Altar was located in the northeastern corner of the Campus Martius, which was developed by Augustus into a complex of monuments. The altar, together with the *Horologium Solare Augusti* and the *Mausoleum Augusti*, indeed formed a complex. Although the Ara Pacis was not recorded in the ancient sources, it appears on later coins of Nero and Domitian. The structure depicted on the coins is, however, schematic. The altar itself was inspired by the classical Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Athenian agora. The dimensions are the same. The contrast with the huge dimensions of the Altar of Zeus at Pergamon is evident. Augustus followed the rules of classicism. Therefore, the small scale of the architecture of fifth century Athens was more congenial to the Roman leader, *primus inter pares*, than the huge altar built to celebrate the glory of an absolute Hellenistic monarch. Beyond the monument's civic ritual function, it forwarded Augustus's imperial ideology (see *Ara Pacis - Reliefs* [8]).

Thematic keywords:
- *Augustus* [9]
- *peace* [10]
- *Roman gods* [12]
- *Rome (city)* [13]
- *sacrifice* [14]
- *priest* [15]
- *altar* [16]
- *senate* [17]
- *Imperial family* [18]
- *piety* [19]

Gros, Pierre, *Aurea Templa, recherches sur l'architecture religieuse de Rome à l'époque d'Auguste* [22] (Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 231; Rome, 1976)
Bloch, Raymond, "L'"Ara Pacis Augustae"* [23], MEFRA (Mélanges de l'école française de Rome) 56 (1939) : 81-120

Other sources connected with this document: Relief / Sculpture

**Ara Pacis (13-9 BCE)_Reliefs** [24]

- Read more about Ara Pacis (13-9 BCE)_Reliefs [24]

Numismatic item

**As depicting the head of Nero and the Ara Pacis (66 CE)** [25]

- Read more about As depicting the head of Nero and the Ara Pacis (66 CE) [25]

Realized by:

**Samuele Rocca** [26]

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