

I

Commissioned on 4, July 14 BC by the Senate and dedicated on 30, January 9 BC, the Ara Pacis Augustae in Rome is one of the most important pieces of Augustan propaganda that is still extant. Created to honor Augustus' victorious return from the Western provinces as well as the *Pax Augustae*, the Ara Pacis is a perfect example of the methods and ideals of Augustan policy in public artwork and building projects. In this single piece of art we can see the different people, ideas, and deities that Augustus seemed to want to be associated with, from his divine heritage and spiritual lineage to the promises he had made and delivered to the Roman people and all of the things that he had accomplished in office that had not been done for decades if not centuries. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the original setting of the Ara Pacis Augustae with a view to showing the different ways in which this piece of art could be interpreted. Additionally it explores Augustus' association with deities, mythic figures, as well his success as a statesman. Thus we will examine the friezes of the Ara Pacis, and discuss their popular identification, as well as those by several scholars.

The Ara Pacis is a reconstruction that was finished in 1938 under the supervision of Giuseppe Moretti, but pieces of the scenes had been discovered as early as the 16th century. The first pieces of relief were uncovered in 1568 when the depiction of Agrippa (from the Southern procession) as well as the panel depicting the goddess Tellus were unearthed with a few smaller fragments, these fragments were dispersed between the Vatican, the Uffizi and the Louvre museums. The next fragments the

stereobate, or base steps, of the altar, the head of Mars, Aeneas' panel, and a section of the floral decoration were found in 1856. These pieces were identified as parts of the Ara Pacis by Frederich Von Duhn in 1881. Eugene Paterson presented the first graphical depiction of the Ara Pacis in 1902. A massive systematic excavation was undertaken by many to complete the altar. During these excavations, Roma, the Lupercal and the right half of the Aeneas panel were rescued. With this the final push to complete the reconstruction began in 1937 with Moretti, who saved the panel depicting the flamines and the right half of the *princeps* as well as architectural elements. During this reconstruction the altar was recreated near the mausoleum of Augustus and rotated 90 degrees so that the viewer no longer approaches the altar from the West, but now approaches from the South.¹

The Ara Pacis originally stood in the Campus Martius. That was a precinct dedicated to Mars and was the home to many military institutions. This section of Rome was established in the time of Numa Pompilius, the second king Rome who reigned from 717 to 673 BC. It was also the area where military triumphs for returning generals were begun, the building of the temple here may have been an allusion to the fact that these triumphs would no longer to be needed as the empire under Augustus was now entering an era of complete peace, harmony and abundance.² This was part of a larger building project started by Augustus including the *Solarium Augustae* an Egyptian obelisk dedicated to Sol in 10 BC, this obelisk was the pointer for a sundial whose shadow touched sunken metal pieces as the day wore on, and as a calendar since the shadow would be slightly different each day. This shadow also showed the blessing of

Sol/Apollo and the destiny preordained for him and his reign by the stars as the shadow of the giant sundial would point into the central altar every year on Augustus' birthday of 23 September.³ The design of the Ara Pacis is thought by some to be a reference to either the temple of Janus Quirinus in Rome, or the Parthenon in Athens, or both. The outer wall structure with an opening at both the east and west ends mirrors those on the temple of two faced god Janus who watches both the future and the past. While the detailed, and specific processional friezes allude to the equally unique and detailed processional frieze decorating the top of the Parthenon.⁴ However, Mortimer Wheeler disagrees with this idea of the Ara Pacis referencing the Parthenon, as he finds the Parthenon too impersonal and cold, whereas in the Ara Pacis, the figures are detailed, warm, interactive, and individual.⁵

II

The frieze on the left side of the Western front is thought to depict Romulus and Remus suckling at the she wolf, with their adoptive father Faustulus to the right and their true father Mars on the left watching the situation unfold as a proud fatherly figure.⁶ (see Figure 1) This is commonly thought to represent the *Lupercalia* where Faustulus finds the twins and takes them home to raise them into the founder of Rome and his ill-fated sibling because this would fit in with an altar dedicated to Augustus. Romulus is an ancestor of Augustus both through his bloodline and through their spiritual connection as *Pater Patriae* (father of the country) a title Augustus would take later, and with this image he would not only connect himself to Romulus but also to his predecessors divine parent. Charles Anderson however points out that according to the

archaeological record, there are no wolf and babes in the scene. He believes that this could actually be Mars approaching a sacrifice meant to inaugurate his new temple credited to Numa. This would make sense as this temple was in the *Campus Martius* and a depiction of Mars would be quite appropriate on this altar.⁷

Next, the frieze that has been identified by many to be Aeneas. (see Figure 2) This frieze appears on the right as the Ara Pacis is approached. In this frieze there stand four human figures, two on the right and two on the left, the figure on the far right is a beardless male, shown wearing a fringed tunic, and carrying a large staff that appears to have been a branch with the smaller branches shaved off of it; the common interpretation of this figure is that of the son of Aeneas, Iulus or possibly Achates, Aeneas' companion from Troy. To the left of him is the figure commonly identified as Aeneas himself. This figure is of an older man as can be discerned from the slight bulge in his midsection, as well as the prominence of his nasolabial fold and sunken eyes, Rehak feels that this is unusual as all of the other human depictions on the altar are in the height of youth and vitality, he is standing before the altar *capite velato* and apparently holding a libation cup and pouring the liquid over the altar, a common depiction in sacrificial scenes, and is holding a staff in his left hand.⁸

The altar in the center of the scene is rough hewn and decorated with garland where as the temple in the background is sophisticated and well worked with garland and a waist high wall obstructing the opening, inside the temple are two bearded men dressed in tunics depicted as if talking to each other. The standard interpretation for this is that these are either the *lar* (household gods), or the *penates* the gods of the household

stores..

The figures to the left of the altar are younger adolescent males, both barefoot and leading what appears to be the sacrificial sow, they are shown wearing short tunics fringed with wreaths. The figure to the left leans slightly forward to prod and urge the sow forward, closer to the center and slightly in front of the other boy stands the second attendant with a mantel draped over his left shoulder with his left hand holding a fluted tray full of fruits and cakes intended for the sacrifice while his right hand holds a similarly fluted pitcher for pouring libations. The two figures on the left have been initially identified as the *victimarius*, the male sacrificial attendant and assistant who leads the animal to the altar, and the *camillus* another type of sacrificial attendant who holds the sacrificial equipment for the main sacrificant. The *camillus* has specifically been identified by some as either Gaius Caesar, Augustus' presumed heir, or Iulus, Aeneas' son, but since by Roman law the *camillus* must have both parents living this would disqualify Iulus, and Gaius was too young at the time of the building of the Ara Pacis to have been depicted as an adolescent this disqualifies him as a candidate for this representation.⁹ With these identifications the scene has the overall interpretation of being Aeneas sacrificing the sow to the *penates*, as described and prophesied in the *Aeneid*, referencing Augustus' relationship both as a descendant of Aeneas as well as his role as *pater patriae*, father of the nation, of Rome.¹⁰

Rehak notes the deviation from the normal imperial depictions of Aeneas as a beardless and armored youth, usually seen carrying his father and leading his young son from their fallen home, and he also offers the explanations of others for this deviation.

But first he also notes that for this interpretation we are missing or deviating from several important features from the fabled sacrifice. Firstly, that the sacrificial animal is not right for this story, in the *Aeneid* Aeneas is told to find a white sow with thirty white piglets, which he does and promptly sacrifices them, but in this relief we have only the one sow, who is nowhere near large enough to be the immense sow referenced in the epic, and none of the piglets mentioned therein, also unlike other depictions of this important event in Roman history, in this the sow is not the main focus of the scene but the sacrificants and the altar are. Secondly, he argues the identities of the deities in the temple in the background, in the *Aeneid*, he is sacrificing to Juno, but here we have two bearded male figures, so she could not be the recipient of the sacrifice, alternate ideas are that these are the *lar* as depicted in Varro, or the *penates* as discussed in Dionysios of Halikarnassos, he also shoots down these ideas due to the fact that the *lar* are typically depicted as youthful female figures and the *penates* as young, beardless males, he feels that an interpretation of these two figures as Jupiter and Dis is much more appropriate and inline with the image, as the two bearded gods were often show seated and turned toward one another as if in discussion. Next, is the issue of “Aeneas” clothing style and that of his “son”, in this scene “Aeneas” is shown *capite velato*, a traditional Roman style of priests where his head is covered by his toga, and his follower is shown in a style that is neither Roman nor Trojan.¹¹

Paul Zanker offers the argument that this depiction of Aeneas is meant not to show the sacrifice when he first arrives in Latium and sacrifices the immense sow and her thirty piglets, but rather that this is meant to represent a later sacrifice when Aeneas

is a more matured *pater Aeneas* after he has become the venerable king and his son is a grown man.¹² Rehak counters this with the fact that Augustus has not taken the title of *pater patriae* until seven years after the Ara Pacis has been dedicated, and that since this title and honor is the last thing etched into the *Res Gestae Divi Augustus* that this honor was something he would not have associated or assumed for himself earlier in his career.¹³

Next, Rehak discusses his issues with the identification of the primary figure as Aeneas, his main issue seems to be that the depiction is so far removed from the standard representation of the figure, also that the figure thought to be his son is depicted not as a younger subordinate as a son would be, but rather as an equal, both carry scepters or staffs of authority and both are the same height at the shoulder leading Rehak to state that they are of equal prominence and power. This along with his disagreement with the identification of the two deities in the temple, the lack of pigs, and the depictions of the primary and secondary sacrificants on the right side lead him to disagree with the identification of the primary as Aeneas. Rehak offers an alternative reading of this scene. He proffers the theory that this is not a depiction of Aeneas, but rather of the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius (r. 715-673 B.C.) along with a generic king cementing peace through the ritual of *fetiales*.¹⁴

A little background on Numa and his accomplishments helps us understand why this makes sense on the Ara Pacis. Numa was a great proponent of peace in Rome and with its neighbors, throughout his career he accomplished great feats which allowed him to keep an unblemished record of prosperity throughout his reign. He built the first

temple of Janus Quirinus whose doors could only be closed when the senate dictated that there was peace throughout the entirety of the Roman world, and is one of two people prior to Augustus who was able to actually close the doors. He also originated two important religious acts in the *Campus Martius* he performed a sacrifice to Mars to confirm peace between the Romans and the Sabines, and he also established *fetial* law, which provided the specific rules that governed the waging of a just war. The *fetial* law stated that war would be declared by throwing a spear into a piece of the *Campus Martius* that had been declared a foreign territory in perpetuity, the Romans then gave their opponents a chance to make peace by coming and sacrificing a sow with the Romans within 30 to 33 days to keep them from attacking, this tradition was lost for many years, but was reinstated as such by Octavian before and during his war with Antony, he performed the ceremony throwing a spear into Egyptian territory, as Cleopatra was the nominal enemy, but this also seems to have been an attempt to impress upon the people of Rome his traditionalist values and ideals.¹⁵ This enables us to see how Augustus would want someone with such qualities on an altar dedicated to peace, and Rehak also points out several similarities between the two men, both showed a reluctance to rule but took the mantle anyway, both had their predecessors deified and created cults to them, both were able to shut the doors to the temple of Janus, and both were peaceful kings who followed times of great warfare and upheaval.¹⁶

James Anderson thinks that this would be appropriate as it shows the connection between Numa's golden age of peace and the age of peace under Augustus.¹⁷ He believes that this relief could be more correctly interpreted as Numa with generalized

foreign king sacrificing a sow in accordance with the *fetiales* while the gods Jupiter and Dis watch as guarantors from above and below of the binding of this oath and peace. This also works well with the frieze on the northwest side of the western front, as with this interpretation we have a visual representation of the image given to Aeneas in book 6 of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas sees Romulus, Augustus, and Numa as an overall vision of Rome's future empire.

“A son of Mars will join his grandfather's line-Romulus, whom his mother bore to the family of Trojan Assaracus. Do you see how double plumes rise upon his helmet, and how his father himself designates him for life on earth? My child, under his auspices renowned Rome will enclose her empire [imperium] on earth and her pride by heaven, and one city wall will enclose the seven hills, fortunate in her family of men. “

Romulus 6.777-783

“But who is he, standing apart, bearing the sacrifice with his head wreathed in olive twigs? I recognize the long locks and gray chin of that Roman king, who built our city on laws, when he was sent from the poor land of insignificant Cures to take control of a great power “

Augustus 6.788-800

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Numa 6.808-810

Rehak next notes the issue that most would have with this interpretation, the fact that for the most part Romans were militantly anti-monarchy, this is true that many Romans hated the idea of having a king, but does not mean that they viewed all past kings as horrible tyrants, Americans are vehemently against having a king yet there are monarchs who we revere as well, such as the fantasized Richard the Lionheart, and the fabled King Arthur.

III

Along the North front of the altar is the procession that contains mostly Senators and priests with a few children (to be discussed later). The friezes along the South contain the imperial family. (Figures 3 & 4) These panels also depict representatives of each of the chief priest groups, there are images of the Pontifices, the Augures, XV Viri Sacris Faciundis, VII Viri Epulonum and the Flamines, on the exterior friezes while on the interior we find the Vestal Virgins. This is commonly thought to represent either the initial dedication of the altar or the annual sacrifice to the *Pax Augusta* to which it was dedicated. These are both possibilities because either one would be accompanied by officials from all the major priesthoods and Vestal Virgins.¹⁹ In these friezes we also have an easily identified Augustus and Agrippa as both are shown *capite velato*, with their heads veiled, Augustus for the purpose of his role as chief priest in the sacrifice and Agrippa for the fact that he had died prior to the dedication of the temple. We

know that these two identifications are accurate due to other portrait depictions of them.²⁰ It is also noteworthy that in this depiction Augustus is not shown as an emperor or as the *pater patriae*, but rather as a *primus inter pares*, or first amongst equals, this is important because this distinction is something that he worked hard to cultivate during his reign, that he was not a monarch but simply a well known and respected citizen in the Republic.²¹ These two are rare in that many of the individuals in the processions are generally not shown as a particular person but rather as a representative of the office itself, but there are a few individualized portraits of important people and the children who are shown rather individualized as well. However, identifying the children is rather problematic as they are thought by many to represent children of the imperial family. Specifically the sons of Agrippa and adopted sons of Augustus, Gaius and Lucius Caesar have been identified with either two of the children on the North procession or with the children dressed in foreign attire.²²

An alternative interpretation by Rose, Buxton, and Kleiner identifies these children to be a mix of Julio-Claudian children as well as representatives of either specific provinces or of the Eastern and Western provinces as a whole.²³ These scholars argue that three of the children that these children could not be members of the imperial family as their outfits are completely non-Roman, and the depictions one of them with his buttocks exposed, and the other two with chests exposed would be completely unacceptable as a representation of a member of the imperial family.²⁴ Another interpretation is that these children may represent young royals visiting from other nations. This was a part of Rome's dealings with other countries as this would

allow the children to get an education in Rome, and when they returned they would, generally, have a pro-Roman style to their administration and dealings with Rome itself. Important examples of this are Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and Juba I of Numidia.²⁵

While Buxton and Kleiner offer a general idea of who these may be, Rose has a very specific idea of who the child on the Southern procession may be. Rose proposes that the child on the Southern frieze and the woman behind him with a motherly pose towards him are royalty from the Eastern provinces, specifically Pontus and Bosphorus. This child is dressed in Eastern clothing in general, but has specific pieces that helps rose identify him as such, the tightly wrapped diadem, the long corkscrew hairstyle that reaches his shoulders, and his soft shoes whose tongue has been pulled out over the tops of his shoes, he also wears a plain torque in line with Eastern style, all of these are in line with depictions of generic Eastern rulers shown on other pieces, he also grasps the toga of Agrippa before him.²⁶ The woman behind him in low relief rests her hand on him and looks down on him, she also wears a diadem and is because of this and her clothing style identified as an eastern queen, the placement and style of the diadem on her head suggests that she represents a kingdom associated with Dionysus, Ariadne, or the Maenads.

This depiction, the depiction of the child, and the proximity to Agrippa has led Rose to suggest that these are Dynamis and her child as visitors to Rome, from the kingdom of Bosphorus and Pontus, the former kingdoms of Mithridates where Agrippa had spent the last several years before he returned to Rome in 13 B.C. Prior to Agrippa

going to these kingdoms, the king of Pontus was killed by his subjects, while a vassal of Rome Polemon from Bosphorus entered to dispatch him, after he tried to take control of the province, there was great civil unrest which led to Agrippa going out to deal with this issue, he decided to marry Polemon to the granddaughter of Mithridates, Dynamis. In 13 or 12 B.C. after Agrippa well had returned to Rome, Polemon had married another woman, and Dynamis is absent from records until 8 B.C. when she returns to the kingdoms. Thus, it would be perfectly in line with precedent and within the timeline for her to have traveled to Rome with Agrippa, similar to Antipater, the son of Herod the Great, who returned with him from the same trip to the Eastern kingdoms.

Also there is evidence that Dynamis viewed Agrippa and Augustus at the very least as friends and possibly as saviors, she renamed a city after Agrippa and even issued coinage with Agrippa and Augustus depicted on the same coin.²⁷ This identification helps identify the child next to her in that he would have been the approximate age of Dynamis' son, Aspurgos, from her first marriage to king Asander, however other than a few lines sources are silent about this child and any other children that she had. These interpretations work well with the evidence we have in the relief, the Eastern dress, the seeming association with Dionysus as Mithridates often stressed his connection with the deity. This also work well with the overarching theme of the altar as the battles with Mithridates had been some of the fiercest of the republic, the pacification and squelching of unrest in these lands were also mentioned in the *Res Gestae Divi Augustus*, also in the *Res Gestae Augustus* enumerates the numbers of royals and families from other kingdoms who had sought protection and residence in the

city of Rome.²⁸

While Rose has a specific identity for the barbarian on the Southern frieze, his interpretation of the child on the North frieze, thought by some to be Lucius, is less specific. The child has curly hair centrally parted and is posed so that his buttocks is exposed, something the emperor would not allow for an image of a member of the Julio-Claudian family, also he is the only child on the frieze who is not wearing shoes and also wears a torc, but where the torc on the child discussed earlier is a rather plain one, this is twisted in the western Celtic style, the child also grasps the toga of the man next to him. He offers that his is a representative of a Celtic prince, Rose proposes this based on the description of the relief as well as the similarities of this description to other images of Celtic chieftains and their progeny, specifically he notes the resemblance to the Boscoreale Cups. In these cups Augustus is shown with three Celtic chieftains who are accompanied by their sons, and two of which seem to be being offered to Augustus as an expression of loyalty and to allow the children to get a Roman education the children in these cups are similar in composition to the one shown on the Ara Pacis. The East-West dynamic is something that is repeated quite often in early imperial imagery, it appears in the Forum Augustus in the form of alternating masks of Egypt and Gaul, as well as in Book VIII of the Aeneid where an image from the battle of Actium is juxtaposed with the defeat of the Gauls in 387 B.C.²⁹ Another interpretation of the presence of the 'barbarians' is that the procession is a form of mock triumph by Augustus, since he had started to wean the Romans off of these extravagant forms of celebration it would make sense that he would hold a final triumph in honor of his

reorganization of the Western provinces and of Agrippa's bringing peace to the Eastern on the altar instead of marching through the city. It was quite common for children and women captured in wars to be brought back and marched through Rome along with the men captured as prisoners of war.³⁰

Now that these children have been given a possible identity other than Gaius and Lucius, we need to see if the heirs of Agrippa and Augustus might appear somewhere else on the altar. Rose proposes that the young man dressed in the guise of a *camillus* on the north face of the altar is a representation of Gaius, the elder of the two brothers. This identification is due to the fact that his appearance in the relief is much like a different portrait of Gaius on the *Vicus Sandalarius*, especially specific hairstyle that is unusual except for representations of Gaius Caesar, as well as the fact that the age of the proposed Gaius and the actual Gaius are quite close if not the same. Also, Gaius has appeared in group monuments along with Augustus. He is also the only child to be presented in the relief who is portrayed as a participant in the sacrifice.³¹ If this is an accurate identification then the two children behind him can more easily be identified as his two younger siblings, one is a male about the size of Gaius, and the other is a female younger than either of the boys, these would be identified as the remaining children of Agrippa, Lucius Caesar and Julia, with Agrippina I possibly in the lost section of the precession. An issue with this is that Lucius is three years younger than Gaius but is depicted as the same size and through that roughly the same age. This can be easily explained since finding both sons depicted in this manner is not uncommon in Julio-Claudian imagery, there is numismatic evidence that shows the boys with their mother

in which the sons are shown to be the exact same size. There are similar images with Britannicus and Nero, brothers of different ages but shown the same size in imperial art.³²

An important question that Rose brings up is why are these sons separated from their fathers, both adoptive and biological. He proffers that this is because they are shown in part of a celebration of the military and political gains of the campaigns of Agrippa and Augustus, by providing them a bit of their own individuality away from the fathers but still allowing them to be associated with them, this would increase their *auctoritas* and allow them to start and gain their own prestige, this also allows them to be not only associated with one, but both of their auspicious fathers. In the context of the *pax augusta*, this would allude to the fact that the fathers set up the peace and that it would be continued by the sons.³³ Along with this interpretation, Kleiner and Buxton propose that the sons provide a future of the imperial family, the 'barbarians' represent the length and breadth of the empire that the peace shall reign over.³⁴

IV

Moving from the processional to the Eastern front we see two scenes similar to the those in the West friezes. The frieze on the right as you look at the altar depicts a personification of Roma sitting on a pile of arms and armor. (see Figure 5) This is primarily a recreation from Moretti, and is a rather straight forward interpretation without any real questions or alternate theories of how it can be read. The Northwestern frieze on the other hand has a bit more substance to it. (see Figure 6) In this frieze we find a matronly deity sits with a dignified pose on a rocky seat while two babes in her

arms reach for her breasts, her laps is filled to overflowing with fruits and grains, in her hair is more grain and wheat, while more of the vegetation grows around her in the scene. Flanking the seated deity are what appear to be hand maidens of some kind, one riding a goose and the other riding a pacified sea serpent, while across the bottom of the scene are several lounging animals and the background is dominated by representations of fruits and vegetables. The big question in this scene is who is the matron meant to represent. But to help that we need to look at the smaller questions of who the babies are, what is the significance of the maidens riding animals and what the surrounding symbols are meant to represent.

An obvious interpretation of the children is that they are the twins, Romulus and Remus. But Zanker proposed the quandary of why would the children be represented both here and on the frieze on the North panel of the Western front? But since we cannot be entirely sure that they were actually presented on the Western panel then this may not be the issue that it seems.³⁵ However, allowing that the twins are the twins what are some possible reasons for them being on this second scene? Perhaps they are to represent the totality of Augustus' ascendancy, having in this one scene his ancestor Romulus, a mother deity who is possibly Venus another of his ancestors, through Romulus a relationship with Mars, and assuming it is Venus an association with Aeneas. So in this one scene he would have connections with two founders of Rome, as well as two important deities. Another possibility is that these are non-specific children meant only to represent the prosperity and abundance of the new Roman world.

Examining the meaning of the handmaidens, Zanker and his sources believe that

the best interpretation of these characters is that they, along with their mounts, are prime representations of the breadth of the empire, they women represent the air that passes over the land and sea, with the land and seas themselves represented by the goose and the sea serpent. These animals being treated as beasts of burden represents that even the wild creatures would be tamed by this new world order under the reign of Augustus. The surrounding animals and plants seem to represent the new prosperity and abundance that was begun under the new empire, this is another fairly straightforward reading of the material. Now that we have somewhat identified the surrounding the central figure we may be able to more easily identify the figure itself. According to Zanker there are several different aspects that allude to several different matron deities. The garment slipping from the shoulder to reveal the chest is commonly seen in depictions of Venus, who would make sense in this seen because she is a mythical ancestor of Augustus through his lineage with Aeneas, another deity is Ceres the Roman goddess of agriculture, whose depictions mirror the veil of the woman as well as the stalks of grain in the background, a third candidate is Tellus, the personification of earth and its bounty, is often shown in a similar pose within a like landscape and rocky seat.³⁶ Kellum offers the idea that it is none of these but rather an anthropomorphism of Italia, as an embodiment of the peace and prosperity brought by the golden age of Augustus.³⁷

V

Just as important as the procession reliefs and the scenes on the top half of the exterior is the acanthus relief that winds around the entire bottom half of the exterior. (see Figure 7) This acanthus design encompasses the lower two meters of the Ara Pacis,

this design includes all kinds of animal and plant life, and is a common occurrence in classical temples as it was an easy way to fill spaces such as sandals and such.³⁸ In the acanthus we will find, acanthus, laurel, roses, and oak leaves, growing out of broad acanthus calyxes into tree like forms which send shoots into all kinds of swirling patterns, this leads the eye through an almost infinite pattern of variety and styles, we see grapes, figs, palmettes, quinces, and many mythical types of fruit growing in this amalgam plant. Alongside the plants are many types of animals, swans, scorpions, snakes, lizards, butterflies, frogs, and swallows. It has been debated whether this entire section of the Ara Pacis has any significance or if it is simply decorative in nature. It seems that to spend all of this space with no ulterior motives would be a waste of valuable time, energy, and materials, so here are some interpretations and allusions that some feel are being made in this frieze.

One interpretation is that the entirety of the acanthus frieze is meant to relay and allude to Augustus own mythic origins. Part of this is due to the fact that both the acanthus and the laurel in the scene are attributional plants of Apollo and Dionysus respectively, in many literary source Apollo and Dionysus are depicted as being wrapped in their particular plants. This is important because a large part of Augustus' early art revolved around his relationship and connection with Apollo as his mythical father, Dionysus ties into this because in many sources Dionysus and Apollo are shown as part of a divine *numen*, or power, where they are depicted together in celebrations and revelry.³⁹ Another reason for this is connection is because of the animals that frolic in the vegetation, each of these animals is either connected to Apollo, Augustus storied

past, or is in some way metamorphic in nature similar to the way Augustus morphed from Octavian after the death of Gaius Julius Caesar. Swans were one of the attributed animals of Apollo, the butterflies, swallows, snakes, scorpions and swans are all transformative creatures, snakes shed their skins, swallows and swans emerge from eggs and change as they mature, and scorpions at the time were fabled to emerge from the bodies of dead crocodiles, and the frogs and snakes are part of Augustus' biographical past, in Suetonius he tells of Atia, Augustus' mother, waking up in the temple of Apollo after being entered by a snake who impregnates her with the child that grows into Augustus, and the frogs could be references to a later story in Suetonius where at His grandfather's estate Augustus is wakened by raucous frogs outside and after admonishing them they are silent and are even said to be silent until the days of Suetonius.⁴⁰

Another interpretation is that this scene is not meant to represent Augustus' past, but rather the present he has established for the empire. That the chaotic growth in the acanthus is symmetrical in each of the panels, as well as the fact that no matter how chaotic the acanthus gets, that it is still in rigid order is something that Zanker seems to prove think is an allegory for the new rigid control and programs that Augustus has implemented in order to bring serenity from the chaos of the first century B.C.:

“However wildly the plants and blossoms seem to burst forth and grow, every tendril, every bud and leaf has its prescribed place.”⁴¹

Also, the animals that were discussed earlier are also shown in many vignettes of

the scene to be in predator and prey pairs, but neither is acting in accordance with its nature, and both seem to be acting in harmony and conjunction with one another.⁴² Additionally, Zanker believes that these prosperous animals at piece with one another as well as the abundance of fruits and vegetations in the acanthus is meant to represent not just the order, but the abundance he has brought, that he has in fact brought about a veritable paradise on Earth for his people.⁴³

VI

While we cannot definitively identify the scene commonly thought to be Romulus and Remus (due to the lack of the wolf and babes in historical record) it is a particularly appropriate for for an altar such as this one, if it is the twins it would be an important connection for the burgeoning leader and would assist the visual representation of the *Aeneid* scene. But if it is not and is instead a depiction of Mars approaching the dedication of the *Campus Martius* then this would help the altar show its connection with the surrounding military district. But judging by the other depictions on the Ara Pacis, connections made to deities and other leaders from the past, it would seem appropriate to portray the founder of the city and therefore I think it is a strong probability that this is what was originally depicted. Staying on the Western friezes the Aeneas/Numa question in my eyes leans much farther toward being Numa Pompilius. The fact that he would be someone who would be a worthy model to emulate for Augustus, the image of a peaceful king may have helped the transition into the monarchy, as well as the image from the *Aeneid* showing Romulus and Numa flanking Augustus as a savior.

The Eastern front is most definitely Roma on the Northern side as there is little to no deviation from this idea in the texts. The Southeastern side due to the ambivalent nature of its depictions leads me to believe that either this is an image alluding to another frieze that we have not seen. Or possibly, and I think most likely, with its amalgamation of common images of several different matronly deities it was meant to be ambivalent in order to allow the viewer read the frieze as they wish, but no matter what the deity would be read as a matronly and peaceful deity.

In the processions it seems that the most likely identity of the children in barbarian clothing are representatives of foreign kingdoms, the Southern barbarian probably a specific prince from the former kingdoms of Mithridates, and the 'Celtic' barbarian is most likely to represent a prince who was brought to Augustus' house as a symbol of loyalty and as a way of showing that other kingdoms would send their offspring to be trained in Rome. The acanthus is most likely a collage of all three of the interpretations offered, it is meant to represent divine lineage, as well as the abundance and order brought to a war torn Rome at the end of the first century B.C. The theme of the friezes is the power of the *Pax Augusta*, and the peace established by a divine ruler, heralding a prosperous Golden Age.

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 - 2 Anderson, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 29.
 - 3 Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Trans. Alan Shapiro 1988, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan; 2003), 144.
 - 4 Paul Rehak, "Numa or Aeneas? Rethinking the Meaning of the Ara Pacis Augustae", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 83 no. 2 (2001): 190.
 - 5 Mortimer Wheeler, *Roman Art and Architecture* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger; 1964, 143.
 - 6 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 198
 - 7 Anderson, "Ara Pacis Augustae," 32.
 - 8 Rehak, "Numa or Aeneas?," 191
 - 9 *Ibid.*, 193.
 - 10 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 204.
 - 11 Rehak, "Numa or Aeneas?," 191-5
 - 12 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 203.
 - 13 Rehak, "Numa or Aeneas?," 192.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 190.
 - 15 Rehak, "Numa or Aeneas?," 196.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, 198.
 - 17 Anderson, "Ara Pacis Augustae," 33.
 - 18 Rehak, "Numa or Aeneas?," 197.
 - 19 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 121.
 - 20 Charles Brian Rose, "Princes and Barbarians on the Ara Pacis", *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 94, no. 3 (1990): 454.
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 - 22 Rose, "Princes and Barbarians", 453.
 - 23 Diana E.E. Kleiner, and Bridget Buxton, "The Ara Pacis and the Donations of Rome", *The American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 112 (2008), 65.
 - 24 Kleiner, "Donations of Rome," 72.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, 68.
 - 26 Rose, "Princes and Barbarians," 456.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 458.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, 459.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, 461.
 - 30 Kleiner, "Donations of Rome," 71.
 - 31 Rose, "Princes and Barbarians," 463.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, 464.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, 467.
 - 34 Kleiner, "Donations of Rome," 76.
 - 35 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 176.
 - 36 *Ibid.*, 174.
 - 37 Barbara Kellum, "What We See and What We Don't See: Narrative Structure and the Ara Pacis

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- Augustae”, *Art History*, vol. 17 (1994), 27.
- 38 David Castriota, *The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1995), 35.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 40 Kellum, “What We See,” 33.
- 41 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 180.
- 42 Kellum, “What We See,” 33.
- 43 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 181.

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