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Affirmation of Power and Peace Propaganda*

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Art & Peacebuilding.

Ara Pacis Augustae. Affirmation of Power and Peace Propaganda

*Angela Busacca**

Abstract: *Indicated as the perfect synthesis of the inspiring motivations of the politics of Augustus and of propaganda aimed at exalting the work of the Princeps, the ARA PACIS AUGUSTAE (the Altar of Augustan Peace) undoubtedly represents one of the pinnacles of Roman sculpture with particular attention to sculptural portraiture and to the revival, in Roman style, of classical decoration models of Hellenic derivation. Alongside the artistic value, however, the ARA PACIS has an undisputed historical and social value, being a testimony of rediscovered peace (social and military) after a century of civil wars and internal conflicts through the representation of a double element, human and mythological, which seem to converge towards the golden age model represented by the Augustan Principate. Artistic testimony and formidable propaganda vehicle of the Princeps, the ARA PACIS represents the spirit of a society that had healed internal conflicts and was looking to its future with awareness of the strength of its origins and the tranquillity of the present times precisely in the dualism of the figures drawn from myth (Romulus and Remus, Aeneas, the goddess Rome and Saturnia Tellus) and from the most current reality (imperial family and senate procession, priests and dignitaries).*

The double procession that develops along the sides of the sculpture highlights calm and peaceful expressions, with the idea of slow movements and solemn strides; also, the representation of children (grandchildren of Augustus) symbolizes a projection towards the future with a serene and satisfied vision. In the interior decorations, moreover, a re-flourishing of the earth is also associated with the general climate of pacification and, similarly, the blend of Hellenistic and Roman styles represents a synthesis best interpreted in the composition of the differences: peaceful coexistence in art as a mirror of the peaceful coexistence of the different factions in Rome and of the different populations in the empire. On these premises, the proposed paper will be divided into two parts: the first will analyse the characteristics of the ARA PACIS AUGUSTAE and its symbolic value in the context of Roman society of the time; the second will offer a brief excursus on the work examining the different parts and friezes of the ARA PACIS, and on the interpretations (related to national identity or national propaganda) proposed in the most recent historiography.

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1. Introduction

Defined as "the most elegant document of Augustan art" (Moretti, 1948, 107, n.44 as in Foresta - Rossetto, 2017) and "the basis on which future (Roman) art would arise" (Wichoff, 1895 (1947), 47 as in Foresta - Rossetto, 2017), the Ara Pacis Augustae represents one of the most significant conjugations between artistic value and social values, presenting itself as a representation of the matured climate of pacification of the Principate and a sign of the composition of the political and social conflicts that had characterized and bloodied the previous decades, since the time of the civil war (Bordignon, 2009).

The representations contained in the panels and the figurative codes allow us to understand the achievement of peace and the projection of an idea of stability, opposed to the vicissitudes and changeability of previous times. Moreover, in a historical projection, the very story of the monument after the imperial age, from fragmentation to the first archaeological studies, up to the re-composition in the 20th century (Palombi, 2017), can be read as a metaphor of the order that succeeds chaos and of the achieved unity that reassembles divisions. The Ara Pacis has been indicated as a reference and representation of the spirit of the "society of the time" in at least three different historical moments: in the classical age, in the first decades after the Unification of Italy up to the interwar period, and also, in more recent years, it has not failed to find itself at the center of new debates as well as of AI experiments and applications, in a constant dialogue between classical heritage and contemporary interpretations (Pollini, 2012; Pepe 2019). The history of the monument intersects and, in some moments, stands as central in the history of archaeological studies and in debates on the re-development of the historical-archaeological heritage of the city of Rome, between philanthropy and discussions on the value of art and history as tools of propaganda.

Already from its origins, however, the Ara Pacis presents as a formidable propaganda tool of the Princeps, placing the figurative arts alongside literature in the declamation of the new Golden Age (Costabile, 2011). The narrative structure of the monument also proposes an interaction between the human element and the divine element and the double level of the reliefs allows for a comparison (ideal) of the natural order and the human order, with a series of conceptual references between the presence of the

Princeps, promoter of peace, the other human figures represented, the divine figures and the naturalistic motifs, which intertwine real and fantastic representations. The figurative code of the narration allows us to interpret the contemporary figures of the Augustan age (imperial family and procession of senators, priests and dignitaries) placed next to the figures drawn from myth and guardians of the origins (Romulus and Remus, Aeneas, the goddess Rome and *Saturnia Tellus*) as components of a spatial iconography that links cosmos and imperium and stands as the "background to the recognition of the universal destiny of Rome" (Rossini, 2014).

In its role of artistic testimony to the feeling of social pacification, the Ara Pacis has been a constant reference for historical and archaeological studies (Pollini 2012) ; precisely on this consideration, in the following pages we will try to offer a synthetic interpretation of the monument and its history (from the discovery of the first panels to the reconstruction and current location), following the double key to interpreting the role of art as an expression of the spirit of the times and of the experience of pacification of conflicts.

2. Figurative language and the narrative power of the Ara Pacis: the divine element and the human element

Classical sources allow us to date the consecration of the Ara Pacis to January 30th 9 BC, the birthday of Livia (wife of Augustus); the construction of an altar dedicated to Peace and symbolically located in the Campus Martius area had been approved by the Senate as early as 13 BC, on the occasion of his return from the expedition to Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula. In classical sources, the intervention of Augustus in the Iberian Peninsula is indicated as an expedition to pacify those regions, thus responding to the ideology of the Pax Romana as a peace imposed by the victors. However, there is no doubt that it was with this expedition that the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula was finally realized, and a period of undisputed peace and prosperity initiated, also for those regions. On this point, while it appears clear that the Pax Romana cannot approach the modern techniques of international mediation aimed at guaranteeing peaceful coexistence between peoples and good relations between States, it must nevertheless be considered that the social impact of military victory came to result not in destruction but rather in the enhancement of the economy and commercial exchanges, also through the use of a common system of rules and laws, which made it possible to overcome (social) conflicts between local groups. The sharing of the system of rules and standards represents a significant social achievement as it laid the

foundations for the affirmation of the principle of legal certainty and the foundations of justice that would later characterize the evolution of Western legal science (Stolfi 2010; Vincenti 2010).

The historical period indicated by doctrine as "Pax Augusta" covers a time of almost two centuries and represents a period of the flowering of literature and the arts, of which the Ara Pacis constitutes one of the masterpieces (Bianchi Bandinelli - Torelli 1976; Costabile 2011). Already, from a first review, the structure is complex and proposes different levels of interpretation: the figurative code of the friezes and front panels offers a view of the relationship between past and present and between human and divine (Foresta 2011); at the same time, the narrative structure, developed in the processions represented on the two long sides, expresses the social value of the rediscovered peace and the centrality of Man, author of that pacification. In the Altar dedicated to Peace, as an otherworldly divinity, Augustus represents the human who allows the conjunction with the divine: he leads the solemn ceremony and ensures peace after a century of civil wars; as stated in the doctrine *"in this way Augustus ends up physically embodying the junction point between the two natural orders (...) the long process of Romanization of traditional cosmology is accomplished with an ad personam recognition"* (Rossini 2014)

The Ara Pacis appears today, as per the reconstruction carried out in 1938 on the basis of classical sources, as an altar placed on a podium which is accessed by means of a stairway surrounded by precinct walls bearing friezes and decorations (both exterior and interior) with two entryways, the main one also being the front one, preceded by a flight of nine steps. The structure resembles a parallelepiped, albeit with due considerations that, in reality, the difference between the longer and shorter sides is just over 1 m (about 105 cm): the presence of the entryways and the discontinuity of the friezes (on the front and rear panels) help to create the optical illusion of a more elongated shape.

The studies and interpretations mainly concern the friezes and decorations on the external side of the precinct walls, which are divided, along the entire perimeter of the monument, into two parts: in the upper part, human and divine figures are represented and in the lower one there are naturalistic sculptures, with realistic and imaginary animals, plants and flowers. Again, following the bipartite structure of the external decoration, four panels can be identified on the shorter sides, representing, respectively, the "sacrifice of Aeneas to the Penates" and the "Lupercal" on the front side of access to the altar and the "personification of Rome" and the "Saturnia Tellus", on the rear side of the altar inside the precinct walls. The long sides have two

continuous friezes representing two processions (probably two distinct phases of a single procession) characterized by the presence of priests (the so-called official procession) and by the presence of members of the imperial family (the so-called private procession).

It seems appropriate to underline how the re-construction has made it possible to reassemble and unite the fragments (found from the mid-sixteenth century), however the current appearance has been impacted by significant repairs carried out since the first findings, with additions that, in some cases, probably created modifications on the original features.

In relation to the panels on the sides of the entryways, only a few, partial fragments are present in the "Lupercal" (which represents the mythology of the foundation of Rome, with the twins Romulus and Remus and the She-wolf in the presence of the god Mars in arms) and for the "Personification of Rome" (sources indicate weapons and warrior clothing), while the "Sacrifice of Aeneas to the Penates" and the "*Saturnia Tellus*" suffered a much better fate. This latter panel, although it has given rise to divergent interpretations as to the figure represented (Mother Earth, Italy, the goddess Venus or Peace itself as a personified divinity), offers a unique key to the underlying *ratio* of the whole monument: pacification brings prosperity to every part of the earth, be it air, earth or water, as symbolized by the figures surrounding the female figure in the centre (two female figures on a swan and on a sea dragon, the animals at the foot of the central figure and the fruits to her right and, of course, the cherubs that she holds in her lap and which show, under her maternal gaze, a ripe fruit: the metaphor of present peace that is projected towards the future can be immediately understood). On the panels on the sides of the entryways, allegory and mythologies merge into a representation of the origins (Romulus and Remus with the She-wolf), in the solid roots of tradition and of the Ancestors (the sacrifice of Aeneas to the Penates, represented in the relief inside a temple), in the warrior vocation (the Personification of Rome in arms but at peace) which lead to a prosperity that spreads everywhere.

The friezes on the longer side represent a procession that brings priests and dignitaries close to the members of the imperial family (Bianchi Bandinelli - Torelli, 1976; Ergin, 2018): also this is a symbolic representation, which includes different generations of the family of Augustus (in a symbolic projection towards succession) and various public figures, some of whom had already died in the year of the consecration (such as Agrippa, who died in 12 BC) or who were older than the depiction (Billows 1993). The procession that winds along the long sides with the figure of Augustus as its cornerstone represents the very sacredness of the rediscovered peace and the advent of

that golden age that was hoped for by many. The figures follow a precise order and are represented with realistic features: the expression of the faces “humanizes” the ideal procession and lays the foundations for a direct interpretation of the role of Augustus and the members of the imperial family, realizing, as indicated in doctrine, a form of “dynastic narrative”; a symbolic interpretation level could be considered as being addressed mainly to the high class and intellectuals, who would have been able to fully grasp the references and interpret the correspondence between human and divine: *“as the moment in which earthly power becomes an expression of the renewal of the cosmic cycle, the beginning of the new ordo saeculorum which is inaugurated, according to the then many prophecies, with the aura aetas”* (Rossini 2014). Regarding the representations, it seems appropriate to emphasize how another holy procession is also represented in the frieze of the altar within the precinct walls, but the figures are not identifiable and in this case the value is purely allegory and decorative.

It has already been said that the external decoration of the Ara Pacis has a two-part structure: in the lower part there are, along the entire perimeter, naturalistic allegories with plants, flowers and animals (Sperti, 2009; Pollini, 2012; Ergin 2018), some of which with a precise mythological reference (laurel, ivy, oak and olive tree that classical art associates to the figure of a God or Goddess) and others with imaginative representations, spirals and fractal figurations that create vegetal crowns. This representation is also part of the more general feeling of returning to the order and prosperity of the age of peace: the almost geometric order of the naturalistic composition breaks down the different parts of the frieze, placing acanthus at the centre and leaving some minor scenes to the margins which, according to some recent interpretations, would symbolize episodes of recent history (such as the palms placed almost in profile and the spiral scrolls of some plants, as well as the presence of threatening snakes, interpreted as a reminder of the story of Cleopatra and the victory in the battle of Azio) .

Finally, it worth noting some considerations of the doctrine in relation to the comparison between the Ara Pacis and other monuments of the classical period “with a narrative structure”; particularly, the frieze of the Parthenon and the Ara of Pergamum, with reference to Greek art, and the Trajan column and the Marcus Aurelius column, with reference to Roman art. First of all, it is clear how the narration is static in the hieratic procession and in the depictions of the panels, compared to the dynamism of the Parthenon or Pergamon scenes; and again how, although built and consecrated to celebrate a military victory, every reference to war is absent in the Ara Pacis, considering that even the representation of the “Personification of Rome”

appears in arms yet not belligerent, rather seated on a pile of arms, thrust forward towards a future of peace; as stated in the doctrine “*there is no space, in the Ara dedicated to the Pax Augusta, for war - much less for enemies, even defeated*” following a very precise programmatic choice that extols the “new and happy golden age” also described in poetry by Ovidio: “*Pax, ades et toto mitis in orbe mane (...) tu ducibus bello gloria maior eris. / sola gerat miles, quibus arma coerceat, arma, / canteturque fera nil nisi pompa tuba*” (Come, o Peace, and stay, sweet, throughout the world (...) you will give our princes greater glory than in war // May the soldier take up arms only to defend yourself from other weapons! / May the ferocious sound of the trumpet ring only in the party!)

3. "Pax" and "Pactum"

On more than one occasion, it has been possible to underline how the Ara Pacis translates the ideal of universal pacification typical of Augustus ideology and propaganda into an artistic representation, with a marked public value. Moreover, while traditionally the ideal associated with the word “pax” and the Roman experience refers to the absence of war (differently from the Hebrew “shalom” which is connected to the absence of violence), in the Augustus age the word takes on a broader reference to social peace and to projection towards a time of prosperity not only for the absence of conflicts of war, but also for the development and increase of social and trade relations.

The etymology of the word “pax” can be traced back to the Sanskrit root “pak-” or “pag-” to which a different word, “pactum”, is also connected that indicates an agreement between two contracting parties and is connected to the archaic forms of the word “paciscor” and “pactio”. The meaning of “bind, unite, weld” is attributed to the root “pak-”: from the common root therefore there derive both peace as union and communion of peoples in the absence of conflict and agreement as a union of the will of subjects to regulate different aspects of social coexistence (Reggio, 2017, 40-44). Pacification as an absence or as a resolution of conflicts can then be declined both with reference to peoples and to personal affairs, and indeed the prosperity that derives from pacification rests precisely on serene social coexistence. In the “pactum” among private subjects, the “fides” (trust) considered and venerated as a divinity assumes a primary value, which guides the behaviour of the associates in respect of the given word and the commitment assumed. The evolution of the social value of “fides” and of its use in the construction of social relationships leads to the emergence of the different “behavioural model expressed by the figure of the *bonus vir*” which guides its action

toward “bona fides”, a concept markedly referred to private law and the procedural sphere of the so-called *iudicia bonae fidei*.

Pax-pactum-fides: peace-agreement-trust (in the solution of disputes); already the Roman experience, from which the tradition of trial and procedural law derive, as well as the culture of the hetero-resolution of disputes itself, had identified the value of agreement and peace and, precisely in the Augustus age, reaped the advantages and implications in terms of economic and social development.

In this paper, it is not possible to allow ourselves a complete analysis of negotiation autonomy in the classical age nor of the evolution of the dynamics of contract and agreement formation, however, it seemed appropriate to insert this brief notation not only to highlight the common root of the terms “pax” and “pactum” but also to compare them the (more) private dimension of fides, which constitutes the Latin origins of the current “good faith” as the leading principle of contract law and ADR and basic solutions of the cooperative dynamics of efficient negotiation.

4. From the recovery of the first fragments to the reconstruction on the Lungotevere: the Ara - national identity and ideology.

As has already been anticipated (in § 1), the history of the recovery and re-construction of the Ara Pacis can also be considered as witness to the value of the monument and the influence it has exercised, in recent centuries, on studies on the art of the Augustan period and on the debate concerning the re-development of urban spaces destined for archaeological heritage in the city of Rome during the 20th century (Foresta – Rossini, 2017; Palombi, 2017).

The particular historical period of the “re-discovery” of a large number of fragments attributable to the friezes of the Ara, at the turn of the first decades of the Unification of Italy, contributed to connote archaeological studies and research with further meanings: the reconstruction of the monument, whose fragments were scattered throughout Italy, assumed the value of a metaphor for the unity of the nation and the reconstruction of an important witness of the glorious past.

While in the years of the Principate firstly, and then of the Emperor, the Ara Pacis and the work carried out on it represented the spirit of the community led by the Princes projected towards a moment of peace in unity, at the turn of the nineteenth century, at least two other historical periods in which studies and works on the monument were characterized by a strong imprint of social feeling can be identified: the decades following Unification until the First World War represent the one (perhaps) most

similar to the vision of a peaceful society projected towards a future full of hope; then, the interwar years become important with a vision that appears instead marked by a rediscovery of the past in the perspective of supremacy, with an enhancement of the Pax Romana in its interpretation of "peace of winners" imposed on the subjected populations. These are two profoundly dissimilar interpretations, which underline clearly different social ideals and values: overcoming conflict in the perspective of coexistence and community progress in the former, overcoming conflict as a victory in the latter.

If we wish to use the current dynamics of the methods of conflict resolution (Fisher-Shapiro, 2005; Vincenti 2007), we could undoubtedly say that in the first interpretation a win-win dynamic prevails and in the second a win-lose dynamic, within which the spirit of retaliation and supremacy of a party aims to impose a unilaterally determined composition. After all, the two different interpretations respond to the different social conditions in which studies and research on the Ara Pacis matured over the decades and at the same time as the social conflict grew, which was then to end up projecting itself into the conflict of war, with the colonial wars at first and the Second World War later.

Retracing, albeit briefly, the decades leading from the Unification to the eve of the Second World War allows us to understand the changed social feeling precisely through the different meanings attributed to the studies and debates around the reconstruction of the Ara Pacis.

Historical sources relating to the period of the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the medieval period are decidedly scanty and do not allow us to identify the particular itineraries that the marble sculptures took that make up the friezes and the different parts of the Ara, and which became, like most monuments and classical buildings, a quarry to draw building materials from for new constructions or for decorating them. It is therefore not surprising that the progressive discoveries, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, have recorded a diffusion of fragments attributable to the Ara in different points of Rome and also in different locations (through commercial exchanges and purchases by collectors some arrived in Tuscany, at the court of the Medici).

The first collections of fragments of friezes and bases can be dated to the first half of the sixteenth century, even if the doctrine still believes that today it is not possible to identify either a date or the names of the first authors of the collations with confidence, among which however, Cardinal Giovanni Ricci from Montepulciano and the aristocrat Camillo Bolognini can certainly be counted.

The excavation area from which most of the fragments were extracted is located in the area of the so-called via "In Lucina", where excavations were also carried out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as evidenced by the findings dated 1859, including the head of Aeneas. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the findings of the (more or less extensive) fragments of the friezes had been the subject of individual study, since, only with the most extensive findings of 1859 did they begin to hypothesize a single provenance and, in particular, a reference to the Ara Pacis. In this regard, it seems appropriate to underline that the incomplete classical sources on the subject (mainly literary and numismatic sources) have left archaeologists with various questions on the re-construction of the friezes and the (re) composition of the monument itself (think merely of the uncertainty of the presence of one or two entryways or on the presence or absence of some figures) and also that during the 16th and 17th centuries there was no lack of interventions on the fragments found, with reconstructions and restorations.

The idea that the different fragments could lead back to the Ara Pacis was proposed by the archaeologist, Von Duhn at first and by the archaeologist, Petersen a few years later (Foresta – Rossini, 2017); the studies that developed from the intuitions of the former and from the critical analyses of the latter were to lead to the definition of the main architectural features of the monument and, at the same time, laid the foundations for an awareness campaign aimed at intensifying excavations in Rome and also bringing back the fragments scattered throughout Italy to the capital (an operation that was not possible for the part of a frieze brought to France and kept in the Louvre). The study and reconstruction works, although initially carried out by a German archaeologist, soon pivoted on the more general feeling of building a single national identity for the Kingdom of Italy: bringing the distant and dispersed fragments back to Rome acquired a meta-meaning and became the theme of journalistic articles that interested public opinion and allowed the debate to cross the boundaries of an academic question among scholars to take on a wide ranging community interest. The new Italian State was looking for unitary symbols to overcome the conflicts and disintegration and criticalities that still accompanied the Unification, and the reconstruction of a monument which could be witness of the glorious Roman past and project toward stable social peace and a future full of opportunities was the best representation of the new times. At the turn of the century, in the early twentieth century, the issue became increasingly relevant and discussions regarding the positioning of the reconstructed Ara intensified, to best enhance its historical value but also its social and identity-giving value.

In some ways, Italian society of the first decade of the twentieth century seemed to reflect a symbol of national identity and the pacification of conflicts in the Ara Pacis, even if in this case the reference is aimed at the new State rather than at a single personality, that is, the Princeps. The desired and symbolized pacification had the value of projection towards a future of prosperity and Italian society opened up to the realities of the new century by keeping faith with its classical tradition, keeping its roots firm, but projecting itself upwards in an ideal search for the new.

It is precisely in the first decade of the twentieth century that some critical issues began to appear: first of all, on the location and state of maintenance of the (recomposed) fragments and friezes which were not always suitably collocated in museums, but above all due to a lack of funds which considerably reduced the excavation work and led to sudden interruptions. The work area, it should be specified, was between via del Corso and the so-called via "in Lucina", which continued to reveal fragments and parts of the double decorations (internal and external) of the Ara, but which at the same time required the commitment of men and means, often more and more excessive. Inspiration for studies on the Ara Pacis did not stop for simple lack of funds, and in the years of interruption of the excavations catalogues were produced, which allowed not only to follow the narrative itinerary of the frieze in the best possible way, but also to create, for the celebrations of 1911, an "Archaeological Exhibition" at the Museum of the Baths of Diocletian. It was the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Unification of Italy that could take on the cloak of caesura between two different historical moments: the phase that had looked at the re-construction of the Ara Pacis as a symbol of a national identity ended, with a centripetal movement towards Rome Capital, and the reconstruction of the symbol of national power opened up, projecting itself from the classical tradition to contemporaneity, reflecting a dimension of expansion that interpreted the Pax Romana as a peace imposed by the winner.

While this still appeared to be evolving in the years of the first African colonial wars, the sentiment became more marked after the First World War and with the advent of Fascism. As stated in the doctrine, "the reconstruction of the Ara Pacis was laden with feelings of revenge" and the reconstruction itself became almost a necessity, functional to the propaganda and affirmation of the power of the new fascist Italy.

The time between 1919 and 1938 can be identified as the third historical moment in which the social value of the studies and works on the Ara Pacis fully reflected the social situation: now driven by the ideology of the Nation and far from the sentiments of social peace, the diatribes on reconstruction and location took on an only political and propaganda value.

The same choice of location along the Tiber near a square designed to enhance the Mausoleum of Augustus (and renamed, in fact, “Piazza Augusto Imperatore” (Agnoli - Carnabuci - Loreti, 2014) and not, as also proposed by the Commission created to coordinate studies and works, at the Museum of the Baths of Diocletian, reflected a precise propaganda design: the enhancement of classical heritage that poured into the Italy of those years; once again “cosmos and imperium”, albeit with a necessary re-interpretation but without any universal range and with a future that was to be, as we well know, the tragic epilogue of a dictatorship.

In the interpretation of the regime's propaganda, the Pax Romana is an extreme concept, exploited by contemporaries: the reading of the figurative codes proposed in those years reflected the dominant ideology, where there was no room for a pacification that was adapted for both social interests and demands, but only pacification in the submission and acceptance of the logic of the dominant.

The reconstruction longed for and hypothesized since the end of the nineteenth century became a reality in 1938, with the relocation of the materials and fragments kept in the Museum of the Baths of Diocletian, of those found in the last excavations of 1937, of those recovered from scattered collections throughout Italy (by virtue of the decree law of 10 February 1937-XV which attributed special negotiating powers so as to be able to deal with institutions and private collectors), as well as casts of the fragments and panels that could not be obtained (such as the one, still today, in the Louvre). The reconstructed Ara Pacis was placed in a special structure characterized by large windows, located on the Lungotevere and commonly known as “the reliquary” designed by the architect, Morpurgo (Foresta - Rossini, 2017). The Ara Pacis could therefore be seen by all, with the splendour of the marble sculptures, offering the narration of the friezes (recomposed) and the scrolls of the naturalistic decorations. With the inauguration which took place on 23 September 1938, at the conclusion of the celebrations for the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Augustus, the ceremonial procession reappeared in its solemnity, but this time moving no longer towards years of prosperity but rather towards what was to be the tragic epilogue of the Second World War.

During the war years, protected by sandbags and wooden structures that sheltered the marble sculptures and the restoration interventions, the Ara Pacis remained in the reliquary of Morpurgo, deprived of the glass that was transferred to San Lorenzo and destroyed in the bombing of July 1943.

The years following the Second World War, with the advent of the Republic, saw new debates relating to the redevelopment of the monument area as well as to a possible

move from the Lungotevere; this need was probably felt more for a break with the past, with its propagandistic connotations and with the choices made in the Fascist period than for any enhancement of the monument. Despite the discussions undertaken, the appointment of a commission and various initiatives to elaborate a valid alternative, the Ara Pacis still maintains its position on the Lungotevere, not far from the Mausoleum of Augustus: several studies have in fact shown that a shift it could cause damage.

5. The colours of the past, the design of the present, the prospects for the future

The new season of the Ara Pacis started with the choice of replacing Morpurgo's reliquary (or more than anything else, what remained of it, given the interventions after the second World War) with a more modern structure with a contemporary design. The Ara Pacis Museum, created by the American architect Richard Meier, was inaugurated in 2006. The structure is characterized by essential lines that allow to enjoy the view of the Ara from the outside and offer, inside, the sensory experience of silence, away from the convulsive life of the traffic of the neighbouring streets (Rossini 2007). The enhancement of the museum complex combines not only the new use of the Ara Pacis, but also an exhibition space that allows the creation of events and exhibitions.

In more recent years, moreover, the Ara Pacis has been at the centre of a series of projects that are able to restore, albeit virtually, the original polychromy, through the use of digital tools and technologies and to create "immersive" experiences with "augmented virtual reality". In particular, with regard to the latter, it should be underlined how the Ara Pacis Museum also offers tools for the fruition of cultural heritage that are aligned with the new modes of experiential knowledge and that allow virtual tours and the reconstruction (in 3D) of places and lands of the 1st century AD.

Once again, past and present establish a circular correspondence: while it is true that only modern technologies can allow us to see "The Ara as it was" (from the title of the project launched in 2016), it is equally true that only the figurative language of the Ara can accompany us along its narrative path, fully restoring the universal value of the message of peace, order and harmony of the work of art.

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