

Paul Rehak, Women and Children on the *Ara Pacis Augustae*."

A paper given at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, St Louis MO, 16 April 2004.

inaugural date: 29 July 2005; last update: 29 July 2005

Comments, corrections, questions: [John Younger \(jyounger@ku.edu\)](mailto:jyounger@ku.edu)



Abstract

The Altar of Augustan Peace (*Ara Pacis Augustae*) in Rome, constructed between 13 and 9 B.C., has attracted much attention as a political, social and artistic document of the early principate (e.g. recently, P. Rehak, *Art Bulletin* 86 [2001] 190-208). Its elaborate scheme of decoration includes two long historical friezes depicting approximately one hundred individuals in parallel processions, perhaps a supplicatio on Augustus' return to the capital from the western provinces (R. Billows, *JRA* 6 [1993] 80-92). It has been claimed that the friezes are the work of Roman, not Greek, craftsmen, and that the inclusion of women and children reflects Augustan social policy favoring families (D. Conlin, *The Artists of the Ara Pacis* [1997]; D. Kleiner, *MEFRA* 90 [1978] 753-85). A reexamination of the children and women in the friezes suggests that both claims require modification.

Women account for no more than 15% of the participants, and most of the women's bodies are based on Hellenistic honorific body types used for priestesses and benefactors in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. Livia's body is a mirror image reversal of the well-known Greater Herculensis type (S-32), while other figures have voluminously swathed bodies and even hands, both Hellenistic traits. At least one woman is shown as aged (N-43), not young and classicizing. None of the women wears the distinctive Roman stola, present on contemporary grave reliefs in Rome and Italy.

The number of children is similarly low (5%), and the artistic sources for the surviving children are diffuse. Some, indeed, are dressed as miniature future citizens with toga and bulla, but one girl in the north frieze wears earrings, a necklace, and the Melon-coiffure, attributes we might expect of a Hellenistic princess rather than a member of the imperial family. A boy (N-38), usually identified as Gaius Caesar garbed as a camillus, does not wear the costume of a religious acolyte, but rather a fringed military cloak with parallels in three-dimensional bronze and marble portraits. This garment perhaps alludes to Gaius' participation in the Troy Game, not a religious festival like a supplicatio, and marks him out dynastically as Augustus' intended successor. The roles of the two "barbarian" children in the friezes (S-31, N-35) are still debated as well.

Thus the artists of the Ara Pacis appear to be sifting through a range of possible iconographic sources of inspiration, instead of presenting a coherent imperial "Roman" artistic vocabulary. Most importantly, the women and children on the altar reflect a significant gender imbalance among the total group of participants. Women and children in fact make up only about 20% of the two processions. The main focus is on Augustus himself, Agrippa, and other adult men, rather than emphasizing the presentation of the family of the princeps to the public.



Text

The Altar of Augustan Peace in Rome, constructed between 13 and 9 B.C., has attracted much attention as a political, social, historical and artistic document of the early principate. Its elaborate scheme of decoration includes two long "historical" friezes depicting approximately one hundred individuals in parallel processions, moving from east to west, in the direction of Augustus' giant sundial, the Horologium-Solarium. The occasion perhaps a supplicatio on Augustus' return to the capital after a three year absence in the western provinces. Despite well over a century of scholarly investigation, the long friezes still invite debate. Today I would like to focus on the women and children, who have usually been discussed historically as relatives of Augustus and as reflections of his social programs that promoted the creation of stable families and the procreation of children. We generally assume that such groupings would be apparent to an informed Roman viewer; however, a reexamination of the children and women in the friezes suggests that this claim require some modification.

Number-crunching:

I begin with some simple number crunching. Despite lacunae at the end of both processions, the friezes preserve a total of 97 figures: 49 possible individuals on the south, and 48 on the north, according to Koeppl's numbering system which is followed here. (fn 1) Of these, only 13 represent women (8 in the south frieze, 5 in the north), with three figures at the end of the north frieze whose sex cannot now be determined because so little of them is preserved. Thus women actually account for no more than 15% of the total participants. The number of surviving children of both sexes is even lower: approximately 5%. The remaining men account for 80% of the total. Not only is this an overwhelming imbalance in terms of overall gender, but the women and children tend to cluster toward the last third of each procession, following the groups of men: lictors, flamines, other groups of priests, and a handful of historical figures who can be identified with assurance, especially Augustus and Agrippa. Thus in visual terms, the compositional focus is clearly on the men and on the apparatus of political and religious power.

Fn 1: G. Koeppl, "Die historischen Reliefs der römischen Kaiserzeit V: Ara Pacis Augustae," *BonnJbb* 187 (1987) 101-57. Pollini earlier proposed a numbering system which omits some of the figures identified by Koeppl: J. Pollini, *Studies in Augustan 'Historical' Reliefs* (PhD. Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley 1978).

Women:

The women are shown in an imaginative range of body types, but few can be considered exclusively Roman sculptural types. Rather, most of them drawn from Hellenistic honorific body types used for priestesses and benefactresses in mainland Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. Recently, Sheila Dillon has drawn attention to the importance of costume as an element of portraiture in the Greek examples.

Among the women, only S-32 (Livia) and S-36 (Antonia Minor), really stand out because they are high-relief foreground figures, and because they appear nearly frontal, relatively free of overlapping figures. These traits suggest that in sculptural terms, these are the two most important women in either processional frieze, though Antonia was only of secondary importance at the time the Ara Pacis was carved: Julia, the daughter of Augustus was not only alive but still in good repute. By contrast, most of the north frieze women are shown in profile (N-36, N-40, N-44).

Livia's body (S-32), for example, is a mirror image reversal of the well-known Greater Herculaneus type, while other figures -- particularly the clump of mostly headless women on the north frieze -- have voluminously swathed bodies and even hands, both Hellenistic traits. Similarly, the palla draped over the tunic is shown as sheer, partially revealing heavier drapery folds underneath. Remarkably, not one of the surviving women wears the distinctively Roman stola of the matron with its shoulder straps, a garment present on contemporary grave reliefs in Rome and Italy. This reliance on Hellenistic female types may suggest that the designers, and perhaps the carvers, of the friezes were Greek rather than Roman craftsmen, as Diane Conlin has suggested in her recent book.

The body of S-36 (Antonia Minor) represents another adaptation of another Greek type draped in a mantle or palla. The earliest examples of the type occur with the portrait of Aischines, probably dating to the end of the 4th c. (the orator died on Samos in 314 B.C.) (fn. 2). The Romans adapted the type for men and women; best known from the example found in the theater at Herculaneum. By the imperial period it had become a formulaic type for the philosopher/poet, but also for private individuals. On the Ara Pacis, variations are introduced by the veiling or baring of the head, along with difference in hairstyle or gesture.

Fn. 2. G.M.A. Richter, *Portraits of the Greeks*, 2 (19--) 212-15, figs. 1369-96; Pollitt 62-63; B. Ridgway, *Roman Copies of Greek Sculpture. The Problem of the Originals* (Ann Arbor 198-) 102 and notes 30, 31; B.S. Ridgway, *Hellenistic Sculpture I. The Styles of ca. 331-200 B.C.* (University of Wisconsin Press 1990) 226 and pl. 109.

Among the women, jewelry is notable mostly by its absence. A background woman, S-30, however, has been identified as a barbarian queen because she wears earrings and a fillet across her brow (fn. 3), and another background figure, S-37, touches her finger to her lips in a gesture that seems to demand silence (fn. 4). Five women are veiled: S-30 (the silencer just mentioned), S-32, S-41, N-36, and background figure N-39. The head of the last is damaged, but her deep naso-labial folds indicate that she is quite old, the only realistic depiction of advanced age on the altar, which otherwise emphasizes classicizing, idealized and youthful features. Four south-frieze women wear laurel wreaths (S-30, S-32, S-36, S-40), but none on the north, where this lack may be due to accidents of preservation. N-36 wears a fringed garment draped over her left shoulder and hanging down her back, which could perhaps be the *ricinium* signifying a widow, and

appropriate for Julia after March of 12 BC, when Agrippa died.

Fn. 3. Koeppel 123-24 no. 30, 123 fig. 13. Koeppel notes her earlier identification as Julia, as well as the possibility that she represents a barbarian.

Fn. 4. Koeppel 125 no. 37, 124 fig. 14.

Children:

During the second half of the first c BC, Roman sources repeatedly call attention paid children, especially in the aftermath of Virgil's 4th Eclogue, the Secular Games of 17 BC, and the problematic children of Antony and Cleopatra. On the Ara Pacis, the artistic sources for the bodies of the surviving children show considerable variation, but only eight children are preserved in the long friezes, six boys and two girls -- continuing the male/female gender imbalance. Some, indeed, are dressed as miniature future citizens with toga praetexta and bulla of Etruscan origin, including two boys and three girls (fn. 5). But Greek votive reliefs also show families with children, like the Xenokrateia relief of late 5th c. date found in the Piraeus.

Fn. 5. The toga praetexta originated in Etruria: Pliny, NH 8.74 and 9.36. See, e.g., the child in procession in toga praetexta in Tomba Bruschi, Tarquinia: R. Bianchi Bandinelli and M. Torelli, *L'Arte dell'antichità classica II* (Turin 1976) pl. 195 = Holliday, *AJA* (1990) 80 fig. 6. Cf. L.M. Wilson, *The Roman Toga* (Baltimore 1924) 18-19; idem, *The Clothing of the Ancient Romans* (Baltimore 1938) 130-31 on the praetexta; L. Bonfante Warren, "Roman Costumes. A Glossary and Some Etruscan Derivations," *ANRW I.4* (1973) 591.

The roles of the two "barbarian" children in the friezes (S-31, N-35) are still debated as well; I'll return to them in a moment.

One girl in the north frieze includes both Greek and Roman elements: she wears earrings, a necklace, and the melon-coiffure, attributes we might expect of a Hellenistic princess rather than a member of the imperial family. No other woman preserved on the Ara Pacis wears a necklace, and she is the only child who holds a laurel branch. Even allowing for the loss of figures at the end of the north frieze, this little girl is singled out as a significant individual, the more so because the adult male nearby places his hand on her head in a protective gesture.

A boy (N- 38), usually identified as Gaius Caesar garbed as a camillus, wears a fringed cloak. His attribute is not the mappa of a camillus, however, which elsewhere has a flocked surface as well as fringe. Better parallels for a fringed cloak are found among depictions of military leaders, such as the bronze equestrian statue of Augustus found in the sea, now in the Athens National Museum. Perhaps, then, the garment of N-38 alludes to Gaius' participation in the Troy Game, not a religious festival like a supplicatio, and marks him out dynastically as Augustus' intended successor. (The textual sources for Gaius' participation leave unclear whether he took part in 13 or 11 BC).

Family Groups:

We might also question whether the Ara Pacis figures form identifiable family groups, as claimed by Diana Kleiner in an influential article in 1978 (fn. 6). This question is complicated by the changing relationships

among the members of the imperial family, and the continuing debate about the extent to which the friezes represent historical documents.

Fn. 6. Kleiner 758-9.

The first possible group includes Agrippa (S-28) and the boy in foreign dress behind him who grasps a fold of his toga, S-31 (fn 7). This child is a crux. In the background is a female figure, S-30, who rests her right hand on the child's head (fn 8). Agrippa and the child form a family group only if we accept the identification that the child represents Gaius in the costume of a Trojan prince (fn 9). Gaius would then appear between his natural father, Agrippa, and the woman (S-32) usually identified as his stepmother, Livia, but not in association with his natural mother, Julia, or his adoptive father, Augustus. Although various historical reasons have been advanced for dissociating Gaius from one or more of his real or adoptive parents, the fact remains that the pair of figures does not form an identifiable family group except by special pleading.

Fn. 7. Koeppl (1987) 123 no. 28, 124 no. 31, 122 fig. 12.

Fn. 8. Koeppl (1987) 124 no. 31, 122-23 figs. 12, 13.

Fn. 9. As does, e.g., Kleiner (1992) 93.

The child, moreover, may not even represent Gaius. Erika Simon has suggested that the child represents a barbarian child, and Brian Rose has followed this identification and expanded the argument (fn 10). They regard the boy as an eastern prince brought to Rome by Agrippa to be raised, and the background woman who places her hand on his head as the boy's mother.

Fn. 10. Simon 21; Rose (1990) 455-59; Kuttner (1995) 101-102, concurs.

A second family group has been identified in S-36, S-38, and S-39, figures usually identified as Antonia Minor holding the hand of her son, Germanicus, and turning toward her husband Drusus (fn 11). Of these individuals, only the identification of Drusus is really secure, since he is shown wearing a tunic with paludamentum and boots, a costume which is thought to reflect his absence from Rome on the German frontier when work on the Ara Pacis began in 13 B.C. (fn 12). (By the time the altar was dedicated he had died of a fall from his horse in Germany). Both adults might reasonably be expected to appear on an Augustan monument: Antonia Minor was the daughter of the emperor's sister, Octavia, while her husband Drusus was the younger son of Livia by her first husband. Nothing in the status of Antonia between 13 and 9 B.C., however, appears to justify her visual prominence here, and possibly we should reconsider her identification. Earlier, moreover, the woman was identified as Julia, turning to flirt with her step-brother Drusus!

Fn. 11. Kleiner (1978) 758-759. On portraits of Antonia, see K.P. Erhart, "A Portrait of Antonia Minor in the Fogg Art Museum and its Iconographical Tradition," *AJA* 82 (1978) 193-212.

Fn. 12. Pollini 100-101.

This apparent group, moreover, does not form a closed unit. Behind Drusus stands another, older boy S-42, who grasps the adult's paludamentum in an intimate, possessive gesture (fn 13). This child, however, has been identified as part of a third family group that includes a draped woman with veiled head, S-41, a foreground girl, S-43, and an adult male, S-45 (Fig. 7). Not attributed to this group is a background figure with highly individualized portrait features, S-44, whose large head occupies much of the space between the man and the woman.

Fn. 13. Koepfel (1987) 126 no. 42, 125 fig. 15.

If one accepts the identification of S-36 as Antonia Minor, then the identification of S-41 as her sister, Antonia Major, becomes plausible though there are significant differences between the two: Antonia Minor is wreathed while Antonia Major is veiled, and the former is a foreground figure while the other stands in the background. Antonia Major was married to Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, and thus the two foreground children with them are thought to represent Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus and Domitia (fn 14). The identification of these children is not without problems: Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, later the father of the emperor Nero, may have been born around 2-1 B.C., too late by more than a decade to have been depicted as a child on the Ara Pacis (fn 15). The girl, who is much taller than the boy, would be even older, perhaps too old to be either of the sisters of Gnaeus recorded in our sources as the aunts of Nero (fn 16).

Fn. 14. Antonia Major was born in 39 B.C. to Octavia and Mark Antony, and engaged at just two years of age to Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, who was cos. in 16 B.C.: RE V.1 1343 s.v. L. Domitius Ahenobarbus.

Fn. 15. RE V.1, 1331-33 s.v. Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus; R. Syme, "Neglected Children on the Ara Pacis," *AJA* 88 (1984) 583-89; A. Barrett, *Agrippina* (London 1996) 44-45.

Fn. 16. Domitia and Domitia Lepida: RE V.1 1510 s.v. Domitia and 1511-13 s.v. Domitia Lepida. For recent discussion of the sisters, see Barrett (*supra* n. 32) 45-46.

If we were to reconstruct a family group here strictly on the basis of visual criteria like pose and gesture, it should include Drusus (S-39), the little boy who grasps his military cloak (S-42) and the woman (S-41) who rests her hand on the shoulder of the little boy.

On the north frieze, the first putative group identified by Kleiner includes two frontal togati who look to the left (N-33, N-34), partially overlapped by a small child in foreign costume (N-35), and followed by a voluminously draped and veiled women (N-36). Once again, there are problems with this apparent family. The child looks up at one man (N-34) and grasps a fold of his drapery with his right hand, while the second man (N-33) holds the child's left hand: despite the physical contact among these figures, both men cannot be the child's father, and Kleiner acknowledges once again that this group does not form an identifiable family (fn. 17).

Fn. 17. Kleiner (1978) 760-61.

Significantly, if N-36 represents Julia she is not shown with Agrippa, her husband in 13 B.C., nor Tiberius, her husband in 9 B.C.: instead, both of these individuals appear in the south frieze. N-36 thus represents a problem for those who believe that Julia, as mother of Gaius and Lucius, should be prominently represented on the altar. Moreover, by adoption Augustus and Livia had become the legal parents of both Gaius and Lucius in 13 B.C. In any case, the Ara Pacis woman and child cannot be said to form a recognizable "family group."

Behind the woman and child in the north frieze is a triad of figures which Kleiner identifies as a second family group (fn. 18). This cluster includes another heavily draped women (N-40) and a man (N-42) with a child between them (N-41). Both the woman and man lack heads, but the figures seem visually to form a pair since the taller woman overlaps the shorter man, and the child nestles between the two adults. In addition, the man places the fingers of his right hand on the crown of the little girl's head, in a protective gesture which should symbolize paternity; compare the barbarian woman and child on the south frieze. The

north frieze woman, however, extends her left hand holding a laurel branch over the head of the young boy (N-38) in front of her, framing his head.

Fn. 18. Koeppel (1987) 137 nos. 40-42.

No secure identifications have been proposed for the man, woman, and girl. Among the proposals are Octavia Minor, the sister of Augustus who died in 11 B.C., her stepson Iullus Antonius (who later, in 2 B. C., was executed for adultery with Augustus' daughter Julia), and Julia the young daughter of Agrippa and Julia (fn 19). If these identifications are correct, the triad of figures represents a mother with son and a child who is not directly related to either adult.

Fn. 19. Woman: Rose (1990) 463: "perhaps Octavia Minor." Girl as Julia, sister of Gaius and Lucius: Pollini (1987) 24, n. 28.

Finally, a nearly frontal boy in a toga praetexta on a fragment of the north frieze, N-45, has been identified as a possible member of a third group, the rest of which cannot be identified (!) (fn. 20). He wears a bulla which identifies him as a child, but unusually he also displays a ring on his left ring finger of the hand which grasps his toga. (A similarly posed boy with long hair appears on a Julio-Claudian relief found on the Capitoline which has been attributed to the Ara Gentis Iuliae) (fn. 21). The frontality of the Ara Pacis figure compares well with that of the older boy on the south frieze, S-42, but the wearing of a ring by a child seems anomalous. Recently, Rose has suggested that this child represents Lucius Caesar (fn. 22). and compared him with the boy he identifies as his brother Gaius, N-38.

Fn. 20. Koeppel (1987) 137 no. 45, 135 fig. 26; Kleiner (1978) 761: "He has not been identified and the group to which he belonged cannot be reconstructed at this time."

Fn. 21. LaRocca in Strocka (1994).

Fn. 22. Rose 464.

Conclusion:

In short, the supposed family groupings do not inspire confidence. Thus, of the six family groups suggested by Kleiner, only one is at all convincing: the representation of Antonia Minor, Drusus, and one of their children (not necessarily Germanicus) in the south frieze. None of the groups within the imperial family that were important in 13 are recognizable. Moreover, in artistic terms, I would like to suggest that the artists of the Ara Pacis appear to be sifting through a range of possible iconographic sources of inspiration, instead of presenting a coherent imperial "Roman" artistic vocabulary. And most importantly, the women and children on the altar reflect a significant gender imbalance among the total group of participants. The main focus is on Augustus himself, Agrippa, and other adult men, rather than emphasizing the presentation of the family of the princeps to the public. The Ara Pacis may embody an Augustan peace, but it is one in which men retain all the power.

CATALOGUE OF CHILDREN

South Frieze

- 1. S-31: barbarian child or Gaius Caesar. For tunic slipping off shoulder, cf. N-38 ("Gaius"), Tellus. Simon pls. 13, 14. Koeppel 124 no. 31, 124-25 figs. 14, 15, 20 (detail of face). Rose 455-59, 455 fig. 2, 456 fig. 3 (detail of face). Kuttner (1995) pls. 78-80.
- 2. S-38: young boy in toga, bulla "Germanicus." Simon pl. 15. Koeppel 125 no. 38, 124 fig. 14.
- 3. S-42: boy in tunic, toga, bulla. "Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus." Simon pl. 15. Koeppel 126 no. 42, 124-25 figs. 14, 15.
- 4. S-43: girl in tunic, toga praetexta (Koeppel)/palla draped like toga (Roman Costume). "Domitia": Simon pl. 15. Koeppel 126 no. 43, 125 fig. 15.

North Frieze

- 1. N-35: barbarian child. Simon pl. 17 (above), 19 (above and below, drawing), 21 (detail of face). Koeppel 135 no. 35 and fig. 24. Rose 459-62, 457 figs. 5, 6 (detail of head). Kuttner (1995) pls. 75-77.
- 2. N-38: boy in tunic, fringed mantle. "Gaius." For tunic slipping off shoulder, cf. Tellus, S-31 (child in foreign costume). Simon pl. 16 (above), 23 (detail). Koeppel 137 no. 38, 136 fig. 25. Rose 463-64, 463 fig. 10, 466 fig. 11 (detail)
- 3. N-41: girl in toga praetexta, meloncoiffure, earring, necklace with pendants, holding laurel branch. Pollini 24, n. 28: Julia, granddaughter of Augustus. Koeppel 137 no. 41, 136 fig. 25. Rose 464, 463 fig. 10.
- 4. N-45: child, indeterminate sex, in tunic, toga praetexta, bulla, ring on left hand. (probably a boy because of the ring). "Lucius" (Rose). Koeppel 137 no. 45, 136 fig. 26. Rose 464, 463 fig. 10.

Tellus Panel

- 1+2 babies held by seated Tellus, not numbered by Koeppel. For discussion of relief, see Koeppel 112-13, 112 fig. 3. For views of the babies, see Simon pls. 26, 27. La Rocca (1983). Kuttner (1995) pl. 74.

Roma Panel

- 1+2 children being suckled by the lupa romana on shield of Roma not preserved, but restored on basis of parallels: see Koeppel 113-114, 113 fig. 4.

Mars Panel

- 1+2 Romulus and Remus (restored): Koeppel 110 nos. 2/3, 109 fig. 1 (drawing).

Aeneas Panel

- 1. youthful victimarius wearing tunic and laurel wreath, leading sow to sacrifice. Koeppl 110 no. 1, 111 fig. 2.
- 2. youthful victimarius wearing tunic and laurel wreath, with braid at back of head, holding offering dish and jug (guttus). Fringed mantle draped over left shoulder. Koeppl 110 no. 2, 111 fig. 2. For views of the panel, see Simon pl. 25. Rose 465-67, 466 fig. 12. Kuttner (1995) pl. 99.



Comments, corrections, questions: [John Younger \(jyounger@ku.edu\)](mailto:jyounger@ku.edu)