Pharaonic Egypt and the Ara Pacis in Augustan Rome

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Abstract: This paper explores processes of cultural appropriation, and specifically Augustan visual receptions of pharaonic Egypt. As a test case, I consider the possibility of Egyptianizing precedents for the Ara Pacis, including the architecture of Middle and New Kingdom jubilee chapels. This requires looking at the Augustan interventions into the traditional temple complexes of Egypt, the transmission of imperial ideas about pharaonic Egypt to Rome, their uses there, and the role of pharaonic appropriations within a broader landscape of Aegyptiaca in Rome.

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1. Appropriations

The Ara Pacis Augustae is the product of a modern appropriation (fig. 1). Fragments were known from the sixteenth century and there was serious interest in the nineteenth, but the decisive intervention came under Mussolini in 1937-38, when the majority of the altar was excavated under the direction of Giuseppe Moretti in a spectacular feat of engineering that included freezing the groundwater at the site. The subsequent reconstruction presented a monument that was compellingly whole. Within a new pavilion designed for it by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, it could be visited and walked around, and its program and sculpture studied in detail. This splendid presence was coupled with a striking absence. The monument had been removed from its original location in the southern Campus Martius and was now reconstructed as the fourth side of the Piazzale Augusto Imperatore, the other three sides consisting of new buildings framing Augustus’ Mausoleum (fig. 2). Tying these elements together, the Res Gestae of Augustus was reproduced on the external wall of the Ara Pacis pavilion facing the Mausoleum, while on the Piazzale’s modern buildings, modern inscriptions and imagery evoked ancient Roman themes, including visual echoes from the altar itself. Excavated and reconstructed in this way to mark Augustus’ bimillennial anniversary, and inaugurated in 1938 on the emperor’s birthday of Sept 23rd, the Ara Pacis Augustae now linked a Fascist political program to an Imperial past through direct analogy, through the process of reclamation, and through its reconstructed materiality.

In the same years of 1937-38, French archaeologists under the direction of Henri Chevrier and Pierre Lacau were reconstructing the so-called White Chapel at Karnak (fig. 3). Hieroglyphics on its blocks identified this small, stone building as a jubilee chapel of the 12th Dynasty pharaoh Senwosret I (1920-1875 BCE). It had been demolished and buried in the 18th Dynasty foundations of the pylon of Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BCE). Excavating and reconstructing it required engineering sophistication similar to that employed for the Ara Pacis Augustae, but the language used by the French was very different from the political ideology underlying the Ara Pacis’ reconstruction in Rome.

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1 A talk on the White Chapel at Karnak, delivered by John Baines at the University of Michigan in the late 1990’s, provided the stimulus for this paper; for a Roman art historian, the White Chapel’s architectural similarity to the Ara Pacis was striking. I have benefited from comments on oral versions of this paper by audiences at the University of California at Berkeley and Pennsylvania State University. For their very helpful comments on earlier drafts, I am grateful to Melissa Bailey, Jas’ Elsner, Walter Scheidel, and three anonymous readers for *JRS*.


Fig. 1. The Ara Pacis Augustae. Constructed 13-9 BCE, reconstructed 1938 CE. (Photograph courtesy Allan Kohl, Art Images for College Teaching.)

Fig. 2. The Piazzale Augusto Imperatore, constructed around the Mausoleum of Augustus during the Fascist period and including the reconstructed Ara Pacis within Marpurgo’s pavilion at lower left. This pavilion has now been replaced. (Reproduced from Kostof as in n. 3, p. 273, fig. 4.)
strongly aesthetic and apolitical theme runs through the scientific report; the building is
said to evoke Greek perfection. Themes of aesthetic appreciation and cultural value are
not surprising here. France’s modern involvement in Egypt was repeatedly legitimized in
cultural terms, from the Napoleonic military expedition’s *Description de l’Égypte* to
Auguste Mariette’s involvement in founding the Egyptian Antiquities Service in 1858
and establishing the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and more broadly in the role of French
education and literary culture among the urban Egyptian elite—a relationship that ended
abruptly with the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 and the Franco-British
military retaliation.

Fig. 3. The White Chapel at Karnak. Constructed for the jubilee celebrations of
Senwosret I (1920-1875 BCE), demolished and buried in the foundations of the
pylon of Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BCE), reconstructed 1938 CE. (Tore

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6 Lacau and Chevrier as in n. 4, p. 11. On the technical difficulties of the reconstruction,
see p. 3 of the same volume.

*Description* remains a valuable resource: Commission des Sciences et Arts d’Egypte. *Description
is alive and well in Claude Traunecker and Jean-Claude Golvin. *Karnak: Résurrection d’un site.*
Paris: Payot, 1984; the building is described as “ce ravissant petit édifice” (p. 191); moreover, “la
beauté de la Chapelle blanche témoigne incomparablement de l’originalité du génie égyptien” (p.
192).
These two very different reconstructions of 1938 introduce this article’s theme: processes of cultural appropriation. Robert Nelson, in a valuable discussion of appropriation in art, shows how this is a useful idea with which to consider the movement and re-use of visual ideas from one time and place to another. Above all, this is not a neutral process, as implied by the terminology of cultural influence or diffusion: “appropriation is not passive, objective, or disinterested, but active, subjective, and motivated.”

It involves the deliberate selection of elements that are made relevant for a new milieu, as in the 1938 reconstruction of a pharaonic chapel deemed aesthetically exemplary, or of a Roman altar made to link the politics of present and past. In addition, artistic appropriation “is a distortion, not a negation of the prior semiotic assemblage.”

There is neither a complete break with the original meaning or function, nor unbroken continuity, but an important shift from the original meanings, uses and associations of a cultural form or idea. Both the Ara Pacis and the White Chapel retained much of their original structure and visual impact in their reconstructed forms. Still, their new physical settings in Rome and Karnak, and their changed social, political and cultural contexts, brought about a very different reception and impact. Analyzing appropriation therefore means looking not only at the movement of artistic ideas, but asking why certain forms or motifs were taken up for a new purpose, what happened to them in that transformation, and what resonance and significance they had in their new settings.

In this article, I consider Augustan state appropriations from pharaonic Egypt. These form a distinct strand within the broad and multifaceted domain of “Egyptianizing” styles, motifs and ideas in Roman art. They also help illuminate aspects of Augustan visual culture. Egypt played an important role in the late Republican cultural imaginary as well as in its political and economic life, and this formed the background for Augustan actions and ideological gestures toward Egypt. Besides the country’s conquest and new administrative status, the Augustan period saw a sophisticated building program in the traditional temple complexes there. In Rome, Egyptian cultural ideas and visual motifs were part of a rich trove for contemporary cultural and political expression: Augustan Egyptianizing there had a very different context and took shape accordingly. Three themes in addition to Nelson’s will be particularly important in exploring these: Augustan cultural appropriations were classicizing, semantic in their workings, and explicit about their own processes of appropriation.

This paper is structured around a test case for these ideas: possible appropriations from traditional Egyptian temple architecture and decorative design on the Ara Pacis Augustae. The existing scholarship has explored Greek and Italic precedents, as well as

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9 Nelson as in n. 8, p. 119.
10 On the problematic distinction between Egyptian and Egyptianizing in some modern assessments, see Molly Swetnam-Burland, “Egyptian Objects, Roman Contexts: A Taste for Aegyptiaca in Italy.” In Laurent Bricault, Miguel John Versluys and Paul G.P. Meyboom, eds. Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007: 113-136. I employ the term “Egyptianizing” as a convenient way to refer to things that look Egyptian or appeal to Egypt in some way. I do not intend any real distinction between “Egyptian” and “Egyptianizing,” and, pace Swetnam-Burland, I do not mean anything pejorative by the term.
the adaptation of Greek art to create the highly ideological style known as Augustan classicism. I suggest here that another set of cultural references can fruitfully be added. The Ara Pacis seems to have drawn also on the form of Middle and New Kingdom Egyptian jubilee chapels, like the White Chapel at Karnak, as well as late Egyptian design ideas. However, in making this argument, it will not be enough simply to suggest parallels between monuments. It must also be shown that there was knowledge of these precedents and avenues of transmission linking the pharaonic and Augustan material, reason to select these particular ideas or models, and some significance for their appropriation on the completed Ara Pacis. Accordingly, I review aspects of the Augustan temple-building program in Egypt, vectors of communication to Rome, and interactions of pharaonic ideas with pre-existing Egyptianizing practices there. The possible Egyptianizing allusions in the Ara Pacis are then assessed in light of the adjacent obelisk brought from Heliopolis to Rome during the same period, and the two monuments are interpreted as very different Egyptianizing comments on the limits of monarchical power.

My initial juxtaposition of the Ara Pacis and the White Chapel thus has a purpose beyond introducing appropriation as a theme. Although the latter was demolished centuries before the former was built, they can be linked through the White Chapel’s architectural and functional descendants and their possible appropriation for the Ara Pacis. By stimulating an exploration of these connections, this test case helps illuminate a sophisticated and imperializing Augustan engagement with pharaonic visual culture. It also raises questions about the limits of interpretation. These Egyptian precedents for the Ara Pacis cannot be proven, but it is revealing to consider how and why the argument can be made at all.

2. Greek and Italic precedents for the Ara Pacis Augustae

The Altar of Augustan Peace needs little review. It consisted of a central altar on a high podium shaped like a stubby, rectangular U, with its open side originally on the west; several cuttings in the floor for water runoff show that it was not roofed (fig. 4). The altar proper was reached by a steep set of stairs, three up to the altar platform and five more between the projecting wings up to the sacrificial table. It was surrounded by an ambulatory enclosed by temenos walls approximately 6.30m high; these external walls covered an area of c. 11.60 x 10.60m in size, with the east-west axis the longer. Two doorways in the center of the eastern and western walls provided access; coins depicting the monument show these doors closed. On the west side, nine shallow steps led up to the entrance from the level of the Campus Martius; on the east side, there were no steps, as the doorway stood at a higher ground level, facing the Via Flaminia. These external features—the axial doorways, temenos walls, and external staircase leading up to the door—will be of particular interest here.

Also important to the present analysis is the organization of the relief on the temenos walls. Their exterior was divided into two registers, the lower covered with acanthus and other vegetal motifs whose appearance and symbolism have primarily Hellenistic Greek precedents (figs. 4, 16). Figural reliefs occupied the upper register and have received perhaps the richest body of scholarship. Mythological-allegorical

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scenes flanked the axial doorways on the short sides; processional scenes including members of the imperial family and religious personnel moved westward on the north and south sides, suggesting the nature and direction of actual movement around the building. On the interior of these enclosure walls, the strong distinction between the lower and upper part of the walls was maintained, but the lower register was carved in the form of upright wooden slats, while the upper register depicted empty space crossed by garlands hanging between bucrania mounted on posts (fig. 5). The altar proper was also decorated with relief sculpture, although at a smaller scale and in a different style than that of the enclosure walls; depicted were priestesses of Vesta, a sacrificial procession, and other figures now lost.

Precedents for this structure and decorative organization have been identified in Classical and Hellenistic Greek altars. Homer Thompson compared the Ara Pacis to the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the northwest corner of the Athenian Agora, used as the origin point for all distance measurements from and to Athens (fig. 6).

First dedicated under the Peisistratids and damaged or destroyed by the Persians, it was rebuilt toward

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Fig. 5. Relief decoration on the inside of the temenos walls of the Ara Pacis depicting upright wooden slats below and garlands between bucrania hanging in open space above. (Reproduced from Simon as in n. 11, pl. 8)

Fig. 6. Reconstruction drawing of the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Athenian Agora, late fifth century BCE. (Reproduced from Borbein as in n. 18, p. 247, fig. 2.)
the end of the fifth-century BCE as an offering table enclosed by a fence-like, marble parapet wall of 9.05 x 9.86m with two axial doorways. The Altar of the Twelve Gods seems to share with the Ara Pacis a similar size, a nearly square plan, a bounded precinct with two axially placed central entrances, and a central offering place. Thompson argued that the parapet fence had mythological relief panels placed on either side of both entrances, with the other panels bare; on the Ara Pacis, too, important mythological and allegorical scenes were placed immediately adjacent to the two doorways. In other ways, the two monuments are less similar: the offering table, low parapet walls, and limited amount of relief sculpture in Athens are quite different from the high, stepped altar, tall enclosure walls and elaborate, two-register relief decoration in Rome. Still, Augustan awareness of this monument is easy to reconstruct, given the new regime’s extensive architectural interventions in the Athenian Agora and its strong interest in the city’s Classical art and architecture.

Fig. 7 – The Altar Court at Samothrace, later fourth century BCE. (Reproduced from Lehmann and Spittle as in n. 15, frontispiece.)
Monumental altars of the late Classical and Hellenistic periods have also been seen as forerunners of the Ara Pacis. For example, the later fourth century altar court at Samothrace had high enclosing walls, as in Rome (fig. 7). Here, however, the frontal structure of the building, with a columned portico across the front and the internal altar set against the closed back wall, makes this a less satisfying parallel. In the sanctuary of Poseidon and Amphitrite on Tenos in the Cyclades, a monumental altar lying 23m east of the temple and dated to ca. 100 BCE has also been linked to the Ara Pacis. With a footprint of 10.46 x 10.77m, it is comparable in size and shape, but the staircase on the west, flanked by antae and leading up to the altar platform, better matches the internal arrangement of the Ara Pacis than it does its external structure.

Scholars have also looked to Italic and Roman precedents, increasingly so in recent decades. Erika Simon pointed to the Temple of Janus Geminus in the Roman Forum, with its similar connection to peace and two doors, famously closed during peacetime (fig. 8). She understood the wooden slats depicted on the inside of the temenos walls as a reference to the initial demarcation of this sacred boundary as part of the altar’s constitutio on July 4, 13 BCE. Adolf Borbein accepted the Athenian Altar of the Twelve Gods as a comparandum for the outside of the structure, but pointed to sixth century precedents. 

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17 Simon as in n. 11, pp. 9 and 10.
and fifth century BCE Etruscan funerary precedents for the depiction of the wooden slats of the inside of those same walls. In this view, the monument linked the viewer to the reality of the procession and the instant of the decision to build through the petrification of a temporary structure.  

For Eugenio La Rocca, the interior depiction of wooden slats recalled textual attestations of the archaic templum minus, a small ritual structure with a wooden fence. Problems remained; a templum minus should have only one door, and its connection to figural decoration is unclear. However, since the Temple of Janus in the Forum had two doors, an almost square plan, and a powerful connection to peace, La Rocca saw no need for an Athenian precedent, especially one in which the crucial points of comparison are as poorly preserved as on the Altar of the Twelve Gods. Similarly, Mario Torelli found sufficient precedents in Rome itself. The structural grammar of the external walls, with their “closed” lower registers and “open” upper registers, again recalled the Temple of Janus Geminus in the Roman Forum (fig. 8). It should be noted, however, that Neronian coins, the only surviving visual evidence of the building, depict an arched doorway spanning an entire short side of the temple, a very different arrangement from that of the short sides of the Ara Pacis. The same coins also indicate no relief depiction on the temple’s external walls, which are shown with rectangular, grated openings along their upper part, except for some ornament on the architrave and above. Finally, in this Italic vein, the rectangular U-shape of the central altar recalls the archaic altars at Lavinium and elsewhere.

Despite these disagreements and different emphases, in current views the Ara Pacis is understood to embody multi-layered appropriations of the past, recombined in sophisticated and innovative ways to meet the needs of the present. As in Nelson’s analysis, these appropriations show an active selection of existing cultural material and visual ideas; antecedents range from archaic and more recent Italy to classical and hellenistic Greece, and were adopted because of their sacral functions and connotations. They also show a distortion of those sources, adapting them to the very different context and ideological needs of Augustan Rome. Three additional themes further characterize the artistic appropriations on this monument. First, they are classicizing in their knowledge of and layered references to styles from different pasts. Second, these

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20 Torelli as in n. 13.
21 It is not clear when the building took this particular form. Procopius adds that the building was square in plan, stood over five cubits high, had doorways in the east and west sides, and was entirely covered in bronze (*Bell. Goth.* 1.25). E. Tortorici. “Janus Geminus, aedes.” *LTUR* III (1996) 92-93 with further references.
appropriations on the Ara Pacis work semantically, drawing on material from a range of
times in the past to create a synthesis in the present. Finally, they are explicit about their
own appropriative quality, even while remaining allusive about exactly what has been
appropriated. The synthesis of past styles and the range of their allusions was celebrated,
not concealed.

How these visual appropriations worked is explained by Tonio Hölscher’s
analysis of Roman art as a semantic system that drew on the diachronic range of Greek
art for synchronic effects. This visual language worked largely through the attachment
of consistent meanings to different forms and styles. For example, battle scenes drew on
Hellenistic developments in the visual depiction of space; the stylistic characteristics of
Pheidian sculpture were thought to express divine majesty, and were accordingly used for
depictions of gods meant to stress this quality. The Ara Pacis’ processional friezes can be
seen to draw on classical Greek ways of depicting figures with balanced postures and
restrained gestures, and of grouping figures in a plane; a close parallel is the fifth century
BCE Panathenaic frieze on the Parthenon in Athens. This does not mean the Ara Pacis
was intended as a specific reference to the Parthenon frieze; nor did it convey a Roman
desire to celebrate and adopt the political ideals of fifth century Athenian democracy.
Rather, in Augustan Rome, this style was employed as a semantic means of expressing
the solemn dignity appropriate to state ceremonial. Allusions to multiple periods of
Greek art are found elsewhere within the Ara Pacis, and even within a single figure; all of
these can be interpreted in semantic terms.

These Greek and Italic precedents for the Ara Pacis explain multiple aspects of
the monument; understanding their semantic workings highlights the synthetic
inventiveness and political significance of Augustan art. Still, none of these analyses
quite accounts for the external appearance of the Ara Pacis as a small, freestanding stone
building with a nearly square plan, two central, axial entrances, and high surrounding
walls. Nor do they explain the organization of its external relief decoration into two
registers employing very different uses of space, with screen-like vegetal panels below
and figures or garlands above depicted as though in the open air. Of course, a state
monument in Augustan Rome did not require a precedent for every single element of its
design. Nor did viewers need a mental catalogue of all possible allusions in order for this
monument to have meaning. Still, it will be suggestive to note certain parallels from
Egypt that seem to reflect exactly those architectural and design aspects that have not
found precedents in Italy or Greece. I turn to these next.

3. Egyptian precedents for the Ara Pacis Augustae

Three groups of comparanda from the traditional temple complexes of Egypt
interact in suggestive ways with certain aspects of the Ara Pacis Augustae. The first is a

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23 Tonio Hölscher. Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System. Abhandlungen der
Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse, 1987.2, now
published in English as The Language of Images in Roman Art (Translated by Anthony
Snodgrass and Annemarie Künzl-Snodgrass; foreword by Jas’ Elsner). Cambridge University

24 Tonio Hölscher, “Greek Styles and Greek Art in Augustan Rome: Issues of the Present
series of Middle and New Kingdom peripteral chapels that share certain architectural
design features with the altar in Rome. The second consists of later peripteral chapels in
Egypt, including the known Ptolemaic and Augustan examples; these, interestingly, are
less comparable to the Ara Pacis. Third, certain decorative design features from Egyptian
temple art of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods also seem to reappear, if somewhat
changed, on the Ara Pacis.

**Middle and New Kingdom peripteral chapels**

Several chapels from Middle and New Kingdom Egypt share characteristics
echoed over a millennium later in the external architecture of the Ara Pacis Augustae. Like the Roman altar, these were small, freestanding, roughly square buildings standing on a low socle and built with clean, low, rectangular lines. They had two axial doorways and low stairways leading up to one doorway or both; by comparison, the Ara Pacis had two axial doorways but only one stairway, on the west side. On all these buildings, in Egypt and in Rome, the entrance sides were partitioned into three parts, including a doorway and two flanking panels; the walls were further divided into upper and lower registers. Inside, the Egyptian chapels and the Ara Pacis consisted of an internal ambulatory around a central focal point for religious ritual. Like the Ara Pacis, the Egyptian chapels were designed for processional use and were located carefully within a larger ritual landscape of movement. Finally, all were explicitly connected to the ruler’s religious and political legitimacy.

Perhaps the best comparandum for the Ara Pacis is a building that could not possibly have shaped it directly. The Twelfth Dynasty jubilee chapel of Senwosret I at Karnak, whose French reconstruction in 1938 was discussed above (fig. 3), was destroyed and buried in the foundations of Amenhotep III’s pylon in the Temple of Amun more than thirteen centuries before the Ara Pacis took form. Its original location at Karnak is unknown, but a waterspout on one side indicates that it stood in the open air. Inscriptions on the walls state that Senwosret dedicated the building to Amun-Ra as part of his first Heb-Sed, the ruler’s thirty-year jubilee festival. This kind of chapel was not the only form of jubilee dedication; Heb-Sed structures included pillar halls in ceremonial courts, gates with imagery related to Sed-festival activities, obelisks, and other building forms. However, this appears to be the oldest known example of a peripteral station building, or stopping point on a ritual journey. Inside was presumably a central throne; this was later replaced by a socle or bark repository. This allowed the building to serve as a halting place during processions of the sacred bark, a long, narrow boat transporting the god’s image and carried by priests in procession.

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25 Still fundamental is Ludwig Borchardt. *Ägyptische Tempel mit Umgang. Beiträge zur Ägyptischen Bauforschung und Altertumskunde*, 2. Cairo, 1938. Borchardt divided his material into three typological categories based on the form of the surrounding columnns or piers. The New and Middle Kingdom chapels discussed here are part of Borchardt’s third group of peripteral chapels with piers, while the more recent Ptolemaic and Roman examples form part of his first group of buildings with plant columns. His second group is not relevant for this study.

As reconstructed, Senwosret’s jubilee chapel is a freestanding limestone building standing on a low socle, with a rectangularity and overall proportions comparable to those of the Ara Pacis (compare figs. 1 and 3). It measures c. 6.54m on each side; the reconstructed Ara Pacis, with a footprint of 11.60 x 10.50m, is somewhat larger. Eight shallow steps with a central ramp lead up to two centrally placed doorways on opposite sides; these recall the axial doorways of the Ara Pacis and the low staircase on its western side. The White Chapel’s design—credited to Senwosret’s vizier Mentuhotep—\textsuperscript{27} is spare and rectilinear, with a flat stone roof and four piers along each side. Like all the other Egyptian chapels discussed here, the White Chapel was genuinely peripteral, while the Ara Pacis was surrounded by solid enclosure walls, visually punctuated by pilasters at the four corners and on either side of the entryways. Still, especially on the front and back, the White Chapel’s piers recall the four pilasters on the east and west sides of the Ara Pacis. This parallel is especially marked in two Egyptian and Roman representations of these buildings, a relief on the White Chapel that depicts the building itself, and an image of the Ara Pacis on a Neronian coin (fig. 9).

Although the White Chapel was destroyed in the 14\textsuperscript{th} c. BCE, these features are found again on several New Kingdom chapels inspired by it or a building very much like it.\textsuperscript{28} Like the Ara Pacis, all were small, freestanding, stone buildings on a low socle, with


\textsuperscript{28} In addition to the buildings discussed here, at least two New Kingdom images of such chapels survive and confirm these shared features. An 18\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty drawing on an ostrakon seems to depict a chapel of this kind with a square footprint, two axial doorways, three piers along each non-entrance side, and a small structure centrally placed within. And, in the 19th Dynasty tomb of Ipuy at Deir el Medina, dated to the reign of Ramesses II, a painting depicts a very similar structure near the water. The building is small and flat-roofed; it sits on a low socle with seven ramped steps leading up to a central entranceway between papyriform columns. Piers
a square or nearly square footprint, and clean, low, rectangular lines (figs. 10, 11, 12). All had axial doorways, normally with shallow staircases leading up to them. For example, Amenhotep III (1390 – 1353 BCE)—the same ruler who buried the White Chapel under his pylon at Karnak—dedicated a very similar chapel to “the lord of both lands” at Kuban (fig. 10, left). Roughly square, with four piers and columns on the entrance sides and five piers along the other two, its axial entrances were reached by low, ramped stairways. Inside was a bark repository arranged lengthwise to facilitate processional movement through the building.

In elevation, the entrance sides of these chapels were divided into three roughly equal sections, with a central doorway and two flanking panels separated by piers or columns (figs. 3, 10, 11, 12). The same exteriors also showed a strong vertical division between solid screen walls below and the empty space of the intercolumniations above. For example, Amenhotep III also dedicated a chapel to Khnum on Elephantine on the occasion of his first jubilee (fig. 11, left). The short east and west sides had central,

Fig. 9. Two ancient depictions of the White Chapel and the Ara Pacis. Left: The White Chapel as depicted on the building’s own relief decoration (Reproduced from Borchardt, as in n. 25, detail of fig. 19.) Right: The Ara Pacis as depicted on a Neronian aes (RIC I.458).
axial staircases and three-part façades consisting of the central doorway flanked by sections of almost equal width. These façades were also vertically divided between the screen walls and podium below and the open intercolumniations above. Here again, the flat roofline and squared walls gave the building a low, compact appearance, although in this case papyriform columns rather than piers framed the entranceways. The same features also appeared on a second peripteral chapel on Elephantine, now destroyed (fig. 12). A second peripteral chapel on Elephantine stood somewhere north of the first; it was dedicated by the 19th Dynasty pharaoh Ramesses II (1290–1224 BCE) (fig. 12, lower left). Borchardt reconstructs it as very similar to the southern chapel, including axial stairways leading to central entrances on the two short sides, papyriform columns rather than piers on either side of the door, and seven piers down the two long sides. Here again, screen walls linked all the piers and were interrupted only by the two entrances, giving the short sides the usual tripartite arrangement and separation between the lower and upper registers. Inside stood a bark repository. Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 100-101, pl. 21, lower left. This chapel too was recorded by the Napoleonic expedition: Description de l’Égypte I, p. 195 and pl. 58.2-4.

“temple du sud,” but was completely destroyed some years before 1838. Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 95-98, fig. 28, pl. 21. Based on the Description de l’Égypte I, pp. 181-195, pls. 34-38.
entrance sides into three roughly similar sections, the wide doorway and its flanking walls (figs. 1, 11 right). Vertically, its exterior temenos walls were distinctly separated into two, with ‘closed’ external acanthus reliefs below and ‘open’ space in which the figures were depicted above (figs. 1, 11 right, 16). This distinction was maintained on the interior in the contrast between the wooden slats carved in relief below and the garlands above depicted as though hanging in open space (fig. 5).

Moreover, the Egyptian chapels, like the Ara Pacis, were designed for processional movement through the building. All had axial entrances connected by an internal ambulatory around a central focal point for ritual (compare figs. 4, 10, 11). That focal point differed radically between the Egyptian chapels and the Roman altar, in keeping with the fundamental differences between religious practices: the Egyptian chapels held socles or repositories allowing them to function as stopping places for sacred barks, while at the center of the Ara Pacis was the altar proper, reached by an additional flight of steps from the west. However, all of these buildings shared a careful
placement within a larger ritual landscape. The Egyptian chapels were usually part of larger temple complexes, as seen, for example, at Karnak and Elephantine, and they were often directly associated with processional routes. Amenhotep III’s chapel at Kuban (fig. 10 left) functioned as a processional station within a temple complex situated on the road to the Nubian goldmines. Little survives of an 18th Dynasty chapel at Amada built perhaps by Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) or his father and dedicated to Harmachis, but it was axially placed in relation both to the main temple and to the Nile.32

Fig. 12. Elevation drawing of the northern chapel at Elephantine, now lost. This chapel too was recorded by the Napoleonic expedition: Description de l’Egypte i, p. 195 and pl. 58.2-4. (Reproduced from Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 100-101, detail of pl. 21.)

32 Its ruins attest to a low podium, a square or nearly square footprint, and at least one shallow ramp or stairway up to a central entrance on the southwest side. Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 99-100, pl. 22.
Analogously, the Ara Pacis was carefully situated along the Via Flaminia in the Campus Martius, part of a commemoration of Augustus’ *adventus*, or ritual return to the city in 13 BCE. The *Res Gestae* of Augustus describes the honorific occasion (12.2):  

*Cum ex Hispania Galliaque, rebus in iis provincis prospere gestis, Romam redi, Ti. Nerone P. Quintilio consulibus, aram Pacis Augustae senatus pro reditu meo consacrandam 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 after successfully arranging affairs in those provinces, the senate resolved that an altar of the Augustan Peace should be consecrated next to the Campus Martius in honour of my return, and ordered that the magistrates and priests and Vestal virgins should perform an annual sacrifice there.

There it became the focus of recurring processions and ritual, as well as part of a much larger monumental and ideological zone that included one of the two obelisks brought by Augustus from Egypt as well as Augustus’ Mausoleum.  

Finally, the pharaonic chapels, like the Ara Pacis, celebrated the ruler and his happy reign. Several were linked to the Heb-Sed festival of the pharaoh’s thirty-year jubilee. This is true of the White Chapel of Senwosret at Karnak and Amenhotep III’s chapel to Khnum on Elephantine, discussed above. A peripteral bark station dedicated by Thutmose III (1479-1425 BCE) and Hatshepsut (1479-1458 BCE) near the Temple of Mut at Karnak may well have been built initially to celebrate Hatshepsut’s jubilee. Thutmose III built a jubilee chapel just west of the sacred lake at Karnak (fig. 10 right); inscriptions link a second phase to his second jubilee. This building shares the features already described. It stood on a low sandstone platform, with four piers along each side linked by low screen walls. Shallow staircases gave access to central doorways on the east and west sides. This created the familiar three-part division between the central doorway and the wall sections to left and right, as well as a two-part division of those panels between solid screen walls below and open space above. Inside stood a bark socle, arranged lengthwise to accompany the direction of movement through the space. Borchardt links this building spatially to Thutmose’s other jubilee structures, again.

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35 Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 79-83, plate 16.

36 Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 90-93, fig. 27, pl. 19.
emphasizing the careful placement of these chapels within a larger religious complex of ritual movement and procession.

The Ara Pacis, according to the _Res Gestae_, was a senatorial commission in honor of Augustus’ successes in Spain and Gaul, and of his return to Rome. Like the Egyptian chapels, it celebrates and legitimized his rule, but unlike them, there is no reference to a regnal jubilee. Perhaps we should not expect one. The _Res Gestae_ was written with the political realities of Rome in mind, and finalized many decades after the altar’s dedication. It mentions the Ara Pacis within a long list of the princeps’ honors in chapters 1 – 14, and it emphasizes the web of ritual connections between Augustus and Rome’s political and religious bodies rather than his own monarchical power. In fact, there are no particular regnal beginnings in 39 BCE, thirty years before the altar’s dedication in 9 BCE. However, in 43, thirty years before the altar’s _constitutio_ in 13, Augustus (then Octavian) held the consulship for the first time. If an evocation of a thirty-year anniversary of rule were indeed among the allusions of the Ara Pacis, it would suggest, rather flatteringly, that Augustus’ legitimate rule dated back to his first consulship—ignoring the intervening civil wars and proscriptions, as well as Octavian’s decisive military victory at Actium in 31 and constitutional settlement of 27. Possibly supporting this is the adjacent obelisk, imported from Egypt by Augustus himself in 10 BCE. It was originally commissioned by Psammetichus II of the 26th Dynasty (595-589 BCE) to celebrate his Sed Festival, or thirty-year jubilee. However, there is no evidence that anyone in Rome knew that about this obelisk, so the connection remains purely suggestive. Much clearer is the Altar’s overall connection to the ruler and the celebration of his reign.

**The late period kiosks**

Significantly, Egyptian chapels from later periods—much closer in time to the Ara Pacis—offer less suggestive parallels. From the Kushite through the Roman periods, peripteral chapels continued to be built, but with important changes. Usually termed “kiosks”, they are a characteristic form of late Egyptian temple architecture, as are the pronaos, _wabet_ (a hall used in ritual New Year celebrations), entrance porch and cult terrace—all of them linked in ritual and the use of space. The kiosk became part of Hellenistic architecture and as such was adopted into Roman art; it is seen, _inter alia_, on the Nile Mosaic at Praeneste and on second century CE coins. These late

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37 Suétone, _Aug._ 26; Ronald Syme. _The Roman Revolution_. Oxford University Press, 1939, pp. 185-186.

38 Cesare D’Onofrio, _Gli Obelischi di Roma: storia e urbanistica di una città dall’età antica al XX secolo_. Rome, Romana Società Editrice, 1992, pp. 369-421. Pius VI’s inscription erroneously says this obelisk was originally dedicated by Sesostris. The hieroglyphic inscription is transcribed and translated in E.A. Wallis Budge, _Cleopatra’s Needles and Other Egyptian Obelisks: A series of descriptions of all the important inscribed obelisks, with hieroglyphic texts, translations, etc._ London, 1926, pp. 219-224.


40 Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 282, 305 and _passim_.

kiosks link the Egyptian religious landscape to the Roman period through a process of continuous building. They also pinpoint the comparative interest of the earlier chapels, and thereby suggest a differentiated Roman appreciation of the recent and pharaonic Egyptian past. Augustan chapels in Egypt follow this late chapel form; it will therefore be important to explain why contemporaneous buildings in Egypt and Rome apparently took up quite different precedents.

In some ways, the late period kiosks are very similar to the Middle and New Kingdom chapels. Like them, and like the Ara Pacis, they were small, stone, freestanding, peripteral buildings with a sacred function (figs. 13-15). Their axial doorways and locations similarly suggest that they provided shaded stops or way stations for a deity’s image along processional routes. Like the older buildings, they were square or nearly so, and showed a tripartite division of the entrance façade, as well as a division between solid walls below and an open upper register. For example, the 30\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty bark station of Nectanebo I (380-362 BCE) on Philae measures 7.6 x 11.5m in plan, with four columns on the surviving short side and six on the long. Ptolemaic temple building outside Alexandria followed 30\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty precedents very closely, and

Fig. 13. Elevation drawing and plan of the Augustan kiosk at Qertassi. (Reproduced from Borchardt, as in n. 25, detail from pl. 9.)

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42 Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 19-20. Like the older chapels, they seem to be translations of temporary architecture into stone. Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 284-85.

43 This kiosk was moved by Ptolemy XII to the southeast corner of the island and placed against the perimeter wall; Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 119-22, figs. 74-78. See also Gerhard Haeny, “A Short Architectural History of Philae,” BIFAO 85 (1985) 197-233. Compare two entrance kiosks of Nectanebo I built very similarly at Tanis and in the El-Kharga oasis; Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 107 and 113-5.
Augustan interventions similarly emphasized continuity with the Ptolemaic.\textsuperscript{44} The Augustan or early Roman kiosk at Qertassi has a footprint of c. 8x10m; the short sides were divided into three by the four columns and central doorway (fig. 13). Here, too, a strong horizontal division obtained all around, with screen walls occupying the lower register of the intercolumniations. Located about 40km south of Philae, the Qertassi kiosk was part of Isis’ annual Nubian circuit.\textsuperscript{45}

![Roman kiosk on Philae, current state (left) and reconstruction drawing (right) including shallow, vaulted wooden roof.](image)

In other ways, the kiosks are quite different. While the older chapels, like the Ara Pacis, are raised on a socle and have a flight of shallow steps leading up to one or both entrances, the kiosks are normally at ground level, with no stairways. The Ara Pacis and the older Egyptian chapels have only two doorways, axially placed and with solid lintels; the kiosks often have secondary doorways in the long sides as well as the main entrances, and the latter are topped with a broken lintel. The low parapet walls of the earlier buildings were flush with the piers’ exterior lines, contributing to an overall rectilinear solidity. By contrast, the kiosks have much higher screen walls topped with cavetto moldings, interrupting the solid lines of the exterior with a play of ornament (figs. 13-44).

\textsuperscript{44} Arnold as in n. 39, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{45} Borchardt as in n. 25, p. 17, pl. 9; Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 237-240, figs. 197-198; Günther Hölbl, Altägypten im Römischen Reich: der römische Pharao und seine Tempel, II: Die Tempel des römischen Nubien (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004): pp. 101-102 and fig. 136. The kiosk was moved in connection with the construction of the Aswan High Dam and reconstructed near the similarly moved Kalabsha temple.
And, unlike the older chapels, the kiosks are surrounded by plant columns, not piers. At Qertassi, four plant columns stood along the short east and west sides, with another five on the long; Hathor columns flanked the doorways and linked the building to Isis (fig. 13). These lively, variegated forms produced a lighter and less solid visual effect than the spare, solid, rectangular lines of the older chapels’ piers (compare figs. 3, 11, 12). Finally, the kiosks typically had a low, vaulted, wooden roof, unlike the flat, stone toplines of the earlier buildings (fig. 14); the kiosk at Qertassi, with its 7m long, flat, sandstone roofing slabs, is an exception (fig. 13).

Finally, unlike the earlier chapels, these late kiosks no longer celebrated the pharaoh’s jubilee, although they were still carefully positioned within a larger sacral landscape. Nectanebo’s kiosk on Philae and the Augustan kiosk at Qertassi were almost certainly bark stations on ritual processions for Isis. So, probably, was the huge, unfinished example on Philae, measuring 15 x 20m in plan and 15.45m in height (fig. 14). This kiosk is proportionally narrower as well as taller than the kiosks at Dendera and Qertassi. Its overall design remains familiar, however, with 4 x 5 columns separated by high screen walls, two axial entrances on the short east and west sides, and a short side elevation divided into three sections around a central doorway, and into two horizontal sections of solid screen walls below and empty intercolumniations above. Different types of composite plant capitals top the columns, and cuttings survive for a shallow vaulted timber roof. There is no trace of any internal structure. This kiosk has been considered Trajanic because two reliefs on the south side depict that emperor, but those could have been added later; an Augustan date has recently been proposed.47 This kiosk stood at some distance from the temple; a paved way connected it to the Philadelphos gate. A second kiosk or chapel, also left unfinished, was built along the same paved way in the Roman period.48

The Ptolemaic or Augustan kiosk at Dendera, which stood on the southwest corner of the roof of the temple of Hathor, exemplifies these similarities and differences (fig. 15).49 The temple proper was begun in the New Kingdom, enlarged by Nectanebo I,

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46 On these later screen walls, Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 302-03.
47 Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 13-14, pls. 5 and 6; Hölbl as in n. 45, pp. 86-87; Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 235-236, figs. 193-94. Arnold follows Haeny as in n. 43, on the Augustan date; Hölbl is sympathetic but points out that there is no certain evidence either way.
48 Hölbl as in n. 45, pp. 86-87 and fig. 124. Several Ptolemaic or Roman kiosks in the Fayum area cannot be dated more closely but offer useful spatial comparanda. At Dionysias (Qasr Qarun), a kiosk stood on a processional route about 300m distant from the late Ptolemaic or Roman temple of Sobek, on the temple’s long axis (Borchardt as in n. 25, pp. 17-18, pl. 9. Arnold as in n. 39, p. 254). At Tebtunis (Umm el-Breigat), Borchardt’s study of aerial photographs persuaded him that there were two kiosks connected to the processional way leading to the Ptolemaic temple of Soknebtunis (Borchardt as in n. 25, p. 18; Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 155 and 254. Cf. nos. 4 and 5 on the labeled aerial photo at http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~tebtunis/ancientlives/map.jpg, part of the online exhibition, Ancient Lives: The Tebtunis Papyri in Context, hosted by the Bancroft Library Gallery, University of California at Berkeley).
replaced by Ptolemy XII starting in 54 BCE, continued under Cleopatra VII, and finally dedicated by Augustus in 20 BCE. The roof kiosk is small and square in plan, measuring c. 6x6m. As in the Middle and New Kingdom chapels, the frontal view of the chapel is articulated by the three vertical divisions of the central doorway and the wall sections on either side, as well as the horizontal division between the screen walls below and the open intercolumniations above. These features recall the Middle Kingdom precedents as well as the Ara Pacis. Others do not. The two doorways are placed not axially but in the north and east façades, taking into account the chapel’s corner position. Four Hathor-head columns along each side stand 3.22m high and support an architrave whose cuttings indicate a shallow barrel-vaulted wooden roof. There is no trace of an internal structure; rather, a light well in the center of the floor illuminated the room below. Inscriptions and two nearby staircases make clear the roof kiosk’s role in the processional movement of the New Year celebration, during which the cult image was brought up into the sunlight from the wabet, or “pure hall,” directly below. Although this chapel was ultimately part of an Augustan temple in Egypt, it is less comparable to the Ara Pacis Augustae in Rome than are its Middle and Old Kingdom precedents.

Late period decorative design features

The Temple of Hathor at Dendera introduces a third group of suggestive Egyptian comparanda for the Ara Pacis in Rome: two decorative design features. Like the chapels and kiosks, these come from the traditional temple complexes. Unlike the chapels and

kiosks, among which the best comparanda were pharaonic, both these features were current in the Ptolemaic and Augustan periods.

Fig. 16. The southeast corner of the Ara Pacis, showing the division of the external reliefs into two parts, figural relief above and plant ornament below. Next to the doorways were allegorical/mythological images; on the long sides religious processions were depicted. The south processional frieze, depicted here, includes men, women and children of the imperial household.

The first is the longstanding convention in Egyptian temple art of covering the exterior walls of a sacred structure with figural relief sculpture. Its content was always religious and focused on the ruler. In the Eighteenth Dynasty Amarna period and in the Ptolemaic period, this imagery was explicitly dynastic as well, and could include the queen and royal children. For example, the outer rear wall of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera depicted, in traditional pharaonic style, Cleopatra VII presenting to the gods her son Caesarion (Ptolemy XV Caesar) by Julius Caesar. Cleopatra shakes a sistrum; Caesarion offers incense. Awaiting them is Isis/Hathor wearing a headdress of horns and the solar disk; Osiris, Horus and Mut are also present. Especially intriguing here is the depiction of a royal woman and child. These reliefs were unharmed during the Augustan completion of the temple, perhaps because of the connection to Julius Caesar, perhaps because Augustan interventions in the traditional temple complexes of Egypt were designed to express religious, ritual and political continuity, not disruption (see below). An analogy on the external walls of the Ara Pacis lies in the north and south reliefs, which show the imperial family and Roman religious personnel in procession (fig. 16). In keeping with Roman tradition, no gods are present in the relief, and the style is entirely
different from the Egyptian. Not at all traditional, however, is the idea of including women and children. In Rome, this relief was part of a new visual ideology that replaced the strictly masculine and adult political representations of the Republican past with dynastic imagery. Conceptual precedents may have been found in Ptolemaic Egypt, where visual models for dynastic autocracy were well-established.  

A second relevant design feature of late Egyptian temple art is the frequent combination of a figural relief above with a sacred plant zone of papyrus or lily below. For example, on the reliefs of the Ptolemaic pronaos at Kom Ombo, a dado of papyrus plants provides a symbolic foundation for the figural imagery above, connecting it to the sacred Nile. The interior of the Ptolemaic Hathor temple at Deir el-Medina shows a similar arrangement. This combination continued to be used throughout the Roman period. Papyrus dados support the figural imagery on the façade reliefs of the Augustan temple house at Dendur and the Ptolemaic/Augustan Kalabsha gate (fig. 17, left), and the screen walls of the pronaos of the Augustan temple of Mandulis and Isis at Kalabsha. On the Khons temple at Karnak, a relief depicts Augustus as pharaoh bringing Maat to Amun above a papyrus and lily dado. Augustus’ successors were depicted similarly. At Esna, in the Roman hall of columns, Horus and Thot purify Claudius above a register of papyrus plants (fig. 17, right). At Dendera, on a screen wall of the Roman birth house, Trajan is shown bringing an offering to Hathor over a papyrus frieze. This arrangement has a conceptual parallel—although not a stylistic or iconographic one—in the division of the Ara Pacis’ exterior walls between an acanthus frieze below and the processional friezes and mythological-allegorical figural panels above (fig. 16). The conceptual parallel extends into the sacred symbolism of the plant zone.


Ragnhild Finnestad notes the importance of this vertical design (figural reliefs over symbolically important papyrus and lily plants) in anchoring the representation within fundamental Egyptian beliefs about the world and the gods. More broadly, she analyzes Ptolemaic and Roman temples in the traditional Egyptian style as vital new expressions within that tradition, pointing to the close interaction of relief decoration and architecture, the careful disposition of images and scenes around the built space, and the role of the dense coverage of reliefs and inscriptions in constructing not only space memory and cultural identity. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad. “Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: Ancient Traditions in New Contexts.” In Byron Shafer, ed. Temples of Ancient Egypt. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1997, pp. 185-237.


Castriota as in n. 12.
These three groups of Egyptian comparanda raise new questions. First, if these are the closest comparanda to be found in the traditional temple complexes of Egypt, they stand out for their differences from the Ara Pacis as much as their similarities. At best, some architectural features, functional aspects and organizational designs are comparable, and certainly not figurative style or iconography. These are not obvious appropriations, and their allusive, structural nature will have to be explained. Second, it remains to be shown how Egyptian buildings, some of them predating the Ara Pacis by more than a thousand years, could offer meaningful precedents for it. Third, to be valid, these Egyptian comparanda will have to work within the larger framework of Augustan appropriations already discussed. Already, the chronological and formal range of these comparanda suggest that these appropriations, much like Hellenizing and Italicizing appropriations in Augustan art, drew on layered references to visual ideas from different parts of the Egyptian past. The next step in this discussion, then, is to explore the Augustan engagement with pharaonic and later Egyptian temple art.

4. Augustus in Egypt, Egypt in Rome

An immediate question is logistical: could Egyptian temple art have offered meaningful precedents for an Augustan monument in Rome? The short answer is yes. Modern classical archaeology focuses on Greece and Rome, but historically, pharaonic Egypt remained well-known and symbolically resonant in later Mediterranean contexts.
More concretely, the Middle and New Kingdom jubilee chapels discussed above were visible elements of the landscape of Augustan Egypt—some even survived above ground another two millennia to be recorded in modern times. The temple complexes themselves were the dominant monumental elements of the Egyptian landscape in the Roman period. Indeed, these complexes were the focus of an extensive and knowledgeable Augustan building program whose goal was to legitimize the Roman conquest and Egypt’s new ruler in a potent symbolic domain. This building program offers vivid evidence of a sophisticated and layered construction of the Egyptian “classical,” with direct relevance for Augustan Egyptianizing activities in Rome. For this reason, exploring Egyptian precedents for the Ara Pacis first requires considering these Augustan interventions in Egypt.

Egypt is often ignored as an isolated backwater of the Roman Empire, distant and disconnected, but the opposite was the case in this period. For particular reasons and in particular ways, the Augustan regime was intensely interested here. Egypt occupied a highly charged space in Roman politics throughout the later Republic and into the start of the Principate. It had an ancient history of its own, as well an important role in more recent Mediterranean history. Rome’s rise to dominance in the eastern Mediterranean during the last two centuries BCE, as the Ptolemaic kingdom was weakening, meant that Egypt was caught up in elaborate diplomatic, economic and military connections with an increasingly powerful and invested Rome. By the first century BCE, Egypt was effectively a Roman protectorate, and Rome was increasingly drawn into Ptolemaic succession disputes. In turn, the Ptolemies became involved in the Roman civil wars, for Egypt guaranteed its ruler vast wealth, resources, and power over a major food source for Rome. The final stages of this history need no repeating: Cleopatra VII’s attempts to capitalize on Rome’s civil strife to create dynastic alliances in Ptolemaic interests; Mark Antony’s choice of Egypt as a power base; Octavian’s defeat of Cleopatra and Mark Antony at Actium in 31 BCE and his emergence thereby as sole ruler of Rome and the Mediterranean world. In short, what Octavian/Augustus did with Egypt after the conquest mattered a great deal.

Augustus’ cultural program there took shape within this Roman political context, with its ongoing danger of threats to his power as well as the immediate need to legitimize his rule along the Nile. His cultural program was marked by an extensive and complex involvement of the Roman state in the new province’s monumental religious centers. A crucial factor must have been the continuing importance of the temple priests

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and the substantial economic and religious power they controlled. The family of the high
priest of Ptah in Memphis, for example, had been exceptionally powerful and closely
connected to the Ptolemaic royal house; it played a key role in presenting Augustus as a
pharaoh in the Egyptian temple context, complete with proper pharaonic titulature.\footnote{Günther Hölbl.} This priesthood did not last beyond 23 BCE, but it had served a crucial transitional
purpose, assuring Augustus’ control over an important sector of Egyptian life. It was
presumably the priests who guided building activity in the temple complexes and
influenced the Augustan program’s aims in important ways.

Augustus became one of late period Egypt’s major temple builders.\footnote{On the Roman imperial engagement with Egyptian temple complexes, see Hölbl as in n. 56. The following list of interventions is distilled from Arnold as in n. 39, pp. 230-48.} New
temples in the traditional style were built at El-Qal’a, Shanhour, probably Deir El-
Shelouit, and Taffeh; Augustan additions to or completions of existing temples include
Dendera, Kom Ombo, Elephantine, Khonsou, Biggeh, Dabod, Kalabsha, Dakka (where
New Kingdom blocks from Quban on the other bank of the Nile were also brought),
probably Maharraqa, perhaps ‘Ain Amur, and ‘Ain Birbijeh. Other religious structures
were built on Philae and at Qertassi—the kiosk already mentioned—and high Roman
officials built temples at Philae and Dendur. Often, Ptolemaic temples were finished or
enlarged. Especially in Nubia, Augustus’ patronage of temples of Isis is strongly marked.
After Augustus, temple-building in Nubia declined, but subsequent Roman emperors,
through the reign of Marcus Aurelius, continued to build and inscribe themselves into the
great Egyptian sanctuaries.

Most interesting here is the way in which this building program emphasized
unbroken continuity with traditional Egyptian religion, engaging harmoniously with
Ptolemaic interventions as well as the more distant pharaonic past. This is in marked
contrast to Augustus’ anti-Ptolemaic bent in Alexandria, to say nothing of his anti-
Cleopatran ideology in Rome. In the very different cultural domain of Alexandria,
created by Alexandria and always under Ptolemaic rule, Augustan political support and
legitimacy were pursued through a direct ideological connection to Alexander, bypassing
the Ptolemies altogether.\footnote{This is surely one reason behind Octavian’s dismissive refusal in 30 BCE to pay his
respects to the dead Ptolemies’ after visiting Alexander’s grave (Cass. Dio 51.16).} Outside Alexandria, a different context and audience required
a different approach. The example of the Ptolemaic Temple of Hathor at Dendera has
already been discussed. Its external reliefs in traditional Egyptian style, showing
Cleopatra presenting Caesarion to the gods, were left unharmed during the Augustan
completion of the temple and remained a permanent part of the finished building. There
was no damnatio memoriae or the equivalent here, or any other sign that the previous
ruler of Egypt was the enemy of the new one. Rather, the appropriate message in this
context was one of religious, ritual and political continuity.

This continuity meant Augustan participation in a long-standing tradition of accretive layering onto the pharaonic past. This tradition included Alexander and the Ptolemies as well as earlier pharaohs. Françoise Laroche-Traunecker has shown how this worked at Khonsou.\textsuperscript{61} Originally a Ramesside temple, its walls are largely covered with 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty decorations, and the complex was filled over time with later building projects, often additions to a single building. A 30\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty chapel attaches to the temple, and the precinct wall and attached chapel were built respectively by Nectanebo I and Alexander the Great.\textsuperscript{62} Alexander was also responsible for repairs to the portal of the pylon, on which he was clothed as a grand priest of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty. There are Ptolemaic traces on the portals, and the two surrounding temples are Ptolemaic; one of them, the Temple of Opet built by Ptolemy Euergetes II, has Augustan external decoration, and other smaller buildings are probably Roman. Each of these rulers not only added to a pre-existing complex but did so with a strategic attachment to earlier interventions. In other words, Augustan activities followed a long-established pattern by which new rulers of Egypt associated themselves with the pharaonic past for ideological gain. These were classicizing acts within an already classicizing milieu.

One further characteristic should be noted. For all its careful continuity, the Augustan program did not follow every Ptolemaic idea and precedent. For example, even though the Roman emperors were represented as pharaohs in Egyptian temple imagery, they did not continue the Ptolemaic practice of making the queen visually prominent and often equal to the pharaoh. Roman empresses do not appear in Egyptian temples until the Hadrianic period—in marked contrast to the development of dynastic imagery and imperial female portraiture in Augustan Rome.\textsuperscript{63} This may have been a way of indicating especial continuity with the past, since, with the striking exception of Amarna-period royal art, queens had not been visually prominent in pharaonic temple imagery. That is, there were deliberate selections at work as well as continuity.

In sum, the Augustan temple-building program outside Alexandria demonstrates a multi-faceted engagement with the monumental remains of pharaonic Egypt as well as the Ptolemaic period. It participated in an ideological layering onto the past, and employed established practices of pharaonic classicism to do so. This, then, was an active, knowledgeable and sophisticated set of interventions into the pharaonic monumental landscape. As noted above, the potentially Egyptianizing aspects of the Ara Pacis draw on both the near and the distant Egyptian past, with certain architectural features most closely paralleled in Middle and New Kingdom chapels, and certain design aspects echoing much more recent religious art along the Nile. Linking them was the Augustan conquest and building program; these made the chronological span of Egypt’s monumental landscape available for Roman imperial art. In short, the jubilee chapels of pharaonic Egypt, and traditional temple art and architecture more broadly, could very


\textsuperscript{62} Alexander, at Khonsou and elsewhere, continued the building programs of the 30\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty, seeking to appear to be a new Thutmose III. Hölbl as in n. 56, p. 85.

\textsuperscript{63} Hölbl as in n. 56, p. 311, n. 7.
well have been known and understood in the Augustan period—at least in Egypt. What about in Rome?

It is one thing to point out an active and knowledgeable pharaonic classicism characterizing Augustus’ interventions in the monumental temple complexes of Egypt. It is another to argue that facets of pharaonic architecture and temple art were appropriated for a state monument in Augustan Italy, and for the Ara Pacis in particular. The availability to Rome of cultural knowledge about pharaonic Egypt does not by itself mean that the knowledge was employed there, or explain how and why Egyptianizing themes appeared and with what effect. To complicate matters, Robert Nelson’s observations on the distortion of meaning inherent in cultural appropriation suggest that we cannot expect direct continuity or the exact transference between Egypt and Italy.

In fact, Augustus was not only one of the great temple builders in Egypt but also one of the great Egyptianizers in Rome. Given the long and fraught history of Egypt and Rome, in the Augustan period we can expect a highly-charged awareness of and involvement with Egyptian culture on the part of the state. Not surprisingly, the official Augustan response toward things Egyptian within Rome was engaged and multifaceted. It included Augustus’ actions against the worship of Isis in Rome, but also his import and installation of two Egyptian obelisks in the Circus Maximus and the Campus Martius. It involved anti-Cleopatran propaganda but also the use of Egyptianizing motifs for decorative effect and perhaps also pharaonic architectural ideas in his Mausoleum. To help bridge the distance between Augustan Egypt and Augustan Rome, and to situate state Egyptianizing activities in Rome, in this section I first review an important shift in the scholarship and then explore a key strand among many in the Roman reception of Egypt: the conception of Egypt as a symbolic landscape for globalizing knowledge and power.

Recent work on Egyptian and Egyptianizing Roman art—Aegyptiaca, in J. M. Versluy’s useful term—is helpful here. The scholarship was long characterized by two distinct strands. One emphasized the religious aspect of representations of Egyptian gods and their associated symbols, often taking any such material as direct evidence for a sanctuary and active worship, especially of Isis. The other strand was typological, collecting things recognizably Egyptian in appearance and defining them primarily in terms of exoticism and difference, isolated from their actual settings and meanings in Rome. New work is offering a more interesting picture. Aegyptiaca in Rome are no means exclusively about the worship of Egyptian gods, nor do they attest to

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64 Sarolta Takács discusses the marked difference between the measures taken in regard to the cult of Isis and the popularity of Augustan Egyptianizing art, in Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World. Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995: 75-80. Penelope Davies has argued that construction techniques from Old Kingdom pyramids were borrowed for the internal structure of Augustus’ Mausoleum and perhaps also for their ideological echoes: Penelope Davies. Death and the Emperor: Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius. Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 56-62.
66 See the review of the scholarship in Versluy as in n. 64, pp. 15-22.
“Egyptomania” in the sense of a simple fad or craze for things Egyptian. Rather, strong and consistent lines of meaning run through the material. Versluys organizes these into three overlapping contextual and semantic groupings: objects and imagery belonging to religious sanctuaries; material employed more broadly for its decorative aspects, and politically motivated Aegyptiaca such as the visual celebrations of Octavian’s victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE. This material could also connote religious solemnity without signifying any specific worship of the Egyptian gods, as seems to be the case on the pyramid tomb of C. Cestius Epulo.

This material opens up richly to the kind of integrated contextual analysis that has been so fruitfully applied to other cultural strands within Roman art. Aegyptiaca were not exotic, alien, or new in Augustan Rome but had been abundant and diverse for some time as part of the cultural importance of Egypt within the Hellenistic world. This included the spread of the worship of Isis in her syncretized Hellenistic form as Isis-Aphrodite, with her consort Serapis. It reflected the importance of Alexandria as a major Hellenistic capital and its profound cultural resonance in Rome, and responded to the extensive contacts between Rome and Ptolemaic Egypt through trade, military activity, finance and diplomacy. This wealth of experiences, attitudes and materials resulted in a range of associations and meanings for Egyptian material in Rome. As in the case of Greek and Hellenizing culture, we should not expect a single role or set of connotations for Aegyptiaca in Rome, but rather a complex, multifaceted, and even contradictory associative range.

Against this extensive and variegated backdrop, one strand in particular shows what was at stake in Egyptianizing activities by the state. This strand is the symbolic role of Egypt in conceptions of global power; it can be introduced here through a Republican image and an Augustan text.

In her discussion of the late second or early first century BCE Nile Mosaic from Praeneste, Gloria Ferrari points out that the image was divided into three regions of time and space. Nearest the viewer lies modern, Hellenized Alexandria within the Delta, complete with contemporary Hellenistic architecture, clothing, and soldiers’ gear. This zone creates a visual here and now. Farther up the Nile and farther away from the viewer are stylistic and ritual elements from the impressive but extinct pharaonic past, including a temple in traditional Egyptian style with four colossal Osiris figures along the front. Finally, in the most distant section of the mosaic from the viewer, lie Ethiopia and the unknown source of the Nile. There, primitively dressed people hunt with bows and arrows; the beasts are wild and even fantastic, and inscriptions in Greek name things for

68 The Augustan pyramid tomb of C. Cestius Epulo, for example, seems to exploit this connotation of monumental religious solemnity without making any direct reference to the worship of the Egyptian gods. Versluys points out that the tomb contained no known Egyptianizing elements or references beyond its pyramid shape, and Cestius himself is not known to have had any particular connection to Egypt (Versluys as in n. 64, pp. 367-68). In this case, the tomb’s form probably served more generally to mark the sacrality of funerary commemoration, to exploit the idea of Egypt as a place of deep time, and to create a prestigious and up-to-date display intended for public viewing in contemporary Rome.


the learned consumption of the viewer. In short, both time and space recede from the
viewer. This mosaic is Ptolemaic in its references; Ferrari follows previous scholars in
connecting aspects of the iconography to the Pompe of Philadelphos and Pythagoras’
expedition to Nubia. At the same time, its structure is part of a longer Greek historical
tradition of viewing Egypt as the repository of history and civilized knowledge, and as a
touchstone for the sanction of world rule. The Praeneste Mosaic thus appropriates not
just Egypt but also Hellenistic ideas about it, encompassing the layered span of history as
well as the land’s extent. This is analogous to the layered Augustan interventions in the
traditional temple complexes there. Different here is the globalizing aspect of that
layering: from a Roman perspective, control over Egypt meant dominion over deep time
as well as space.

A similar conception runs through Strabo’s description of Egypt. Book 17 of the
Geography is dedicated to Egypt, Ethiopia and Libya, where Strabo traveled in the mid-
20s BCE with the prefect Aelius Gallus and his entourage of friends, officials and
soldiers. His account will have been one route for the transmission of contemporary
ideas about Egypt into elite Augustan circles at Rome; it is also an illuminating gloss on
Augustan Egyptianizing. As on the Praeneste Mosaic, a mix of direct observation and
received knowledge informs the representation. The travelers move from Alexandria
and the Delta southward along the Nile all the way to the border of Ethiopia, much as the
viewer’s eye moves across the mosaic. Strabo’s Ethiopia, like the mosaic’s, is a barren
and uncivilized place, lying beyond the boundary of the known and desirable world and
here said to have a terrible climate and barely dressed, nomadic people (17.2.1-3). The
mosaic offers vivid images of Egyptian architecture, animals and plant life; similarly,
Strabo’s text presents a wealth of details about contemporary Egypt, from characteristic
foods to social customs. Both image and text make clear the organizing role of the Nile
and its flood, although Strabo’s narrative is far more administrative in orientation,
listing nomes, their locations and cities, and the major forms of worship there.

As on the Mosaic, pharaonic Egypt is treated as impressive, knowable and located
firmly in the past. Strabo’s group visits the great pharaonic sites, from the royal center of
Memphis with its palaces, temples, and royal tombs (17.1.31), to Thebes (Luxor),
introduced by a reference to Homer and then described in terms of its great ruined
buildings and the colossi of Memnon (17.1.46), to ruined Heliopolis, the source of the
two great obelisks that Augustus imported to Rome some years after Strabo’s visit. The
nilometers at Elephantine and Philae are explained (17.1.48-49), and traditional Egyptian
temple architecture is knowledgeably described, although entirely in terms of its
similarities and differences from Greco-Roman temples (17.1.28). The author describes
the content of inscriptions on obelisks (17.1.46), although without explaining how he
knows this or how accurate the information is—the point is that hieroglyphics are
represented as both knowable and of interest. The text’s social sympathies lie firmly with
the temple priests, for among all Egyptians from the deep past they were dedicated to
philosophy and astronomy, and were the companions of the king (17.1.3). And, as on the
mosaic, existing Greek historical knowledge is a powerful structuring dynamic. Strabo’s
presentation explicitly engages with earlier Greek writers and their descriptions of
Egypt—named references in book 17 include Eratosthenes, Plato, Poseidonius,

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71 Strabo’s role within Hellenistic geography is explored in Katherine Clarke, Between
Callisthenes, Aristotle, Thrasyalces, Pindar, Homer, Artemidoros, and Callimachus—sometimes repeating previous contributions, sometimes refuting or claiming to improve on existing ideas (e.g. 17.1.52). The text shows a clear knowledge of Ptolemaic history and how it relates to developments along the eastern Mediterranean seaboard (17.1.11); Rome is described not only as the Ptolemaic kingdom’s successor but as improving on its mistakes and weaknesses (17.1.12-13). Here again, envisioning Egypt means representing evolutionary time as well as space.

Strabo’s authorial voice is thus classicizing as well as imperializing, interested not only in the new Roman province’s administrative and economic resources, but also appropriating existing notions of its past as both glorious and extinguished. In these ways, Book 17 of Strabo’s Geography illuminates the very transitions that concern my larger argument here: from knowledge within Egypt to knowledge about Egypt, and from the pharaonic past to the Roman present. Like the Nile Mosaic from Praeneste, it illuminates the construction of a pre-selected and value-laden past in the ruins of ancient Egypt. Augustan state Egyptianizing took shape against this background, and in response to it. Egyptian motives and style not only helped celebrate the princeps’ immediate victory over the Ptolemaic queen; they situated the new political order within a much longer-term historical and symbolic framework.

5. Augustan state Egyptianizing in Rome

I have discussed comparanda for the Ara Pacis in pharaonic and late period Egypt, the Augustan building program in the temple complexes of Egypt, and aspects of the transmission and reception of Egypt in Rome. It is now time to look more closely at Augustan state appropriations of Egyptian visual ideas, and to ask in what sense the Ara Pacis can have functioned as an Egyptianizing monument in Rome, and with what effects. To do this I will evaluate the Ara Pacis in comparison and contrast to the nearby Horologium obelisk (figs. 18 and 19). Both were Augustan state monuments, although with different patrons: the obelisk was one of two imported by the princeps from Heliopolis, while the altar was commissioned by the Senate. In some ways, they relate similarly to visual and political ideas about a “classical” Egypt; in other ways, they do not. Not least, the obelisk was ostentatiously Egyptian; by contrast, even if Egyptian precedents are granted, the Ara Pacis was far more allusive, integrated and synthetic in its visual appropriations. It is therefore revealing to consider these two monuments in terms of the key themes already identified for Augustan cultural appropriations: active selection, distortion of meaning, classicism, semantic workings, and explicitness about their own appropriative processes.

The obelisk and the Ara Pacis were set up at almost the same time: the obelisk was installed in 10 or 9 BCE and the Ara Pacis was completed in 9. They also stood near each other, between 80 and 90 meters apart in the northern Campus Martius, and the main, western entrance into the Ara Pacis faced the obelisk, although we do not know whether the space between them was empty or whether other monuments blocked the line of sight (fig. 18). Edmund Buchner has famously reconstructed this obelisk as the

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72 Edmund Buchner points out that Augustus’ titles on the obelisk inscription were valid from June 27, 10 BCE to June 27, 9 BCE, and suggests it was dedicated together with the Ara Pacis on January 30, 9 BCE. Buchner as in n. 34, p.10. In his view, both are monuments to military success, the obelisk for victories in the East, the Ara Pacis for achievements in the West.
Fig. 18. Reconstruction drawing of the obelisk imported by Augustus from Heliopolis and installed in the Campus Martius as the monumental pointer for a north-south meridian line rather than a sundial as drawn here (see Schütz as in n. 34). The Ara Pacis Augustae is at right. (Buchner, as in n. 34, p. 43, fig. 13.)

Fig. 19. One of two obelisks imported by Augustus from Heliopolis in 10 BCE. This one was set up in the northern Campus Martius near the Ara Pacis (see fig. 20). It now stands in the Piazza Montecitorio. (Reproduced from Buchner, as in n. 34, p. 81, pl. 108.)
gnomon, or pointer, of a vast circular sundial with a net of bronze lines in the pavement indicating the hours of the day and the calendar.\textsuperscript{73} He has further argued that the obelisk’s original position, height and function connect it spatially and symbolically to the Ara Pacis and Augustus’ Mausoleum through themes of cosmic time and the emperor’s birth. Unfortunately, this very attractive and widely used reconstruction has been refuted in almost every particular by Michael Schütz.\textsuperscript{74} Schütz concludes, on the basis of the textual and archaeological evidence, that this obelisk was almost certainly not part of a sundial at all but a spectacular meridian instrument, indicating not the hours of the day but the position of the sun in the zodiac cycle along a measured north-south line on the ground. Its specific orientation did not geometrically link the Ara Pacis, obelisk and Mausoleum through a right angle, and the obelisk could not have cast a shadow as far as the Ara Pacis, on Augustus’ birthday or any other day. My discussion takes this into account.

\textit{Active selection}

Following Robert Nelson’s analysis of appropriation, the Ara Pacis and the Campus Martius obelisk should both show an active selection of existing Egyptian cultural material and visual ideas. The obelisk literally embodies an active selection, underlined by the sheer logistical challenge of transporting it to Rome.\textsuperscript{75} Augustus imported two pharaonic obelisks from Egypt in 10BCE. They have the height and slenderness of New Kingdom and later obelisks, in contrast to the stocky Old Kingdom examples.\textsuperscript{76} The one eventually installed in the Campus Martius was originally a commission of Psammetichus II of the 26\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty (595-589 BCE) to celebrate his Sed Festival, or thirty-year jubilee.\textsuperscript{77} Re-erected in 1792 in the Piazza Montecitorio, in its heavily restored state it stands 21.79m (fig. 19). The other, erected by Ramesses II (1279-1213 BCE) at Heliopolis, was placed on the central barrier of the Circus Maximus; it measures 23.914m and was re-erected in the Piazza del Popolo in 1589.\textsuperscript{78} Both

\textsuperscript{73} Buchner as in n. 34. He adds updates and corrections in “Horologium Augusti,” \textit{LTUR} III, 1996, pp. 35-37, but, to my knowledge, has not responded to the substance of Schütz’s criticisms (Schütz as in n. 34).


\textsuperscript{77} D’Onofrio as in n. 38, pp. 369-421.

\textsuperscript{78} D’Onofrio as in n. 38. D’Onofrio explains that both obelisks lost over 1m of their original height because of the need to regularize their damaged bases during their more recent re-erectations in Rome (p. 369, n. 1). John H. Humphrey points out that although the term spina is employed in the scholarly literature to refer to the central barrier of this and other circuses, the
obelisks were taken from Heliopolis, a traditional center in Egypt for the worship of the sun god and a site accordingly rich in obelisks. The Romans knew this (Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.27); Pliny provides the names and dates of pharaohs who commissioned obelisks at Heliopolis, comments on the monuments’ connection to monarchical power, and explains that they are a gift to the sun god (*NH* 36.14). Pliny is wrong about which pharaohs originally dedicated Augustus’ two obelisks, but he presents his assessment as properly including an awareness of which ancient Egyptian ruler commissioned them and why. Heliopolis was also famous as a center of knowledge about the calendar and the accurate measurement of the year, so much so that Plato and Eudoxus spent time there learning this (Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.29). It mattered that these obelisks came from Heliopolis, and the re-installation of one as a giant meridian instrument in the Campus Martius also appropriates this aspect of Heliopolis’ and Egypt’s past for Roman glory in the present.

The Ara Pacis, if it is to be considered an Egyptianizing monument, should similarly demonstrate the active selection of Egyptian motifs or ideas, in addition to the Hellenic and Italic. Above, I proposed that Middle and New Kingdom jubilee chapels offer precedents for important aspects of the Roman altar’s architectural design that are not found in the other cultural traditions that were drawn on for the building’s design and decoration. These include its overall appearance as a small, squared, freestanding stone building on a low podium, its relatively low and even squat proportions, its two axial doorways and their structuring of ritual movement through the building, its low staircase providing access to the entrance on the western side, the three-part structure of the entrance walls divided between a wide central doorway and its flanking panels, and the two-part vertical division of the temenos walls between a ‘solid’ zone below and an ‘empty’ zone above (figs. 1, 4, 11 right, 16). In addition, there are precedents for some of its decorative organization in late period Egyptian temple art, specifically dynastic imagery of the ruler on figural reliefs, and the combination of reliefs that depict the ruler in a sacred context above and vegetal ornament with sacred and fertile connotations below. These aspects suggest an active selection of motifs and ideas from the traditional religious landscape of Egypt. And, as in the obelisk, they imply a clear distinction made in Rome between “classical” pharaonic Egypt and later periods. At the same time, the altar and the obelisk are very different in this active selection; the obelisk was physically removed from Egypt and reinstalled in Rome, while the Ara Pacis at best suggests that knowledge of pharaonic and Ptolemaic ideas was employed together with other cultural appropriations to create an entirely new monument.

**Distortion of meaning**

Both monuments also show a distortion of their original meaning, in Nelson’s terms. Augustus’ obelisks were re-erected alone in Rome, rather than in a pair as was standard in Egypt. They were installed in public spaces, the Circus Maximus and the Campus Martius, instead of in temple complexes, as in Egypt. Their very height and word is not attested in the ancient sources until the sixth century CE: *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing*, London: B. T. Batsford, 1986: p. 175.

overall appearance were changed even as they were displayed in their original form. Each stood on a new base identically inscribed: 80

Imp(erator) Caesar Divi f(ilius) Augustus, pontifex maximus, imp(erator) XII, co(n)s(ul) XI, trib(unicia) pot(estate) XIV, Aegypto in potestatem populī romani redacta, Soli donum dedit.

The emperor Caesar Augustus, son of the Deified [Caesar], as pontifex maximus, imperator for the twelfth time, consul for the eleventh time and with tribunician power for the fourteenth time, with Egypt restored to the power of the Roman people, gave this as a gift to the Sun.

These dedications celebrated Augustus’ power and the Roman conquest of Egypt—recalling Republican evocationes of defeated people’s gods—while also reproducing the obelisks’ Egyptian function as dedications to the Sun. The Campus Martius obelisk took on a new role that was related to Heliopolis’ continuing calendrical fame: it was made the pointer of an enormous meridian instrument, measuring the length of the shadow thrown by the sun throughout the year (Pliny, NH 36.15). Through this distortion, the obelisk became a cultural souvenir and metonym, standing in not only for its own past but for the associations of Heliopolis and Egypt in the Augustan present.

A similar distortion can be seen in the Ara Pacis in comparison to pharaonic jubilee chapels. Like the White Chapel and its successors, this was an explicitly religious building; unlike them, it was not part of a larger temple complex. It retained the Egyptian chapels’ emphasis on sacred movement through the building, but now as part of Roman sacrificial rituals rather than jubilee festivals and bark processions. It appealed not to specific Egyptian religious practice but to a broader sense of religious solemnity and time. And, as noted above, it celebrated the ruler and his legitimacy, but in a different way from the Egyptian chapels’ commemoration of the pharaoh’s thirty-year jubilee, or Heb-Sed festival. It anchors a different kind of ritual and a different kind of time: the celebration of the ruler’s successes at a specific moment, and the annual repetition of ritual observances. Its external decorative organization, with religious figural relief above and sacred vegetal ornament below, echoes Egyptian temple art of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, but on the Ara Pacis the reliefs themselves were carved in a strongly Hellenizing style, and with Hellenistic and Roman rather than Egyptian symbolism.

Classicism

Looked at as Egyptianizing monuments, both the obelisk and the Ara Pacis show a similar conception of the Egyptian pharaonic “classical”—not necessarily in the ways seen in the great temple complexes of Augustan Egypt, but in ways relevant to current artistic practices in Rome. Jas’ Elsner’s consideration of Egyptianizing as well as Hellenizing artistic currents is helpful here. He defines classicism as “the emulation of any earlier set of visual styles, forms or iconographies, which in the very fact of their

80 The Circus Maximus obelisk inscription is CIL VI.701; the Campus Martius obelisk inscription is CIL VI.702.
being borrowed are established as in some sense canonical (or ‘classic’). This was an active classicism, one that constructed its object as classical by virtue of treating it as such. The two obelisks brought to Rome by Augustus do this in a strongly imperializing form. Their import from Heliopolis ostentatiously reached into an Egypt far beyond Cleopatra and recent events, more distant than the Ptolemaic period, Alexander or the Persians, into a venerable, distant and unchanging pharaonic time.

This classicism was itself appropriative, taking over existing classicizing practices for new purposes. In the examples of the Praeneste Nile Mosaic and the Geography of Strabo, a particular vision of Egypt was reproduced for Roman consumption through the filter of earlier Ptolemaic and Greek constructions of pharaonic Egypt. More specifically, in removing two obelisks from Heliopolis, Augustus followed classicizing monarchic practices. Pliny retells the story of Cambyses so admiring a particular obelisk at Heliopolis that, during the Persian sack of the city in 525 BCE, he prevented fire from destroying it (NH 36.14). This story has an Augustan echo: the princeps’ obelisks from Heliopolis were chosen because they were comparatively intact (Strabo, Geog. 17.1.27). Like Cambyses’, they became objects suitable for imperial collection and preservation. Augustus had already taken two obelisks from Heliopolis to Alexandria for the Caesareum in 13-12 BCE; in this he was following yet another precedent, for under the Ptolemies, obelisks were taken to Alexandria and reinstalled there. In importing obelisks to Rome, Augustus was appropriating not only the monuments but existing ideas about how rulers interacted with obelisks—for political purposes in the present.

The Ara Pacis, too, appropriates not only the classical past but more recent engagements with that past. This is already clear in its Greek appropriations. Augustan art drew on Hellenistic constructs of fifth century Athens; these offered an already-classicized past for imperial appropriation and legitimation displays. The Egyptian comparanda proposed earlier in this paper tend in the same direction. The closest architectural precedents for the Ara Pacis are not those of Augustus’ own time or recent Egyptian history; they belong to the pharaonic period. And here, too, this classicism was itself an appropriation. The New Kingdom chapels looked back to Middle Kingdom precedents; Augustan interventions in the Egyptian temple complexes followed existing models of engagement with the past. This past was established as authoritative and exemplary in large part through its repeated reconstructions over time. Finally, this classicism was not about the art’s original political meanings and contexts but was oriented strictly to the interests of the present. As Tonio Hölscher has pointed out, the classicizing forms and style of the processional figures on the Ara Pacis cannot be intended to celebrate and adopt the actual ideals of fifth century Athenian democracy. Rather they were employed as the most appropriate style for solemn Roman state ceremonial. Similarly, pharaonic themes and ideas in Augustan Rome did not signify a desire to recreate New Kingdom forms of political or religious power. Rather, the obelisks and the Ara Pacis associated Augustus’ rule with a very Roman perception of

82 Arnold as in n. 39, p. 150.
84 Hölscher as in n. 24.
pharaonic time, religious monumentality, and Egypt as symbol of the fulfillment of global rule over time as well as space.

A semantic system

These connotations can be explored more fully by returning to Hölscher’s analysis of Roman art as a semantic system. What looks in Roman art like eclecticism is in fact a highly consistent use of certain styles and forms as appropriate for certain subjects. For example, it was not that classical Greek style was the preferred aesthetic option in Augustan art, but that the prestige of those forms and styles made them the best suited for subjects of high state ceremony, such as the processional reliefs on the Ara Pacis. For the depiction of certain deities and religious subjects, an archaizing style was preferable, and so on. Egyptianizing motives and styles can fruitfully be analyzed in the same terms. Two trends stand out. First, Aegyptiaca were often employed in conjunction with Hellenizing themes, not on their own but as part of integrated ensembles. Second, in these ensembles, Aegyptiaca had consistent organizational functions as well as semantic meanings. This usefully meant that Hellenic, Egyptian and other themes could coexist and complement one another on the same monument.

The Campus Martius obelisk was combined in particular ways with other cultural elements in its new installation in Rome. Framed by its Latin inscription and base, it was given a new function as the pointer of a giant meridian line—at least in a second phase—which itself had zodiac names and other seasonal information inscribed along it in Greek. In its new installation in Rome, the mix of Egyptian and Greek was part of the authority and validity of the monumental knowledge display. The obelisk was thus reframed in layered cultural terms: it was a religious object from pharaonic Egypt, a monarchic object of removal and re-installation, part of a Hellenizing scientific apparatus, and a triumphal Roman appropriation of all of these. Within this ensemble, the obelisk alluded directly to pharaonic Egypt; it also played a structural and functional role as pointer. Indeed, pharaonic Egyptianizing in Augustan Rome often seems to have drawn on architecture, rather than iconography or figural style, as in the pyramid tomb of C. Cestius Epulo, the two obelisks from Heliopolis, and perhaps the architectural design of the Ara Pacis.

On the Ara Pacis, any Egyptianizing allusions were similarly layered within a multi-cultural ensemble, and they played a structural and organizational role in addition to their stylistic meanings. For example, one Egyptianizing aspect of the Ara Pacis may be the organization of the reliefs on the external temenos walls. As noted above, the depiction of regnal figures over sacral plants is part of the decorative grammar of the traditional temple complexes of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Here, however, the figures and plants themselves are rendered in Hellenizing forms and styles, and the subject matter refers to Roman myth and ritual. There seem to have been similar organizational rules, or shared practices, structuring the Egyptianizing motifs in Augustan wall-paintings, as in the Mausoleum of Augustus, the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, and the Houses of Augustus and Livia. These show formal and associative patterns that hint at a grammar of design. For example, in the wall paintings from the Black Room of the Augustan Villa of Boscotrecase, Egyptianizing images are found in particular places

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85 Hölscher as in n. 23.
86 Buchner as in n. 34.
within the painted architectural framework. They do not appear in the central spaces, which are reserved for sacro-idyllic landscapes and mythological scenes in a comparatively Hellenizing style, but are pictorial framing devices and evocative ancillary elements. On the Ara Pacis, a similar decorative framing role is played on the interior of the temenos walls by the border of palmettes and lotus buds that separates the wooden slats below from the garlanded bucraania above—although this well-known motif will probably not have carried any marked “Egyptian” connotations by now (fig. 5). In sum, Aegyptiaca had an organizational role as well as iconographic and stylistic connotations, and that role was carried out in relation to non-Egyptian visual material.

The same themes hold true for the possible pharaonic references on the Ara Pacis. These can be imagined in two ways. For some people, this altar may have alluded in structural and functional terms to pharaonic jubilee chapels. This level of recognition recalls the specific referents proposed for other aspects of the Ara Pacis, such as the Altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens, or the archaic Roman templum minus. Not many people in Rome could have known and recognized any of these. That is not in itself a problem; the Ara Pacis was surely seen and considered by many viewers with different levels of knowledge. Any echoes of pharaonic chapels on the Ara Pacis may also have been stylistic and semantic, with no specific references intended or perceived. This, too, would match the monument’s Greek appropriations. Hölscher argues that the processional friezes on the Ara Pacis were probably not intended to refer to a specific monument such as the Parthenon frieze in Athens—its location posed enormous visibility challenges for Athenians, let alone people in Rome. Rather, its style was consistently employed in Roman art as connoting the dignity and solemnity proper to the depiction of Roman state ceremonial. Similarly, pharaonic ideas or stylistic allusions had semantic force in Augustan Rome: the deep time, religious solemnity and implications for power already noted. Even without any specific references to jubilee chapels, aspects of the structure and lapidary lines of the Ara Pacis may have looked pharaonic in Augustan Rome.

Explicitness

Finally, I suggested above that Augustan cultural appropriations are explicit about their own processes of appropriation. Here, the two monuments seem very different. The obelisk was far more direct and explicit than the Ara Pacis. Its Egyptian shape, hieroglyphs, and explanatory Latin inscription made its geographical and cultural origins clear. It trumpeted its Egyptianness. Obelisks in Rome and other cities hardly seem

exotic now; Augustus’ imperial successors imported additional examples, and popes and
other later rulers repeatedly moved and re-installed them. The two brought in 10 BCE, however, were the first of their kind in Rome; they must have been visually thrilling.
Moreover, Nilotic scenes or images of Isis-Aphrodite were widely known by this period,
but these giant objects were hyper-Egyptian by contemporary standards. They were not
part of the existing panoply of Egyptianizing themes and motifs known at Rome, nor the
product of Hellenistic syncretism or other Mediterranean cross-currents. These were
from Egypt itself, and from a site construed as authentically pharaonic. In this blatant
removal and re-installation of the things themselves, Augustus’ obelisks recall the fifth
century BCE pedimental sculptures of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, removed from a
temple in Greece and integrated into an entirely new setting in Rome. This “making
present” of actual obelisks was a new form of explicit and spectacular Egyptianizing in
Rome.

The Ara Pacis was far more allusive and indirect in its appropriations—of Italic
and Hellenic precedents as well as any Egyptian ones. On one hand, the presence of
multiple visual references and allusions was made plain and not concealed. The temenos
walls depict vegetal reliefs, figural friezes, and mythological-allegorical scenes, all in
carefully structured locations and all in markedly different styles, forms and kinds of
imagery. If their architecture and arrangement looked at all Egyptian to viewers, that will
have added to the effect of eclectic cultural synthesis. Inside, precisely where the solidity
of the marble temenos walls will have worked most powerfully on viewers in the closed
space of the ambulatory, the same two registers depict wooden slats below and open air
above. This cannot be an attempt at genuine illusion or trompe l’oeil; instead, it calls
attention to the Ara Pacis’ juxtapositions of theme, material, genre and style. On the
other hand, these juxtaposed elements remained highly allusive about exactly what was
appropriated. One might well ask: if pharaonic Egypt were a desired allusion, why not
make it explicit, as the nearby obelisk’s inscription does? Whatever the answer, it
affected all of the Ara Pacis, not only its possible Egyptian echoes. Nowhere did the
architecture, carving, or an inscription point to particular origins for its styles, motives or
themes, whether Italic, Hellenic or Egyptian. Their force was suggestive rather than
direct.

One possibility is that the cultural strands amalgamated in the Ara Pacis, perhaps
including Egyptianizing architectural and organizational themes, may have been selected
precisely because they allowed for this kind of accretive and synthetic layering. It may
be no coincidence that the form of pharaonic chapels is not so far removed from
Hellenistic altars in Greece, or that the axial doorways of Egyptian peripteral chapels
match the two-door symbolism of another Roman building with powerful connections to
peace, the Temple of Janus Geminus in the Roman Forum. There was not necessarily a
specifically “Egyptian” sense about these features for patrons, sculptors or viewers, much
as contemporaries probably did not see much that was considered “Greek” in the various

90 Erik Iversen. *Obelisks in Exile*. Copenhagen, 1968. The last obelisk to be brought from
Egypt by a Roman emperor was erected in the Circus Maximus by Constantius II in about 360
CE: D’Onofrio, as in n. 38, p. 369. Susan Sorek. *The Emperor’s Needles: Obelisks in Rome*
(Oxbow 2005) was not available to me during the writing of this article.

91 Eugenio La Rocca. *Amazzonomachia: Le Sculture Frontonali del Tempio di Apollo
styles and figural motives represented on the monument. It was much more a case of a rich array of precedents, cultural traditions and existing practices in Augustan Rome, and their selective synthesis into something new. In this sense, artistic appropriation on the Senate’s Ara Pacis worked very differently from the ostentatiously direct appropriations of the princeps’ obelisks or the pedimental sculpture of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus. This altar can be seen as a rich and carefully constructed synthesis of Egyptian, Hellenizing and Italic ideas and traditions, a layered and allusive monument to Rome’s incorporation of distant cultures, past times, and powerful traditions of political symbolism.

6. The limits of interpretation

One piece of this proposal remains to be made. The potential Egyptianizing aspects of the Ara Pacis can be integrated into what we know of its visual and cultural functioning, but to what end and with what effects in Augustan Rome? Assuming the monument’s designers drew on Egyptian precedents, what force might these have had? One answer has already been suggested; certain Egyptianizing ideas and themes can be integrated into the cultural appropriations previously identified for this monument. Further, it was possible to understand them in terms of semantic stylistic workings more broadly. Can this proposal also be pushed in political terms? In this final section, I propose one way to do that, and then conclude by commenting on the limits of the interpretations offered in this paper.

This discussion has raised the crucial issue of audience, or rather, of multiple audiences with different interests in the Ara Pacis, and different levels of cultural knowledge. Who in Augustan Rome could have recognized specific allusions to pharaonic jubilee chapels, or even a more general sense of “Egyptianness” in the Ara Pacis? It is possible that these were much more recognizable in Augustan Rome than they are to modern scholars, trained in the visual and material culture of Greece and Rome but often less familiar with that of Egypt, now taught as an entirely separate discipline. Augustus’ obelisks look immediately and obviously Egyptian to modern eyes, but we are conditioned by the Egyptianizing activities of subsequent Roman rulers and later centuries, in which obelisks played a spectacular public role in Rome and elsewhere that pharaonic jubilee chapels simply did not. Elite Romans and high officials may have known a surprising amount about Egypt, especially in light of its extremely important recent history for Rome; Book 17 of Strabo’s Geography is a vivid reminder of how much information was available. More broadly, Augustus celebrated a triple triumph at Rome in 29 BCE for his victories in Illyricum and Egypt as well as at Actium; the procession may well have included visual depictions of the lands and people conquered. If so, it is easy to imagine a graduated degree of knowledge and recognition within Augustan Rome. The form of the Ara Pacis may have looked somewhat Egyptian to a number of people, but not many could have recognized a specific allusion to pharaonic chapels, and very few could have associated the Ara Pacis with a thirty-year jubilee festival. If such a reference was among the intentions of the monument’s designers or patrons, it could only have been directed toward the most knowledgeable people in Rome with respect to pharaonic culture: its political elite, and perhaps especially the Senate, who commissioned the Ara Pacis, and the princeps, for whom it was built.
This is significant, for the Senate had a particular interest in Egypt after Augustus’ conquest. To reduce the danger of an Egypt-based political threat, Augustus installed as governor an equestrian, not a senatorial, prefect of Alexandria and Egypt (Cass. Dio 53.13.2). Roman senators and high-ranking equestrians were no longer permitted to visit Egypt without imperial permission (Tac. Ann. 2.59). The Senate, apparently anxious to reassure the princeps that it did not pose a threat, passed a senatus consultum that made the date of Octavian’s triumphal entry into Alexandria a holiday. Egypt was also formally ceded to Augustus’ control as part of the constitutional settlement of 27 BCE (Cass. Dio 51.19.6, 53.12.7). And of course, the Senate had access to the same long-standing tropes and historical knowledge about Egypt as did Augustus and his immediate entourage: the same set of themes concerning deep time and sacrality, the image of Egypt as emblem for the fruition of world history and political power in the Mediterranean, the past century and more of Roman interventions in Egypt, and the immediate history of Egypt as a powerful base for opposition in the Roman civil wars. It was one thing for Augustus to sponsor Egyptianizing monuments and imagery at Rome; it was a very different thing for the Senate to do so. In a senatorial Egyptianizing gesture, we may glimpse the high stakes and anxieties surrounding the new political order at Rome and the fraught role of Egypt within it.

With its commission of the Ara Pacis, the Senate was intervening in a key political issue of the time: how to represent the nature and limits of that power. Any Egyptianizing allusions, like its other references and overall impact, were in important ways about contemporary political affairs and about the relationship between princeps and Senate. On one hand, the altar was a complex expression of Augustan ideology in its juxtaposition of Roman and ancestral Julian myths, its pairing of the allegorical figures of armed Roma and Pax/Tellus, its emphasis on ceremonial piety in the processional reliefs, and its dynastic representation of women of the imperial house. In this vein, architectural allusions to a solemn pharaonic classicism could add powerful symbolic dimensions to the celebration of Augustus’ power. On the other hand, an Egyptianizing Ara Pacis can also be seen as a counterpoint to the obelisk, a carefully constructed foil that draws on the same pharaonic language while mitigating the obelisk’s strongly monarchic force. If Augustus’ obelisk saluted the Sun god in terms of the princeps’ conquest of Egypt and sole dominion over the Mediterranean, the Ara Pacis expressed a somewhat different and more restrained view of the nature of the princeps’ power. Its allusions to Middle and New Kingdom jubilee chapels celebrated Augustus’ rule and its stability over time, but they also situated that rule firmly within a larger context of proper ritual observation and sacred limits on the ruler’s power, embedded and constrained by human communities and religious obligations. In other words, it may be possible here to glimpse fissures and fault lines in Augustan political imagery. Augustan art is famous for its depiction of a harmonious golden age, but the differences between these two monuments hint at the high-stakes struggles and negotiations underlying that representation of harmony.

But is it true? Were pharaonic jubilee chapels in fact meaningful precedents for the Ara Pacis? The possibility is intriguing and worth considering, but there is no way to prove it. In the absence of an explanatory inscription, unmistakeable visual emulation, attestation in an ancient text, or further examples pointing strongly in the same direction, this can be a suggestion only, requiring evaluation on less explicit criteria: a sense of

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92 Zanker, as in n. 22.
meaningful similarity, or of historical plausibility in the surrounding geographic and
cultural connections, or of satisfying explanation. These are not decisively present either.
This article exists precisely because there is no suggestion of Egyptian precedents in the
existing scholarship. The surrounding context of possibility can be shown, but it does not
imply that this particular connection existed. And, if these potentially Egyptianizing
elements are to be blended into a larger model of synthetic cultural appropriations on the
Ara Pacis, then they are not needed for its interpretation, and there can be no sense of a
satisfying explanation.

The reception of the Ara Pacis certainly did not depend on these proposed
Egyptianizing aspects. Besides, if these precedents were at work, why was there no
further Egyptianizing of this particular kind after the Ara Pacis? Obelisks had a long
afterlife in Imperial Rome, as did other Egyptianizing ideas and motifs, but to my
knowledge there are no other buildings at Rome that allude to Middle and New Kingdom
jubilee chapels—or for that matter to the Ara Pacis itself.93 It may be that these chapels
also served elsewhere in Rome as architectural reference material and that this simply has
not been recognized. Or, their symbolism at the start of the Principate did not remain
relevant with the consolidation of dynastic rule. More plausibly, the Ara Pacis itself was
so rich a cultural construct that it became a new origin point; referring beyond it to its
own precedents was not necessary or interesting. It may also be significant that
pharaonic classicism does not seem to have continued in the same form after the
Augustan period. Later imperial Egyptianizing saw more blended stylistic expressions
that have more in common with the blended forms of the Hellenistic period.

It may be more fruitful to think about how and why the proposal can be made at
all. The Egyptian precedents adduced early in this paper were suggested by following
existing practices of visual and architectural comparison. They also depended on the
selection of certain aspects of compared monuments as especially similar and relevant.
Likewise, there were clear vectors of cultural knowledge and transmission between the
religious landscape of Egypt and political monuments in Augustan Rome, but their
existence does not prove that specific ideas actually moved along them or were
employed, or how and in what form. And, seeing Egyptian echoes in the architectural
lines and decorative organization of the Ara Pacis says nothing about whether these were
deliberate and meaningful allusions to a specific pharaonic form and function, or simply
ideas in circulation, used without any conscious “Egyptian” meaning or allusion. Finally,

93 The Ara Fortuna Redux, dedicated by the Senate on Augustus’ return in 19 BCE and
erected outside the Porta Capena, took a far more basic and traditional form than the Ara Pacis (F.
Coarelli, “Fortuna Redux, Ara,” LTUR II, 275 and fig. 103). We do not know the architectural
shape of the Julio-Claudian Ara Pietatis (Eugenio La Rocca, “Pietas Augusta, Ara,”LTUR IV
[1999] 87-89). An anonymous reader of an earlier draft of this paper for JRS observed that “it
would certainly be surprising if such a seminal monument as the Ara Pacis did not spawn at least
some imitators (it is a pity we know nothing in detail about the plans of the contemporary Altar of
the Gauls in Lyon [12 BC] or the Altar of the Ubii in Cologne [probably 9 BC]).” The same
reader suggested that there might be a parallel in a monument excavated in 1886-87 in the
Campus Martius and reconstructed by Lanciani as having three screen walls concentrically
arranged around a central altar and punctuated by doorways on a central axis. However, both its
initial identification as an altar to Dis and Proserpina and Lanciani’s architectural reconstruction
have since been rejected (compare F. Coarelli, “Dis Pater et Proserpina, Ara,” in LTUR II [1995]
understanding the Ara Pacis as a richly layered, culturally allusive and semantically complex visual monument allows multiple readings and insertions of new layers. This in turn raises the question of where to limit this process and on what grounds. The argument may or may not be right, but it is clear that proposing pharaonic precedents for the Ara Pacis requires connecting these gaps and uncertainties in particular ways, and that this is itself an appropriative process.

In this article, I have been concerned with processes of cultural appropriation, not only tracing the adoption of visual material and artistic ideas, but asking how certain forms or ideas became available, why they were taken up for a new purpose, what happened to them in that transformation, and what resonance and significance they may have had in their new settings. My focus has been Egyptianizing material, and in particular Augustan visual receptions of pharaonic Egypt. As a test case, I have explored the possibility of pharaonic and other Egyptianizing allusions in the Ara Pacis. This has required considering the extensive Augustan interventions into the traditional temple complexes of Egypt, the transmission of imperial ideas about pharaonic Egypt to Rome, their particular uses there, and their role within a much broader, multi-faceted Roman engagement with Egypt and Aegyptiaca. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this test case, then, is to help illuminate a sophisticated imperial engagement with pharaonic visual culture and integrate it into our understanding of Roman artistic appropriations. This returns me to the modern appropriations of the Ara Pacis and the White Chapel with which I began. Much like the Italian Fascist relationship to Imperial Rome and the French colonialist engagement with pharaonic Egypt, the Augustan state appropriated the distant past of Egypt as an extinguished but symbolically powerful culture whose elements could be transported and displayed with political force for the present.