

# Between Republic and Empire

*Interpretations of Augustus and  
His Principate*

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## The Pontificate of Augustus

On the sixth day of March in the year 12 B.C. Augustus Caesar was declared *pontifex maximus* in succession to the recently deceased triumvir M. Aemilius Lepidus. The date of this event is securely attested on three of the great epigraphic calendars of the Roman Empire: on the *Feriale Cumanum*, for example, we read [*eo die Caesar Pontifex Ma*]ximus creatus est, supplicat[i]o Vestae, an entry that explicitly records the role of the *pontifex maximus* in the Vestal cult. Despite his program of reorganization and renewal and his desire to reinvigorate the religious life of Rome, Augustus had allowed the priesthood of the Vestals to lie unattended for nearly two decades. Lepidus, *pontifex maximus* from the troubled days of the forties, resided in ignominious confinement at Circeii but continued to hold the office, which not even Augustus chose to strip from him.

This, the highest and most august priesthood at Rome, had traditionally been conjoined with the office of *princeps senatus*, which Augustus already held. But the splendor of the pontificate seems to have kept Augustus from defiling it by arrogation, and he waited patiently for the old Lepidus to die. When this finally happened, he added the grandiloquent words *pontifex maximus* to his own titlature, and they then became a

standard part of the imperial titlature for all of his successors. Nothing is more consistently or ostentatiously paraded by the Roman emperors apart from their tribunician power. When one considers the enormous labor that has been expended on interpreting the nature of the tribunician power, it can only seem surprising that the pontificate has attracted so little attention.

A new assessment of Augustus could well take as one of its starting points the circumstances that surround the assumption of the office of *pontifex maximus* in 12 B.C. This was the time in which the design of the great sundial of Augustus was laid out, the time in which the Ara Pacis was being created, the time in which two obelisks were brought from Heliopolis in Egypt to Rome, the time in which the fourth book of Horace's *Odes* was first being circulated at Rome—to convey a sense of the excitement of that age. To examine the long neglected pontificate of Augustus we must look at the whole period from 13 to 9; in other words, the period from the return of Augustus to Rome from Gaul and Spain down to the dedication of the Ara Pacis on 30 January 9 B.C.

In any book on Augustus it would be hard to find much more than a simple reference to the death of Lepidus and the emperor's assumption of the office of *pontifex maximus*. In the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* an excellent article on Augustus even omits the priesthood altogether. The general impression conveyed is that Augustus did not really care much about the position and therefore left it to the old triumvir. The long wait appears to have been understood as an indication of disinterest on the emperor's part. In his *Roman Revolution*, Syme wrote: "The official head of the state religion, it is true, was Lepidus, the *pontifex maximus*, living in seclusion at Circeii. Augustus did not strip him of that honour, ostentatious in scruple when scruple cost him nothing. He could wait for Lepidus' death."<sup>1</sup>

And yet the extraordinary prominence of the title, once assumed, both in the Augustan period and afterwards ought to have suggested the opposite of such a view. The priesthood was simply too important to tamper with. The whole survival of the Roman world seemed in some sense to depend upon the Vestal cult, which traced its origins to Troy and the flight of Aeneas. Readers of the last poem in the third book of Horace's *Odes* will recall that the longevity of Roman civilization and with it the renown of the poet are expressed by a reference to the *pontifex maximus* climbing the Capitoline Hill with a Vestal virgin: *dum*

1. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 477.

*Capitolium / scandet cum tacita virgine Pontifex* (*Carm.* 3.30.8–9). These words must have seemed all the more portentous when they were written in the twenties, since at that time the *pontifex* was not ascending the Capitolium at all but living out his life in a kind of internal exile.

Caesar Augustus had long displayed an exceptional interest in the revival of traditional religion and his own participation in priestly colleges. He had become a *pontifex* very early and subsequently became *augur*, *quindecimvir sacris faciundis*, *septemvir epulonum*, *frater arvalis*, *sodalis Titius*, and *fetialis*. It is inconceivable that he thought that the greatest of all priesthoods, the position of spiritual leadership of the Roman state, did not really matter. The high priest traditionally controlled the calendar and state sacrifices. He chose the *flamines*. Yet at the celebration of the secular games in 17 B.C. Augustus presided with Agrippa in the embarrassing absence of the *pontifex maximus*, but he dared not touch the incumbent. A newly discovered fragment of the great inscription describing the organization and celebration of those games now reveals Augustus' solemn prayer to the gods on that occasion.<sup>2</sup> He ought to have pronounced it as *pontifex maximus*. Neglect of the pontificate has kept an important part of the Augustan principate in the dark.

Augustus himself did not even believe that Lepidus had properly assumed the priesthood, but nonetheless he was unwilling to deprive him of it. Despite the attitude of modern historians, the emperor in his *Res Gestae* clearly indicates the significance he attached to the priesthood he assumed in 12: *pontifex maximus ne fierem in vivi [c]onle / [gae mei] l]ocum, [populo id sace]rdotium deferente mihi quod pater meu[s] / [habuer]at, r[ecusavi. qu]od sacerdotium aliquod post annos, eo mor[is]uo q[ui civilis] m[otus o]ccasione occupaverat, cuncta ex Italia / [ad comitia mea] confluen[te mu]ltitudine, quanta Romae nun[quam] / [fertur ante] id temp[us fuisse], recep[er] P. Sulpicio C. Valgio consulib[us].* "I refused to become *pontifex maximus* as a successor to my colleague while he was still alive, even though the people offered me that priesthood, which my father had held. Some years later, after the death of the man who had seized this priesthood on the occasion of a civil war, a multitude from the whole of Italy came together to elect me, a crowd such as they say had never been seen at Rome before that time. I took the priesthood in the consulate of P. Sulpicius and C. Valgius."<sup>3</sup>

2. L. Moretti, "Frammenti vecchi e nuovi del Commentario dei Ludi Secolari," *Rend PontAcc* 55–56 (1982–1984) 361–79.

3. RG 10.2.

These words leave no doubt of Augustus' view of the high priesthood nor of his desire to guarantee the legitimacy of his assumption of it. The very date of the event was perceived as important by his successors, who regularly waited to take the office of *pontifex maximus* in the month of March, no matter when their actual power began. The date for the pontificate became as traditional as the December date for the assumption of the tribunician power.

In his *Fasti* (3.415–28) Ovid commemorated the event of 6 March in a series of couplets that emphasized the Trojan connections of the Vestal cult (*Iliacis tura pone focus*) and the role of Aeneas in rescuing the sacred objects of the cult that were still preserved at Rome. Because of the emperor's own Trojan ancestry through Venus, Ovid is able to declare that the right priest has assumed the right priesthood: "A priest sprung from Aeneas touches the divinities that are related to him (*cognata numina*)." Accordingly the poet beseeches Vesta to protect her *cognatum caput*. Both the Vestal fires and their priest are to live forever: *vivite inextincti, flammaque duxque, precor*. Once again we see the importance of the Vestal cult and its priest for the symbolism of eternity and immortality.

Although both the epigraphic and the literary *fasti* are explicit on the date of Augustus' assumption of the pontificate, the historian Cassius Dio records the event under the year 13 B.C. This is evidently because it was in that year that Lepidus died. The entry in Dio begins simply, "On the death of Lepidus he was appointed high priest."<sup>4</sup> Although it is customary to say that Lepidus died either in 13 or in 12, the evidence as it stands would suggest that his death came in 13 and that Augustus allowed some time for the preparation of the formal assumption of the priesthood. The death of Lepidus in 13 has significant implications, for that is the year in which Augustus returned from Spain and Gaul, and it is also the year in which the Ara Pacis was begun. Although the Ara Pacis may well have been formally voted as an immediate expression of gratitude for the return of Augustus, it has long been evident that there must have been substantial discussions and preparations for such a major proposal.

The assumption of a preparatory phase is now made absolutely certain by the phenomenal discoveries of the German Archaeological Institute in the vicinity of San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome. The publication of the German excavations by Edmund Buchner has revealed the full

4. Dio 54.27.2.

extent of the huge and complex sundial that was laid out in the Campus Martius, undoubtedly the largest sundial ever constructed anywhere at any time.<sup>5</sup> It is now clear not only that this monumental work was conceived at the same time as the Ara Pacis, but that the orientation of the altar itself was actually determined by the lines of the sundial.

This means that the sundial (or *solarium*) and the Ara Pacis were part of a single great plan designed in 13 B.C. in connection with the return of Augustus. The interdependence of these two projects is borne out as well by the grand inscription that appears on two sides of the base of an Egyptian obelisk, now on the Montecitorio, which served as the *gnomon*, or pointer, of the sundial. The text of this inscription records dedication to the sun (*solī donum dedit*) in the year 10/9 B.C.<sup>6</sup> Since we know that the Ara Pacis was dedicated on Livia's birthday, 30 January 9 B.C., Buchner has rightly brought the dedication of the sundial into conjunction with the dedication of the Ara Pacis, and he has seen the entire complex as dedicated on 30 January 9 B.C.

The preeminent role of the sun in the overall concept of the scheme for the Campus Martius is reinforced by the obelisk itself. This object was brought to Rome at some time between 13 and the end of 10 on the orders of Augustus and inscribed on two sides with the Latin dedicatory text. What was dedicated to the sun came from the city of the sun, Heliopolis, in Egypt. Furthermore, in precisely the year 13/12 B.C., as can be determined from inscriptions, two other obelisks were removed from Heliopolis and placed in front of the shrine of Caesar Augustus, the Caesareum, at Alexandria in Egypt.<sup>7</sup> This operation was obviously correlated with the design for the Campus Martius, which also honored the Augustan achievement. Finally, in the same period (between 13 and 10) a fourth obelisk was taken from Heliopolis and brought to Rome for erection in the Circus Maximus. The inscription on this obelisk,<sup>8</sup> which stands now in the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, was identical to the one that served as the *gnomon* in the Campus Martius.

Our understanding of the thinking of Augustus and his planners in 13 can be broadened still further if we survey the full text of the inscriptions on the obelisks at Rome and on those in Alexandria. The two at Rome begin in large letters with the emperor's name, *Imp. Caesar divi f.*

5. E. Buchner, *Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus* (Mainz 1982), incorporating articles in *RM* 83 (1976) 319–65 and 87 (1980) 354–73.

6. *ILS* 91.

7. *OGIS* 656; *CIL* III.6588. Cf. J. Klein, "P. Rubrius Barbarus," *RhM* 35 (1880) 634, with Pliny *HN* 36.69 (on the two obelisks).

8. Cf. *ILS* 91.

*Augustus / Pontifex Maximus.* In the next line follows the titulature that establishes the date of 10/9 B.C., and after this the words *Aegypto in potestatem populi Romani redacta / soli donum dedit.* In other words, these obelisks, coming from Egypt, are memorials of Augustus' victory over Cleopatra and the fall of Alexandria. The prominence assigned to the title *Pontifex Maximus* is remarkable and new, for Augustus had held the office for only about two years. And he was not holding it at all when the scheme represented by these obelisks was designed.

The reference to Egypt ties the two obelisks in Rome to the two that were set up before the Caesareum in Alexandria in 13/12. There the two obelisks from Heliopolis, which stand today in London and New York, were set up on newly created bronze bases in the shape of crabs, and on each of these crabs was inscribed in both Latin and Greek the year of Augustus in which the objects were erected at Alexandria and the name of the prefect of Egypt. The bases were probably designed to represent the astrological sign of the Crab (Cancer). And to understand this some technical observations are required. It is astronomically impossible that Augustus' *horoscopus* was in the Crab (in other words, that this was the sign rising) at the moment of his birth, because we know from Suetonius that he was born shortly before sunrise on 23 September 63 B.C. The Crab was not ascendant at that time. But it could well have been rising at the moment, equally significant astrologically, of his conception.

Suetonius suggests that Augustus' vital dates of genesis and birth were irresistible to mathematicians and astrologers. When as a young man the heir of Caesar and future Augustus met the mathematician Theogenes at Apollonia and reluctantly revealed the dates of his coming into the world, Theogenes jumped up ecstatically and then bowed down before the youth. As a result Augustus later showed so much faith in his horoscope, according to Suetonius, that he published it widely and issued coins with the sign of Capricorn, under which he was born (*quo natus est*).<sup>9</sup> Now, the allusion to Capricorn here and on the surviving coins that confirm it have baffled commentators for a long time.<sup>10</sup> The emperor's birth date in September should place him in Libra, and a *horoscopus* in Capricorn is just as impossible at the time of birth as one in Cancer.

Capricorn as a zodiacal month came much earlier than Augustus'

9. Suet. Aug. 94.12: *exilivit Theogenes adoravitque eum. tantam mox fiduciam fati Augustus habuit, ut thema suum vulgaverit nummumque argenteum nota sideris Capricorni, quo natus est, percusserit.* Cf. also German. *Phaen.* 558–60.

10. Cf. RIC 61 (28–27 B.C.), 63 (19–18 B.C.), 83 and 85 (25–22 B.C.), 88 (12–11 B.C.).

birth date in September. But it came exactly nine months earlier. In other words, Capricorn ought to be considered the sign of his conception, and so it was by the excellent Bouché-Leclercq in his *L'astrologie grecque*.<sup>11</sup> But philologists like A. E. Housman could neither tolerate *quo natus est* as a reference to conception nor concede that Suetonius might have erred here.<sup>12</sup> This was in spite of the plain and multiple evidence that Augustus was born under Libra. Suetonius himself provides the correct calendar date in that sign, and Virgil in his first *Georgic* had long before located the birth of the future Augustus in Libra.<sup>13</sup> The astronomical poet Manilius, whose text Housman understood better than the Augustan world in which Manilius wrote, was able to name Capricorn as the emperor's sign in Book 2 and Libra as his sign in Book 4, leading not only Housman but George Goold, his successor in editing Manilius, into transparent contradictions.<sup>14</sup> It took Housman ten years to face up to the fact that Augustus had at least two signs, and unfortunately when he did so he misinterpreted the situation.<sup>15</sup> He assumed that the sun was in Libra but the moon in Capricorn at Augustus' birth, and yet anyone who was at all familiar with the importance of the sun on the obelisks and indeed generally in Augustan Rome would have found it odd that the emperor chose to advertise a zodiacal sign determined by the moon. The discovery of the sundial has now proved beyond any doubt, by means of its mathematical layout, that Augustus celebrated both conception and birth.

Conceived on the winter solstice, he was born on the autumnal equinox. It has now been demonstrated that in the great plan of the horizontal sundial the equinoctial line passes directly through the middle of the Ara Pacis and determines the openings on the eastern and western sides of the altar. Furthermore a circle described through the endpoints of the curved line of Capricorn passes directly through the midpoint of the Ara Pacis, there intersecting the equinoctial line. The conjunction of these lines fixes exactly the orientation of the altar within the *solarium*.<sup>16</sup>

11. A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris 1899) 374, n. I am grateful to Otto Neugebauer for patiently instructing me in astrology and for emphasizing the enduring value of Bouché-Leclercq's book.

12. Manilius, *Astronomica*, ed. A. E. Housman (London 1903) vol. 1, lxxix-lxxi.

13. Virg. *G.* 1.32–35.

14. Manil. *Astron.* 2.507–9 (Capricorn) and 4.773–77 (Libra). Cf. G. P. Goold, Loeb edition of Manilius' *Astronomica* (1977) 284, n. b.

15. Housman (supra n. 12), revised in "Manilius, Augustus, Tiberius, Capricornus, and Libra," *CQ* 7 (1913) 109–14, and reprinted in J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear, eds., *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman*, vol. 2 (Cambridge 1972) 867–72. Cf. the posthumous second edition of Housman's Manilius (Cambridge 1937), vol. 1, 93–95.

16. Cf. Buchner (1982: supra n. 5) 27 (= id. [1976: supra n. 5] 337).



Hence the position of the Ara Pacis was such that on Augustus' day of birth the shadow of the sun would traverse the equinoctial line and ultimately fall directly upon the center of the altar. The sun would signal its winter rising annually on the day of Augustus' conception by casting the shadow of the obelisk's point along the line of Capricorn, from the eastern end of which a perpendicular would intersect the equinoctial line at the very midpoint of the altar. The revelation of this symbolism at Rome tells us more about the mechanics of Augustan ideology than do centuries of scholarly speculation. And there is more: in the previous generation Varro's friend Tarutius had prepared retrospectively a horoscope for Romulus, and he had discovered that the founder of Rome had been conceived under Capricorn and born under Libra.<sup>17</sup>

This momentous parallel was not lost on Manilius. In Book 4 the poet puts the foundation of Rome under Libra, *qua genitus Caesar . . . nunc condidit urbem*, "under which sign Caesar was born who has now founded the city and curbs (*frenat*) the world."<sup>18</sup> It is hard to credit the pertinacity with which both Housman and Goold have clung to the view that the reference here to Rome's new founder and current ruler, described as born under Libra, is to Tiberius and thus that this part of the *Astronomica* was written after Augustus' death. Their error is rooted in the old mistake that Augustus was born under Capricorn, even though Housman finally knew better. The allusion is precisely to Augustus, still living, and with it the poem is authoritatively vindicated as a wholly Augustan achievement. When Manilius speaks earlier of Capricorn at the time of the *ortus Augusti*, he uses *ortus* in a broad sense to encompass conception.<sup>19</sup> Whether Suetonius used *natus* in the same way or simply misunderstood an earlier source that had *ortus* is unclear. But the importance of the date of conception is triumphantly affirmed both by the sundial and, with its help, by Manilius rightly understood. And so the possibility, raised earlier, of referring the Alexandrian crabs to the *horoscopus* showing the rising sign at the moment of conception becomes the most attractive explanation of their appearance in 13/12 B.C.

The interdependence of the projects and themes—*solarium*, Ara Pacis, the conquest of Egypt, the days of Augustus' conception and birth—now open up to us the whole process of planning that must have gone on in 13 in anticipation of Augustus' return. Although the projects took

17. Plut. *Rom.* 12. Cf. Bouché-Leclercq (supra n. 11) 369 with n. 1.

18. Manil. *Astron.* 4.773–77.

19. Manil. *Astron.* 2.509.

nearly four years to reach fulfillment, they were conceived as a whole; and the ideology that they represent is precise and interlocked. When the public monuments were ready, Augustus presented himself to the public on the obelisks as *pontifex maximus* before anything else, and in the great frieze on the right or southern side of the Ara Pacis he appears, as has been widely recognized and much discussed, in the guise of the *pontifex maximus*. It would appear, therefore, that his succeeding to this priesthood upon the death of Lepidus was an integral part of the overall plan. It would thus be legitimate to assume that Lepidus had already died when the preparations were under way to receive Augustus in Rome in 13 and to inaugurate the spectacular sequence of honors that followed.

The great voice that we can still hear today from that momentous time is that of Horace, reawakened to poetry in his early fifties. (He was less than two years older than the emperor.) It is scarcely necessary to argue here, despite an occasional dissenting opinion, that the fourth book of the *Odes* must be assigned to the year 13 or perhaps, as I am inclined to think, 13/12 B.C.<sup>20</sup> The anticipation of Augustus' return to Rome in the second and fifth poems and the account of Augustus' steps-sons, Drusus and Tiberius, in the second and fourteenth poems can leave no doubt about the time of composition. Furthermore, as Michael Putnam has observed in his illuminating new book on these late odes of Horace, the poet proceeds chronologically from longing for the absent Augustus to hailing the present ruler, received in the city with honors and encompassed with evocations of his Trojan ancestry and the peace of the contemporary empire.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the earlier poems must precede the emperor's return and antedate 4 July 13, while the later poems must be dated after that day. It is hard to say whether the fourth book of *Odes* included pieces from early in 12, but there is a seasonal progression within the book as well as the progression from the absence to the presence of the emperor.

The marvelous poem to Torquatus on the inevitability of death begins with late winter and the retreat of the snows: *diffugere nives, redeunt iam gramina campis*. The same poem evokes the solemn procession of seasons and the helplessness of men before them. The ode to Phyllis is set exactly on Maecenas' birthday in April, and the following piece evokes the Thracian breezes of full springtime. Is it possible that

20. Cf. M. C. J. Putnam, *Artifices of Eternity: Horace's Fourth Book of Odes* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1986) 23, n. 6.

21. *Ibid.*, esp. 24–25.

this obsession with the seasons and their progression is a reflection of the bold scheme to represent not only days and nights but seasons and the winds on the massive sundial in the Campus Martius? Horace seems, at any rate, to have been attentive to the solar theme in the plan worked out in 13 B.C. In his second ode he wants to cry out to the emperor, *o sol / pulcher, o laudande*, and in the fifth poem (*divis orte bonis*) he beseeches the ruler to give back his radiance to his homeland, *lucem redde tuae, dux bone, patriae*, “for when your countenance like the spring has shone upon the people, the day passes more agreeably and suns are more radiant (*et soles melius nitent*).”

In the penultimate poem of the book Horace invokes the efforts of the senate and people of Rome to immortalize the virtues of Augustus, *qua sol habitabilis illustrat oras*, “wherever the sun illumines the habitable shores.” In those extraordinary lines with which the poem begins, Horace evokes the concerted efforts of the *patres* and the *Quirites* to pile up honors on Augustus, to make his virtues eternal forever, *virtutes in aevum / per titulos memoresque fastos / aeternet*. The placing of *aeternet* at the beginning of the second strophe and the choice of this preternaturally rare word gives it tremendous emphasis. The virtues of the emperor are immortalized *per titulos memoresque fastos*. The *fasti* are, of course, the calendars that prescribe annual celebrations such as the *anniversarium sacrificium* that is established along with the Ara Pacis. The *tituli* could either be inscriptions or honorific offices bestowed upon Augustus.

That the latter is what Horace means here is supported by a remarkably similar passage in Ovid’s *Fasti*. The passage comes from the very lines that describe the assumption of the office of *pontifex maximus* in 12.<sup>22</sup> The pontifical honor (*pontificalis honor*), says Ovid, has been added to the innumerable *tituli* of Caesar, which he chose to accept. As a result the divine manifestation of eternal Caesar presides over the eternal fires of Vesta. The Latin is very striking: *Caesaris innumeris, quos maluit ille mereri, / accessit titulis pontificalis honor. / ignibus aeternis aeterni numina praesunt / Caesaris*. This close conjunction of the *tituli* of Caesar and the office of *pontifex maximus*, together with the explicit statement of eternity suggested by the Vestal cult, matches exactly the conjunction in Horace’s ode. I am inclined to think, accordingly, that the fourteenth ode of the fourth book makes reference to the assumption of the pontificate and must be dated after 6 March 12. When the

22. Ov. *Fast.* 3.420–22.

long question with which that poem begins comes to an end in line 6, Augustus is addressed as *maxime principum*. This could well be the poet's way of referring to the reestablished union of the *princeps senatus* and the *pontifex maximus*.

The relation of the sundial and its obelisks to the commemoration of the conquest of Egypt is likewise recalled in the same poem of Horace. After a series of strophes concerned with the Claudii Neronas, the poet returns to Augustus in order to celebrate the peace that now reigns throughout the empire. And the peace begins with an evocation of the conquest of Alexandria and the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty: *nam tibi, quo die / portus Alexandria supplex / et vacuam patefecit aulam, / Fortuna lustrum prospera tertio / belli secundos reddidit exitus*, "for to you, on the day when Alexandria as a suppliant opened its harbors and its deserted palace, prospering fortune gave favorable outcome in war in the third lustrum."

After this poem comes the closing ode in the fourth book, beginning with Phoebus Apollo and ending with Troy, Anchises, and Venus. Peace, fertility, and good harvest dominate the poem and have long suggested to readers some kind of parallel with the motifs of the Ara Pacis, which was to be dedicated a few years later. In a valuable appendix to his book Michael Putnam has raised very plausibly the possibility that the inauguration of the Forum Augustum should also be dated to this period and seen as part of the overall grand scheme.<sup>23</sup> Since we know that Augustus and his planners included the Circus Maximus in the commemoration of his rule and his family, it is by no means impossible that the Forum Augustum, which could have been started in 12 or 11, was a part of the larger plan.

It has already appeared that the timing of these interlocked projects seems to have been due to the fortunate coincidence of Lepidus' death and Augustus' return from Spain and Gaul in 13. The centrality of the assumption of the high priesthood in 12 in the whole complex of honors must now be considered directly with reference to the Ara Pacis itself.

Augustus appears on the south wall as *pontifex maximus* in the great frieze with his family. Erika Simon's eccentric opinion that he appears as *rex sacrorum* need not detain us.<sup>24</sup> Augustus never held this inferior office, assiduously avoided the word *rex* in any context, and gave away the house of the *rex* presumably because there was no incumbent at

23. Putnam (supra n. 20) 327–39. Cf. P. Zanker, *Forum Augustum: das Bildprogramm* (Tübingen 1968).

24. E. Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (Tübingen 1967) 17.

all.<sup>25</sup> He is unmistakably *pontifex maximus* on the frieze of the Ara Pacis. There has long been a temptation to assume that the scene represented there was the actual dedication of the altar on 30 January 9 B.C., when Augustus was indeed *pontifex maximus*. On the surface this seems a reasonable assumption in the light of the grand statement of the office on the obelisk inscriptions of the same date. But it cannot be. The frieze depicts Augustus' friend and counselor for many decades, M. Vipsanius Agrippa, as a member of the solemn procession. The veil he wears marks him as a priest, although this in itself poses no problem since as adjutant to the emperor he is more than likely to have served as a plebeian *pontifex* in the college of *pontifices*.<sup>26</sup> The problem is simply that the great man died at the end of March in 12 B.C., only a few weeks after Augustus had assumed the pontificate.

If, however, one opts for an identification of the procession with that of the *constitutio* of the Ara Pacis in 13 B.C., other serious obstacles intrude. Not least of these, of course, is the appearance of Augustus as *pontifex maximus*. Furthermore, Drusus in military garb is clearly recognizable, and on 4 July 13 he was away in Gaul looking after the situation there when Augustus had returned to Rome. Agrippa too was probably absent, not yet back from Syria. An additional problem seems to be the fourth *flamen* who appears conspicuously in the procession with his distinctive cap with an *apex*, or point, on top. The appearance of four *flamines* means that one of them must be the *flamen* of Jupiter, the so-called *flamen Dialis*; and, according to present opinion, the office was vacant in that year and not filled until 11.<sup>27</sup>

Problems of this kind have forced scholars to assume that the frieze is to a greater or lesser extent fictional, representing some kind of ideal procession in which a *flamen Dialis*, Agrippa, Drusus, and Augustus as *pontifex maximus* could all be brought together at the same time. Here, for example, is Mario Torelli in his recent volume of Jerome Lectures on Roman historical reliefs: "Therefore the meeting of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* is entirely fictitious but is represented as 'the meeting that could have taken place.' The only possible truth of the representation is not the reality but the norm, i.e. how the *apantesis* should have been performed in 13 B.C. as in the future."<sup>28</sup>

25. Cf. M. W. Hoffman Lewis, *The Official Priests of Rome under the Julio-Claudians* (Rome 1953) 76–77. On the house of the *rex*, Dio 54.27.3.

26. Lewis (supra n. 25) 68–71.

27. By Ser. Cornelius Lentulus Maluginensis (*PIR*<sup>3</sup>, C 1394).

28. M. Torelli, *Typology and Structure of Roman Historical Reliefs* (Ann Arbor, Mich. 1982) 54.

It must be obvious, in view of the care and exquisite precision that went into the delineation of the *solarium Augusti* and the Ara Pacis, to say nothing of the work in Alexandria, in the Circus Maximus, and perhaps elsewhere, that so careless a representation that has nothing to do with reality on the south side of the Ara Pacis—the very side that looks toward the obelisk—is very difficult to accept or believe. All the more so when there is a date and an event that would accommodate perfectly the entire scene on the south side of the altar. That is a procession of the imperial family on the day that Augustus became *pontifex maximus*.

On that occasion the emperor was quite properly garbed as the high priest, and we know that Agrippa had already returned to Italy and thus could easily have been in Rome, close by his leader, on 6 March before retiring to Campania where he was soon to die. As for Drusus, Augustus had left him in Gaul to look after the German frontier in his absence. But it appears that relatively early in 12 B.C. the Sugambri and their allies opened a war. This probably means that Drusus had left the area at the time and provided an opportunity for hostile action in much the same way as the return of Agrippa from Illyricum led to an outbreak in that region. As we know, the Illyrian campaign was subsequently entrusted to Drusus' brother, Tiberius. But he too was present in Rome on 6 March, and he is almost certainly to be identified alongside Livia on the frieze of the Ara Pacis. So Drusus would have appeared with his brother at Rome on the occasion of Augustus' assumption of the pontificate and on a representation of that event.

The presence of the *flamen Dialis* is actually less of a problem than has been surmised. It disappears altogether in the light of what we now know about the plans of 13 and 12 B.C. The last *flamen* of Jupiter before the Augustan Age had been Cornelius Merula, who had died in 87. In recording the events of 11 B.C. Cassius Dio observes, in the characteristically vague expression "at about the same time" (*en tōi autōi toutōi chronōi*), that the priest of Jupiter was appointed for the first time since Merula.<sup>29</sup> The appointment is also mentioned by Tacitus in the *Annals*, where a specific number is given for the years intervening between Merula and his successor.<sup>30</sup> In all modern texts of the *Annals* the number appears as seventy-five, producing a date of 11, which coincides with the year under which Dio records the event. But it is time to insist that

29. Dio 54.36.1.

30. Tac. *Ann.* 3.58.

that number is nothing more than an emendation designed to harmonize Tacitus with Dio and that what survives in the Medicean manuscript of Tacitus is seventy-two, in other words, 14 B.C.

Nothing stands against this date, nor is it intrinsically unlikely that in the year before his return to Rome Augustus was already thinking about new appointments to strengthen his revival of the old traditions of Roman-religion. By what procedures he secured the election of *flamines* in the lifetime of Lepidus is unknown, but we know that he did it. Thus the *flamen Dialis* on the south frieze of the Ara Pacis would also be no impediment to a date in 12 (nor, for that matter, should he have been even in 13). But there is no year other than 12 in which the entire group pictured as they are pictured could have assembled. It may well be, therefore, that we have on the Ara Pacis not only the precise commemoration of Augustus as a prince of peace, of Trojan ancestry, whose genesis and birth are remembered by the sun twice a year and whose peace was won by conquest commemorated by the great obelisk that cast the shadow; the altar was also an eternal reminder of an eternal cult, that of Vesta and her priest, the *pontifex maximus*.

It was in the majesty of the pontificate that Augustus presented himself as the conqueror who brought peace. The astronomical precision of the buildings and images associated with the assumption of the pontificate reveal with a clarity hitherto unexampled the reality of Augustan ideology. The crab, Capricorn, and the sun itself were components in a mathematical construct to honor the emperor by showing that his destiny was part of the universal order. The haunting verses in the fourth book of Horace's *Odes* faithfully mirror the spirit of that time, an era of *tituli*, *fasti*, and solar radiance that chronicled the ceaseless march of days, months, seasons, and years. Even the long poem of Manilius, all of which was composed when Augustus was still alive, can now be seen not as a bizarre by-product of the early empire but as an integral and authentic reflection of later Augustan culture. Manilius' world is the world of the great sundial: he must have seen it and understood its calibrations. He wrote to honor an emperor who published his own horoscope, and he had the leisure to write because the emperor had brought peace. *Hoc sub pace vacat tantum*, "Only in time of peace is there leisure for this task," Manilius declares in the proem to Book 1 of his *Astronomica*.<sup>31</sup>

A new vision of the Augustan Age has opened up under our scrutiny

31. Manil. *Astron.* 1.13.

of the commemorations that surrounded the assumption of the pontificate. The inscription that stands in large letters on the obelisks of Montecitorio and the Piazza del Popolo has long been familiar to those who know Rome. But if we use our imagination to restore those spoils from Egyptian Heliopolis to their original Roman setting—to the sundial and to the Circus Maximus—and to read again the text they both bear, we can now perhaps hear a resonance we had missed before: *Imp. Caesar divi f. Augustus / Pontifex Maximus, imperator*” for the twelfth time, consul for the eleventh, in the fourteenth tribunician power, having brought Egypt into the power of the Roman people, dedicated this to the sun (*soli donum dedit*).”