

## WAR AND PEACE: HOUSING THE ARA PACIS IN THE ETERNAL CITY

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MUSEO DELL'ARA PACIS, ROME, designed by Richard Meier, curated by Eugenio La Rocca and Orietta Rossini.

Along with the classical Athenian Parthenon and the Great Altar of Pergamon, Rome's Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace) is one of the most famous monuments of the Graeco-Roman world. The opening in 2006 of a new museum to house the Ara Pacis invites reconsideration of the altar in its original Roman context and relays the history of the altar's modern recovery and display.

The altar, decreed by the Roman Senate in 13 B.C.E. to honor the emperor Augustus upon his return from negotiating peace in Spain and Gaul, was completed in 9 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> The monument was originally located along the urban stretch of the Via Flaminia (the so-called Via Lata, now the Via del Corso). Its main entrance, accessed by a short flight of steps, faced the large, open public space of the Campus Martius. Here, nearly 15 years earlier, Octavian (the adopted son and great-nephew of Julius Caesar)—before being named Augustus in 27 B.C.E.—had erected his monumental mausoleum.<sup>2</sup> The altar was aligned with a huge sundial that used an Egyptian obelisk as a gnomon.<sup>3</sup>

The altar's mensa, where the animal sacrifice was actually made, is a parallelepiped block of Luna marble flanked by couchant lions

supporting scrolling vegetal tendrils. The frieze on the altar's crowning element represents a sacred procession, including the vestal virgins and sacrificial animals led by their attendants, that probably depicts the sacrifice ordered by the senate to be held every year on 30 January, the anniversary of the altar's dedication. Yet the monument is most renowned for its large, richly decorated marble precinct enclosure (lgt. 10.63 m, wdth. 11.63 m, ht. 6.30 m [as reconstructed]). The reliefs on the enclosure's inner side clearly imitate the real wooden fence that originally served as the boundary for the altar's sacred space; depicted above the fence's tall posts are garlands suspended from bucrania and paterae suspended above the garlands.

The decorative reliefs (probably by Neo-Attic craftsmen) on the lower level of the enclosure's outer side show scrolled vegetal tendrils emerging from acanthus leaves that are peopled with swans and other creatures—an allusion to the new Golden Age initiated by the Augustan principate. The upper level on the short entrance side is decorated with two relief panels depicting key Roman legends. The left, now highly fragmentary panel is related to Rome's mythical origins: it appears to represent the ancient Lupercal grotto on the Palatine Hill with the twins Romulus and Remus suckled by the she-wolf in the presence of Mars (their

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<sup>1</sup> Moretti 1948; Simon 1967; La Rocca 1983; Zanker 1987; Torelli 1999 (with updated bibliography); Rossini 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Summarized in von Hesberg 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Buchner 1982, 355–73; 1996. The obelisk of Pharaoh Psammetichus II (r. 594–588 B.C.E.) from Heliopolis employed in the sundial (now in Piazza Montecitorio) was the first Egyptian obelisk transported to Rome. On 23 September, Augustus' birthday, the obelisk's shadow pointed exactly to the center of the Ara Pacis.

father) and Faustulus (the shepherd who raised them). The right panel represents Aeneas, mythical ancestor of the clan of Julius Caesar (gens Julia), accompanied by his son Julius (or Ascanius) and two attendants, sacrificing the sow of Lavinium to the Penates (household gods). The relief panels on the opposite short side appear to depict deities. The mostly lost left panel represents the goddess Roma, probably accompanied by the god Honos (Roman honor). The right panel depicts another female divinity, seated with two infants on her lap in a luxuriant landscape, whose three basic elements—earth, water, and air—clearly represent the entire cosmos. The identity of this goddess has long been disputed—Venus, Italia, Ceres, Saturnia Tellus (Earth of the Golden Age), and Pax (Peace) have been proposed. In any case, this relief panel surely symbolizes the fertility and abundance of the world in the peaceful era under the new Roman regime.

The four panels of the short sides constitute a mythical counterpart to the real historical scene rendered in relief on the upper part of the marble enclosure's long sides: an imposing religious procession that took place either at the moment of Augustus' return or, following another hypothesis, when the altar was decreed in 13 B.C.E. Here, senators and priests, Augustus, Agrippa (Augustus' son-in-law and close friend), and the other members of the emperor's family are shown moving along in two parallel lines. In fact, this depiction documents the first official public appearance of what is now proclaimed to be an imperial dynasty. Like most ancient stone sculptural monuments, originally both the altar and its precinct enclosure were painted in bright colors.<sup>4</sup>

The extant remains of the Ara Pacis were recovered at different times, beginning in the 16th century, under the foundations of the Peretti palace (later the Fiano-Almagià palace). A more methodical excavation, started in 1903, was not completed until 1937–1938 under Italy's Fascist government—in anticipation of the 1938 celebration of the 2,000th anniversary of Augustus' birth. Since the Fascist regime's ideology considered the Ara Pacis to be a highly significant symbol of ancient Ro-

man spirit (Romanitas), the placement of the restored altar became a much-debated political question. Reconstructing the monument beside its original location (i.e., within an interior next to the Fiano-Almagià palace) would have been the best solution, even if it lacked visible impact on 20th-century Rome. Rebuilding the altar along the Via dell'Impero (now Via dei Fori Imperiali) or even inside the Mausoleum of Augustus was also suggested.<sup>5</sup>

The final decision to rebuild the Ara Pacis in its present location—beside the mausoleum, between the Via Ripetta and the Lungotevere—was made by Benito Mussolini himself. This placed the monument alongside the new Piazza Augusto Imperatore (Emperor Augustus Square), designed in 1936 by the fascist architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo (1890–1966), which enclosed the mausoleum on two sides with modern buildings featuring huge travertine arcades.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the altar itself would not simply have been left forever in the open air. While an initial suggestion was to shelter it under a third arcade, the prevailing choice placed the altar inside a pavilion. The Ara Pacis' new location thereby crowned the regime's project of creating a mythological-historical place for ancient Roman memories inside the contemporary city and within the modern Roman empire. Moreover, in the Mussolini-sponsored design, Augustus' mausoleum would have housed the dictator's own burial place.<sup>7</sup>

Reconstruction of the altar was entrusted to Giuseppe Moretti, director of the 1937 excavation, who was assisted by the architect Guglielmo Gatti, while the pavilion was realized by Morpurgo. Many difficulties arose. First, there was a great rush to finish the work before the 1938 celebration. Later on, Morpurgo, a Jew, faced problems following the enactment of discriminatory racial laws in Italy. As a result, his original conception was severely simplified and, for the most part, reduced to a mere concrete shell; it was painted to look like travertine, not making full use of the range of fine materials planned by the architect. The structure, however, was provided with large windows that allowed the monument to be viewed from outside. During World War II,

<sup>4</sup>Infra nn. 11, 18. See Holloway (2008) on the recent traveling exhibition about reconstructing the original color of ancient sculpture.

<sup>5</sup>See the summaries by Pignatti Morano and

Refice 1985; Gobbi 2003; Rossini 2008, 107–17.

<sup>6</sup>Morpurgo 1937.

<sup>7</sup>On Mussolini's role, see Kostof 1978.

Morpurgo's pavilion was protected by an antishrapnel wall, which was later demolished, and its windows were replaced by a wall 4 m high. Finally, in the 1970s, the windows of the original design were reinstalled.

A new project to house the Ara Pacis began in 1996 and was completed in 2006. It belonged to a series of high-profile architectural initiatives to improve the modern city's image, promoted by Rome's City Council and the Superintendency of Rome's Cultural Heritage (Sovraintendenza ai Beni Culturali del Comune di Roma). At the same time, a new building was sorely needed to protect the altar because of grave problems affecting the Morpurgo pavilion, including both structural and environmental deterioration. The new project's execution was entrusted to the internationally acclaimed American architect Richard Meier, who had just completed the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Meier is known for his purist and rationalist architectural designs expressed through linear constructions in white materials and an abundant use of large windows—a classic modernist vision compatible with the context of Rome's Piazza Augusto Imperatore.<sup>8</sup>

Meier designed a long building, which is preceded by a fountain, a plaza, and a broad flight of steps approaching the beautifully articulated main entrance (fig. 1). He intended the staircase and the fountain to form a reference to the old river port of Ripetta, demolished in 1901 to provide space for the Lungotevere. The museum complex itself is composed of three main parts: a transparent (predominately glass) central element flanked by two white solid geometric forms—a juxtaposition that creates a play of light and shadow and is typical of the architect's work (fig. 2). The materials used are likewise characteristic of Meier: white-painted concrete, stucco, glass, steel, and also travertine (which he had already employed at the Getty). The large central space, designed to house the altar, is preceded by a lower entrance hall containing a bookshop and a small exhibition space. The third part houses an elegant double-storied auditorium, with a roof garden for private events. The auditorium's compact form deliberately resembles the volume of the Accademia delle Belle Arti nearby and links

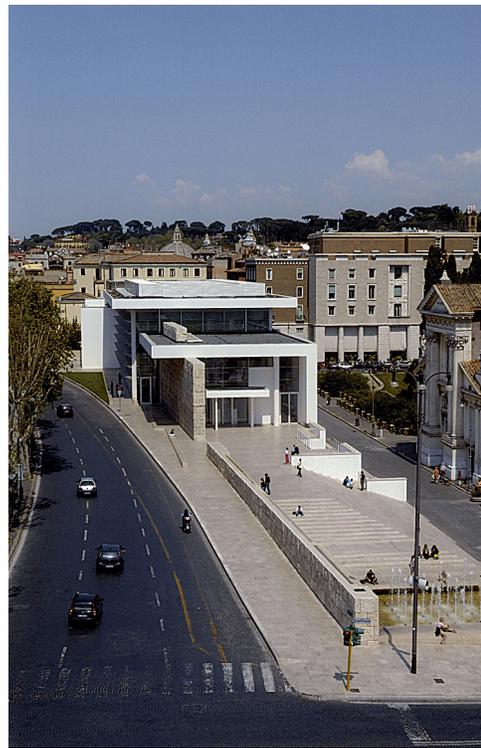


Fig. 1. The Ara Pacis Museum, 1996–2006, Richard Meier, Rome; view toward main entrance (Archivio Sovraintendenza Comune di Roma).

the museum complex to the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, as well as to the Via di Ripetta, on which it has a separate entrance. The only element retained from the Morpurgo pavilion is the travertine base inscribed in bronze letters with the *Res gestae*, the solemn will dictated by Augustus before his death. A mosaic, designed by the Italian artist Mimmo Paladino, decorates the museum's exterior wall that faces the Tiber.

From the very first moment it was presented, the new project for the Ara Pacis Museum has been subject to a series of violent attacks by Italian architects and art historians.<sup>9</sup> A main charge concerned its enormous cost, which increased from an initial estimate of €5,940,000 to €15,800,000. Additional criticism has been aimed at the destruction of the Morpurgo pavilion, which some consider to

<sup>8</sup>For the Meier project, see <http://www.richard-meier.com/PROJECTS/AraPacis.html>; see also, most recently, Bazzèa 2007; Crespi 2007; Rossini

2008, 118–20.

<sup>9</sup>As summarized in Benedetti et al. 2004.



Fig. 2. The Ara Pacis Museum, view from the south bank of the Tiber (courtesy Sovraintendenza ai Beni Culturali del Comune di Roma).

have been an important example of Italian rationalist architecture, deeply associated with a particular phase in the Fascist city planning of Rome. Attacks have also been leveled against the aesthetics of the new building. Perhaps the most vehement and sensational was that of the art critic and politician Vittorio Sgarbi, who described it as “resembling a highway rest stop (*autogrill*) or a pizzeria, good for the outskirts of Las Vegas, but certainly not for the center of Rome.”<sup>10</sup> And in 2004, with great theatricality, he even set a model of Meier’s museum on fire in the Piazza Augusto Imperatore.

In my opinion, many of the criticisms are not fully justified. With regard to the destruction of the Morpurgo pavilion, one must remember that it was merely a repeatedly remodeled, highly simplified version of the original project, and thus an unlikely candidate for being considered a cornerstone of rationalist architecture. And while the cultural association Italia Nostra has declared in regard to Meier’s new museum that “the building should never have been put in that place and in that context,” it should not be forgotten that the context now so fiercely defended is none other than a square that, already from the 1930s, had been consid-

ered a heavy-handed insertion into the urban cityscape of Rome. In a certain sense, Meier’s museum complex, through its linearity and use of a traditional material such as travertine, has actually reclaimed the urban context, renewing it with a touch of class. Moreover, despite Sgarbi’s criticism, the new structure is hardly “an eyesore,” and many who were initially critics have surrendered before the fine quality of the finished building. Thus, the placement here of a modern architectural complex should not be considered a heresy—that is, unless one wishes to condemn Rome’s historical center to eternal immobility.<sup>11</sup>

This corner of Rome would be even further transformed by a final detail of Meier’s project—not yet realized because of a lack of funds—that would turn the whole area into a pedestrian zone with a terrace facing the Tiber and a tunnel to divert traffic beneath the Lungotevere. A separate, broader unifying scheme for the square as a whole would also embrace the Piazza Augusto Imperatore and Augustus’ mausoleum. While it is regrettable that the projects for the altar and the square were planned separately, earlier in the 2000s the municipality of Rome did launch an international design

<sup>10</sup> Architettrioma 2003, 19 March; see also Benedetti et al. 2004, 105–56.

<sup>11</sup> For a full report, see Architettrioma 2004, 10

April; 2009, 18 January; see also <http://www.ara-pacis-museum.com>.

competition for the latter project, which was won by the *Urbs et Civitas* group, a team of well-known Italian architects headed by Francesco Cellini and also including the renowned archaeologist Dieter Mertens.

Winds of war, however, have continued to blow on Meier's Ara Pacis Museum. The 2008 mayoral election resulted in the victory of Gianni Alemanno from the *Alleanza Nazionale*, a right-wing party stemming from fascist tradition. The new mayor declared that he wanted to demolish the building, rebuild it for different purposes in Rome's suburbs, launch a new international competition for the altar's home, and then submit the question to a public referendum. But despite calls for its demolition, perhaps the new museum is here to stay: as this review goes to press, the Municipality of Rome has announced that the Tiber terrace of Meier's project will be built after all. Yet Meier's Ara Pacis Museum is not entirely free of faults. The building's excessive size has come in for deserved criticism. In particular, its forepart, delimited by a heavy travertine wall, creates a screen obscuring the two adjacent churches of San Girolamo degli Schiavoni (rebuilt in 1588) and San Rocco (17th century with 19th-century neoclassical facade). Both had already suffered from the 19th-century construction of the Tiber embankments, which involved the demolition of stairs leading from the river level to these churches' facades, and now they have been constrained within an even more restricted space. A less pharaonic museum project consisting of fewer parts might have resulted in greater respect for the square's baroque component. For example, given the existing venues for films, lectures, and performances in Rome, there probably was no pressing need to include an auditorium here.

Furthermore, a fairly large reinforced-concrete column, initially mounted in the upper plaza, symbolized the obelisk gnomon of Augustus' sundial by being placed at the distance of about 90 m that separated the Egyptian obelisk from the altar in their original ancient locations. In addition to its fairly cryptic reference, Meier's column itself was rather ugly and was therefore removed early on. The architect wanted his column to be replaced with an original antique column, but the Superintendency, perhaps not unreasonably, has maintained that an available one cannot be found.

The visitor enters the museum by means of either the broad staircase or an elevated part of the plaza in front of the building. The entrance hall's exhibition space (ht. 8.5 m) is articulated on the right by three slender concrete columns with waxed surfaces composed of plaster mixed with white marble powder. A model of the surrounding area as it was in antiquity—showing the Ara Pacis, the mausoleum, the sundial, and also the Pantheon as reconstructed in Hadrianic times—is displayed on this side of the hall, and a long text panel, in both Italian and English (which is not entirely idiomatic) illustrates the topography of the area. Unfortunately, the latter uses a few technical terms inappropriate for the general public, including Latin words such as *diribitorium* or *saepta*. Another panel showing a family tree details the imperial dynasty's complex structure.

On the other side of this exhibition space, against a monumental wall composed of rough-hewn travertine blocks, the most important members of the Julio-Claudian clan are portrayed by coarse modern plaster casts made after specific ancient Roman portraits (fig. 3), including Augustus, Agrippa, Livia Drusilla (Augustus' wife), and Augustus' grandchildren, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, from the marriage of the emperor's daughter Julia with Agrippa. Another portrait copy portrays Tiberius, Livia's son from an earlier marriage, who succeeded Augustus as emperor in 14 C.E.

At the far end of the entry hall, a polished travertine wall hides an opening in the floor that illuminates galleries in the museum's basement. This winglike wall also frames the entering visitor's view of the altar, which stands at the center of the museum's main room (see fig. 3). This large space (ht. 13.5 m) has two external glass walls, each 50 m long (and together comprising more than 1,500 m<sup>2</sup> of glass), which face the Tiber on one side and the mausoleum on the other. Another highly polished travertine wall at the far end of the main room serves as a backdrop for the altar.

The Ara Pacis was considered too fragile to be moved for the construction of the new museum, and thus it stood in place, shielded by heavy packing materials, as intense building activity went on around it. After this ordeal, a cleaning and restoration revealed anew the traces of still-extant color on its marble surface observed by Moretti decades ago.<sup>12</sup> The entire

<sup>12</sup>Moretti 1948, 176–77.

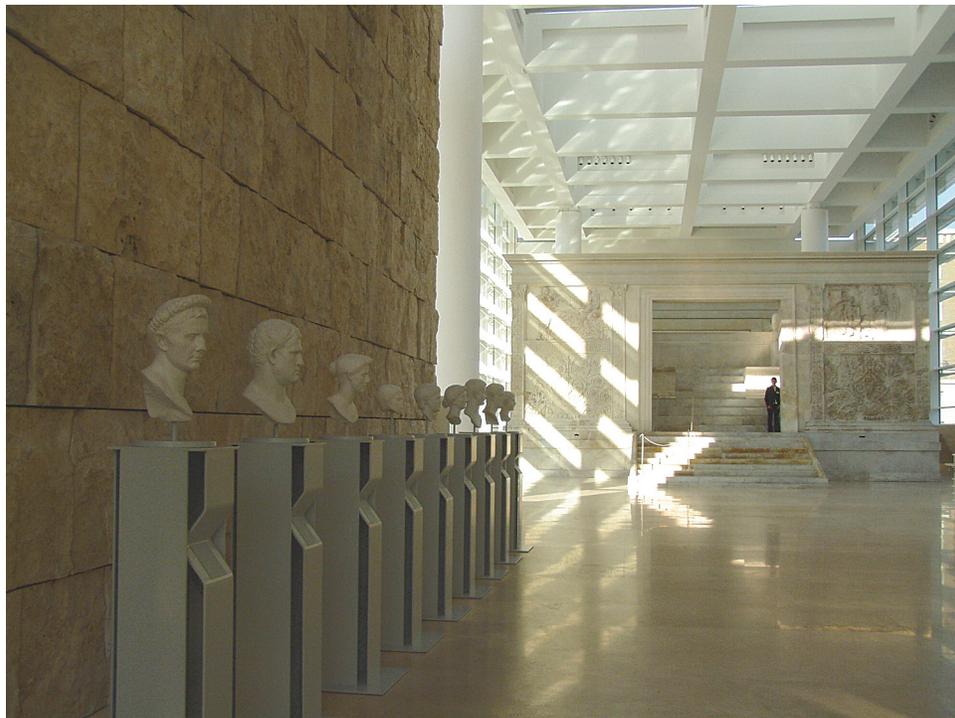


Fig. 3. Installation view of main floor: *foreground*, modern plaster casts of Julio-Claudian Roman portraits; *middleground*, the Ara Pacis Augustae, 13–9 B.C.E. (courtesy Sovraintendenza ai Beni Culturali del Comune di Roma).

museum complex has been conceived according to the most advanced technologies for guaranteeing environmental protection of the restored monument. The space has sophisticated climate-control equipment designed to prevent sudden changes of temperature and to filter out pollution. The north-oriented skylights and glass sidewalls are soundproof and provide thermal insulation.

The new home for the Ara Pacis, however, has left unresolved serious problems concerning the visibility of the monument. The altar's disposition in the main room is conditioned by the retention of Morpurgo's travertine base, unfortunately resulting in restricted lateral space. The walkways beside the two long sides of the altar's marble precinct enclosure are too narrow, making the view of the procession frieze on the upper part decidedly difficult and compelling visitors to crane their necks uncomfortably. Paradoxically, the best straight-on view of the frieze can be enjoyed from the street by looking through the museum's windows. For the new project, the utmost attention should have been paid to the monument's visibility. Either the width of the space for the altar should

have been increased or the possibility of creating paths for visitors on different levels should have been explored. Another serious problem is created by the museum's internal lighting. The Meier project supposedly provides a diffuse light through the use of filters, but the result is not entirely satisfactory. Although typical of Meier's architecture, the *brise-soleils*—parallel horizontal louvers on the building's glass outer walls intended to protect them from excessive sunlight and heat—reflect annoying streaks of light and shadow onto the monument most of the day, which negatively impacts one's ability to perceive it as a unit (see fig. 3). Despite the abovementioned shortcomings, the museum's main room for the Ara Pacis is quite successful because of its substantial use of glass, which softens but does not eradicate the contrast between modern and ancient and enables the monument to be viewed within its current urban context.

The museum's curators made a calculated choice to avoid putting too many didactic materials in the central space: a panel in one corner illustrates the precinct enclosure's reliefs, and a reduced model of the altar (scale 1:10) indicates

the names of all identifiable characters in the procession. A visitor who wishes to know more while viewing the monument may rent an audio guide (available in five languages: Italian, English, French, German, and Spanish) for an additional €3.50, on top of the museum's €6.50 entrance ticket. Its detailed narration is clear and satisfying, and it ends with information about Meier's architecture.<sup>13</sup>

On the museum's lower floor (at the level of Morpurgo's inscribed base) are some serviceable white-painted galleries with travertine floors, illuminated by recessed ceiling spotlights and large windows on the building's mausoleum side. Five of them are devoted to a more detailed didactic display related to the Ara Pacis. The first didactic gallery contains text panels illustrating the history of the recovery of the altar's fragments. One panel describes the cutting-edge technology used to carry on an excavation beneath the poor foundations of the Fiano-Amalgia palace; archaeologists even resorted to freezing the earth with carbon dioxide—a method never before employed in Italy. Other panels recall the main protagonists of the altar's recovery, including the 16th-century Renaissance cardinal Giovanni Ricci da Montepulciano and the scholars Friederich von Duhn, Eugene Petersen, and Angiolo Pasqui of the 1903 excavation.

Here, in addition to traditional text panels, a computer touch screen enables the visitor to explore a rich database, which is accessible in Italian, English, French, and German. This resource includes a virtual tour that employs a three-dimensional reconstruction showing the altar both in its present condition and with its probable ancient coloring. And the distinguishing of the altar's original fragments from integrated restored parts is likewise well illustrated. There are also virtual reconstructions showing the historical and urban evolution of the Ara Pacis area, as well as antiquarian images—in prints, drawings, and paintings produced since the 16th century. Another section is devoted to the various scholarly hypotheses about the altar's reconstruction,<sup>14</sup> including Foresta's recent proposal that changes the po-

sition of some slabs in the procession frieze.<sup>15</sup> In sum, this excellent, complex database is probably more useful for specialized scholars than the general public (an assumption reinforced by the presence of only two seats at the computer station). Perhaps it could be sold on a DVD-ROM to accommodate those who might wish to use it in depth.

The second gallery houses a detailed treatment of the altar's famous Saturnia Tellus relief, including the display of two comparanda in plaster casts: a similar relief from Carthage (now in the Louvre Museum in Paris) and the statue of a seated female figure with a child on her lap, found in the Forum of Cumae (now in the Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei in Baia). Both are probably copies of the altar's goddess. A display case containing fragments that certainly belong to the altar but could not be inserted into Moretti's 1937–1938 reconstruction confusingly includes a fragmentary hanging decorative marble relief (*oscillum*) and child's head found during the altar precinct's excavation that do not belong to the monument. The great young male head at the center of this case certainly deserves a more prominent display. Inserted in the Aeneas panel in Moretti's reconstruction of the altar, it has now been recognized as belonging to the god Honos in the panel with the goddess Roma and thus was removed during the 1980 restoration.<sup>16</sup>

Didactic materials in the third gallery, including a cast of a relief from the Altar of the Julian Family in Carthage (now in the Bardo Museum in Tunis), reconstruct the image of the goddess Roma herself by means of her widespread iconography. According to the German archaeologist Kähler,<sup>17</sup> a fragmentary group of figures (ht. 88 cm) displayed here—but not inserted in the 1937–1938 reconstruction—probably belonged to a frieze on the altar's podium, which either depicted personifications of Roman provinces or, according to Moretti, standing gods.<sup>18</sup> Smaller fragmentary figures (ht. 66 cm) belong to the sacrifice frieze under the altar's crowning element, and the four fragments lost between 1950 and today

<sup>13</sup>For a more detailed account, see Rossini 2008; see also the museum's informative Web site at <http://www.arapacis.it>.

<sup>14</sup>Moretti 1948; Gatti 1949.

<sup>15</sup>Foresta 2002.

<sup>16</sup>La Rocca 1983, 49. On the 1980 restoration, see Ruesch and Zanardi 1983, 61–108; see also Rossini 2008, 46–7.

<sup>17</sup>Kähler 1954.

<sup>18</sup>Moretti 1948, 282–84.

are now documented by means of casts made from photographic evidence.

Fragments of the precinct enclosure's floral frieze that could not be inserted in the 1937–1938 reconstruction are displayed in the fourth gallery. Here, rather cryptic text panels by botanical scholar Giulia Caneva (which are not geared to the general public) include uncommon terms such as “fractal logic” and difficult arguments proposing that the frieze symbolized concepts such as “unity,” “rebirth,” “metamorphosis,” and “eternity.”<sup>19</sup> But all visitors can enjoy the large colored reconstructions, with eye-catching blue backgrounds, green leaves, golden tendrils, and red flowers.

The fifth gallery, devoted to a Julio-Claudian monument whose dimensions, architecture, and decoration were similar to the Ara Pacis, is one of the museum's highlights (fig. 4). The casts displayed here are important reconstructions made from a group of famous reliefs excavated in part at the beginning of the 16th century, which were then sold to the Medici family and incorporated into the internal facade of the Villa Medici on Rome's Pincian Hill.<sup>20</sup> For the first time, these reconstructions have been united with surviving original fragments of the same monument found in Rome at the beginning of the 20th century. The now-fragmentary great frieze from the exterior shows a procession, including togated male citizens, priests, and animals led to sacrifice, that follows a route lined with temples among which the temples of Mars Ultor and of Magna Mater may be readily identified. Associated earlier with Claudius' Ara Pietatis and with the Ara Gentis Juliae on the Capitoline Hill, a recent proposal suggests instead that these fragments belonged to an altar erected by the Senate in 43 C.E. to celebrate the emperor Claudius' triumphal *reditus* (return) from his victory in Britain,<sup>21</sup> an occasion similar to the decree of the Ara Pacis upon the return of Augustus from Spain and Gaul in 13 B.C.E.

The remaining basement galleries are for the temporary exhibitions held periodically in the Ara Pacis Museum, such as the engaging retrospective of the Milanese artist and designer Bruno Munari on view during the fall and winter of 2008–2009. The tantalizing juxtaposition of contemporary and ancient art



Fig. 4. Installation view of basement gallery with original marble fragments and plaster casts of reliefs from a Claudian Roman altar, mid first century C.E. (courtesy Sovraintendenza ai Beni Culturali del Comune di Roma).

constitutes an excellent pretext for promoting interest in the classical Roman monument. This holds true provided the relationship is not reversed, forcing the antiquity to lose the role of protagonist on its own stage, which is exactly what happened when the exhibition dedicated to the famous fashion designer Valentino was held at the Ara Pacis Museum in 2007 (fig. 5). Valentino's splendid evening clothes—a symphony of reds, blacks, and whites—rather than being confined to the basement galleries, invaded the museum's main room, making it almost impossible to view the nearly hidden Augustan monument. From high up in the marble procession, Julia, the emperor's frivolous and witty daughter, probably would have cast an interested look at the marvelous achievements of modern Italian fashion, but we can bet that she would have been immediately called into line by her father, rightly outraged that the most famous monument to imperial majesty of all time was used as a mere backdrop for the celebration of female vanity.

<sup>19</sup>See Castriota 1995.

<sup>20</sup>Cozza 1958, 107–11.

<sup>21</sup>See the summary in La Rocca 1999, 87–9.

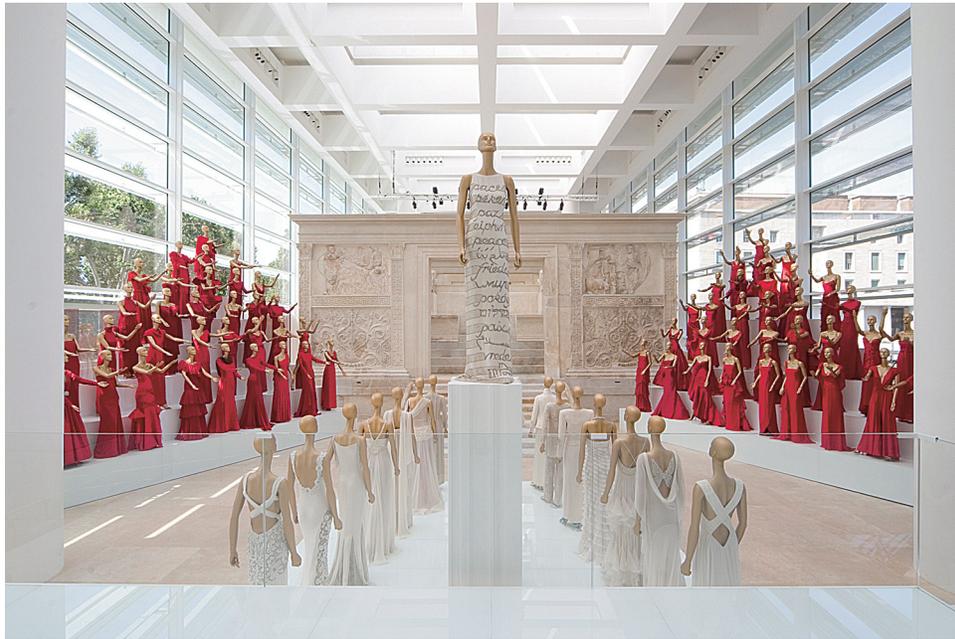


Fig. 5. Installation view of the exhibition *Valentino in Rome: 45 Years of Style* in the main gallery of the Ara Pacis Museum (B. Pediconi; courtesy Valentino Archives).

In conclusion, despite its shortcomings, Meier's Ara Pacis Museum constitutes a courageous attempt to insert an important document of contemporary architecture into an urban space with a well-established role as a historical memorial in the city. As is often the case, the controversy surrounding this building has greatly enhanced its visibility. Since reopening in this new museum, the Ara Pacis has received a record number of visitors—more than 330,000 in 2007. It thereby has become one of most popular monuments in Rome and is now second only to the Colosseum.

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