

Forerunners of the scrollwork on the Ara Pacis Augustae made by a Western Asiatic workshop

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In 1973 C. Börker argued that the rich vegetal forms on a partially preserved pilaster currently in the Centrale Montemartini, Rome, were sculpted shortly before the Ara Pacis and anticipated the scrollwork on its pilasters (figs. 1-4). He deduced that the scrollwork of the Montemartini pilaster was Pergamene in character.¹ In 1999 M. Mathea-Förtsch speculated that a marble fragment rich in scrollwork, which is now lost but was formerly in The Hague, probably came from the same monument as the Montemartini pilaster (fig. 7). She found that it also had a strong eastern character and elements of its design re-appeared on the Ara Pacis. She suggested that both fragments were from the Ara Fortunae Reducis.² In a review of her research in 2001, I briefly discussed several unpublished fragments of scrollwork that were closely related to the Montemartini and The Hague reliefs; they were in the storerooms of the Louvre, the Antiquarium del Foro, and Antiquarium Comunale on the Caelian (figs. 5-6, 8-13).³

I present here a catalogue of the aforementioned scrollwork and some new conclusions about it.⁴ The catalogue entries are detailed since much of the material remains in storage; further, the remarkable pilaster in Montemartini (no. 1) has not been properly documented until now (it was missing for many years). In the analytic sections, I demonstrate that in all likelihood one pilaster (no. 2) and quite possibly a second in the Louvre (no. 3) come from the same monument as the Montemartini pilaster (no. 1). Mathea-Förtsch's proposed assignment of the Montemartini and The Hague reliefs (no. 4) to one monument is shown to be a fair possibility, and I add that no. 5 from the Antiquarium Comunale may be from the same monument as no. 1 and/or no. 4. I also establish that fragments of scrollwork from the Roman Forum (nos. 6-10) come from a different but related monument.

The newly introduced fragments are eastern in character. Some of them may have directly or indirectly influenced the Ara Pacis, and the Montemartini pilaster impacted the design of the Ara Pacis beyond what Börker and Mathea-Förtsch already demonstrated. In all likelihood, a single atelier, originating on the coast of Asia Minor, made the catalogued works at the end of the Late Republic and in the Early Augustan period in Rome, although there remains a slight possibility that they were by two or three ateliers active in Rome for two or more generations. Almost all the reliefs presented here are of unusually high quality and are thereby a fitting prelude to the Ara Pacis.

The Montemartini Group

The reliefs of the Montemartini Group

In describing plants I often use vocabulary that may be little known.⁵ I occasionally employ scientific terms. A "bract" is a more or less modified leaf close to a flower. A "spadix" is a club-like inflorescence bearing stalkless, minute flowers, and a "spathe" is the bract that encircles a spadix. A typical example of a plant with a spadix and spathe is the cuckoopint, also known as lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*). This and many plants like it are called arums (see, for example, no. 7, fig. 10). "Margin" refers to the edge of a leaf; margins with teeth are "dentate" (see, for example, the bottom of the front of no. 1, fig. 1). As for words commonly used by art historians, "candelabrum" refers here to a fanciful series of floras growing directly on top

1 Börker 1973, 283-317.

2 Mathea-Förtsch 1999, 40-43, Beil. 9. 1, 2.

3 Cohon 2001, 372.

4 I have, however, omitted the fragments inv. nos. 18559 and 18734 from the Antiquarium del Foro (Cohon 2001, 372), since their connection with the other catalogued entries seems now slightly more tenuous.

5 I hope shortly to publish a guide to vocabulary for describing ancient renderings of plants that will be more in line with botanical terminology. In the process, a clearer idea of the boundaries between the artist's fantasies and his observation of nature will be achieved.