

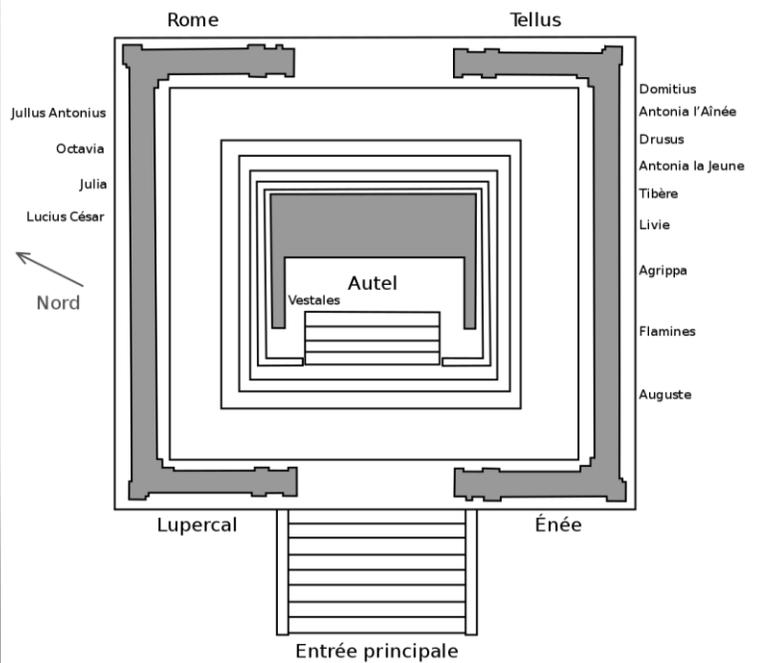
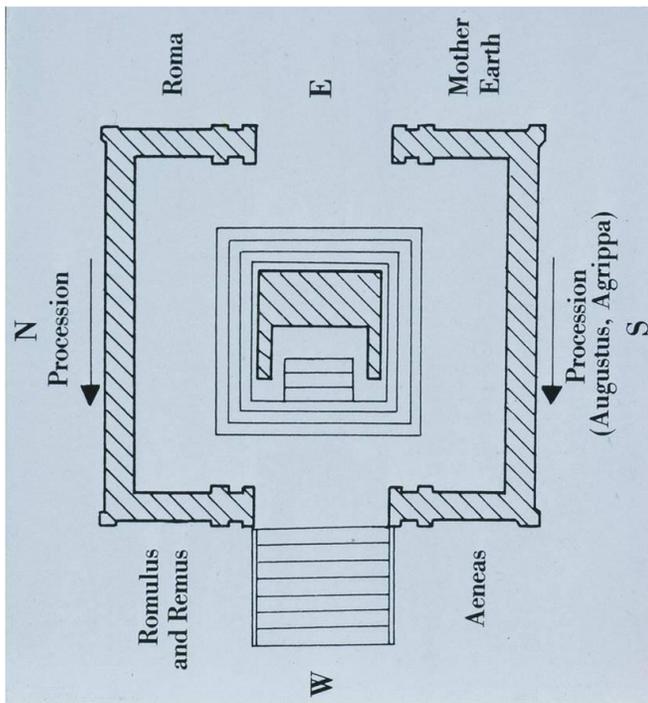
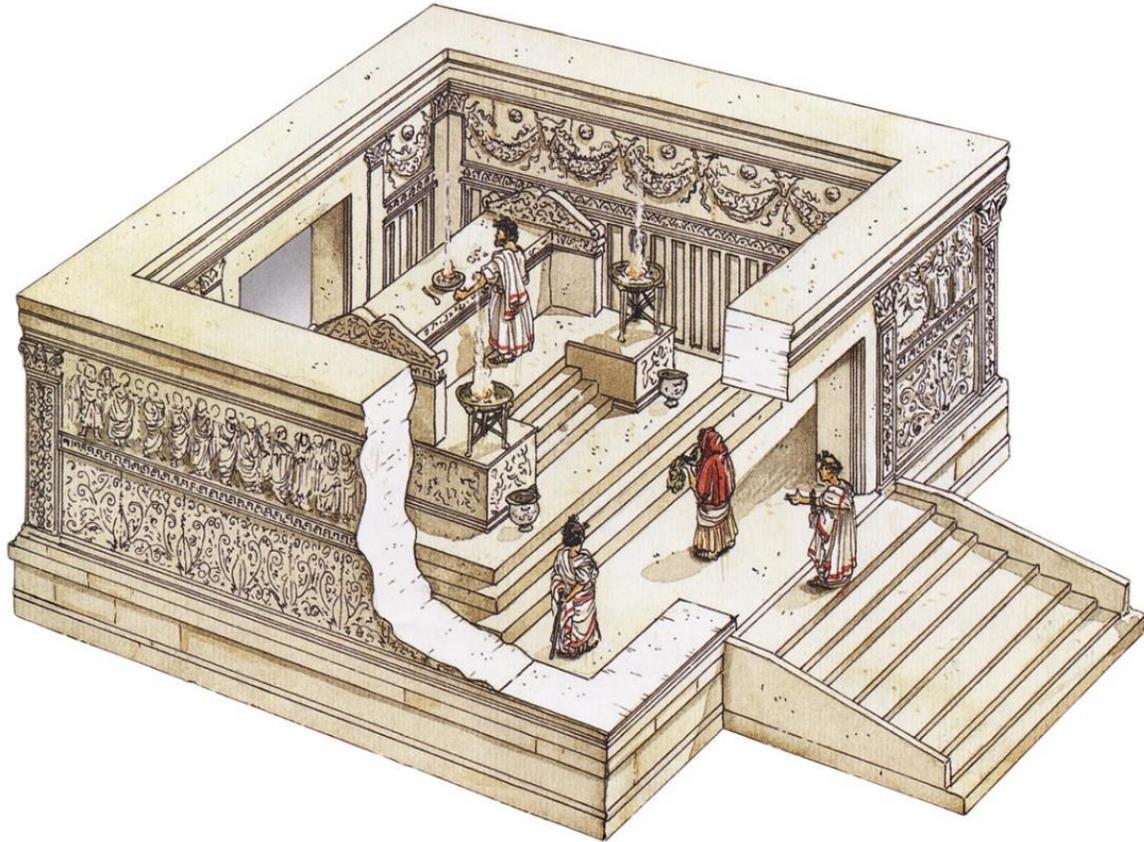
Ara Pacis

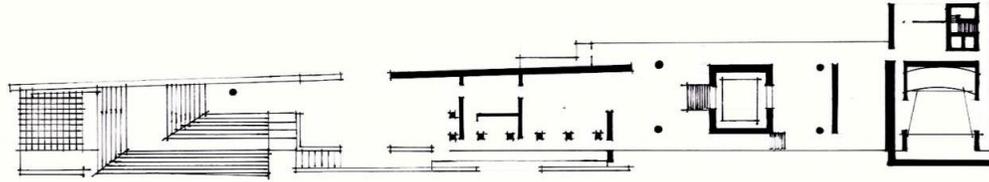
Lungotevere en Augusta

. Next to the Piazza Augusto Imperatore.

Buses: 70, 81, 117, 119, 186 and 628

9 AM – 7 PM (Closed Monday)





Ground Floor Plan 1: 20 scale



The Ara Pacis is a commemorative monument that was built between the years **13 and 9 B.C.** to celebrate peace in the Mediterranean after the victorious battles of Emperor Augustus in Hispania and Gaul.

The monument, which is an altar located in the interior of a closed structure carved in **Carrara marble**, stands out with its impressive decoration made up of various reliefs **showing the family of Augustus in procession**, in addition to different **allegories** related to the mythical foundation of Rome.

Erected in the Campus Martius, the Ara Pacis was **dedicated to the goddess of Peace, in honour of whom each year a ram and two oxen were sacrificed there.**

The altar was located in such a way that the **shadow of the great obelisk** located in the Campus Martius was **projected** on the Ara Pacis on the **birthday of Augustus.**

Due to the **expansion of the river** the altar was **submerged in mud**, where it remained for more than one millennium. It was not until the 16th century that part of the remains were found and in 1938 its reconstruction was carried out, preserving it until the present day.

The Roman state religion in microcosm - The **festivities of the Roman state religion were steeped in tradition and ritual symbolism. Sacred offerings to the gods**, consultations with priests and diviners, ritual formulae, communal feasting—were all practices aimed at fostering and maintaining social cohesion and communicating authority. It could perhaps be argued that the Ara Pacis Augustae—the Altar of Augustan Peace—represents in luxurious, stately microcosm the practices of the Roman state religion in a way that is simultaneously elegant and pragmatic.

Vowed on July 4, 13 B.C.E., and dedicated on January 30, 9 B.C.E., the monument stood proudly in the **Campus Martius** in Rome (a level area between several of Rome's hills and the Tiber River). It was adjacent to architectural complexes that cultivated and proudly displayed messages about the power, legitimacy, and suitability of their patron—the emperor Augustus. Augustus himself discusses the Ara Pacis in his epigraphical memoir, Res Gestae Divi Augusti (“Deeds of the Divine Augustus”) that was promulgated upon his death in 14 C.E. Augustus states “When I

returned to Rome from Spain and Gaul, having successfully accomplished deeds in those provinces ... the senate voted to consecrate the altar of August Peace in the Campus Martius ... on which it ordered the magistrates and priests and Vestal virgins to offer annual sacrifices”

An open-air altar for sacrifice - The Ara Pacis is, at its simplest, an open-air altar for **blood sacrifice associated with the Roman state religion. The ritual slaughtering and offering of animals in Roman religion was routine**, and such rites usually took place outdoors. The placement of the Ara Pacis in the **Campus Martius (Field of Mars)** along the Via Lata (now the Via del Corso) situated it close to other key Augustan monuments, notably the Horologium Augusti (a giant sundial) and the Mausoleum of Augustus.

The significance of the topographical placement would have been quite evident to ancient Romans. This complex of Augustan monuments made a clear statement about Augustus’ physical transformation of Rome’s urban landscape. The dedication to a rather abstract notion of peace (pax) is significant in that Augustus advertises the fact that **he has restored peace to the Roman state after a long period of internal and external turmoil.**

The altar (ara) itself sits within a monumental stone screen that has been elaborated with bas relief (low relief) sculpture, with the panels combining to form a programmatic mytho-historical narrative about Augustus and his administration, as well as about Rome’s deep roots. The altar enclosure is roughly square while the altar itself sits atop a raised podium that is accessible via a narrow stairway.

Processional scenes occupy the north and south flanks of the altar screen. The solemn figures, **all properly clad for a rite of the state religion**, proceed in the direction of the altar itself, **ready to participate in the ritual.** The figures all advance toward the west. The occasion depicted would seem to be a celebration of the peace (Pax) that Augustus had restored to the Roman empire. In addition four main groups of people are evident in the processions: (1) the **lictors** (the official bodyguards of magistrates), (2) priests from the major collegia of Rome, (3) members of the Imperial household, including women and children, and (4) attendants. There has been a good deal of scholarly discussion focused on two of three non-Roman children who are depicted.

The north processional frieze, made up of priests and members of the Imperial household, is comprised of **46 figures.** The priestly colleges (religious associations) represented include the **Septemviri epulones** ("seven men for sacrificial banquets"—they arranged public feasts connected to sacred holidays), whose members here carry an incense box (image above), and the **quindecimviri sacris faciundis** ("fifteen men to perform sacred actions"—their main duty was to guard and consult the Sibylline books (oracular texts) at the request of the Senate). Members of the imperial family, including Octavia Minor, follow behind.

A good deal of modern restoration has been undertaken on the **north wall**, with many heads heavily restored or replaced. The south wall of the exterior screen depicts Augustus and his immediate family. The identification of the individual figures has been the source of a great deal of scholarly debate. Depicted here are Augustus and Marcus Agrippa (friend, son-in-law, and lieutenant to Augustus, he appears, hooded, along with other members of the imperial house. All of those present are **dressed in ceremonial garb appropriate for the state sacrifice.** The presence of state priests known as flamens (flamines) further indicate the solemnity of the occasion.

A running, **vegetal frieze** runs parallel to the processional friezes on the lower register. This vegetal frieze emphasizes the fertility and abundance of the lands, a clear benefit of living in a time of peace.

Mythological Panels - Accompanying the **processional friezes are four mythological panels** that adorn the altar screen on its shorter sides. Each of these panels depicts a distinct scene: a scene of a bearded male making sacrifice; a scene of seated female goddess amid the fertility of Italy; a fragmentary scene with Romulus and Remus in the Lupercal grotto (where these two mythic founders of Rome were suckled by a she-wolf); and a fragmentary panel showing Roma (the personification of Rome) as a seated goddess.

Since the early 20th century, the mainstream interpretation of the **sacrifice panel** has been that the scene depicts the **Trojan hero Aeneas** arriving in Italy and making a sacrifice to Juno.

The better preserved panel of **the east wall** depicts a seated female figure who has been variously interpreted as **Tellus** (the Earth), **Italia** (Italy), **Pax** (Peace), as well as **Venus**. The panel depicts a scene of **human fertility and natural abundance.** Two babies sit on the lap of the seated female, tugging at her drapery. Surrounding the central female is the natural abundance of the lands and flanking her are the personifications of the land and sea breezes. In all, whether the goddess is taken as Tellus or Pax, the **theme stressed is the harmony and abundance of Italy**, a theme central to Augustus’ message of a restored peaceful state for the Roman people—the Pax Romana.

The altar itself sits within the sculpted precinct wall. It is framed by sculpted architectural mouldings with crouching **gryphons** surmounted by volutes flanking the altar. The altar was the functional portion of the monument, the place where blood sacrifice and/or burnt offerings would be presented to the gods.

Implications and Interpretation - The implications of the Ara Pacis are far reaching. Originally located along the Via Lata (now Rome's Via del Corso), the altar is part of a monumental architectural makeover of Rome's Campus Martius carried out by Augustus and his family. Initially the makeover had a dynastic tone, with the Mausoleum of Augustus near the river. The dedication of the Horologium (sundial) of Augustus and the Ara Pacis, the Augustan makeover served as a potent, visual reminder of Augustus' success to the people of Rome. The choice to celebrate peace and the attendant prosperity in some ways breaks with the tradition of explicitly triumphal monuments that advertise success in war and victories won on the battlefield. By championing peace—at least in the guise of public monuments—Augustus promoted a powerful and effective campaign of political message making.

Rediscovery - The first fragments of the Ara Pacis emerged in 1568 beneath Rome's Palazzo Chigi near the basilica of San Lorenzo in Lucina. These initial fragments came to be dispersed among various museums, including the Villa Medici, the Vatican Museums, the Louvre, and the Uffizi. It was not until 1859 that further fragments of the Ara Pacis emerged.

Mussolini and Augustus - The revival of the glory of ancient Rome was central to the propaganda of the Fascist regime in Italy during the 1930s. Benito **Mussolini himself cultivated a connection with the personage of Augustus** and claimed his actions were aimed at furthering the continuity of the Roman Empire. **Art, architecture, and iconography played a key role** in this propagandistic "revival". Following the 1937 retrieval of additional fragments of the altar, Mussolini directed architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo to construct an enclosure for the restored altar adjacent to the ruins of the Mausoleum of Augustus near the Tiber river, creating a key complex for Fascist propaganda. Newly built Fascist palaces, bearing Fascist propaganda, flank the space dubbed "Piazza Augusto Imperatore" ("Plaza of the emperor Augustus"). The famous Res Gestae Divi Augusti ("Deeds of the Divine Augustus") was re-created on the wall of the altar's pavilion. The concomitant effect was meant to lead the viewer to associate Mussolini's accomplishments with those of Augustus himself.

Enduring Monumentality - Augustus had a **strong interest in reshaping the Roman world** (with him as the sole leader), but had to be cautious about how radical those changes seemed to the Roman populace. While he defeated enemies, both foreign and domestic, he was concerned about being perceived as too authoritarian—he did not wish to be labeled as a king (rex) for fear that this would be too much for the Roman people to accept. So the Augustan scheme involved a declaration that Rome's republican government had been "restored" by Augustus and he styled himself as the leading citizen of the republic (princeps). These political and ideological motives then influence and guide the creation of his program of monumental art and architecture. These monumental forms, of which the Ara Pacis is a prime example, served to both create and reinforce these Augustan messages.

The story of the Ara Pacis become even more complicated since it is an artifact that **then was placed in the service of ideas in the modern age**. This results in its identity being impossibly, a mixture of Classicism and Fascism and modernism—all difficult to interpret in a postmodern reality. It is important to remember that the sculptural reliefs were created in the first place to be **easily readable**, so that the viewer could understand the messages of Augustus and his circle without the need to read elaborate texts. Augustus pioneered the use of such ideological messages that relied on clear iconography to get their message across. A great deal was at stake for Augustus and it seems, by virtue of history, that the political choices he made proved prudent. The messages of the **Pax Romana**, of a restored state, and of Augustus as a leading republican citizen, are all part of an **effective and carefully constructed veneer**.