

## CULT AND SCULPTURE: SACRIFICE IN THE ARA PACIS AUGUSTAE\*

By JOHN ELSNER

(Plates I–VII)

On 30 January 9 B.C., two thousand years ago this year, the Senate dedicated the Ara Pacis Augustae.<sup>1</sup> This paper celebrates that anniversary by putting forward a new interpretation of the altar's significance. Rather than focusing on a discussion of iconography or the identification of individuals portrayed on the altar, I shall explore the sacrificial implications of what was, after all, an important site for sacrificial cult in Rome. We may note that the earliest Roman accounts of the Ara Pacis both emphasize sacrificial rite. In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus comments (12.2):

Cum ex Hispania Galliaque, rebus in iis provinciis prospere gestis, Romam redi, Ti. Nerone P. Quintilio consulibus, aram Pacis Augustae senatus pro reditu meo consacranda censuit ad campum Martium, in qua magistratus et sacerdotes virginesque Vestales anniversarium sacrificium facere iussit.

On my return from Spain and Gaul, in the consulship of Tiberius Nero and Publius Quintilius [13 B.C.], after successful operations in these provinces, the Senate voted in honour of my return the consecration of an altar to Pax Augusta in the Campus Martius, and on this altar it ordered the magistrates and priests and Vestal virgins to make annual sacrifice.

Ovid, too, in the *Fasti* (1.709f.) specifically stresses the sacrificial theme of the Ara Pacis when he describes the festival connected with it on 30 January:

Tura sacerdotes pacalibus addite flammis  
albaque perfusa victima fronte cadat . . .

Add incense, priests, to the flames which burn on the altar of Peace;  
let a white victim fall after the sprinkling of its brow . . .

One general weakness of scholarly discussions of the Ara Pacis is that they fail to emphasize sufficiently this sacrificial *function* of the altar. They therefore miss an important aspect of its meaning to which the Romans themselves were particularly responsive. In fact, it is hard to overestimate the significance of sacrifice in Roman culture as a whole. In Augustan Rome, sacrificial ritual not only defined the relation of Romans to their gods, but also established the hierarchy of social relations.<sup>2</sup> It is in this context, then, that I shall examine the meaning of the Ara Pacis.

Before proceeding any further, I should make my position explicit with regard to previous interpretations of this much-studied monument. Underlying most traditional interpretations is a set of assumptions about ancient art which centre on the theme of 'naturalism'.

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<sup>1</sup> On the dates and historical circumstances, see S. Settis, 'Die Ara Pacis', in *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik* (1988), 401 and E. Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (1967), 8. The relevant texts are *RG* 12.2; Ovid, *Fasti* 1.709 ff.; *CIL* vi, 2028b; vi, 32347a; x, 8375.

<sup>2</sup> On Roman sacrificial procedure, see G. Wissowa,

*Religion und Kultus der Römer* (1912), 409–32 and K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (1970), 379–93. On aspects of the sociological and anthropological significance of Roman sacrifice, see R. L. Gordon, 'The Veil of Power: Emperors, Sacrificers and Benefactors' and 'Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and its Limits', both in M. Beard and J. North (eds), *Pagan Priests* (1990), 201–55; J. Scheid, 'La Spartizione a Roma', *Studi Storici* 4 (1984), 945–56; idem, 'Sacrifice et banquet à Rome: quelques problèmes', *MEFRA* 97 (1985), 193–206. General works on the significance of sacrifice in Graeco-Roman antiquity are: R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1979), W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (1983), M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *La Cuisine du sacrifice en pays Grecs* (1979), J. Rudhardt and O. Reverdin (eds), *Le Sacrifice dans l'antiquité* Entretiens Fondation Hardt 27 (1981), R. G. Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Violent Origins* (1987).

'Naturalism' is an entailment of the ancient theory of mimesis whereby art represents nature. Narrowly defined, it assumes that a naturalistically painted or sculpted image refers back specifically to a real object or situation. So a particular figure on the Ara Pacis must be a portrait of Augustus, Agrippa, or a member of the imperial family (for example), while the processions sculpted on its walls must refer to specific historical processions — at the altar's dedication in 9 B.C., for instance. My objection to this approach is not that it is necessarily wrong, but that it is limiting. It assumes that images have single meanings rooted in the intentions of artists or patrons. The ancient viewer's role is simply to register such original meanings; the modern scholar's role is to decode them. This naturalist theory of art leads scholars into a debate of identifying and re-identifying figures and thereby tends to exclude the viewer. It deprives art of the many possibilities for additional, creative and subversive interpretations which images inevitably evoke in different viewers and at different times.

There is a less narrow version of the 'naturalist' thesis, advanced most recently and with considerable sophistication by Paul Zanker.<sup>3</sup> With this I must also take issue. Zanker argues that the Ara Pacis does not merely represent a single historical event or a group of individual portraits. On the contrary, as Zanker writes of the processional friezes (Pl. I):

The sculptural style and composition, inspired by classical reliefs, elevates the scene beyond the historical occasion into a timeless sphere. Not all the figures depicted were actually in Rome on the day of the dedication. The Senate, which commissioned the monument, was concerned not that every figure be recognizable, but with the correct grouping of each of the priesthoods. Significantly, only the most important men have portrait features, while the rest have idealized faces that conceal their individual identity. (p. 121)

Zanker eschews the narrow naturalism of reductivist identifications for a much broader ideological interpretation of the altar's reliefs. The naturalistic rendition of specific details such as the actual order of the priests (pp. 120–1), or their leather caps, cloaks and staffs (pp. 118–19) conveys an aura of likelihood and actuality on what is in fact a highly symbolic representation. The idealism of such iconography 'conveys the dramatic experience of the ritual slaughter, which was able to unleash powerful emotional forces every time' (p. 114). In short, the Ara Pacis (like Augustan art generally in Zanker's account) uses its naturalistic style and religious associations to propagate a highly sophisticated and politicized picture of the Augustan Principate. But such an interpretation is too totalizing. It assumes that viewers would see and accept the Augustan message without the possibility of alternative readings or questionings of the iconography presented to them. And yet we know very well that poets like Ovid subjected the official meanings of state ideology to irony and subversion. Although Zanker cites odd works of art (such as a caricature from a villa near Stabiae of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius as dog-headed apes with large phalli) as 'minority voices',<sup>4</sup> he never conceives of the bulk of official imagery as offering any meanings other than 'their unrelentingly didactic intent, manifested in constant repetition, similies and equivalences' (p. 209). Essentially, Zanker's account, by presenting Augustan art as the state might ideally have wished it to be viewed, deprives art of any subversive or conflictive viewings in a way that is culturally and sociologically too simplistic.<sup>5</sup> No society has ever been so efficiently dictatorial that the image propagated by the government of itself was at once the only image held of the government by every citizen.

My interpretation of the Ara Pacis is based on an alternative model of art to that provided by 'naturalism'. I emphasize the nature and importance of *viewing* in the understanding of images.<sup>6</sup> Traditional approaches limit the *meaning* of art by referring us back to the

<sup>3</sup> P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988).

<sup>4</sup> Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 209; see also Zanker's article 'Bilderzwang: Augustan Political Symbolism in the Private Sphere', in J. Huskinson, M. Beard and J. Reynolds (eds), *Image and Mystery in the Roman World* (1988), 1–22.

<sup>5</sup> At the heart of this approach is the straightforward sociological pyramid of Roman culture drawn by

G. Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (1985), 146, with the emperor at the top and the plebs at the bottom. This model, accepted by Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 152 (cf. also 129), may be acceptable as a crude picture of social hierarchies but has little relevance to the way people viewed, thought about, or ironized such hierarchies.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (forthcoming).

supposed prototypes of naturalistic images — a member of the imperial family, particular priests' hats, a sacrificial procession on a specific date. In this paper, I argue that an important meaning of the Ara Pacis for its Roman viewers was actually constructed by their participation in the sacrificial ritual which was the altar's function. Based on their previous experience of sacrifice and on their experience at the moment they viewed the altar (whether as part of a sacrificial ritual or not), viewers creatively constructed numerous meanings which might deconstruct, undermine or conflict with each other. A Jewish view, for instance, or a Pythagorean one might have been very different from that of a Roman priest. Moreover, the altar — as a temple and a place of sacrifice — carried a series of cultural associations which themselves constructed the ancient viewer as a religious participant. (We modern viewers, by contrast, are no longer affected by these cultural associations — or we should not be so inclined to naturalist interpretations.) There is a reciprocal relation of art-object and viewer, viewer and art-object, that creates a 'dialogue' out of which meaning is born. In looking at the altar, Roman viewers did not simply see images of a sacrifice that once happened. They saw a cultural process in which they themselves became involved. This was a process which included the sacrifice Aeneas made long ago, the sacrifice Augustus and the Senate made when the altar was dedicated, the sacrifice that emperor and people would be making every year, the sacrifice in which the viewer had himself participated (maybe last year and the year before) and would make again in the future. In this sense, the sacrificial process, of which the Ara Pacis was the setting, was permanently incomplete and yet always temporarily fulfilled by the viewer's own participation in the sacrificial rite.

I do not argue that viewers never identified particular figures on the frieze. But in addition to that kind of looking, and to the assimilation of the ideological impact of images so well evoked by Zanker, there was a further, more complex, area of meaning embodied by the sacrificial theme and context of the altar. A deep paradox is embedded in this set of religious meanings. While sacrifice held out a promise of divine blessing and fruitfulness and life, it simultaneously denied or at least undermined these benefits by the death and blood-spilling and skulls through which man approached god.

#### I. TOPOGRAPHY, POLITICS AND SACRIFICE

All religious art evokes an Other World, which is different from this world. The particular orientation of that Other World varies according to what kind of goal or Other a religion presupposes. Before we examine the sculpture of the Ara Pacis, it may be helpful to set this altar-temple's religious orientation into context and by this to suggest something of the nature of the Roman state cult. The Ara Pacis was significantly located in relation to the gigantic solarium of Augustus, dedicated in 10 or 9 B.C., in the same tribunician year as the altar itself.<sup>7</sup> On Augustus' birthday, celebrated at the autumn equinox, the shadow of the gnomon or pointer of the sundial (a 30 m tall Egyptian obelisk) pointed to the Ara Pacis.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the whole orientation of the precinct, the width of its entrances and even its central point were 'dictated' by a complex geometry based on the equinoctial line in the grid of the solarium, which (if extended eastwards) would have cut through the entrances in the precinct walls and through the sacrificial altar itself.<sup>9</sup> In effect we cannot clearly separate the significance of the Ara Pacis from the broader context of the Horologium and the whole Campus Martius complex (including the Mausoleum and Ustrinum of Augustus), built between 42 and 9 B.C.<sup>10</sup> This entire programme, which cannot be dissociated (certainly after Augustus' death) from

<sup>7</sup> See E. Buchner, *Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus* (1982), 10 (also idem, 'Horologium Solarium Augusti', *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik* (1988), 240–5). On the topography of this part of the Campus Martius, see E. Rodriguez-Almeida, 'Il Campo Marzio Settentrionale. Solarium e Pomerium', *Atti* 51–2 (1978–80), 195–212 and F. Rakob, 'Die Urbanisierung des nördlichen Marsfeldes: neue Forschungen im Areal des Horologium Augusti', in *Urbs: espace urbain et histoire* Coll. de l'école Française 98 (1987), 687–712.

<sup>8</sup> Buchner, *op. cit.* (n. 7), 37 and Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 144.

<sup>9</sup> Buchner, *op. cit.* (n. 7), 36 and the diagram at 27. For a brief discussion of the symbolic effects of this relationship of monuments, see E. Simon, *Augustus* (1986), 26–9; on Augustus' propagandist use of the theme of time, see A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Time for Augustus', in M. Whitby, P. Hardie and M. Whitby (eds), *Homo Viator: Classical Studies for John Bramble* (1987), 221–30.

<sup>10</sup> On this whole 'Baukomplex', see Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 26–46.

the Emperor's apotheosis, is a visual enactment of the interpenetration of Augustan religion with imperial politics. The Ara Pacis, a prime site of sacrificial cult, always bore the visual and symbolic reminder that its sacrifice had a socio-political orientation.<sup>11</sup>

When we come to the imagery of the Ara Pacis, its sculptures directly relate either to the theme of sacrifice which defined its cultic function or to the imperial mythology with which its context had already imbued it.<sup>12</sup> Like the imagery of other Augustan altars,<sup>13</sup> the reliefs which we may provisionally identify as representing Aeneas, Mars with the twins, Italia, and Roma at the corners of the West and East walls all refer pointedly to myths propagated under the Principate. Generally, interpretations of the sculptural programme of the Ara Pacis have focused on the mythic-political aspects of this imagery, or have attempted to identify and reidentify particular figures in the sculpted frieze.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, I wish to concentrate on the cultic implications of the sculpture and the relation of the imagery to the altar's primary sacrificial function.

In fact the political theme of the Ara Pacis is dependent on the cultic theme, since any politics involved in its inauguration drew on the charisma of the altar's sacrificial implications. Moreover, the cultic theme offers us access to some of the responses of Roman viewers to their art by giving us a context or frame within which they saw it. The festal context of a sacrificial procession and the commentary which the processional and sacrificial reliefs of the Ara Pacis make on such a festival provide a means of elucidating some of the cultural and social implications of how the Romans looked at their art. Because, to some extent, we know how the Ara Pacis was used, and can reconstruct something of the ritual flavour of its use from archaeology, this monument is extraordinarily important not only for the finesse of its sculpture but also for the more general information it can give us about the ritual and sacred functions of Roman religious art. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that the religious art of the Ara Pacis is always related to an explicitly political imperial context.<sup>15</sup>

Before we turn to the sculptural decoration of the Ara Pacis, we should note some important features of Roman sacrifice. In Roman religion, the cult statue (which represented the deity whom the sacrificial rite was intended to propitiate) was normally not in the same place as the actual sacrifice. Many reliefs (such as the image of Aeneas and the Penates on the Ara Pacis, Pl. II) seem to suggest an ideology of divine presence where the god appears to be there during sacrifice. Yet at the same time both reliefs and actuality often represent this presence as at a spatial distance from the place of sacrifice. In the image of Aeneas and the Penates (Pl. II), the temple or shrine is behind and away from the sacrificial space of the altar and the act of libation. In the surviving temples excavated at Pompeii the altar is always within the main sanctuary but outside the *aedes* proper in which the god's image was housed.<sup>16</sup> This Pompeian arrangement is actually prescribed as an ideal for temple architecture in Vitruvius (*De Architectura* IV.5.1 and IV.9) where the author makes much of a play between the gaze of the statues within the temple looking out and down on those who sacrifice and that of the worshippers who look up towards the temple and its cult deities — 'the very images may seem to rise up and gaze upon those who make vows and sacrifices'.

<sup>11</sup> While doubt was once raised whether the monument I discuss should be correctly identified with the Ara Pacis (see S. Weinstock, 'Pax and the "Ara Pacis"', *JRS* 50 (1960), 44–58), there is no doubt about its sacrificial nature, its Augustan date or its topographic location in relation to other highly significant Augustan monuments in the Campus Martius.

<sup>12</sup> The principal discussions in English of the Ara Pacis are M. Torelli, *Typology and Structure of Roman Historical Reliefs* (1982), 27–62, and Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 120–5, 158–61, 172–6, 179–83, 203–6. Two major overviews are Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 1), and Settis, *op. cit.* (n. 1). The fundamental publication of the excavation is G. Moretti, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (1948). A comprehensive bibliography (to 1986) of what has now become a huge literature is provided by G. Koeppl, 'Die historischen Reliefs der römischen Kaiserzeit v: Ara Pacis Augustae, Teil I', *Bonner Jahrbucher* 187 (1987), 101–57, esp. 152–7.

<sup>13</sup> For instance the altar of the *gens Augusta* set up by

P. Perelius Hedulus in Carthage, see L. Poinssot, *L'Autel de la gens Augusta à Carthage* (1929).

<sup>14</sup> The latest example of this, with a large bibliography, is C. B. Rose, "'Princes' and Barbarians on the Ara Pacis', *AJA* 94 (1990), 453–67.

<sup>15</sup> On the politicizing of sacrifice in the Roman Empire, see Gordon, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 201–31.

<sup>16</sup> See the excellent diagrams in J. B. Ward-Perkins and A. Claridge, *Pompeii A.D. 79* (1976), 58–61. On the separation of sacrificial altar and temple proper 'for reasons of convenience' see H. C. Bowerman, *Roman Sacrificial Altars* (1913), 5; Pauly-Wissowa 'Altar' II, 1649; J. E. Stambaugh, 'The Functions of Roman Temples', *ANRW* II, 16.1, 554–608, esp. 571–2. The implication of 'the altar in front of the temple' in I Clement (of Rome), *Ad Corinthios* 41 (c. A.D. 96) is that the same structural arrangement is true (or was thought true by Christians in Rome) of the Temple in Jerusalem before its destruction in A.D. 70.

The altar is in one sense the goal of sacrificial action, the point where the *exta* are finally placed.<sup>17</sup> And yet this is only a preliminary goal in that the actual propitiation is of the god in his temple. Furthermore the altar may not be the actual locus of killing but rather the place where the *exta* are finally laid after being extracted. The altar is thus as much distanced locationally and temporally from the sacrificial act of slaughter (there may be a considerable time-lag between killing and cooking) as it is present by being the goal of at least some part of the action. I shall touch later on the importance of what I shall call 'deferral' — this quality of the altar as preliminary rather than final goal, its function of being an end-point that points to a further end (the deity in the *aedes* at which one gazes), a completion that hints beyond itself.

The Ara Pacis was *not* an untypical Roman *templum* in its layout or structure. In the strictest definition, a *templum* was a piece of land set aside for religious purposes and determined by ritual as a place for taking the auspices. This meant that a *templum* need not possess an *aedes*, or house for the statue of the god.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the Ara Pacis, the absence of an *aedes* complicates the process of 'deferral'. There was no cult statue within the precinct walls, no obvious end to which the sacrificial process was directed. Clearly, who the final recipient of any sacrifice at the Ara Pacis was to be, was deliberately left ambiguous. Among the candidates must have been Pax herself, Mars the patron deity of the Campus Martius, and not least the god Augustus whose remains were housed in the Mausoleum after A.D. 14 and whose Horologium pointed portentously towards the sacrificial altar on the day of his birth. Not only was 'deferral' extended here by removing any deity to be placated from within the precinct walls, but it was further complicated by the multiplicity of divine Others who might receive the oblation.

## II. THE ALTAR SCENE

In the art of Roman religion there are two principal types of representation of sacrifice: the sacrificial procession and the altar scene.<sup>19</sup> Both are to be found on the Ara Pacis. There are sacrificial friezes both around the altar ('the small procession', Pl. III) and on the exterior of the precinct walls ('the large procession', Pl. I).<sup>20</sup> There is, furthermore, a relief panel on the exterior of the sanctuary wall to the right of the main entrance to the precinct which depicts a togate and bearded man probably pouring a libation onto an altar (Pl. II). This seems to be the preliminary ritual before the slaughter of the sacrificial animal, here a sow. Over the altar is an oak tree and behind is a temple in which are two male deities. The scene is usually interpreted as the sacrifice of Aeneas to the Penates (Virgil, *Aen.* III.389f. and VIII.81f.; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* I.57.1).<sup>21</sup>

Whatever its mythological associations, the scene of Aeneas pouring a libation has a general relationship to its context. It decorates the walls of the precinct within which the very ritual it portrays was enacted. The scene may have a specific referent (as has often been argued)<sup>22</sup> in the inauguration rites for the Ara Pacis. But it also has a general referent in the act of sacrifice that would take place at different times within the sanctuary.<sup>23</sup>

The position of the Aeneas relief on the outside wall of the precinct is important. It marks not a goal and location of sacred action (as would an altar scene actually carved on the altar), but the boundaries of a sacred site by representing on the outside the sacrificial act which occurs in the inside — the act by which the site is sanctified. It may represent the original sacrifice, in Aeneas' case not the origin of the altar but of the nation and city which the altar's sacrifices uphold and the origin of the ancestry of Augustus who, on his own account, restored the nation ('respublica', *RG* 1), the city (*RG* 19–20) and of course was voted this very altar by the city and nation in gratitude (*RG* 12). But at the same time the relief marks not only the 'origin' but also the present — the eternal repetition of sacred action through the passage of

<sup>17</sup> W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (1911), 180–1.

<sup>18</sup> See Stambaugh, *op. cit.* (n. 16), 557 and 568.

<sup>19</sup> I. Scott Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Rome*, *MAAR* 22 (1955), 190–1.

<sup>20</sup> Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 14–16.

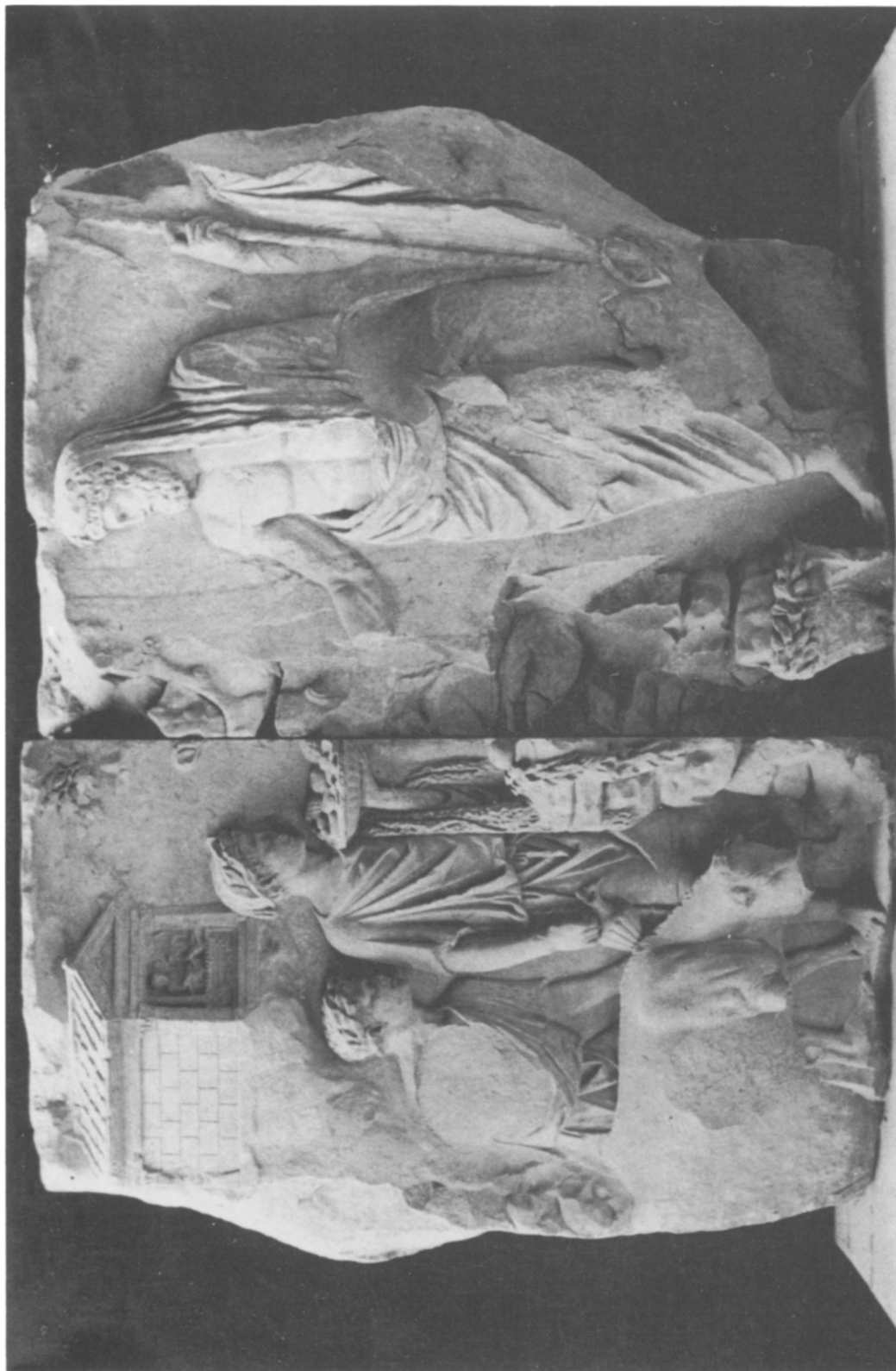
<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 23–4.

<sup>22</sup> *e.g. ibid.*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> The Aeneas relief 'is surely intended to prefigure the main sacrifice which is represented on the two outer faces of the monument', Gordon, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 209.



ARA PACIS: 'THE LARGE PROCESSION' — DETAIL OF THE FRIEZE FROM THE OUTER FACE OF THE PRECINCT WALLS, SOUTH SIDE.  
 Photo German Archaeological Institute, Rome (copyright).



ARA PACIS: 'AENEAS MAKING SACRIFICE' — RELIEF FROM THE WEST FRONT, OUTER FACE, SOUTH SIDE OF THE ENTRANCE.  
*Photo Ashmole Archive, King's College, London.*





ARA PACIS: 'THE SMALL PROCESSION' — DETAIL OF THE FRIEZE FROM THE WALLS OF THE INNER ALTAR, OUTER FACE, NORTH SIDE.  
*Photo German Archaeological Institute, Rome (copyright).*





ARA PACIS, THE PRECINCT FROM THE NORTH WEST. BENEATH THE FIGURATIVE RELIEFS ARE THE ACANTHUS SCROLLS (OF WHICH PLATE VII IS A DETAIL), TO THE RIGHT AT THE TOP IS 'AENEAS MAKING SACRIFICE' (SEE PLATE II), THE INNER FACE OF THE PRECINCT WALL GLIMPSED THROUGH THE ENTRANCE APPEARS IN PLATE VI.  
*Photo German Archaeological Institute, Rome (copyright).*



ARA PACIS: 'ITALIA' — RELIEF FROM THE EAST FRONT, OUTER FACE, SOUTH SIDE OF THE ENTRANCE.  
*Photo German Archaeological Institute, Rome (copyright).*



ARA PACIS: BUCKRANIA, PATERAE AND GARLANDS — FRIEZE FROM THE INNER FACE OF THE PRECINCT WALLS, SOUTH SIDE, IN THE FOREGROUND ARE THE WALLS OF THE ALTAR ITSELF.  
*Photo German Archaeological Institute, Rome (copyright).*



ARA PACIS: ACANTHUS SCROLLS — DETAIL OF THE LOWER RELIEFS FROM THE OUTER FACE OF THE PRECINCT WALLS.  
*Photo Ashmole Archive, King's College, London.*

time within this particular space. It thus represents, defines, and enunciates the sacredness of the enclosure by virtue of the signs which the enclosure boasts in its decoration. The present is validated by being the enactment of the 'original' past, the past is meaningful because it is re-lived, re-presented, in the present.

At the same time as it describes function by representation, the Aeneas relief is a prescriptive sign. It looks forward to ritual action, defines and delimits it — setting a representative ideal for the sacrifice which will actually take place. In ritual action (which is always process, a dynamic that leads to and beyond the act of sacrifice), the altar relief is static: not only as a particular furnishing and stage of ritual action but also as a representation of a single frozen moment (even if that 'moment' is in fact a symbolic conflation of actual 'moments'). The altar relief engages in a play with the viewer as he participates in the ritual; it constantly summarizes and conflates a multifaceted diachronic rite in a synchronic and schematic space. Ritual is action through time while the image is the static synchronic commentary and prescription for this action; although, when it partakes in the rite (by being a decoration of the Ara Pacis), it may be symbolically 'activated'. The viewer is of course never an objective or distanced observer; he is always a participant, or potential participant, an initiate, in the ritual.

In effect, there is a play of time. For the relief foretells in a general way throughout the year on non-sacrificial days what will happen on the special day of sacrifice, and also more specifically what will happen when the sacrificial procession moves through the gates past the relief to the ritual act at the altar when the appointed day of sacrifice has come. But the image also looks back to what has happened and stands therefore for the general truth, the eternal value of an act which can happen only occasionally. Marking sacred space and action in this way, Roman images function in order to define the meanings of religion. Their very presence in sanctuaries is a kind of visual theology.

All these meanings are borne by the Aeneas relief of the Ara Pacis in its particular position and context at different times and for different viewers. In terms of the notion of 'deferral', it is significant that many of these meanings stand for an act that will happen, or has happened (in fact an act that is both past and future, an act that ritually creates the terms for temporality in religion). Even on the day of sacrifice, the relief never actually represents what is happening now where it is happening. Its reference is in a general sense to the kind of act it portrays — but there is always a gap (temporal and spatial) between the image and what it refers to.

Deferral is in fact built into the iconography of the scene. Not only are the *aedes* and the gods in it located away from the altar (something both disguised and emphasized by the fact that the image juxtaposes the two locations into a single panel), but the action of libation is specifically not the action of sacrifice. The living sow is not the animal slaughtered or during slaughter. The living sow stands for the preliminary nature of the libation represented (on a scene which is itself placed at a preliminary position outside the door of the precinct). The Aeneas scene, perpetually frozen in an uncompleted sacrifice stands always as a pre-sacrifice at the sacred entrance, but also for the perpetual incompleteness of sacrificial action itself because of the deferral that characterizes it. In the Ara Pacis, where there is no *aedes*, there is no cult image, no representation of a god to receive the propitiation of the site. Of course there must be such a god; but the greater the ideological need to construct that deity imaginatively (as opposed to visually through a cult statue), the greater the factor of deferral.

### III. THE SACRIFICIAL PROCESSIONS

Processions also appear in a wide variety of contexts in Roman art: on altars (for example, the Ara Pacis), sanctuary walls (for instance, the Ara Pacis and the Ara Pietatis), arches (for example, that of Titus in Rome), and columns. They play a tantalizing game with the viewer since they always evoke sacrifice (through the animals, ritual implements, and so forth represented) and yet the sacrifice is always deferred. Thus the main theme and end of the ritual occasion depicted is always an absent goal.

In the Ara Pacis the effect of such deferral is particularly pronounced. The 'large processions' on the long sides of the exterior walls both lead from the sanctuary door at the east towards the sanctuary door at the west (Pls I and IV). However, instead of continuing round the wall onto the western face (as for instance the Parthenon frieze does), the procession is 'interrupted' by the panels on either side of the door. To the right as one faces the altar is the scene with Aeneas and to the left a now very fragmentary relief usually interpreted as Mars with the infant Romulus and Remus. The rhythm of processional movement is disturbed by the static panels with a disruption or at least switch of subject matter.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Aeneas relief (which we have in relatively good condition), the scene gives us a sacrifice to which the procession is moving. But it is not *the* sacrifice (since it is not inside the *temenos*, or sanctuary precinct, but on the outside wall) nor is it a representation of any actual sacrifice but rather a mythological (or at best myth-historical) act — which generally and ideologically validates not only the altar and the procession leading to it but also the Roman viewer who is proceeding past it into the sanctuary.

Inside the precinct, along the low walls at the altar sides and encircling them, is a second frieze procession (Pl. III). It is preserved well in some parts, but is very fragmentary or lost in others. Its scale is much smaller than that of the outside wall. Is it the same procession or a different one? Some would like the altar frieze to portray the annually recurring sacrifice while the exterior frieze shows actual people (the imperial family and senators) performing the original rite of consecrating the altar.<sup>25</sup> On similar lines, others have emphasized the contrast of a specific and unique event celebrated on the precinct walls as opposed to the altar frieze which represents the annual celebration — 'simultaneously a unique event and a single instance of the cyclically recurring ritual'.<sup>26</sup> However, all such views are limited by the 'naturalism' which I discussed earlier. They want the different figures and portions of the altar to have single, simply definable meanings which it is the role of scholars to disentangle. While I would not argue that any such scholarly interpretations are necessarily wrong, it seems to me unnecessary to insist on the singleness or exclusivity of such meanings. The Ara Pacis was a highly creative complex of sculpture arranged in a very careful programme which invited creative interpretation from its viewers. One of the questions deliberately and tantalizingly left open by the altar's structure was the relation of the two friezes. Viewers could make up their own minds.

The frieze on the altar itself inside the precinct is unfortunately fragmentary. In particular the whole section at the rear of the altar is lost, which means we cannot ascertain the direction of its procession.<sup>27</sup> Both processions (that on the altar frieze and that on the precinct walls, if they are indeed two rather than one) move in the same direction: from east to west (see Fig. 1). The interior frieze (on the altar itself) curls round the heart of the altar. If two different processions are depicted, then the inner one ends at the altar, while the goal of the outer one is deferred (although, if the frieze represents an actual procession, that too would have ended at the actual altar). If, however, the same procession is represented in different scales on the two friezes, then the outer procession (on the precinct walls) ends at the west (the front entrance), whereas the inner procession begins at the east (by the rear entrance). There would appear to be a problem of continuity.

The fact that the friezes offer a complex set of movements which are not easy to interpret, in addition to the framing of the outside processions with 'static' images, is evidence not of clear differentiation in meaning between the friezes, but of ambiguity. As the effect of any ritual depends on the participants' response, so the sculptures of the Ara Pacis are open to the viewer's interpretation. The limits to this play of subjectivity are precisely the cultural boundaries of ritual and sacrificial experience which viewers would have brought to the Ara Pacis, particularly when they were present during an actual sacrifice, and which we cannot reconstruct. In particular, it would be interesting to know if there was a representation of an altar scene and a sacrifice on the lost part of the altar frieze. If not, then the process of deferral would go to a stage further — offering only fulfilment in the sacrificial act of the actual ritual.

<sup>24</sup> On the "'arrested" movement' of these reliefs — 'more an icon than a narrative scene', see Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 205–6.

<sup>25</sup> Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 15 f.

<sup>26</sup> P. J. Holliday, 'Time, History and Ritual on the Ara Pacis Augustae', *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990), 542–57, quote 554.

<sup>27</sup> Because this portion of the altar is lost, I ignore the debate about its possible iconography, on which see H. Kähler, 'Die Ara Pacis und die augusteische Friedenseer', *JDAI* 69 (1954), 67–100 and Simon, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 31–3.



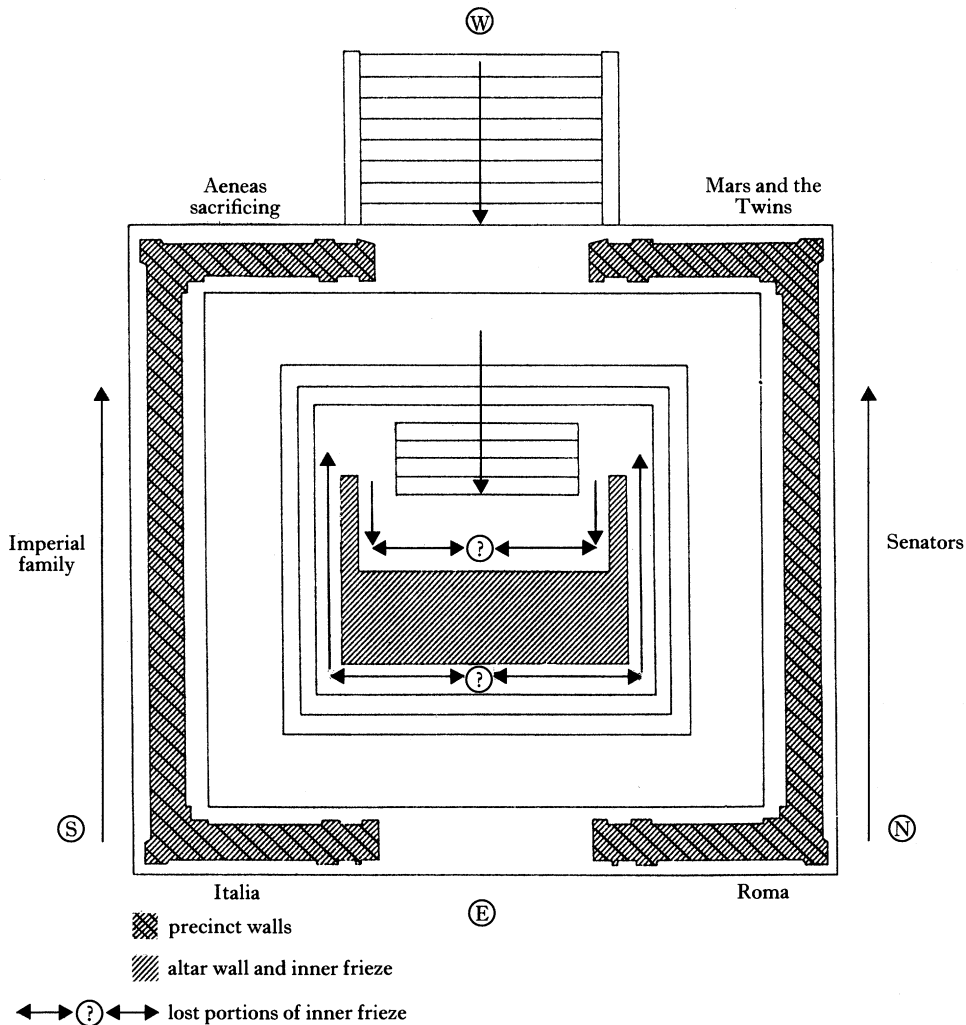


FIG. I

The notion of the gap is important in a further respect. The frieze offers us on the inner altar wall images of animals — including what is either a bull, an ox or a cow — being led to sacrifice (Pl. III). A cow also appears in the famous relief usually called ‘Tellus’ or ‘Italia’ at the south side at the east (the back) of the altar’s exterior wall (Pl. V).<sup>28</sup> One precondition of fruitful plenty in the years of the Pax Augusta is the cow — the animal which ploughs the earth for man (e.g. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.63ff.) and which the earth nourishes in order that man can bring it to the sacrificial altar, as in the altar frieze (e.g. Ovid, *Fasti* iv.629f.). In the actual sacrifice a white cow would probably have been slaughtered within the *temenos*.<sup>29</sup> The death of one of the animals most necessary to human life is a kind of insurance for the continuation of

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of some of the complexities of this scene, and some of the identifications given it, see Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 172–6.

<sup>29</sup> This is the conclusion scholars draw from a fragmentary inscription probably of Caligula’s time: *CIL* vi, 32347a. See e.g. H. le Bonniec, *Ovide: Les Fastes I* (1965), *ad Fasti* 1.720, p. 110. Ovid’s own text on the sacrifice to Pax ‘perfusa [or percussa with Frazer] victima fronte’ does not specify the victim, and it may be that other animals than cows were slaughtered at the Ara Pacis. If we

follow the iconographical hints in the imagery, such victims could certainly have included sheep and perhaps pigs. See also Wissowa, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 334–5. The third-century A.D. *Feriale Duranum* corroborates this assumption by recording male cattle (bulls or oxen) a being offered to male deities, and cows as the offering for goddesses such as Salus or Pax; see R. O. Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyri* (1971), inscription no. 117, pp. 422–9.



that life.<sup>30</sup> The notion of the gap — of the loss of what is one's own as the guarantee of the preservation of one's own — is built into the ideology of sacrifice. At the heart of sacrifice is the great gap of death, which in the case of sacrificial killing is a kind of aversion of disaster, a shunning of death by the sacrificers through death.

#### IV. SACRIFICE AND DEATH

The Ara Pacis is eloquent on the subject of death. Around the inner walls of the enclosure is a frieze of garlands boasting many fruits hanging between the skulls of dead cows. Above the garlands are images of paterae or sacrificial vessels (Pl. VI).<sup>31</sup> Even as sacrifice took place, its participants were surrounded by the *memento mori* of its results — the fruitfulness of life bought at the ritual cost of death. Just as the Aeneas relief both presaged and looked back to the sacrificial action and function of the sanctuary, so the Italia scene (in the opposite position at the back of the altar to the Aeneas relief at its front) offers a golden age fantasy of fruitfulness which in Augustan ideology marked the distant past, the Augustan present, and the immediate future. The fruitful bliss of the Italia scene, cow and all, is insured by the procession of cows to their death at this very altar, by the cows becoming the skulls from which the garlands hang. The visual pun works in both Latin and English: the garlands *depend* on the skulls. The cow, a recurring image in its different forms in the precinct, is a visual metaphor for the reciprocity of sacrifice, for what depends on what and for the cost of Augustan plenty. The scene of Italia could not be there but for this altar, could have no meaning but for the skulls. In the Ara Pacis, the cows of fruitfulness, the cows of sacrifice, and the skulls of the precinct wall represent as one thematic continuity the sacrificial transaction by which man's social life is insured and linked to the sacred.

However, sacrifice in Roman ideology is more than 'a unifying and re-creative social phenomenon'.<sup>32</sup> At times, in Roman poetry of the late Republic and early Empire, the act of sacrifice may define the golden age, when the blood of animals was spilled for the gods instead of the blood of fellow-men (e.g. Catullus 64.386–408), or may represent celebration (as in the sacrifice on behalf of Caesar in Virgil, *Georg.* III.22–3). But the image of sacrificial blood is an unstable metaphor — a metaphor liable to imply the reverse. In Lucretius, sacrifice — one of the *impia facta* of Religion (I.83) — is tied to the sense of fear (v.1161–8). In Virgil's *Georgics*, 'two interpretations of ox-slaughter — as impious crime and unifying ceremony — are balanced at the very centre' in the form of the sacrifices at II.536–7 and III.22–3.<sup>33</sup> In both *Georg.* II.536–7 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* xv.95–142 the combined image of animal sacrifice and the eating of meat is used to define the end of the golden age. At the very least, the image of sacrifice is an ambivalent one. While it establishes social life through ritual killing, it also evokes the gap of death which gapes before that social life at its boundary and undermines its very foundations, its very meaning, with a great denial. Ritual killing and imagined religious worlds to be placated seem (like imperial 'apotheosis') to be the defence of Roman ideology against the deconstructive fact of death. But it is ironic that death itself must be the prophylactic barrier to death.

In the *Carmen Saeculare*, Horace prays that the prayers of Augustus, entreated of the gods by the slaughter of white bulls, be answered (vv. 49–52).

quaeque vos bubus veneratur albis  
clarus Anchisae Venerisque sanguis,  
impetret, bellante prior, iacentem  
lenis in hostem.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Burkert, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 2–3 on the Ara Pacis.

<sup>31</sup> On this part of the frieze and more generally on the widespread imagery of 'bucrania' (cattle skulls) — but without any sense of a deconstructive or ambivalent meaning — see Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 115–17.

<sup>32</sup> T. N. Habinek, 'Sacrifice, Society and Vergil's Ox-Born Bees', in M. Griffith and D. J. Mastrorarde (eds), *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (1990),

209–23, quote p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> Habinek, *op. cit.* (n. 32), 213–15, quote p. 215. His argument has been contested by R. Thomas, 'The "Sacrifice" at the End of the *Georgics*, Aristaus and Virgilian Closure', *CP* (1991, forthcoming) — although Thomas accepts the ambivalence of sacrifice in Roman ideology which Habinek implies. I am grateful to Don Fowler for referring me to both these papers.

Whatever he of Ancises' and Venus' pure blood  
 (a warrior heretofore, now lenient to the fallen  
 foe) entreats of you with white bulls,  
 grant him his prayers.

(Translated W. G. Shepherd)

Significantly, the image of blood — which echoes in the references to war and sacrificial slaughter — is transferred to the Princeps upon whom the success of these acts depends.<sup>34</sup> To be Augustus is an act of blood (in both the kin and carnage senses of the word), and upon the Augustan blood of divine progeniture, war, and sacrifice rests the image of the golden age of Augustan plenty (vv. 57–60):

iam Fides et Pax et Honos Pudorque  
 priscus et neglecta redire Virtus  
 audet, apparetque beata pleno  
 Copia cornu.

Now Faith, and Peace, and Honour,  
 and pristine Modesty, and Manhood neglected,  
 dare to return, and blessed Plenty appears  
 with her laden horn.

This image of blissful plenty including Pax is like the balmy fantasy of Italia on the Ara Pacis: in Horace, as on the altar, Augustan plenty rests on the fact of death. Nor is this problematic relationship confined to political or 'Augustan' themes. In *Odes* 1.4 the poet's celebration of the return of spring turns sombre as the necessity for celebratory sacrifice leads to the inescapable fact of death. There is a brilliant chiasmus whereby the dancing of the deities at springtime (vv. 5–8) leads to the fittingness of human celebrations (vv. 9–10) and the parallel fittingness of sacrifice to appease those deities (vv. 11–12), which in its own right leads to the dance of death (vv. 13–14). The relevant lines (vv. 5–14) read as follows:

iam Cytherea choros ducit Venus imminente Luna,  
 iunctaeque Nymphis Gratiae decentes  
 alterno terram quatiunt pede, dum gravis Cyclopum  
 Vulcanus ardens visit officinas.  
 nunc decet aut viridi nitidum caput impedire myrto  
 aut flore terrae quem ferunt solutae;  
 nunc et in umbrosis Fauno decet immolare lucis,  
 seu poscat agna sive malit haedo.  
 pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas  
 regumque turris . . .

Cytherea leads the dance by moonlight,  
 the seemly Graces hand in hand  
 with Nymphs tread the rhythm while flamy Vulcan  
 inspects the Cyclopes' gloomy works.  
 Now is the time to deck your glistening hair  
 with green myrtle or the flowers  
 of the liberated earth, to sacrifice to Faunus  
 in the shady wood a lamb or a kid.  
 Pallid death kicks impartially at the doors  
 of hovels and mansions . . .

(Translated W. G. Shepherd)

The ambiguous theme of dance ('Gratiae . . . quatiunt pede' (vv. 6–7) and 'pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede' (v. 13)) encloses the parallelism of celebration and sacrifice articulated in the anaphora of 'nunc decet' (vv. 9 and 11). The themes of spring and love (vv. 19–20) become

<sup>34</sup> For the image of sacrificial blood and its transference to new life in a different context, see Horace, *Odes* III.13 with R. Hexter, 'O Fons Bandusiae: Blood and Water in Horace, *Odes* III.13', in Whitby *et al.*, op. cit. (n. 9),

131–9. On such patterns of life and death in Horace (but without special reference to sacrifice), see N. Rudd, 'Patterns in Horatian Lyric', *AJPh* 81 (1960), 373–92.

inseparable from that of death — both the death which we inflict through sacrifice and the death which dances at the door of the rich and the poor alike. The verbal imagery of Roman lyric, like the visual imagery of Roman art, is unable to extricate living from the problematic of dying and the implicit negation by which death (whether inflicted by us or upon us) undermines life.

On the face of it the Italia relief of the Ara Pacis is the least significant part of the altar for a discussion that proposes to be about sacrifice. But, on the contrary, it is precisely because the relief's relation to sacrifice is at the same time so tenuous and so essential that it is important. This scene (like the very fragmentary representation of Roma in the corresponding position on the other side of the rear entrance of the *temenos* — if indeed it is Roma) offers, in the present viewing moment in this very image, the goal or rather the resultant effect of the sacrificial action of the rest of the altar. The positive implications of the Italia panel cannot be separated from imagery that reeks of killing. Every image on the relief — the cow and the sheep (another animal that appears in the sacrificial procession on the altar), the personifications seated on bird and sea monster, the central female figure nourishing the infants — whatever their meanings, which are the complex and idiosyncratic construct of a new imperial ideology that was only at that moment in the process of formation, none of this can be separated from the death by which this fantasy of perfection is to be bought. It is a fact of Roman religious ideology that both the act of sacrifice and its literal imagery of death and slaughter must be constantly interpreted to mean life. Not only the Italia relief but also the great panels of acanthus scrolls teeming with birds, frogs, snakes, and other life (which form the bottom layer of the outer wall — which literally underlie its imagery, Pl. VII) are the visual paradigm of this necessary and constraining interpretation.<sup>35</sup> The art of the Ara Pacis could not work without an intense cultural framework of meaning to keep the anarchy of its possible (negative) implications at bay. It is because religion is about the most essential things, that it shows up so strongly a culture's deeper ideological contradictions in the face of precisely the most essential things.

#### V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Long after the identities of the figures portrayed on the Ara Pacis would have been forgotten, sacrifice was still offered at the altar. An exploration of the cultic themes of its imagery offers perhaps a deeper guide (deeper than the uncertainties of identifying particular figures)<sup>36</sup> to the responses the altar would have elicited from its viewers. There would have been a deep response to the sacrificial nature of the reliefs even in Augustan times, when the sculpture also carried immediate political messages. But later, under Hadrian say, when the politics of Augustus were all but forgotten, the sacrificial theme in its ritual context would have remained a primary avenue for understanding the monument. What is interesting is that this very avenue for interpretation — offered by the images of the altar itself in combination with its sacrificial function — should have led in such an ambiguous direction, towards some of the deeper contradictions implicit in Roman religious life.

One important question, especially in the light of Paul Zanker's presentation of Augustan art, is where does an awareness of these contradictions take us? It has been Zanker's signal contribution to establish forever the centrality of images and monuments to any understanding of the cultural, social, and political implications of the Principate. He portrayed images working together in a complex, cohesive, and synthetic manner with texts, rituals, and monuments to propagate a new ideology of empire. Far from seeing any contradictions openly displayed or any possibilities for subversive readings, Zanker emphasized the overwhelmingly unified effect of such Augustan propaganda.<sup>37</sup> To the Romans 'an image was more powerful than the reality, and nothing could shake their faith in the new era' (p. 238). 'No one could

<sup>35</sup> On the symbolism of vine scrolls in the Ara Pacis and Augustan art in general, see Zanker, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 179–83.

<sup>36</sup> See Rose, *op. cit.* (n. 14), 454: figures on the 'Ara Pacis are so idealized that identification based on physiognomy alone is extremely difficult . . . '.

<sup>37</sup> See the comments of A. Wallace-Hadrill in his review of Zanker's book, 'Rome's Cultural Revolution', *JRS* 79 (1989), 157–64, especially 162–3.

escape the impact of the new imagery, whether he consciously paid attention to it or not' (p. 274). 'The impact of the new imagery in the west thus presupposed the acceptance of a complete ideological package' (p. 332). In short, for Zanker, Augustan art unproblematically encapsulates and propagates Augustan ideology — retailing it to a public which accepts its implications wholesale.

What is the impact of the ambivalences and contradictions, which I have examined in the Ara Pacis, on this picture of how Augustan art works? If the Ara Pacis, a prime monument located in the great new imperial complex in the Campus Martius, could evoke ambiguity and uncertainty even during the sacrificial ritual for which it had been designed, can we be sure that no other Augustan monuments might work in a similar way? If the imagery of the Ara Pacis could be read in more than one way by different viewers, how can we decide which way was most normal in Roman culture? As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has noted, 'the possibility for which Zanker does not allow is that the monuments had an ambivalent effect on *all* Romans'.<sup>38</sup>

This problem of the ambivalence of Augustan art — and in particular of the ambivalence of sacrificial representations — raises a still more worrying question about the nature of the Principate itself. Was it really as overwhelming an ideological phenomenon as Zanker's thesis suggests? An emphasis on the ambivalence of the art which propagated the Principate goes rather a long way to undermining the overwhelmingness of its dominance. Can we perhaps sustain Zanker's thesis, however, by arguing that the ambivalences about life and death, and the gaps of deferral, exist only at the religious level, and that on the political plane the message remained deliberately unambiguous? Can we support, then, a view that the religious implications of Roman art went in one direction (towards uncertainty and even contradiction), while the political meanings of the same images reinforced a simple picture of Augustus as the new Aeneas, a paradigm of Roman piety, standing as indispensable mediator between life and death, man and god, Roman war and Roman peace? Richard Gordon has argued that the placing of the princeps at the centre of the visual representation of sacrifice helped to turn religion into 'a naked instrument of ideological domination'.<sup>39</sup> But this begs the very question at issue: if such visual representation frames the emperor in a context of ideological uncertainties and contradictions, then can it really be *reinforcing* imperial power, ideology and domination, as Zanker and Gordon would wish? Perhaps we might say that the prime position of sacrifice in Roman religious ideology provided the dynamic which gave the imperial image its power, but that the gaps, deferral and ambivalences implicit in Roman sacrifice had the potential to undermine the imperial image from within.

Given my own principles of emphasizing the role of viewers and readers in creating meaning, it would be incongruous of me to attempt to legislate about any of these questions. But it does seem that a number of positions are available for students and scholars to adopt today, just as there were a number of positions available even in Augustus' own time. There was no one simple view of the emperor. There was a multiplicity of views created competitively in numerous monuments and texts, and themselves creatively transformed in the experience and according to the prejudices of the people whose father the emperor claimed to be.

*Jesus College, Cambridge, and Courtauld Institute of Art*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 163.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon, *op. cit.* (n. 2), esp. 202–19, quote 207.