Created Memories: (Mis)identification of Monuments in Early Modern Rome

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Introduction

“The sum of what Rome was, its own ruin teaches”

Francesco Albertini, *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae et Veteris Urbis Romae* [A Small Work About the New and Old Marvels of the City of Rome]¹

Connection of the historic and the contemporary city was both actual and idealised in early modern Rome. Remains of the Roman Empire littered the piazzas, and supported the walls of new buildings, while life carried on around them. With the ancient inhabited alongside the early modern, experience and knowledge of the parallel cities became intertwined, and progressively integral to civic identity. As the popes took charge of the landscape, casting themselves as new Augusti and the champions of *Roma sancta renovata* [sacred Rome restored] through reinvigoration of its monuments, the city became the place to see antiquity and – more importantly – to be seen doing so.² Cultural tourists, dilettantes, and scholars flocked to Rome.³ While literary and visual culture celebrated new discoveries of the past,⁴ Rome’s citizens and visitors oriented their new understandings within contemporary urban life. The relationship between Rome’s ruined past and its early modern interpretation was not, however, as easily achieved as Albertini suggested in 1510.

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1 Francesco Albertini, *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae et Veteris Urbis Romae* (Rome: Per Jacobum Mazochium, 1510), 47. All translations are the author’s own.


3 Prominent amongst theories forwarded at the time – and of particular relevance to this article – was that the study of antiquity was fundamental to successful modern practice. Leon Battista Alberti, *L’Architettura (De Re Aedificatoria)* [Architecture (Regarding Built Objects)] (Venice: Francesco Franceschi, 1458), 16.6.2; Sebastiano Serlio, *Tutte l’Opere d’Architettura et Prospettiva [All of the Works of Architecture and Perspective]* (1519; New Jersey: The Gregg Press incorporated, 1964), 3.68; and Andrea Palladio, *I Quattro Libri dell’Architettura* [The Four Books of Architecture] (Venice: Appresso Bartolomeo Carampello, 1616), 1.5

4 The most influential of these were *guide* [guide books] and *vedute* [views of the city]. For the role of *guide*, Rose Marie San Juan, *Rome: A City Out of Print* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 58-60; and for that of *vedute* Clemente Marigliani, “Lo «Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae» e I Viaggiatori del Cinquecento,” [The «Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae» and the Tourists of the 1500s] in *Roma e la Campagna Romana nel Grand Tour* [Rome and the Roman Countryside in the Grand Tour], ed. Marina Formica (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2009), 85-86.
Centuries of *spolia* and *renovatio* had blurred the lines of the ancient Roman cityscape. Amongst those monuments lost was the richly ornamented *Ara Pacis Augustae* (*Altar of Augustan Peace*) (Fig. 1). Created in 13-9 BCE in honour of Augustus’ triumphant return, the altar remained prominent in the city while the Empire lasted.\(^5\) By the end of antiquity the *Ara Pacis* was likely submerged in the rising marshes of the Campus Martius.\(^6\) As the former Augustan precinct became the site of Rome’s northern urban development, the altar was further buried. When rediscovered in the mid fifteenth century, the *Ara Pacis* was in pieces.\(^7\) In 1569 these were subsequently dispersed as unidentified, but nonetheless beautiful and admirable, Roman reliefs.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) *Res. Gest.* 12; and for the later imperial history of the *Ara Pacis*, Monique Webber, “*Ara Pacis Imperatorum*: The Post-Augustan *Ara Pacis Augustae*” (PhD diss., The University of Melbourne, 2014).

\(^6\) The altar began to sink in the Hadrianic period, when a retaining wall was built around it. Anthony Bonanno, “Tradition in Late Antique Sculpture: Conservation, Modernization, Production,” *Acta Jutlandica* 69 (1994): 20-54. There are suggestions in the altar’s friezes that it was reworked in late antiquity, indicating that the wall protected the monument until that time. Diane Atnally Conlin, *The Artists of the *Ara Pacis*. The Process of Hellenization in Roman Relief Sculpture* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 51. The altar was submerged by the early medieval period. Simona Dolari, “Riscoperta e Fortuna dei Rilievi dell’Ara Pacis nell’Età della Rinascita,” [The Rediscovery and Fortune of the *Ara Pacis* relief in the Renaissance Period] *Engramma* 126 (2015): http://www.gramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=380 (May 2015). For concision Dolari’s article, as the most recent discussion of the early modern *Ara Pacis*, will be the main source for the altar’s chronology.

\(^7\) Dolari, “Riscoperta”.

Disconnected from their history and site, the altar reliefs were absorbed into existing areas and ideas of the city. The Augustan Ara Pacis was not, however, lost to memory.

The seemingly lost Ara Pacis persisted as an ideal in the search for Roma antica [ancient Rome] while its fragments were found, purchased, and again dispersed. Into the late seventeenth century scholars, writers, and tourists attempted to locate the altar, to discern its history, and to articulate its meaning in their own urban environment. Concurrently, the altar’s site and reliefs inspired an analogous discourse that reconciled the remembered past with the contemporary city. The essential chronology of the early modern Ara Pacis has been documented by modern scholarship.5 The meaning of the altar’s interpretation, and its impact upon the city, is yet to be explored.6 Misidentification of both the physical Ara Pacis and its idea created a disjunct of the intellectual record with the physical landscape. Without concrete identification of the site and reliefs on the one hand, and a lack of physical evidence for the Ara Pacis idea on the other, this was fundamentally subjective knowledge. Its potential to impact upon contemporary life – not just how people moved through the urban environment, but also what they thought and valued – was prodigious. Inquiry into the motives and outcomes of the altar’s reception reveals that parallel explanations of the Ara Pacis were communicated. Through perception of the altar as an unrecognised site, as dispersed fragments, and as a constructed ideal, Rome’s past and present entwined. This held consequences for both the real and the imagined city, and now augments our appreciation of the early modern relationship with the ancient urban environment.

The Allure of Antiquity: the Site

The Ara Pacis site was famous even before it was visible to the general public. In 1427 renovations on the Palazzo Lucina on the corner of via del Corso and Piazza di San Lorenzo in Lucina began.11 This palazzo had, unbeknown to its owners and the workers on the site, been built atop the remains of the Ara Pacis (Fig. 2). The renovation, which reached completion in 1510, was not a closed site. It was visited by Flavio Biondo at some time between 1443 and 1446, likely while he was researching the so-called ‘Arch of Domitian’ which immediately precedes the palazzo in his Roma Instaurata [Rome Restored] and its translation Roma Ristaurata [Rome Restored].12 Biondo saw the ground that had been opened beneath the palazzo, and in Roma Instaurata praised the “most beautiful foundations above which it [the palazzo] is built” before they were covered over.13 Aware of the aesthetic quality of what he saw, if not their meaning, Biondo suggests the altar fragments are part of a Domitianic complex related to the adjacent ‘Arch of Domitian’.14
De Urbanitate. Tales of Urban Lives and Spaces

Roma Instaurata was typical of the early modern hunger for all things antique. Both the physical and the intellectual remains of ancient Rome were valued as an impetus for future development, as expressed in the 1542 preface to Eugenio IV of Roma Ristaurata.\footnote{Footnote 3; and Biondo, Roma Ristaurata, np.} In this extended translation of the Roma Instaurata preface, Biondo states his purpose as “to refresh in the memory of men the significance of the ancient edifices; also of the ruins…” of Rome.\footnote{“di rinfrescare ne la memoria de gli huomini la notitia de li antichi edificii; anzi de le ruine…”. Biondo, Roma Ristaurata, np; cf. Biondo, Roma Instaurata, np.} These had made – and continued to make – the city the “head and the mistress of the world…”\footnote{Ibid.} As a text so closely aligned with current attitudes and ideas, Roma Instaurata accordingly enjoyed an exuberant recognition. It swiftly became “the reference text for the topography of ancient Rome throughout the century…”\footnote{“le texte du reference pour la topographie de la Rome antique durant un siècle…”. Coarelli, “Préface,” x.} Inclusion of the Ara Pacis site – and unwittingly the object – in this text significantly impacted upon the area’s status. Without even being visible, or fully identified beyond potentially Domitianic remains, the fragments became part of the cognoscenti’s cityscape. What Biondo expressed was a highly subjective view, which could not be verified through comparison with the evidence. Yet this does not appear to have been an obstacle, either for Biondo when deciding to include the palazzo site, or for his readers. It certainly did not diminish
the text’s popularity. That someone had seen the ancient fragments, and had recognised their beauty so that others could vicariously experience the same, was sufficient. This emphatically authored view of the site allows us to inquire into why and how such encounters were articulated.

In his praise of the Palazzo Lucina foundations, Biondo was recommending that visitors to Rome view a site of which the main attraction was invisible. This was not only because a Domitianic edifice may have been there, but equally because the ruins were positively judged by early modern aesthetics. As Roma Instaurata was reprinted, this new memory of the antico-modern city was reinforced. Lucio Fauno’s 1542 translation of “amplissima [most beautiful]” as “meravigliosi [marvellous]” a century after Biondo visited the site emphasises the value placed upon the beauty and presence of antiquity. The foundations were long gone, either excavated or covered over. Nonetheless, the site that the Ara Pacis pieces had occupied – and Biondo’s version – still contributed to the urban experience.

The Imagined City: the Idea of the Ara Pacis

The subjective construction of Rome’s past perpetuated by Fauno, founded on a self-consciously partially understood site, was not an isolated occurrence. It was instead symptomatic of interaction with the Ara Pacis. With its physical presence unrecognised, the altar existed initially as an idea in early modern Rome. Its importance to the Empire notwithstanding, the Ara Pacis itself featured in relatively few ancient sources. Of these, the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries possessed solely Ovid’s Fasti and examples of a Neronian as bearing an image of the altar upon its reverse. To this a Tiberian provincial type, now generally believed to be a Renaissance forgery

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20 cf. Ibid; and Biondo, Roma Ristaurata, ch. 15, 28r.


but at the time considered to be genuine, was added.\textsuperscript{23} The paucity of the ancient evidence notwithstanding, these sources revealed that Augustus, the emperor revered by popes and the populace for his stewardship of Rome, had created an altar celebrated by a Roman poet. The concept of such an altar was, for Guillaume Du Choul in 1581, of sufficient prestige to allow the Ara Pacis to enter the early modern understanding of Rome.

Despite situating itself in scholarship primarily as a religious study, Du Choul’s \textit{Discours de la Religion des Anciens Romains} [Discourse on the Religion of the Ancient Romans] functions equally as a guide book.\textsuperscript{24} Du Choul frequently orients the reader in contemporary Rome, describing the current aspect of an historic edifice before explaining its ancient function.\textsuperscript{25} With the Ara Pacis site having been found, but not recognised as such, that monument could not be described in the cityscape. Yet it is discussed alongside edifices that could be visited, engineering a presence for the ‘lost’ altar in Rome.\textsuperscript{26} Even without being directed to a precise site the reader is invited to remember, and to reflect upon, the Ara Pacis as a former participant in the city. Du Choul was, of course, not aware that the site he imagined was that visited by Biondo. From the perspective of urban history and theory, the two readings of the Ara Pacis site present a significant parallel. Arising from a similar early modern context of revived antiquity Biondo and Du Choul equally privilege the idea of the historical city, and their interaction with the same, over its physical reality.\textsuperscript{27} At the same time, lacunae in knowledge about the edifice – whether it be its name or its location – are pushed aside. Appreciation of the edifice’s role in the ancient city, and early modern perception of the same, are instead emphasised. For Du Choul, this is amplified in his exploration of the Ara Pacis in contemporary politics.

Du Choul’s text is broadly directed at a French/Italian audience with Claude d’Urfé, the tutor of the Dauphin, addressed from the beginning as its most significant reader.\textsuperscript{28} It is to D’Urfé that Du Choul directs his exploration of ancient mores and their contemporary application, including the role of \textit{pax} (‘peace’). Pausing his discussion of \textit{pax} in imperial coinage, Du Choul stresses that “it is the figure of peace that is so desired, which nourishes public happiness…” and urges D’Urfé to instil these principles in the \textit{dauphin}.\textsuperscript{29} Immediately below, the Ara Pacis as dedicated by Augustus and perpetuated by Ovid, Tiberius, and Nero is highlighted as the epitome of religion, governance, and honour.\textsuperscript{30} Distanced from its site, Biondo’s Ara Pacis became a subjective experience of the antico-modern city. Subject to the same conditions in a different context, the altar became for Du Choul a device for engaging with the city’s past and creating an \textit{exemplum} for the future.

\textbf{Possession and Prestige: the Reliefs}

As the impact of the Ara Pacis site and memory persisted through Biondo and Du Choul’s texts, the reliefs excavated from beneath the Palazzo Lucina gained their own notoriety. Biondo was not the only prominent figure to visit the site. In the late fifteenth century a member of the circle of Andrea Mantegna’s produced the engraving \textit{Senators}, after Mantegna’s original design.


\textsuperscript{24} Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 4 describes his text as a “small discourse, which I have written about the religion of the ancient Romans…” ["petit discours, que i ay fait de la religion des anciens Romains…”].

\textsuperscript{25} See Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 5; and 9.

\textsuperscript{26} Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 16.

\textsuperscript{27} cf. Biondo, \textit{Roma Instaurata}, ch. 15, 15r; and Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 16.

\textsuperscript{28} Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 2r-v.

\textsuperscript{29} “C’est la figure de la paix tant désirée, qui nourrit la felicité publicque…” Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 15.

\textsuperscript{30} Du Choul, \textit{Discours}, 16.
for the *Triumph of Caesar*. And in the early sixteenth century Agostino Veneziano’s engraving *Untitled (Panel of Ornament with Acanthus and a Swan)* was produced. The ‘senators’ section of the *Triumph* takes its composition from the processional friezes of the Ara Pacis found at the *palazzo* site, and the shield of the centurion on the far left its pattern from the exuberant floral relief captured by Veneziano. The similarity of these images to the Ara Pacis reliefs not only confirms the identity of Biondo’s “most beautiful foundations…” It also reveals that Veneziano and Mantegna similarly saw, and appreciated, the altar fragments without knowing what they were. That early modern artists should reflect ancient discoveries in their work is, in itself, remarkable. Especially for Mantegna who believed “that good ancient statues were the most perfect and possessed the most beautiful proportions, which the natural does not show…” However, like Biondo’s and Du Choul’s celebration of the inaccessible altar, the use of the Ara Pacis as an exemplum – when it was just one of many unidentified fragments – emphasises the status of the antique in early modern culture.

Veneziano and Mantegna neither give the reliefs the Domitianic identity suggested by Biondo, nor do they proffer a new one. Veneziano’s engraving is notably untitled. Sold from the workshop of Marcantonio Raimondi, an engraver as famous for his classical images as for his reproductions of Raphael’s drawings, it would nonetheless have been clear that Veneziano’s engraving depicted a Roman monument. Any information beyond an aesthetic antiquity is – in Veneziano’s construction – omitted as superfluous. Mantegna’s visual response to the reliefs also centres on their aspect. In comparison to the carefully recorded and recognisable *Meta Romuli* in the fresco background, the deconstructed Ara Pacis here exists as a source of inspiration to be elaborated upon and manipulated. Like Biondo and Veneziano, Mantegna has valued the Ara Pacis for its own beauty and aura of history. Between circa 1443 and 1535 these three men had accessed Rome’s history through the meeting of its ancient and contemporary urban environments. Even without a name for the fragments they viewed, this shared interaction had a significant impact upon its resultant knowledge. Their different media and audiences notwithstanding, Biondo, Veneziano, and Mantegna conveyed coherent readings of the reliefs. As with the readership of *Roma Instaurata* and *Roma Ristaurata* both the site, and the act of its visit and interpretation, persisted in visual and extended to literary culture after the reliefs were dispersed.

In 1568-1569 Cardinal Giovanni Ricci da Montepulciano purchased “fifteen or eighteen” blocks from the Ara Pacis site. Of these, pieces including the figurative ‘Tellus’ panel and some of the garland reliefs were sold to Duke Cosimo I to adorn his Florentine *palazzo*. In his first letter to

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34 “amplissima fundamenta…”. Biondo, *Roma Instaurata*, ch. 15, 15r.
35 Vickers, “Mantegna,” 112-113; and Dolari, “Riscoperta”.
39 Although Mantegna’s final composition differs slightly from *Senators*, the elements praised by Vasari – the arrangement of the figures, and the inclusion of children – are those inspired by the reliefs. Vasari, *Le Vite. Tomo III*, 396-400.
40 “XV o XVIII…”. Ricci, “11 Febbraio 1569,” 22; and Dolari, “Riscoperta”.
Bartolomeo Concini, the duke’s secretary, Ricci, directs the reader’s attention initially to the site.\textsuperscript{42} Like Biondo, he viewed the pieces at the \textit{palazzo} and recognised the importance of this location to their meaning. Informing Concini that the “pieces…[were] found underground…”\textsuperscript{43} Ricci emphasises the connection that he had perceived between the pieces and the cityscape.\textsuperscript{45} From the beginning of their post-excavation history, Ricci was the author of the reliefs’ interpretation. His initial experience of the reliefs was enacted in the same space as those of Biondo, Veneziano, and Mantegna, and his understanding shared many of their ideas.

Even before they left Rome, the scholarship around the altar’s site was expanded to include its reliefs. Ricci expands on Biondo’s opinion of the reliefs as Domitianic, adding that “they say [that the reliefs are] from a triumphal arch built by Domitian…”\textsuperscript{44} Yet for the cardinal – and, he supposed, for his prospective buyer – the relief’s beauty and antiquity, coupled with popular opinion of its identity, was not adequate. To the stream of writers, artists, and tourists already visiting the Ara Pacis site can be added hired scholars, as Ricci sought the advice of “masters…” and “people of the profession…” about the reliefs.\textsuperscript{45} Although his objective of selling the pieces does not change over the course of the letters, as Ricci discovers more about the academic value of the reliefs his tone shifts.

Main interest in the garland relief in Ricci’s first letter is that “there were many dogs [sic. it was very expensive] to buy it…”.\textsuperscript{46} A month later, the ‘Tellus’ relief is discussed in detail.\textsuperscript{47} It is “a beautiful oddity,” the subject of an interpretative drawing and of a theory about the original edifice’s wider decorative scheme.\textsuperscript{48} Money changing hands is no longer mentioned, nor is the possibility that other pieces were destroyed there.\textsuperscript{49} In so academic a culture as the papal and ducal courts, this scholarly interest would have raised the status of the reliefs.\textsuperscript{50} The “most beautiful foundations…” were still aesthetically valued, but were also judged for their contribution to knowledge of Rome’s architectural history.\textsuperscript{51} Yet upon arrival in Florence, the prestige attached to the reliefs by Ricci was considerably diminished. Although they entered the ducal collection, more spectacular and identifiable works that would confer greater glory on their new owner overshadowed the pieces.\textsuperscript{52} Just as Du Choul could use the conceptual Ara Pacis as a platform for political discourse, so did removal from their site increasingly expose the reliefs to divergent interpretations.

The reliefs that Ricci did not sell to Cosimo I were soon moved to his new villa atop the Pincio Hill (Fig. 3).\textsuperscript{53} There they suffered minimal, if any, physical alteration.\textsuperscript{54} However, transposition to a new site in Rome, with its own pre-existing significance, shifted again their meaning in the early modern landscape. The \textit{palazzo} site, and subsequently the future audience and political use of the reliefs, had previously informed their reception. This was now shaped by transference...
and possession. With the garland reliefs set in the villa façade, and the processions viewed by Mantegna and possibly Biondo inserted into the garden wall, the Ara Pacis pieces became part of a decorative scheme. As the villa reached conclusion under Ricci and his successors, the complex gained fame for its abundance of ancient and contemporary art. In seventeenth century vedute (views) capturing the “most stupendous…” villa, the Ara Pacis reliefs are again unnamed. Grouped amongst the “ancient bas-reliefs inserted into that façade,” they are sketched only in the barest detail or omitted entirely. Appreciation of their beauty and antiquity, as prized by Biondo, Veneziano, and Mantegna, persisted. Conversely, interest in their analysis had dissipated. It had been replaced, as in the other reliefs’ transfer from Rome to Florence, with their potential to contribute to the villa’s overall magnificence and to that of its patron.

Understanding of the reliefs became aligned with – and in some instances subsumed by – the identity of their new owners in the vedute. Images by Étienne du Perac and Pietro Santo Bartoli

55 For placement of the pieces, Dolari, “Riscoperta.”
57 “bassirilievi antichi in quella inserita…”. Falda, Prospettiva del Giardino, 1683.
heightened this connection to the present by focusing on the reliefs. The interest of these prominent figures further evinces that, despite a new context, aesthetic interest expressed at the site persisted for over a century at the villa. Yet the tone and objectives had become suffused with a different, in many ways more contemporary, perspective. Bartoli’s interest in the reliefs is, upon first examination, largely retrospective. The aim of *Admiranda Romanorum*, in which the images were published, was to assist with the study of antiquity through “exemplary marbles…” Bartoli’s engravings accordingly record meticulously and explain the processional friezes. Appreciation of the appearance and history of the reliefs had already been expressed in their early modern history. Bartoli’s approach, however, was neither the purely aesthetic appreciation of Veneziano and Mantegna, nor the inquisitory approach of Biondo and Ricci.

The captions on Bartoli’s engravings identify the religious figures of the friezes, engineering a coherent relationship between the ancient image and its early modern perception. The past does not exist solely as a revered object of beauty. It also has a contemporary function, to increase understanding of the “marvels of Rome…” and their place in the city. The subtitle of the engravings, *in the Medici gardens* makes this explicit. Du Perac’s drawings share with Bartoli’s images their title, close attention to the processional friezes, and lack of further analysis. Although Biondo’s texts were still being consulted, the “most beautiful foundations…” had become an idealised recent past disconnected from their physical reality at the villa. Du Perac, and later Bartoli, were disinterested in the origins of the reliefs. Antiquity was becoming valued predominately as a catalyst for early modern interpretations. These were now aimed at forwarding the contemporary city and reflecting the status of antiquity, scholarship, and beauty upon its owners and authors. In the concurrent memory of the ancient Ara Pacis, these ideas of possession and identity extended to the altar’s imperial patrons.

**Revising the Past and the Present: False Memory**

Du Choul was not the only early modern writer to be intrigued by the Neronian *as*. Illustrated without comment by Jacobus Biaeus in 1618, the *as* was discussed in Sebastiano Erizzo’s 1571 *Discorso* [Discourse] and Francesco Angeloni’s 1641 *La Historia Augusta* [The Augustan History]. Du Choul, Erizzo, and Angeloni all had access to the same coin type, and participated in a culture that prized Ovid. The three writers therefore possessed much of the same evidence with which to interpret the Neronian coin. They did not, however, come to the same conclusions about its meaning. Unlike Du Choul, Erizzo and Angeloni do not attribute the depicted Ara Pacis to Augustus. The later writers instead assume, likely due to the obverse portrait, that it is a Neronian monument. Angeloni must have been aware of the *Fasti* passage about the Ara Pacis. He understands Augustus to have built an Ara Pacis, which he believes Nero later replicated. Erizzo was also conversant with the *Fasti*. Yet he chose to disregard Ovid’s mention of the

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60 “Admiranda Romanorum…”.

61 *in hortis medicaeis*.


63 Footnote 22.

64 Neither Erizzo nor Angeloni mention the Tiberian coin, suggesting that it had a limited audience.


66 Erizzo, *Discorso*, 100; and Angeloni, *La Historia Augusta*, 53.


Ara Pacis, and also some of the *as* reverse legend, to better align the depicted monument with a pre-existing argument. Erizzo inserts the coin into revision of his Temple of Janus section.69 Recognising the role of *pax* in the Janus cult and Neronian politics, Erizzo suggests that the *as* was issued “after he [Nero] closed the Temple of Janus…”70 Alignment of identity and possession was seen in the late sixteenth to seventeenth century understanding of the reliefs. Responding to this current, and contrasting with Du Choul’s historical perspective, Erizzo and Angeloni’s discussions focus on patronage of the Ara Pacis. Divergent in both intent and conclusion, these explanations of the *as* reveal the fragility – and the mutability – of early modern appreciation of the past. This did not prevent the false (in Erizzo’s instance willingly so) memory of the Ara Pacis from participating in the ancient and modern cities.

Explanation of the Ara Pacis as a Neronian edifice posed a moral issue. The traditionally poor opinion of Nero had achieved such virulence in the medieval era that the last Julio-Claudian was frequently vilified in popular culture.71 This persisted into early modern culture, with Andrea Fulvio summarising the emperor’s demise as “at length, with all of the human population being so aggrieved with him, they slaughtered him” when discussing his coinage.72 The same obverse portraits, when paired with an Ara Pacis reverse, cast Nero in an entirely different light. Confronted by this opposing view of the vilified emperor, Erizzo and Angeloni shifted their tone accordingly. When discussing the Ara Pacis coin, both praise Nero’s ability to create and perpetuate *pax*.73 Esteem for remains of Rome’s past was so high that new discoveries forced reconsideration of even widely held views. As a result, memory of the Ara Pacis – even when openly subjective as in *Discorsi* – had the power to prompt revision of a popularly detested figure.

Erizzo and Angeloni’s reception of Nero, not just with regards to the Ara Pacis but as a whole, is considerably more sympathetic than that of their contemporaries. Eschewing tales of matricide and cruelty so beloved by other writers, Erizzo and Angeloni highlight Nero’s kindness to the soldiers and his “liberalità…” in rewarding the populace.74 This sympathetic view is especially true of his architecture. Outlandish projects such as the Domus Aurea were commonly regarded as symptomatic of the young emperor’s wider misplaced arrogance, which extended to his other architectural projects.75 In contrast, Erizzo and Angeloni praise Nero’s “most beautiful…” triumphal arch as depicted on a *sestertius*.76 “Their opinion of Nero, prompted by the idea of such edifices as the Ara Pacis, flew in the face of established attitudes. Conveyed through memory of the Ara Pacis, and thereby of a monument from revered antiquity, this now contributed to early modern knowledge of the city’s past. Erizzo goes on to suggest that the horses once seen atop the arch now adorn the Basilica di San Marco in Venice.”77 Connection of the lost Neronian arch to a contemporary site reveals the importance of tangible interactions with antiquity. Whether a hidden site as in Biondo’s text or a ghosted cityscape as in Du Choul’s, the new possession *in hortis medicaeis*, or connection to a monument outside the city, all of the Ara Pacis readings emphasise the role of place. That the site may not be accessible or authentic is not an obstacle to its significance. It is the experience of landscape, whether real or imagined, that holds the potentiality to alter contemporary life.

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69 Erizzo, *Discorso*, 99-100.
70 “doppo ch’egli chiuse il Tempio di Giano…”. Erizzo, *Discorso*, 100.
72 “tandem toto genere humano in se exacerbatosi ipsius interfector”. Andrea Fulvio, *Illustrium Imagines [Illustrious Images]* (Rome: Jacopo Mazzocchi, 1517), XLIV.
73 Erizzo, *Discorso*, 100; and Angeloni, *La Historia Augusta*, 53.
76 “bellissimo…”. Angeloni, *La Historia Augusta*, 53; Erizzo, *Discorso*, 97; and *RIC I* (Nero) 146.
77 Erizzo, *Discorso*, 100.
Conclusion

By the end of the seventeenth century, the Ara Pacis existed in a series of parallel, yet often intertwined, translations into early modern society. Whether physically and unknowingly or theoretically and idealistically, the altar was visited repeatedly over the course of its early modern period. These experiences, and the interpretations that arose from them, were not inconsequential. Celebrated in visual and literary culture, the (mis)identification of the Ara Pacis was perpetuated as a significant construct in contemporary understandings of the city. Concurrent dissemination of this idea, as subjectively voiced by prominent commentators, prompted further encounters with the altar. Depending upon the audience's reading of the texts, their own knowledge of the Ara Pacis could be singular or multiple, consistent or contradictory, within the broader context of early modern interaction with the altar. Sense of the past was constantly in motion, as new interactions with the ancient landscape augmented existing ideas.

Within the shifting concept of the Ara Pacis, authored expressions of its meaning functioned as touchstones for the altar's cumulative reading. The images and texts in which these were expressed varied in intent and interpretation. Nonetheless, key concepts of landscape, beauty, antiquity, and reflected identity can be traced from Biondo's initial praise of the "most beautiful foundations…” to the reappraisal of Nero as a patron of pax. These shared ideals echo wider concepts of antiquity in the early modern period, demonstrating their universal application. The lure of the past, and its relevance to the contemporary city, was projected even onto objects that were unidentified or unseen. As a result, monuments such as the Ara Pacis became active contributors to understandings of the landscape, and the activities enacted within it. The Ara Pacis presents a unique insight into how the historic city was perceived and expressed. Disjunct between physical interaction with the unidentified reliefs, and the concurrent imagined altar, crystallises the motivations and desires that underpinned early modern articulations of the past. The open subjectivity of experience and analysis consciously engineered a ghosted historic landscape, parallel to that of the early modern city. In a culture that in many ways defined its present through its past, immersion in this antico-modern urbanism allowed its inhabitants to shape Rome's future.

78 cf. "amplissima fundamenta…". Biondo, Roma Instaurata, ch. 15, 15r; Erizzo, Discorso, 100; and Angeloni, La Historia Augusta, 53.
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