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The living museum: Theory converted in praxis

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Abstract

A visit to an archaeological museum often has more in common with a visit to an art collection than with a visit to a learning faculty. The objects on display in the archaeological museum are chosen for their beauty and the aspects of their time period which they can enlighten are often neglected. Hence many museums present their material as mere objects of art instead of as time pieces. When the museums do not interpret their material, the visitor misses out on the opportunity for learning that the museums otherwise represent and a great amount of studies and knowledge goes unused. The objective of this paper is to show how museums can become teaching faculties through the set up of temporary exhibitions. Here a deeper visitor understanding is achieved applying academic research, meaning that theories and interpretations of the museum material should be explained to the visitor. This is done through a case study, using the Ara Pacis museum in Rome. The theory based analysis regards the propagandistic aspect of Augustean golden age imagery, using the altar of Ara Pacis as the example. A such exhibition is meant to function within the framework of the museum and is meant to be temporary, enabling the museum to lure the visitor back, with yet another temporary exhibition, demonstrating a new aspect.

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Introduction

A visit to an archaeological museum often has more in common with a visit to an art collection than with a visit to a learning faculty: we wander, looking at objects chosen for their artistic beauty instead of for their historical potential. By potential I mean: what can we learn from this object, why is this an important time piece and how can it, alone or in conjunction with other objects, enlighten us about its own period?

The word “museum” has in time come to be equivalent with, not only history, but with “dead” history.¹ Museum objects have become trophies, not aimed at fulfilling a need or a want of knowledge as much as at being an attribute for the institution.²

I wish to show that a museum/exhibition can be more than a collection of beautiful objects. How an exhibition can be explanatory, through the introduction of different theoretical viewpoints, how museum objects may obtain added value as their purpose expands. With expanded purpose I refer to an object going from being seen almost purely for its artistic value and thereby having one single objective³, to becoming a time piece. A time piece is an object which through varying interpretations can enlighten an aspect of its time period. The time piece will hence acquire differing value through the different roles it can achieve in various exhibitions, the same piece can within different scenarios and theories highlight a certain aspect within its own time period. Through temporary exhibitions the viewer will experience an ever changing and living museum that will challenge and teach something new at each visit.

In order to create something new there must be a destruction of the old; a museological dilemma.⁴ The function of the museums has so far been threefold: collect, preserve, present, but an even more important function is emerging. The role of museums is no longer limited to the conservation of objects: they also have to share and continuously reinterpret them;⁵ the pedagogical museums have to be for everyone and they have to be a teaching as well as learning facility.⁶ In the museums, the object creates a connection between the material culture, and the social reality of its own as well as our present time,⁷ with this in mind it is obvious that the function of a museum has to be to educate rather than just to present. The museums have to obtain the role as mediators of cultural competence, a deeper understanding for our culture and heritage, mediated through the museum material.

In this case study, I will as the “expert” on classical Roman archaeology and history, present the museum with an in-debt study and consequent analysis, leading to a thesis and objective which can be interpreted through the material of the museum. I will also make suggestions as to how this can be performed in practice. My aim is for an educational

¹ Broberg & Sörlin 1991 s. 4.

² Broberg & Sörlin 1991 s. 5.

³A portrait bust of an emperor, for example, is more than a mere portrait, and will express the virtues which the emperor wishes to impress on the public.

⁴ Broberg & Sörlin 1991 s. 5.

⁵ Hooper-Greenhill 2007 s. 1.

⁶ Broberg & Sörlin 1991 s. 9.

⁷ Palmqvist 1997 s. 131.

exhibition aimed at adults, the average visitor to a museum, and will concern the exhibition itself only.⁸ The information needs to be presented as a debate in order to engage the visitor: if the information is simply presented as true without any debate or alternative perspectives, the motivation to delve in deeper and learn more is stunted and there does not seem to be any point if there is nothing to discuss or evaluate.⁹ Due to these factors a theoretical objective and interpretation of the material will serve very well to engage the visitor in a discussion. I will explain my theory, I will guide the visitor through the exhibition, explaining how these materials help highlight my case and in that way inviting a debate through the difference in opinions that will inevitably occur in the interpretation. If the theory as well as the material are thoroughly explained the visitor will have a much sounder foundation for making his or her own judgement, and hence a much more active experience of the museum. Sadly the experience of most visitors to most museums is limited to a much more restricted learning, one which is based on learning by looking. “Learning at a glance” has a long pedigree in museums, but the research raises questions about its effectiveness.¹⁰ Consideration needs to be given to whether, if learning modes are broadened, the use of museums might be broadened to match. Based on the idea that museums should teach, the aim of this paper is to show how that can be achieved in practice through the set up of temporary exhibitions where a deeper knowledge is achieved through the introduction of academic research, meaning that theories and interpretations of the museum material, should be explained to the visitor.

Introducing the case study

This particular study will focus on Augustus’ implementation of political propaganda in public architecture and is made with the purpose of enabling a temporary exhibition, focusing on a certain aspect of the Ara Pacis altar and employing a thesis on this aspect within the framework of the Ara Pacis museum. I will start off with an indepth analyses of the figurative language used on the Ara Pacis and through comparisons with other public monuments and objects of the period reach a conclusion regarding the altar’s use as a political monument for the Augustan government. The analysis will demonstrate how exactly the different points of the altar are used for propagandistic purposes and place them in a historical perspective; I will go over the development of certain figure types in the republican period ahead of its final Augustan use. The findings of my analysis form the basis for a set of suggestions and recommendations on how to employ my thesis for highlighting this particular aspect of the altar through the Ara Pacis exhibition. My recommendations will include: how to form an explanatory introduction to the exhibition, which parts should be drawn attention to, and what complementary objects could be brought in to highlight the aspect. In this way the exhibition will introduce the public to an academic analysis which can be demonstrated through the monument and hence introduce the visitor to an aspect of the monument otherwise missing in the exhibition. Furthermore, this is an approach which will enable the museum to continuously employ

⁸ For the purpose of this study complementary visitor aids such as audio phones or other guide materials are not considered, and neither is cultural education for children.

⁹ Hooper-Greenhill 2007 s. 177.

¹⁰ Hooper-Greenhill 2007 s. 189.

temporary exhibitions all the while highlighting new aspects of the monument and hence intrigue the visitor to new visits.

Theories on museology

Museology as a scientific discipline was created in the 60's and 70's and the international committee for museology, ICIFOM, was established in 1977 by ICOM, a UN organ.¹¹ Today, three main directions dominate the museological research: the theoretical, the ethical/critical, also known as “new museology” and the normative line, in England known simply as “museum studies”.¹² The normative line is the most practically aimed of the three.

The theoretical line concerns the evolution of the collection/museum through the times, and is an almost purely descriptive science. New museology looks critically at the formation of the museums and their role in society. This line of research deals with the importance of analysing the museums roles as privileged culture formators.¹³ This goes to say that the critical school of museology is working with culture theoretical principals: how conscious are museums of their part in shaping the general publics idea of culture and heritage and how is this implemented through the museum exhibitions. One important argument for this school is that it is a 19th century illusion to think that museum exhibitions can be permanent, quite contrary to museum practice, which can be rather conservative when it comes to employing changes in the general set-up of exhibitions, they argue that it is necessary to break the old in order to build something new. Simultaneously this line also stresses the importance of an active role of museologists and cultural critics in the formation of the museums as an important culture formatter. This line is about breaking down the wall which still exists between theory and practice. In normative museology pedagogic methods are included in order to achieve more satisfied visitors. In articles on normative museology it is the informing of the visitor which is given importance. This line is especially popular in Germany, where museums are considered educational institutions¹⁴ as well as the interpreters of objects. An interpreter of objects is more and different from an exhibitor of objects, meaning that an exhibition will achieve an added educational value due to the fact that it is interpreted object which are on exhibition, objects which through explanations can demonstrate several facets of its time or use, not only the object in itself.¹⁵

However, it has for a long time been considered that museums alone are powerless to educate, and need to work together with other organisations which will then form a public teaching system.¹⁶

¹¹ Palmqvist 1997 s. 120.

¹² Palmqvist 1997 s. 122.

¹³ Palmqvist 1997 s. 125.

¹⁴ Palmqvist 1997 s. 136.

¹⁵ A wall painting may, for example, be full of symbolic language which an uninitiated visitor will need an interpreter to explain in order for fully understanding the image.

¹⁶ Hooper-Greenhill 2007 s. 197.

How can museology theory acquire a more practical application?

Even if by now, museology as an established academic science has been evolving for more than 40 years, the picture forming is still that of a discipline where the results achieved through theoretical studies are lacking in a clear methodology and the actual connection remains unclear. Museology still appears as a science only in theory and is lacking in a finished identity. Even though volumes upon volumes on museological theory can be found in the libraries, a work dealing with the practical implementation of museological research is still missing.¹⁷ The new museology line is in theory working towards breaking down the wall between theory and practice, but is in reality mostly seen as operating to far from the reality which it treats and is therefore considered an “armchair museology”.¹⁸

A part of museology studies regards the museal mediation, defined by Carter and Geczy¹⁹ as the process whereby meanings are transmitted from one object to another in this context obviously referring to the interaction of the museum object and the viewer. I would however, like to expand on this interaction in the sense that I wish for the interaction to be between the interpreted object and a “decoder”.²⁰ With the term decoder I am here referring to a more active viewer, a participant in the exhibition, a visitor who is enabled, through the interpreted objects to form an independent opinion. When an exhibition is challenging the viewer by being or requiring active participation this can radically change how the “decoder” perceives the message.²¹ The message will have to be consciously formulated, the museum staff will not only show objects, but will interpret the material and actively engage the visitor in decoding the exhibition, simultaneously enabling a new understanding of the material.

In museology circuits modern media are seen as a competing factor instead of as yet another source of mediation, a perhaps more modern approach to access the public. When museologists speak of a missing framework for the theory formation on museology which can help build the tools required for developing museology into a complete science, they speak of a theory treating the social and educating role of the museums in society as well as the role which museums hold in forming our relation to our cultural heritage,²² still the actual implementation of theory on museum exhibitions is so estranged that it only forms a very rudimentary part of this framework.

According to Lindvall and Bohman,²³ it is often claimed in museum circuits that museums are too academic and too intellectual, and therefore boring. Quite in accordance with Lindvall and Bohman I think that the opposite is rather the case; museum exhibitions are lacking in academia and intellect and need to, in order to achieve more interesting exhibitions, move beyond the simple, expected and handbook-like.²⁴ Intellectual engagement and research is needed in order to create an exhibition which

¹⁷ Palmqvist 1997 s. 125.

¹⁸ Palmqvist 1997 s. 126.

¹⁹ Carter & Geczy 2006 s. 162.

²⁰ I am here using a concept from Carter & Geczy 2006.

²¹ Carter & Geczy 2006 s. 162.

²² Palmqvist 1997 s. 134.

²³ Bohman & Lindval 1997 s. 84

²⁴ Bohman & Lindval 1997 s. 84

engages and teaches the visitor. The museal responsibility areas of collecting, preserving and presenting need amplifying- need to replace presenting with teaching. Museums possess a unique position in society, the trust that the general public holds in museums is unequalled, and in the case of larger museums, the institution is in possession of unique spaces as well as collections. What a museum is the holder of is hence, a unique way, as well as responsibility, of enabling a more profound understanding through the 3 dimensional material that they possess, collections including material that stretches over long periods of time as well as vast areas geographically speaking. Through the richness and the variety of the gathered materials present in the museums the results are an extraordinary array of possible interpretations and objectives. What they are in need of is some thinking outside of the stereotype²⁵, some challenging of the visitor as well as the museum.

Augustus political use of public monuments

The use of public monuments, art and coins for personal glorification and political gain, was nothing new in Rome at the time of power accession of the new *Princeps senatus*, but seeing as this period offered no competition to Augustus' political power and influence, it was now possible for the new princeps to practically monopolise all the most dominant forms of media. The message Augustus wished to imprint in the consciousness of the public was the advantage of his new political system over the old. Peace instead of war, and stability in the government instead of instability and the constant infighting between political fractions which had dominated the republic.

Definition of the term propaganda

In order to be able to discuss the use of a public monument for propagandistic causes it is important to have a clear definition of the term propaganda. In modern times the term has acquired somewhat negative connotations, thoughts go to Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia and Mao's China. What I here wish to discuss is however the original definition of the term, as described below:

Propaganda:

1: the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person **2:** ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause; *also:* a public action having such an effect.²⁶

A basic assumption of propaganda is that repetition is needed in order for the message to be effective, propaganda has to have a main message which is constant, and it must be timely and speak of contemporary events.²⁷ Ellul states that literature and history must be rewritten according to the needs of propaganda, as a process aiming to integrate past

²⁵ As an example of a worldwide stereotype can be mentioned the fact that archeological exhibitions almost always are put up in chronological order or types: emperor busts e.g.

²⁶ Websters dictionary.

²⁷ Evans 1992 s. 3.

events through re-explaining, into the present.²⁸ In order to be influenced by propaganda the audience must be actively engaged in the culture and able to focus on the society as a whole, which is a fact which for the most cases eliminates the lower classes. It is therefore ironically the more educated classes which are most susceptible to propaganda.²⁹

The Ara Pacis - Description

Augustus refused several grand honors which the senate wished to bestow upon him as he returned to Rome after three years on military expedition in Spain. He refused a triumph and the senate's offer to build an altar in the senate chamber itself.³⁰ Instead of these honors he approved the building of an altar to the Pax Augusta on the *Campus Martius* outside of the *pomerium*, the sacred boundary of the city. Augustus was in this manner showing his *pietas* in not accepting overly grand gestures and placed his altar of Peace squarely between the spheres of military power (the *Campus Martius*) and the domestic (the *Pomerium*).

There are no inscriptions on the Ara Pacis, the imagery presented on this monument was for all levels of the public, presented through images so simple, well known and clear that no text was needed to clarify the message.

The monument of Ara Pacis Augustae was raised on the 4th of July, 13 B.C. and inaugurated on the 30th of January, 9 B.C. The size is relatively modest: the measurements of the outer walls are 11.6 x 10.6 m, and the walls are 6.30 m. high. The inner altar itself measures 7x6m at its base. Two central doorways in the east and west walls grant access to the altar (Figure 1).

The altar might be of a modest size but the entire structure is executed in marble from the Luna quarry and is carefully situated exactly on the line which marks the passing from the military sphere and into the domestic, hence clearly demonstrating the importance which Augustus imbued in the building.

The north and south side of the outer wall contain the main friezes, a religious procession while east and west, the front and back of the altar, is occupied by four friezes with mythological scenes.

East friezes (Figure 2): A goddess is sitting in the centre of the composition: her iconography is characterized by multiple associations and hence has led to uncertainty regarding her identification. Whether the goddess represents Venus, Ceres or Tellus, she is fully emblematic of peace and prosperity. In her lap she holds two small children as well as fruits, and all around her plants are sprouting from the fertile land. A cow and a sheep lie peacefully at her feet. The sheep drinking from the water that flows from her throne. On both sides of the goddess we see a female companion, one riding a swan, the other a sea animal. The scene expresses idyll, peace and prosperity. The goddess is a purely Roman personification, meaning that she has no Greek prototype, and represents

²⁸ Ellul 1973 s. 14.

²⁹ Evans 1992 s. 7.

³⁰ Galinsky 1996 s. 142.

idyll, peace and prosperity. She was often used by contemporary poets to express the joys of the coming golden age.³¹ Even if the debate regarding this goddess identity is still ongoing; Venus due to the garment slipping of the shoulder, Ceres on account of the stalks of grain or Tellus, the earth goddess recognized from the landscape and the rocky seat which forms the throne, this divinity of growth and fertility is commonly recognized under the name of Tellus.

This is however only one of the scenes on the east side of the altar, and the other scene expresses the price of this idyll and prosperity. Presented seated in a similar pose as our peaceful goddess, also on a throne, is Dea Roma (Figure 3). Although this frieze is very poorly preserved, only a draped thigh of a seated figure, surrounded by arms and armour, survives, experts agree on a typical representation of the goddess seated on a pile of arms from the defeated enemies of Rome.³² Even if the representation of Dea Roma is known from coins and art, this is the first time for the goddess to appear on a state monument.³³ Peace is achieved through victories this frieze clearly states “*Parta victoriis pax*” as Augustus himself commented in his *Res Gestae* regarding the altar of peace.³⁴

On the west side the two friezes are also seen to complement each other. The sacrificing Aeneas (figure 4) shares the west side of the altar with the god of war; Mars and the twins Remus and Romulus. Not only can it be noted that both panel pairs contrasts peace with the price paid for the achievement, but also that the two opposing sides of the altar includes either female or male figures. Romulus and Remus are actually missing from their highly fragmented panel, but since the major aspects of the scene can be discerned most scholars identify the helmeted man on the left as Mars, and the man approaching from the right under a fig tree, while leaning on a staff, as the Herdsman Faustulus. Mars’ and Faustulus’ attention are caught by the missing central scene; supposedly the twins suckled by the she-wolf. The pose in which Faustulus is being pictured is reminiscent of two works where the nude Herakles leans on his club while watching his infant son, Telephos being suckled either by a lioness or a hind.³⁵ Even though the central scene is missing, the surrounding elements all speak for a reasonable restoration of the babies and the she-wolf. Several of Rome’s leading men, Sulla, Pompey and Caesar had been hailed as a “new Romulus” but Augustus made a special effort to connect himself with Rome’s original founder, and even deliberately built his house on the Palatine near the traditional hut of Romulus.

Aeneas is represented as the mythical forefather of Rome, and of course of Augustus himself, sacrificing to the gods upon his arrival in Lavinium. Aeneas is sacrificing in the Roman manner, *velatus*, and with the *toga capite velato* over a laurel wreath he is reflected in the veiled figure of Augustus, the only other person to be veiled in this manner, seen on the south side portrayed in his role as *pontifex Maximus*. Aeneas is portrayed as an older man, no longer the young man fleeing Troy, but father Aeneas whose *pietas* was legendary. The physical resonance of the two figures demonstrates the importance of Aeneas to Augustus. Aeneas is sacrificing upon his arrival to Italy; Augustus is sacrificing on the inauguration of the altar celebrating his return to Italy, both in the company of their families. Behind Aeneas is his son Iulus, the namegiver to *Gens*

³¹ Horatius. *Carmen Saeculare*, 29-31.

³² Galinsky 1996 s. 107.

³³ Rehak 2006 s. 113.

³⁴ *RG* 13.

³⁵ Rehak 2006 s. 114.

Iulia. Augustus is seen as about to perform the sacrifice (Figure 5a), *velatus* and amongst his peers, surrounded by Ti. Claudius Nero and P. Quinctilius Varus,³⁶ the two consuls of the year, he is perceived as *pius*, one of his cardinal virtues expressed on the *clipeus virtutis* in the curia. Augustus put great weight on the fact that he was *pius*, the amount of representations showing Augustus as *togatus capite velato* (Figure 6) is astounding.³⁷ This was a very successful “campaign”, his example set a precedent and the most ambitious from all classes of society began actively pursuing religious offices which were imbued with renewed respect and opportunities for advancement. This stress on the importance of religion and piety can also be seen by the fact that Augustus almost single-handedly restored or rebuild most of the temples of Rome. To handle the mundane aspects of the cities organisation alongside Augustus, was the ever loyal Agrippa, who improved greatly on Rome’s water supply by, not only restoring Rome’s ancient aqueducts, but also by building two new.

Amongst all other participants of the procession Augustus is only slightly elevated in height and hence seen as *primus inter pares*. Augustus is not outstanding as a god but is only recognized due to his *lictors*, themselves recognized by their *fascēs*, a republican acknowledged symbol of power and authority. The priests following behind Augustus are recognized by their head-gear as the four *Flamines Maiores*, the priests of Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus (Romulus) and *Divus Iulius*. Next comes another veiled man identified as the deceased Agrippa (Figure 5b) and next to him the empress herself, Livia. Consequently the man following Livia ought to be her oldest son Tiberius. The imperial family is represented as a happy, peaceful and prolific family. The children occupy the foreground, they are the promise of the future and are shown in their importance as such, they are grouped with their parents according to their proximity to the throne (Figure 7). The sacrificial procession of the Ara Pacis is a carefully planned, idealized reflection of the new Republic. On these friezes we are seeing the newly constituted leading aristocracy of Rome, as it wished to be represented. For this same reason it is not an actual representation of the inaugural procession, but instead the ideal of that same procession. This signifies that deceased Agrippa and young Drusus, campaigning in the north, are both represented on the altar procession.

The top of the inner altar shows a figural frieze, now fragmentary, of a sacrificial procession of vestal virgins, presumably representing the annual sacrifice at the altar also mentioned in the *Res Gestae*.³⁸

Five fragments of friezes depicting women have been found, probably from the sides of the inner altar. Since only women are depicted they may very well represent personifications of pacified provinces. Personified provinces under political control have a long Greco-Roman history.³⁹ Augustus makes use of representations of personified provinces in his forum as well as on the Boscoreale cup and on coins. Also here are representations of the vestal virgins performing their annual sacrifice at the altar.

Almost 55 square meters of the altar are covered by acanthus vegetation, which forms a strong connecting element on all sides of the altar, where it spreads from centrally placed calyxes and curls and spreads upward in repeating patterns (Figure 8). Any

³⁶ Syme 1984 s. 583.

³⁷ Zanker 1988 s. 102.

³⁸ *RG* 13.

³⁹ Rehak 2006 s.101.

eventual monotony is avoided through the introduction of other types of plants and animals.

Many of the acanthus leaves gradually turns into other plants: grapes, ivy, roses, laurels and oak, symbols of natural fertility as well as political symbols linked to Augustus.

The propaganda of the Ara Pacis

Seeing or perceiving is a social process. A painting or a monument is not perceived as an isolated object, but is seen as a “participant” in an ongoing visual discourse.⁴⁰ In the time of Augustus this same discourse was known from art, coins, poetry, history, bibliography and laws.⁴¹

The idea that one can learn to “see socially” as introduced by Rea⁴², fits snugly with the Augustan imagery and its spread through society. Rea states, that by inserting images into a social framework which is already in place within a culture, the audience will learn to interpret the pictorial language and “see socially”. This then defines the exact nature of Augustan propaganda which is trying to promote the idea of an Augustan created “golden age” in a cultural language which would be understood by all.

Also it should be considered that the community of Augustan Rome is a highly visual culture where large portions of the populace are in fact illiterate. In the case of the Ara Pacis we are handling the foundation myth of Rome which would be known to large groups of society as well as more subtle themes which would be aimed at the group which compose the most powerful members of society. Augustus propaganda can be seen as fulfilling the logical end to Republican propaganda. What started up as a combination of state and family propaganda, ended up as propaganda for the family which was becoming the state.

Even if the myth of Aeneas escape from Troy had a long standing popularity among the Etruscans, it enters the Roman canon relatively late and we do not see any figural representations of Aeneas before the late Republic. He enters the literature only in the second half of the third century B.C., as the distant forefather of Rome. The first author to retell the story of Aeneas to a Roman audience was Naevius in the late third century,⁴³ and the tradition was soon followed, by famous as well as unknown authors. As early back as the second century B.C. the Iulians laid claim to ancestry from Venus, but even though this claim was through Aeneas,⁴⁴ it was Iulius Caesar who stressed the specific claim of being descendant from Aeneas, heretofore only implied in the Iulian family propaganda which had been focused on the descent from Venus. Caesars stress on Aenean propaganda can easily be seen as an effort of legitimizing his rule over Rome, in the very same way it would later be utilized by Augustus. It can then be seen that it was Caesar who introduced the idea of descent from Aeneas as a family propaganda, which Augustus was later able to aggrandize and utilize in his own scheme. Aeneas is not only seen as the mythical forefather of Augustus himself and Rome, but as the quintessence of

⁴⁰ Rea 2007 s. 67.

⁴¹ Augustus concerns on morals was clearly expressed in poetry, law, art and architecture and was turned into a political issue of the period.

⁴² Rea 2007 s. 67.

⁴³ Evans 1992 s. 36.

⁴⁴ Evans 1992 s. 39.

pietas, a Roman value which Augustus could then link to his own, a perfect example of the reinterpretation of history with a propagandistic aim as described by Ellul. Augustus would imbue the figures with new depths and meanings, not only using them to claim ancestry but also to form the image in which he wished to appear to the Roman people. The myth of Aeneas as the mythical forefather of Rome had circulated for centuries, since the third century B.C. when Rome began having an interest in displaying venerable and semidivine founders to their city and hence being able to equate in status the Greek colonies in Italy which more often than not boasted with divine founders. The Aeneas version began as one alongside many other foundation myths and versions, but was since fully accepted by the Romans as the true foundation myth. That it is the myth of the Trojan hero escaping Greek aggression that ultimately gained hold in Rome is not surprising. This myth had the advantage of placing the Romans within the Greek mythological hero world, but at the same time set them apart from a Greece which they were conquering.⁴⁵

Augustus uses easily recognisable iconographic types in a limited and small number. A good example is the *cornucopia* which had always been invested with positive meanings but whose basic idea was now given a contemporary meaning as well. A sheaf of grain, for example, could stand for the fertility of the fields, a sign of fertility in general, for peace or even for Augustus as guarantor and the grain supply in Rome. The chief characteristics of the Augustan pictorial vocabulary are the broad associations and the general applicability of the individual symbols, which of course also imply a lack of specificity in any particular case. The vine plant, an old decorative motif, gained a more specific meaning as a symbol of growth in nature, and is one of the most frequently repeated elements of the new pictorial vocabulary of the Golden Age. Repetition and an accessible aesthetic norm were essential to the spread and acceptance of this new imagery, and constituted a considerable part of their power. On the Ara Pacis more than half of the walls surfaces on the enclosure are covered by vines and garlands.

Also in the use of mythological figures did Augustus show restraint and his program consisted of relatively few figures and basically no new elements. The essential part was the combining of two mythological cycles: the legend of Troy and the story of Romulus. Through Vergil's *Aeneid*, the coming of the golden age was presented as foretold from the mythical beginnings of Rome. Vergil's national epic was extremely popular in Rome, a popularity which demonstrates the Romans readiness to identify with this myth which provided ancestry both from the Trojans, who without being Greek still had the cultural superiority of the Greeks and who furthermore supplied a divine forefather, Aeneas son of Venus, for their *princeps*. The other mythological cycle was regarding Romulus, who as the son of Rhea Silvia, daughter of the king of Alba Longa, and Mars also belonged in the family tree of Augustus. Rhea Silvia was referred to by Augustan poets as Ilia; from Ilium.⁴⁶ This was a national mythology which provided for Augustus a legitimacy drawn from the past. Mars was presented as the guarantor of *virtus* and Venus the protectress of fertility and prosperity. Now Venus and Mars would often be standing besides one another, as for example in the Forum Augustum: the goddess of love and fertility and the

⁴⁵ Gruen 1992 s. 17.

⁴⁶ Zanker 1988 s. 195.

god of war reinterpreted as prefiguring the destiny of the Iulii.⁴⁷ Hence it was possible for the Iulian family myth to centre itself squarely within the national myth.

Military victories occupy a special place in Augustan ideology, where the vine symbolises the peace of the new golden age, the slogan of the age was most precisely "through just war to the blessings of peace"⁴⁸: military victories demonstrate that the morally reborn Republic, with its leader, had won the gods back to its side. Every new victory becomes a justification of the ruler, and the pietas of Augustus and the victories of the new Republic were shown as closely related. The iconography of the Augustan era clearly states the link between military victory, internal order and happiness in general.

Augustus wanted his very name associated with victory, in fact his name implied triumph after he adopted *Imperator*, meaning "victorious commander", as his first name (*praenomen*).⁴⁹ In his *Res Gestae* practically all of chapter 4 is dedicated to his victories and military honours.⁵⁰ All this is simultaneous with his claim to have brought peace to Rome. Pax, the root-noun of the verb pacisci, did not originally mean "peace" but a "pact" which ended a war and led to submission, friendship or alliance.⁵¹ Augustus wanted his rule to go down in history as the *Pax Augusta*, a peace bought through victorious military campaigns. As such was then also presented the return of the three lost military standards from the Parthians. Although this was a feat gained through diplomatic efforts, in Rome it was presented with the usual military imagery (Figure 9). The association between the Emperor and Pax can be traced in two directions. One leads to the Greeks where the idea of a peacemaker was begun with Alexander and which was then applied to Caesar towards the end of his life and then finally to Augustus. The other direction leads to an early Roman usage, to the *Pax deum*. This Pax is the heavenly one, a "pact" which can be obtained through prayers, sacrifices and offerings. The supremacy of the gods is acknowledged and the peace the gods should bring would end all sorts of suffering, famine and war. The gods can also become active peacemakers on earth and such a superhuman role is given to Augustus in passages of Ovid, *Fast.* 4, 407.⁵²

Augustus proudly records in his *Res Gestae*⁵³ that the doors to the temple of Janus Quirinus "which our ancestors ordered to be closed whenever there was peace, and which, before my birth, is recorded to have been closed only twice since the foundation of the city, the senate ordered to be closed three times while I was princeps".⁵⁴ Since the *Res Gestae* is the princeps' own description of his grandest deeds it clearly demonstrates the great importance and pride the princeps took in keeping the empire at peace. A peace gained through the successful termination of wars abroad, the exact message of the altar of peace.

Other symbols achieved new meanings as a part of the new golden age iconography. Examples include Victorias, vegetal ornaments, such as fruit garlands but especially

⁴⁷ Zanker 1988 s. 196.

⁴⁸ Zanker 1988 s. 182.

⁴⁹ Eck 2007 s. 123.

⁵⁰ Eck 2007 s. 123.

⁵¹ Weinstock 1960 s. 44.

⁵² Weinstock 1960 s. 50

⁵³ RG 13.

⁵⁴ Rehak 2006 s. 100.

laurel and oaks, tripods, candelabras and *bucrania*, eventually they all became generalized symbols of *pietas* and *pax Augusta* in the sense that they convey a notion of blessings and abundance (Figure 10, 11 and 12). These symbols were used and combined on art and architecture and permeated into the private sphere where for example laurel on an ash urn could symbolize that one had led a god-fearing life.⁵⁵ Laurel wreaths had always crowned victors and were attribute of Victoria herself as well as Apollo's tree. In having two laurel trees growing by the entrance to his own house, Augustus managed yet another connection to be linked to the plant, that of himself. Henceforth laurel and oak leaves gradually lost their original meaning and became widely understood as synonyms for Augustus (13 and 14).

The effectiveness of these symbols derived from their infinite repetition. What seems to us now merely ornamental or decorative was then something new and exciting in the emotional mood of the "new age".⁵⁶

Aeneas, Romulus and Augustus.

Both Aeneas and Romulus were descended from deities and were granted special protection throughout their lives. Augustus claimed a common bond with them through his own descent from a god, a heavenly descent which came with being a descendant of Aeneas: a descent that furthermore established a kinship with all the Roman people. This was a claim that he strengthened successfully through his connections with Romulus as well. Seeing as Romulus had a mixed reputation, he had after all committed a horrible sin in killing his own brother, and evil tongues reported that it was the senate itself, during a storm, that had killed him, hiding his dead body under their clothing. It was hence very important for Augustus not to be connected too strongly with Romulus: Aeneas formed a perfect counterpart.

The propaganda which Aeneas and Romulus embodied, as the founders of the city of Rome as well as her people, highlighted Augustus' role as the city's new founder. The importance of these mythical founders can also be seen from their inclusion in the family statue groups of the Forum Augustum (Figure 16). With his forum Augustus created a monumental architectural setting which was focused on the temple of *Mars Ultor*, adorned with statues of the emperor and his family, stretching back to Mars himself, this temple was transformed to a temple for the *gens Iulia*. The forum complex was important in enhancing the prestige of Augustus' imperial authority, and its proximity to the Forum Iulium further served to link Augustus to his deified father.⁵⁷ The connection between war and peace as expressed on the Ara Pacis is seen very clearly on the statue of Mars *Ultor* (the avenger) in the Forum of Augustus. The cuirassed figure of Mars is bearded and peaceful looking and has *cornucopiae* (Figure 15) on the shoulder straps.⁵⁸ That the message of this heavenly pact of peace was successfully communicated can be seen by its interment into the private sphere. (Figure 17, 18 and 19)

As also during the time of Romulus, Rome had gone through a bloody chapter and as Romulus, Augustus himself had proven to be a successful military leader. In also aligning

⁵⁵ Zanker 1988 s. 89.

⁵⁶ Zanker 1988 s. 118.

⁵⁷ Stamper 2005 s. 132.

⁵⁸ Galinsky 1996 s. 111.

himself with Aeneas, Rome's other mythical founding father, Augustus showed himself as a leader of *pietas* and a priest of his people, reviving, among others, the cult of the *Lares* again, the gods which Aeneas himself had brought from burning Troy, along with his old father and his son Iulus, others symbols of the *pietas* of father Aeneas with which Augustus sought to align himself.

Never before had a new ruler implemented such a far reaching cultural program, so effectively embodied in visual imagery,⁵⁹ and the altar of Ara Pacis expresses most of the all embracing elements of Augustus' political pictorial program. As an example of Augustan propaganda it is perfect.

The message was, as clearly stated: Augustus is the new founder of Rome. A Rome of peace and prosperity gained through victories in wars abroad. Hence Augustus was, as a mythical metamorphosis of Aeneas and Romulus: the pious leader of a Rome at peace, and the strong leader of a Rome at war.

My theoretical objective (what do I want to show through the exhibition?)

Firstly an introduction to the theme of the exhibition is needed. The visitor to the Ara Pacis museum is introduced to the idea of the altar of peace as a political monument serving certain political goals through the use of pictorial propaganda. The term propaganda needs explaining in order to avoid any negative misgivings. In order to acquire an active participation of the museum visitor it is, as described above, important to present the thesis so it will open up for a discussion. The visitor should be introduced to the elements that are considered part of the propaganda program, and then upon viewing the monument, recognize these elements and be able to form an opinion on their propaganda values. It is of course very helpful to the understanding of the spread of this pictorial imagery if also other objects are presented which will underscore the general spread through different spheres of society; religious, public, profane and private. Other examples of the spread through the layers of society could also be the expensive grave monuments for the upper social classes, or cheaper ash urns for the lower classes.

The text box below is a suggestion to a possible introduction to the exhibition with the theme: Ara Pacis- The world's first political monument.

⁵⁹ Zanker 1988 s. 101.

Ara Pacis – The world’s first political monument

The Ara Pacis was finished in the year 9 B.C. Augustus had by then been sole ruler since the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. and wished to show through this monument to peace the great achievements of the Roman people under his “just” rule. That his rule was just, both morally and through right of his divine family line was of utter importance for Augustus to demonstrate to all Romans.

Definitions of the term “propaganda”:

1. The spreading of ideas, information, or rumours for the purpose of helping an institution, a cause, or a person. **2.** Ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause.

In order for a propaganda message to be effective repetition is needed and at the same time the propaganda needs to hold a central message which must remain constant. Furthermore propaganda needs to treat contemporary events.

Literature and history can be rewritten according to the needs of the propagandist. This is done as a means of integrating past events, through re-explaining, into the present, in this way acquiring a legitimacy through history. In order to be influenced by propaganda the audience must form an active part of the culture and be able to perceive of the society as a whole, see the “bigger picture” that is, this is a fact which for the most cases eliminates the lower classes.

Augustus wished to promote the idea of an Augustan created “golden age” in a cultural language which would be understood by all. On the Ara Pacis he is portraying the foundation myth of Rome which would be known to large groups of society as well as more subtle themes which would be aimed at the group which compose the most powerful members of society. Augustus uses easily recognisable iconographic types in a limited and small number. A good example is the *cornucopia* which had always been invested with positive meanings but whose basic idea was now given a contemporary meaning as well: “The fertility and richness of the golden era”. Other simple iconographic symbols, a sheaf of grain, for example, could stand for the fertility of the fields, or of fertility in general, could signify peace or lead the thoughts towards Augustus as guarantor for the grain supply in Rome. The chief characteristics of the Augustan pictorial vocabulary are the broad associations and the general applicability of the individual symbols, which of course also imply a lack of specificity in any particular case. The vine plant, an old decorative motif, gained a broader meaning as a symbol of growth in nature, and is one of the most popular and most frequently repeated elements of the new pictorial vocabulary of the Golden Age.

The oak crown was the time honoured symbol given to a roman soldier for saving a fellow citizen, it had been given to Augustus for ending the civil wars and hence save all of the Roman people. The laurel crown was likewise given to him for his “restoration” of the republic and as an honour two small laurel trees grew besides the entrance to his home. Whenever these plants hence occurred in the arts, any Roman would invest the images with strong associations to Augustus.

Repetition and an aesthetic norm which could be understood by all, were essential to the spread and acceptance of this new imagery, and constituted a considerable part of their power.

Military victories occupy a special place in Augustan ideology, where the vine symbolises the peace of the new golden age, the slogan of the age was most precisely “through just war to the blessings of peace”. The iconography of the Augustan era clearly states the link between military victory (Dea Roma, Mars), internal order (Aeneas and religious piety) and happiness in general (Tellus).

Also on the mythological aspect did Augustus show restraint and his program consisted of relatively few figures and basically no new elements. The essential part was the combining of two mythological cycles; the legend of Troy and the story of Romulus. Through Vergil's *Aeneid**, the coming of the Augustan golden age was presented as foretold from the mythical beginnings of Rome. Vergil's national epic was extremely popular in Rome, a popularity which demonstrates the Romans readiness to identify with this myth which provided ancestry both from the Trojans and who furthermore supplied a divine forefather, Aeneas son of Venus, for Augustus. The other mythological cycle regarded Romulus, who as the son of Rhea Silvia, daughter of the king of the city-state Alba Longa, and Mars also belonged in the family tree of Augustus. Rhea Silvia was referred to by Augustan poets as Ilia; from Ilium (Troy). This was a national mythology which provided for Augustus a legitimacy drawn from the past and whose popularity insured a broad spectre of understanding for the mythological figures that Augustus included in his state art.

Never before had a new ruler implemented such a far reaching cultural program, so effectively embodied in visual imagery.

* A second box can further introduce Vergil and the Aeneid to the interested visitor.

Apart from this introduction to the exhibition, which should be placed at the entrance where it will explain the scope of the exhibition to the visitor upon entering, I would suggest having other, smaller text boxes surrounding the altar itself. Placed in front of specific sections they could make a short introduction to the theme of the panel and give hints to items which are otherwise easily missed. This would serve as a reminder for the visitor on what to look for, when looking for aspects of Augustean propaganda.

Tellus Frieze

The Tellus Frieze represents fertility.

The goddess is seated with two babies in her lap; Augustus was introducing special rights and privileges for couples with many children as well as taking away rights from unmarried people or couples without children.

Also in the goddess lap are fruits, and behind her there are poppies and stalks of grain- Augustus was the guarantor of the grain supply in Rome.

In the left bottom corner of the frieze there is a knocked over vase, from it flows fresh water, nourishing the plants which grows there and the sheep; During the reign of Augustus the water supply of Rome had been extended greatly, with several new aqueducts.

The Aeneas Frieze

Aeneas is seen sacrificing in the Roman manner, with his head covered, he is wearing a laurel wreath; Augustus is portrait in the exact same manner, and it was he who had been awarded the laurel wreath for “restoring” the republic. Behind the altar there is an oak tree; Augustus had been awarded the oak crown, for saving his fellow citizens when he ended the civil wars. In the background is seen a temple; Augustus had almost single handedly restored or rebuild Rome’s temples which had fallen into neglect during the last years of the republic.

The Dea Roma Frieze

This personification of the Roman might is sitting so as to watch the peace and fertility of the Tellus Frieze. The peace which is won through successful wars abroad, the wealth and fertility which was gained from the conquered provinces. She is sitting on the weapons of her defeated enemies; Augustus slogan was: “Through just war to the blessing of peace”.

The Mars, Romulus and Remus Frieze

This frieze is very poorly preserved, but the founder of Rome is off course to be found on the altar, where his more warlike presence balances the piousness of Aeneas. The bloody history of Romulus, though, is only implied, since the scene shown to us is the peaceful one of the twins being suckled by the she wolf.

The religious procession

The introduction of a happy, peaceful and prolific imperial family. Augustus extended family is portrayed in small family groups with their children. The importance of the children can be seen through the fact that they are placed in the foreground and are individually very detailed. This is the first time children are portrayed on a state monument.

Complementary exhibition

Currently only part of the museum area of the Ara Pacis are used for exhibiting the altar or related items, the room on the buildings lower level is usually given over to exhibitions of a more modern kind, more often than not completely unrelated to the Ara Pacis exhibition itself.⁶⁰ Where I do agree that changing exhibitions of a very different character can help lure another type of visitor in to the museum, I would like to include this area, at least for the duration of this temporary exhibition, for the purpose of housing a complementary exhibition.

I would wish for a complementary exhibition in to fully demonstrate the spread of Augustan golden age propaganda and iconography. One thing is to tell the visitor that the imagery of the Augustan age qualifies as propaganda due to its constant repetition and enormous spread, another thing is for the visitor actually to see this. I have in this paper included a small variety of different material demonstrating the spread of the pictorial language of the Augustan period and it is objects such as these that could form the basis of the complementary exhibition. Whether the complementary exhibition is build up of original objects, copies or photos is of little importance, the stress lies on demonstrating the great spread of the golden age pictorial program and in this case off course learning can come from either of the three materials and are mostly dependent on their presentation.

Conclusions

Upon visiting archaeological museums I have often left the buildings with a feeling that very essential parts of the exhibitions were lacking. That it would be very difficult for an uninitiated, sometimes even for me, to actually learn something from these visits, at least if by learning you refer to something deeper than dates and names. For an archeologist who loves history and who thinks that there is a great reason for everybody else to do the same, this is a very sad feeling. Furthermore I can not help but feel that this way of exhibiting is a great waste of resources. Here I refer to all the studies, all the knowledge which is not being mediated to the visitor. So I set about investigating how some of this knowledge, academic knowledge, could be transmitted through the museums. The logically first place to look for studies in exactly this field is within museology. I found a science filled with studies and debate, but on a very theoretical level, and completely lacking in a hands-on approach, a framework for enabling theory to

⁶⁰ For more information on these exhibitions see annex no. 1.

be put into practice. Even the international committee for museology, ICIFOM, is lacking in a forum for facilitating the spread of ideas or exhibitions between the museums. Hence this case study is my own attempt at a museological/archaeological hands-on approach, showing how a museum visit could be transformed into a learning experience, in this case study specifically aimed at the Ara Pacis, but assuming that the theoretical analysis oriented case study should be applicable to any museum collection. This case study is, however, specifically aimed at the Ara Pacis museum and where it only shows one application I can imagine several different exhibitions focusing on different aspects of the altar, for example I could mention the highlighting of the original coloring of the altar, or using the altar as a means of demonstrating how a religious procession in Rome would take place, or going into details on the identification of the personalities on the altar and their importance in forming the Roman empire etc. Although there is need for more research in this field, I argue that this theoretical analysis approach could be applicable to any museum collection where many interesting aspects could arise through a new setting of exhibitions which highlights aspects of already existing material. Furthermore, I would argue that a such implementation of theoretical analysis, demonstrating new aspects of museum objects, is a very cost beneficial way for any museum of renewing their existing exhibitions as well as a very rewarding way of any academic within our field to share our knowledge. This is, however, a desk study based on theory, an empirical study is needed, involving the museum, staff and visitors in order to test the findings of this study. Another interesting field where further studies could be useful is in the open air archaeological sites, how these can become more easily approachable, meaning better understood through a learning experience for the visiting public.

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Annex 1 – Lower floor exhibitions in the Ara Pacis museum



The Piazza of the Emperor Augustus and the Mausoleum of Augustus

The competition – the projects.

1 December 2006 - 28 January 2007

The exhibition displays the ten projects presented for the second phase of the International Competition for the redevelopment of the Mausoleum of Augustus and of the Piazza of the Emperor Augustus.



Valentino a Roma

45 Years of Style

8 July - 28 October 2007

A retrospective which, with approximately 360 costumes and rare, archived materials celebrates Valentino's 45 years of creativity, through a spectacular display at the Museum of the Ara Pacis.



Jean Prouvé, The Poetry of a Technical Object

20 June - 14 September 2008

Between 20 June and 14 September, the Ara Pacis Museum is hosting the “Jean Prouvé: the Poetry of a Technical Object” exhibition, a comprehensive retrospective on one of the greatest French architects and designers of the 20th century.



Mimmo Paladino | Brian Eno: a work for the Ara Pacis

11 March - 1 June 2008

This event, which could well be described as long-awaited, is the second time that these two indisputably important contributors to contemporary culture have worked together; the first being almost ten years ago in 1999 at London's “Round House”.



Bruno Munari

9 October 2008 - 22 March 2009

The Museum of the Ara Pacis in Rome is hosting an important exhibition dedicated entirely to versatile Milanese artist – a sculptor, illustrator, graphic artist and industrial designer – Bruno Munari.

Annex 2- Figures

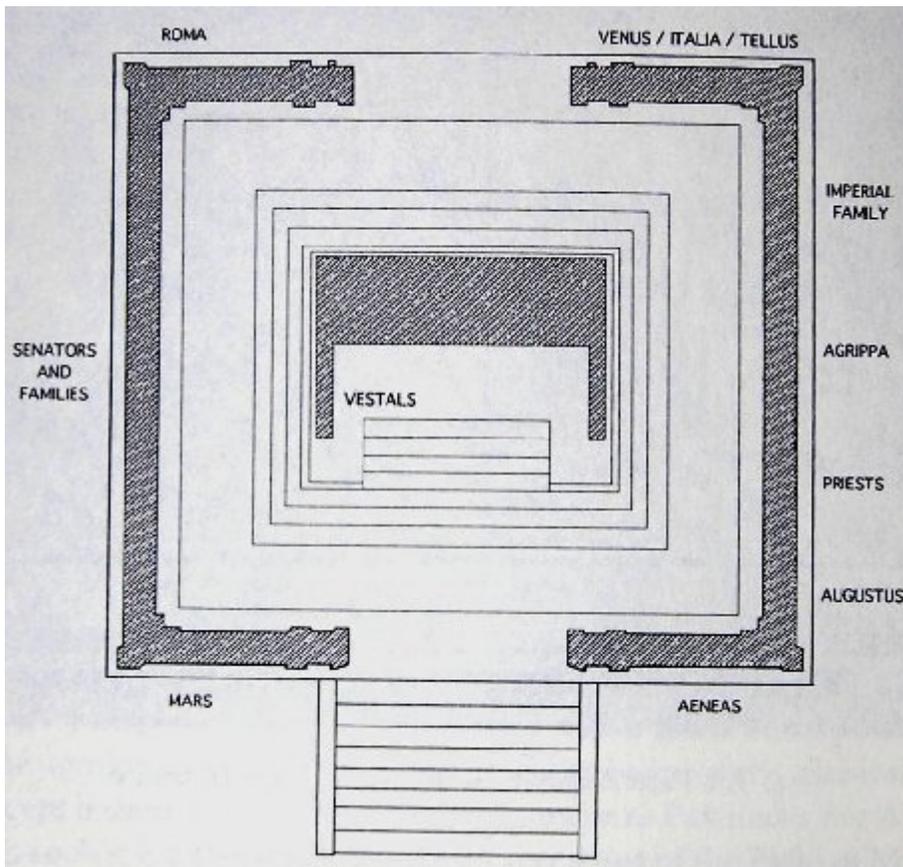


Figure 1. Plan of the Ara Pacis, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 2. Tellus Frieze, Zanker 1988.



Figure 3. Dea Roma frieze, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 4. Aeneas frieze, Zanker 1988.



a



b

a Augustus capite velato, Zanker 1998.

b Agrippa, Zanker 1988.

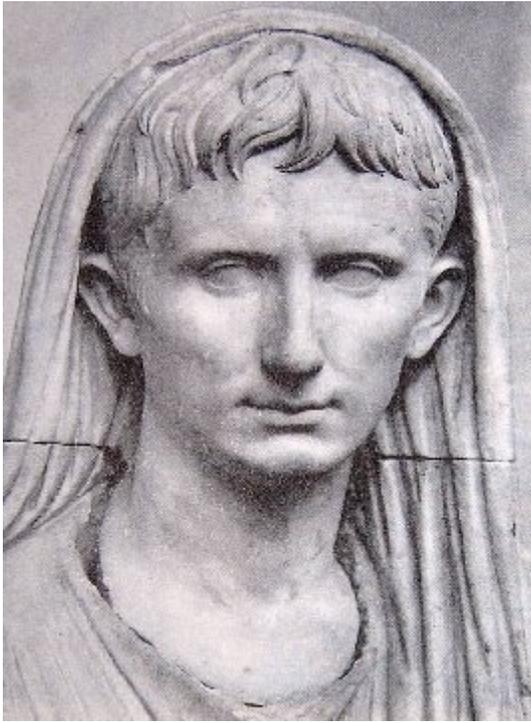


Figure 6. Augustus capite velatus, Zanker 1988.



Figure 7. Imperial family, Zanker 1988.



Figure 8. Acanthus and vine leaves, Zanker 1988.



Figure 9. War imagery - The Parthian King, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 10. Victoria with shield and laurels, Zanker 1988.



Figure 11. Bucrania, Zanker 1988.



Figure 12. Oak mixed with peace, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 13. Oak and Pietas, Zanker 1988.



Figure 14. Oak and nature's fertility, Zanker 1988.



Figure 15. Mars with cornucopia on shoulder straps, Zanker 1988.

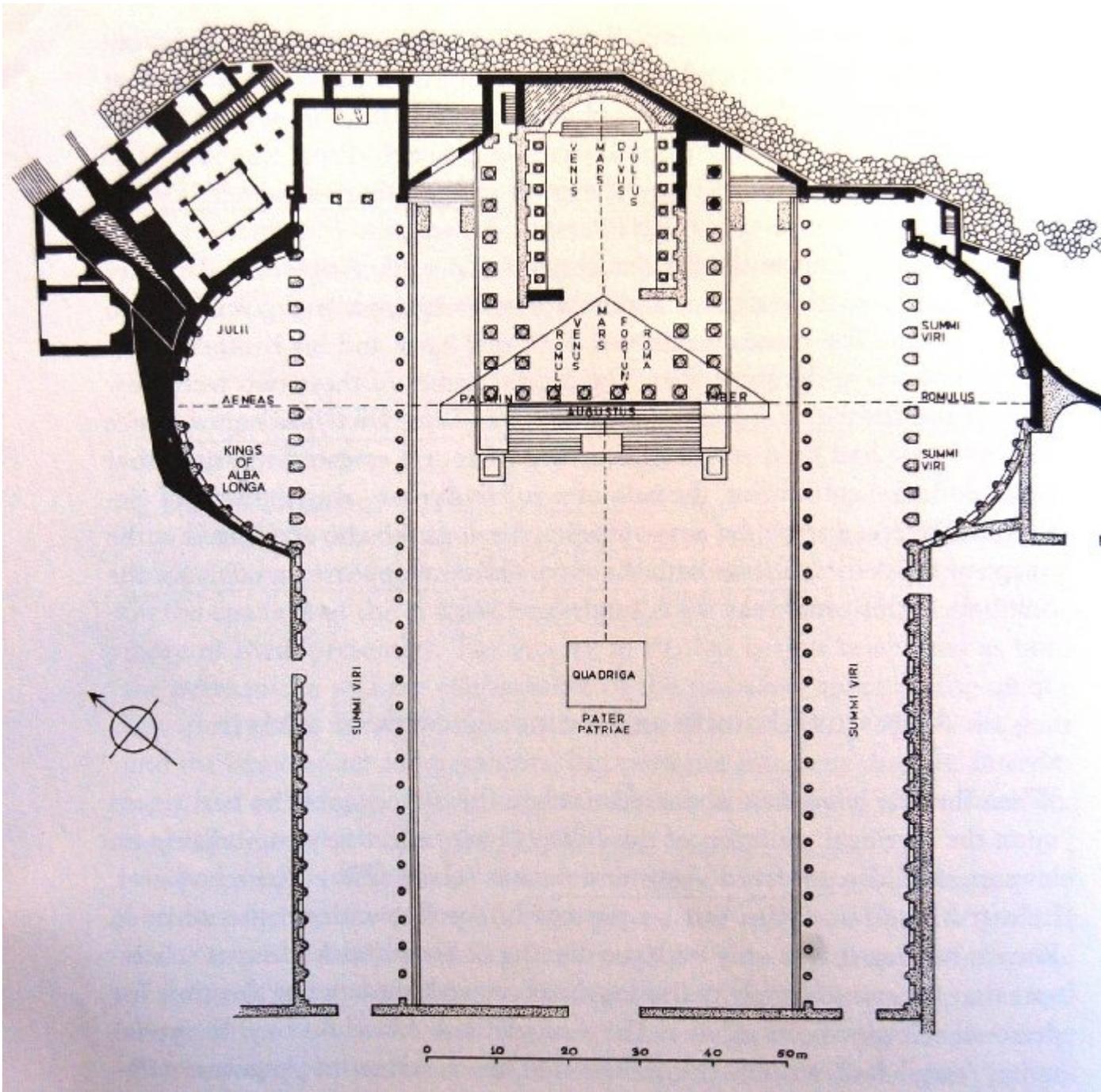


Figure 16. Plan of Forum Augustum, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 17. Terracotta lamp, Victoria, Lares, shield and cornucopia, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 18. Terracotta lamp, Victoria and acorns, Galinsky 1996.



Figure 19. Terracotta lamp, Victoria and Clipeus virtutis, Galinsky 1996.