

The religious procession of the Ara Pacis Augustae: Augustus' *supplicatio* in 13 B.C.

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The Altar of Augustan Peace is one of the most studied monuments surviving from ancient Rome — see, for example, the attached bibliography, which is by no means exhaustive. There are good reasons for the scholarly attention paid to it: not only is it intrinsically an outstanding and well-preserved artistic monument, but it is the only major Augustan monument mentioned in both literary and epigraphical sources that survives almost intact, and the great historical friezes on its N and S temenos walls provide a uniquely detailed picture of an historical event of major religious and political significance, at least in the estimation of its creators.¹ Unfortunately, despite the scholarly effort and ingenuity expended on studying it, there is still no reliable consensus on the exact nature of the occasion depicted in these historical friezes.² Various rival interpretations of the event depicted have been proposed:

1. that the friezes depict a sacrifice accompanying the *dedicatio* or *constitutio* of the altar;
2. that we see Augustus inaugurating the terrestrial *templum* which is to be the site of the Ara Pacis;
3. that a sort of 'disguised' triumph is shown;
4. that we are shown the festival of Augustus' elevation to the post of Pontifex Maximus in 12 B.C.;
5. that a *supplicatio* in honor of Augustus is shown.³

The aim of this paper is to present what I think are decisive iconographic and historical arguments fixing the event depicted, together with some commentary on the personnel involved.

My methodological premise is that any attempt to characterize the nature of the event must start by taking into account all the features depicted on the friezes and interpreting them by comparison with other known depictions and descriptions of Roman religious events; only then should historical arguments be introduced. In other words, in interpreting artistic evidence, analysis of the iconographical features must form the basis for historical interpretation. Too often a historical interpretation has been decided on first, and then foisted onto the monument by misinterpreting some iconographical features and ignoring others. I begin, therefore, by showing what events are clearly *not* depicted, and why.

1. The notion that this is a sacrifice accompanying the *constitutio* or *dedicatio* of the altar has already been disproved on several occasions, and can therefore be dealt with briefly.⁴ We possess numerous depictions of state sacrifices (see Ryberg 1955). Certain features always present in such depictions — an altar, victims, *tibicinae*, *victimarii* — are absent on the Ara Pacis friezes. We can therefore conclude that

1 See figs. 1 (S frieze) and 2 (N frieze). The Ara Pacis is mentioned by Ovid twice, at *Fasti* 1. 709ff. and 3. 879-82; epigraphic attestations are the "fasti anni Caeretani" and the "fasti anni Praenestini" under the date Jan. 30, and the "fasti anni Amiternini" and "fasti anni Antiates" under the date July 4 — the festivals of the altar's *dedicatio* and *constitutio* (see V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents illustrating the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*² [Oxford 1976] 44-55 at pp. 46 and 49); the altar is also mentioned by Augustus himself in his autobiographical *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 12 (Ehrenberg and Jones 1-31 at p. 10). See further Koeppel (1987) 102 n. 4 for ancient *testimonia* on the Ara Pacis. For the importance of the Ara Pacis in the scheme of Augustan art and propaganda, see now Bowersock (1990) emphasizing the altar's links to the great Solarium Augusti and the Augustan Mausoleum in a single scheme of monumental celebration of Augustus' rule and achievements.

2 This paper concentrates solely on the historical friezes; for treatments of the altar as a whole, see Moretti (1948), Simon (1967), La Rocca (1983), Settis (1985) and Koeppel (1987; 1988).

3 That the friezes depict a sacrifice was argued by Welin (1939), Ryberg (1955) and Hanell (1960); that a *supplicatio* is depicted was proposed by Polacco (1960/61), Simon (1967) and Koeppel (1988); the notion of inauguration was proposed by Pollini (1978) and accepted by Torelli (1982) and La Rocca (1983); the "disguised triumph" is the idea of Settis (1988); and that the festival of Augustus' elevation to the post of Pontifex Maximus is shown was argued by Bowersock (1990). Some scholars have been frankly undecided as to what occasion is specifically depicted.

4 See e.g. Simon (1967) 16-17, Pollini (1978) 75-112 and La Rocca (1983) 38.