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# The Colours of Ara Pacis

Gürkan Ergin

## Özet

Augustus'un 2000. ölüm yıldönümü anısına 2014'te, Ara Pacis'in orijinal renkleriyle canlandırılması amacıyla bir çalışma yürütülmüştü. Diğer Roma mimari kalıntıları gibi Ara Pacis de aradan geçen yüz yıllar içinde orijinal renklerini büyük oranda yitirmiştir. Rekonstrüksiyon ekibi çağdaş anıtlar, duvar resimleri ve yazılı kaynaklar ışığında belirlediği renkleri özel bir ışık projeksiyonuyla Ara Pacis'e uygulamıştır. Her ne kadar kullanılan renkler dönemin sanat geleneklerine uygun olarak seçilmişse de bilimsel incelemeler anıtın üzerinde çok az renk izine rastlamıştır. Bununla birlikte, Roma devlet anıtlarının yapılış amaçlarına uygun şekilde kullanılan renklerin de sembolik anlamlar taşıdığını düşünmek yanlış olmayacaktır. Kısmen eldeki verilerin yetersizliği nedeniyle anıtların bu yönü üzerinde pek durulmamıştır. Bu makale yapılan rekonstrüksiyonun tercihleri ışığında Ara Pacis renklerinin potansiyel sembolizmi üzerine bir denemidir. Antik kaynaklardaki renk terminolojisi ve sembolizmine ilaveten benzer anıtlardaki uygulamalardan hareket ederek rekonstrüksiyon renklerinin, anıtın verdiği mesajlarla ve figürleriyle ilişkisini çözümlemeyi amaçlamakta, renk seçiminin estetik boyutunun ötesinde bu mesajları belirginleştiren tamamlayıcı bir öge olarak düşünülebileceğini göstermektedir. Başta erguvan olmak üzere, sarı, kırmızı, mavi gibi temel renkler dönemin edebiyatında ve retorik el kitaplarında renklerin sembolik kullanımıyla yakından ilgili ve uyumlu görünmektedir. Ara Pacis sahnelerinin çağdaş Latin literatürüyle yakın ilişkisine paralel olarak, renk sembolizminin de bazı Augustus dönemini yapıtlarında öven Vergilius, Horatius vb. yazarlarla Quintilianus ve Seneca gibi retorik üzerine yazmış kişileri takip eden Romalılar için daha farklı mesajlar içerdiği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ara Pacis, renk sembolizmi, Roma kamu anıtları, Latin edebiyatı, antik retorik.

## Abstract

In 2014, in honour of the 2000th death anniversary of Augustus, a team of scientists and scholars led a project to restore original colours to Ara Pacis. As is the case with other Roman monuments, its colours were lost in course of time, leaving only minute traces of gilding and paint behind. The team turned to other monuments, tombs, literary sources and wall paintings for a plausible reconstruction. Although there are numerous studies on colour and colour symbolism in Greco-Roman world, they overwhelmingly focus on its role in classical literature; how the colour was used on public monuments as a medium of communication did not attract much attention probably due to the scarcity of scientific evidence. Yet, given the nature and

function of Roman public monuments, colour preferences and symbolism must have played an important role in overall design and purpose of the scenes. Thus, although scientific proof is scanty, discussing the possible colour symbolism on Ara Pacis based on the reconstruction might at least provide us with an insight into the relationship between the colours used and the messages given by the scenes themselves. A brief look offered here shows that beyond aesthetic concerns, colours of the monument may be regarded as complementary elements that enhance the messages conveyed by the scenes and serve as status and moral markers to the figures. The link between the reliefs and the colours becomes more pronounced when we couple them with the use of colour symbolism in the contemporary Latin literature and rhetoric manuals. The colours of Ara Pacis would appeal to the readers of Vergil, Horace, and of writers of rhetoric such as Quintilian and Seneca; in other words, to the educated Romans.

**Keywords:** Ara Pacis, colour symbolism, Roman public monuments, Latin literature, Classical rhetoric.

Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in the use of colour on ancient sculptures and architecture. Although it was already known that the Greeks and Romans painted their sculptures, reliefs and buildings in vivid colours, this often-overlooked aspect of the Classical art was recently reminded by Vinzenz Brinkmann and his team's exhausting but rewarding analysis that introduced the polychromy of Classical art to a wider audience.<sup>1</sup>

In 2014, in honour of the 2000<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Augustus, scholars and scientists led a project to restore the original colours of Ara Pacis to their former glory, and the results were displayed in an exhibition at the Ara Pacis Museum with the aid of a non-invasive technique of light projection applied directly on the monument itself. Unfortunately, with no news of an exhibition catalogue on the horizon that I am aware of, we are left with photographs from the exhibition and some illustrations based on the reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> Due to the conditions of preservation, scientific analyses were able to identify only traces of a yellowish primer, gilding on architectural frames and miniscule remains of red pigment. Thus, the team drew upon the literary descriptions and inspirations from famous ancient paintings in other media, Pompeii Style II and III wall paintings, Hellenistic tombs and other archaeological sources to reconstruct the original appearance of the monument as faithfully as possible, though the details of their choice of colours are not made explicit.<sup>3</sup>

As the team mentioned, the results are naturally hypothetical and might be incorrect at some points, and although this surely withholds us from more detailed and satisfying interpretations, the possible colour symbolism on such monuments should also be taken into consideration when studying messages in the scenes themselves to fully appreciate their overall meaning and effect. Thus, as the colour reconstruction of Ara Pacis is hypothetical in the sense that only small fractions of colour have been scientifically identified on the monument, my comments are open to discussion. Yet, I hope to give a sense of what the monument could have offered to and how it might have communicated with contemporary Roman viewer through its colours.

Before delving into the colours of the monument, I must make some brief remarks on the matter of colour in general and on its meaning in Roman culture in particular for a better understanding of colour use on Ara Pacis. It is a difficult

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1 BRINKMANN 2006.

2 I did not include these reconstructions due to technical restrictions, but high-resolution images can be found on the Internet.

3 ROSSINI 2010, 21-22.

task to evaluate colour perception in Roman culture, since there are many factors at play -cultural, environmental, biological, linguistic etc.- that one should consider. The famous passage in Aulus Gellius is alone a good reminder of this. It includes a discussion between Marcus Cornelius Fronto and philosopher Favorinus on colour in Greek and Latin, each emphasizing their respective richness of colour terms:

...Then Fronto, replying to Favorinus, said: "I do not deny that the Greek language, which you seem to prefer, is richer and more copious than ours; but nevertheless, in naming these colours of which you have just spoken we are not quite so badly off as you think. For *russus* and *ruber*, which you have just mentioned, are not the only words that denote the colour red, but we have others also, more numerous than those which you have quoted from the Greek. For *fulvus*, *flavus*, *rubidus*, *poeniceus*, *rutilus*, *luteus* and *spadix* are names of the colour red, which either brighten it (making it fiery, as it were), or combine it with green, or darken it with black, or make it luminous by a slight addition of gleaming white. For *poeniceus*, which you call  $\phi\omicron\iota\nu\iota\chi$  in Greek, belongs to our language, and *rutilus* and *spadix*, a synonym of *poeniceus* which is taken over into Latin from the Greek, indicate a rich, gleaming shade of red like that of the fruit of the palm-tree when it is not fully ripened by the sun. And from this *spadix* and *poeniceus* get their name; for *spadix* in Doric is applied to a branch torn from a palm-tree along with its fruit. But the colour *fulvus* seems to be a mixture of red and green, in which sometimes green predominates, sometimes red. Thus, the poet who was most careful in his choice of words applies *fulvus* to an eagle, to jasper, to fur caps, to gold, to sand, and to a lion; and so Ennius in his Annals uses *fulvus* of air. *Flavus* on the other hand seems to be compounded of green and red and white; thus Virgil speaks of golden hair as *flava* and applies that adjective also to the leaves of the olive, which I see surprises some; and thus, much earlier, Pacuvius called water *flava* and dust *fulvus*.<sup>4</sup>

The dialogue is an enigma: How saffron, gold or lion can be described with the hues of green or red? How is that *flavus*, a mixture of green, red and white denotes a "blonde"? These questions are linked to another question: whether colour perception is etic, i.e. a shared natural trait among the humans, or emic, i.e. to the inner mechanisms of cultures. It might be helpful to paraphrase Umberto Eco, who, taking Gellius' dialogue as starting point, tries to explain this "anomaly." Just as *mus*, a Latin word that denotes both a mouse and a rat, cannot help us to distinguish these two different rodent species, so too the colour categorization of Gellius has similar "gaps." Gellius' red accommodates hues that we cannot place in the same category. The results of Farnsworth-Munsell test, which includes 100 hues, demonstrated that the subjects could not correctly place colours given to them on a scale. Linguistically, the experiment is more interesting, since most of the subjects was unable to find proper terms to define these 100 hues. This "defect" is a cultural one: The Russians have two categories for blue; Indians cannot discern red from orange, and the Maori is known to recognize and define 3000 different

<sup>4</sup> Gell. NA 2.26.



hues. In the Hanunuoo of the Philippines we can speak of four basic colours that define cultural units (lightness, darkness, wetness and dryness).<sup>5</sup>

According to Eco, in the multicultural environment of Rome, Gellius was trying to piece together the codes of two-hundred-year-old Latin literature and foreign cultures, who had their own perception of colour. In his words, “We seem to be watching a flickering TV screen with something wrong in the electronic circuits, where tints mix up and the same face shifts, in the space of a few seconds, from yellow to orange of green. Determined by his cultural information, Gellius cannot trust to his personal perceptions, if any, and appears eager to see gold as red as fire, and saffron as yellow as greenish shade of a blue horse.” Latin poets were less sensitive to clear-cut spectral oppositions and more interested in distant hues. In other words, they are not sensitive to pigments but are open to perceptive effects originating from the play between the nature and purpose of things. Thus, a Latin poet can define a sword as jasper (*fulva*) because he sees the colour that it could spill.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, if we follow Eco’s interpretation of Gellius, the colours of Ara Pacis might have communicated differently with different sections of population in the multicultural setting of Rome, and readers of, say, Vergil or Horace, could have ascribed various meanings to the figures and scenes in accordance with the colour terminology in their texts. On the other hand, what the colours on public monuments meant to an Egyptian or a German is very difficult to assess. Berlin and Kay’s popular theory, argues the existence of cross-cultural colour concepts centred on the notion of a “basic colour term”, which generally include black, white, red, blue, yellow, green etc. The number of these may change from language to language, but Berlin and Kay proposed a sequence in which the number of basic colour terms in a language predicts what those terms would be. According to the scheme, a Stage I language will contain terms for black and white. In Stage II, these are joined by a word for red. In Stage III a word for green or yellow appears, and in Stage IV these two must exist together. A word for blue arises in Stage V, followed by a word for brown in Stage VI. Thereafter, in Stage VII, words for pink, purple, orange, and gray appear in no particular order. According to Berlin and Kay, all languages share a universal system of basic colour categorization and these universals are inherent in the human perception of colour. Colour perception of all peoples is the result of a common set of neurophysiological processes and these pan-human neurophysiological processes are the basis of the universal patterns in the meanings of basic colour terms.<sup>7</sup> Yet it must be noted that Berlin and Kay’s definitions proved to be unsatisfying in some cases.<sup>8</sup>

5 Eco 1985, 165.

6 Eco 1985, 167-174.

7 KAY – McDANIEL 1978, 610-611.

8 The Mycenaeans, for instance, seem to have had several terms for colours but not as hues. If we adapt Berlin and Kay’s theory, they would appear below Stage I, which contradicts their sophisticated use of various colours on their walls and ceilings (GILLIS 2004, 58). There is clear archaeological and textual evidence, on the other hand, to suggest that in the Classical period painters used four colours, namely white, yellow, red and black, though this practice do not point to a direct influence from Empedocles’ own choice of colours for his theory of four elements (IERODIAKONUOU 2004, 91-93). Greek architectural elements, ornaments and relief sculpture,

It would not be unreasonable to expect that even Romans' interpretations of colour could vary through time depending on the fashion trends or cultural changes. Yet, the high degree of standardization of scenes and symbolism on these monuments especially from the Flavians on<sup>9</sup> could also make way for the development of a standard language of colour. A fixed range and code of colours used for centuries would carry the same message throughout the empire. Their application on dress, which is a status marker itself in Roman society, would strengthen the overall message of the scenes on a monument. In this sense, Ara Pacis is also a representation of social order defined by colours. It is worth-noting that with the beginning of the empire, thanks to the fixed seats of the spectators and their coloured garments, the audience in theatrical buildings would appear like a colour reproduction of the social order.<sup>10</sup>

Colour use on several later public monuments indicates the existence of a uniform approach to selection of colours. Although the recent study on colours of the Arch of Titus was able to identify only traces of yellow on the Menorah (rest of the relief was recoloured based on archaeological parallels and ancient accounts), a dozen Late Imperial architectural elements with exceptionally well-preserved colours, which were found at Çukurbağ in modern İzmit (Nicomedia) in 2001, show that colour coding did not changed very much. The reliefs appear to have been a part of a victory monument built in the reign of Diocletian. The precise historical context of the scenes is unclear, but they include a military expedition, barbarian captives escorted by Roman soldiers, a triumphal parade and a meeting of Roman generals. Apart from these, mythological figures Athena, Nike, Roma and Heracles are also present along with scenes from daily life in Nicomedia. The men of high status and generals have red paint preserved on their togas and cloaks, while Roma and Nike wear yellow garments like those of the women on Pompeian wall paintings.<sup>11</sup>

The panels and the frieze of Ara Pacis share the same colour, i.e., blue, as the background. It goes without saying that blue denotes the colour of the sky, but its effect might have transcended its function. Blue was also the background on the friezes of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. A viewer on the Sacred Way to the Temple of Apollo would see its east frieze, where a gathering of Olympians and a battle between the Greeks and Trojans over the dead body of Antilokhos are depicted. The absence of any borders on the edges of the frieze allows the background to diffuse into the actual sky, removing the borders between the scenes and the natural environment of the sanctuary as if the figures act in the real world.<sup>12</sup> The Ara Pacis

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too, used a fixed array of colours consistently from its beginnings up to the Hellenistic period (NEILS 2016, 166-168). Pliny, on the other hand, criticizes the polychromy of the contemporary Roman art as being degenerate, and sees the basic colours of previous works as a sign of moral superiority of the past (Plin *NH* 35.49-50). His criticism is especially directed towards Nero, though use of coloured marbles in architecture at least was already proliferating in the reign of Augustus (BRADLEY 1989, 102, 104-105, 107).

9 HANNESTAD 1988, 130-131.

10 NEUDECKER 2015, 364.

11 <https://www.yu.edu/cis/activities/arch-of-titus/> (The Arch of Titus Project homepage of Yeshiva University); <http://archive.antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/sare346>, February 20<sup>th</sup> 2018 (the Çukurbağ reliefs). See also "Original Colour Scheme of Antonine Wall Revealed", <https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/original-colour-scheme-of-antonine-wall-revealed-1-4726470>, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

12 STAGER 2012, 96-97.

scenes, on the other hand, are framed by coloured pilasters at the sides and floral panels below that seem to disrupt the seamless blending of the background with the sky. One might argue that this would have reduced, if not completely spoiled, the kind of experience the Siphnian Treasury offered. Actually, Ara Pacis creates a similar effect with a different approach. Firstly, we should not rule out the location of the monument in Campus Martius, an open area without dense architecture and high buildings, and the painted floral decoration around the scenes. The difference between the treasury and Ara Pacis is that the latter itself is a physical frame that imitates a ritual space, complete with boundaries defined by trompe l'œil wooden stakes on its interior.<sup>13</sup> The painted vertical and horizontal vegetal compositions that frame the scenes actually represent what we would expect in a real setting: an altar bordered by a parapet wall. In this way, not only the altar itself but also its outer confines were represented on a single plane. The painted scene frames, therefore, are not just ornamental elements that separate the figures or events from the real world, but they imitate the borders of an altar. Combined with the blue background, the painted floral motifs help to situate the procession in real world as if the procession is taking place inside the walls. The parapet walls, then, should not be viewed as obstacles between the real world and the scenes, but as an organic element of the monument that represent the actual arrangement. Of course, since this phenomenological approach takes conscious and subjective experiences into account, there is a lack of concrete evidence<sup>14</sup>, but, as mentioned above, colours themselves do not exist outside the subjective experiences.

We may now turn to the panels themselves. On the sacrificial panel on the east façade Aeneas stands out with his purple *toga*. Purple, of course, has a long history as regal symbol<sup>15</sup> and Romans too associated it with royalty and nobility. The Julio-Claudians and later emperors ensured that purple was first and foremost a symbol of imperial power and prestige. Suetonius tells that Caligula banned wearing purple garments in public, reserving the colour for imperial family. We are told that he even killed guest Mauretanian king Ptolemy for wearing an eye-catching purple garment to the Roman games.<sup>16</sup> After Caligula, Nero went one step further, forbidding the use of *amethystus* in public, and in the manner of Caligula, when he spotted a matron clad in purple in the audience at one of his recitals, he dragged her out, stripped her and confiscated her property.<sup>17</sup> Later, Josephus regards purple a colour exclusive to the Flavians and in the later empire its association with regal status and divine power increased.<sup>18</sup>

The purple of the senatorial togas too had similar associations. Statius describes gold pectoral as “brother” of purple-striped *toga praetexta* reinforcing the duo’s meaning as symbols of prosperity and power.<sup>19</sup> In fact, one could distinguish a

13 VERITY – SQUIRE 2007, 80.

14 WALTON 2012, 135; HOPP 2012, 147; POELLNER 2012, 299.

15 REINHOLD 1976, 7-36.

16 Suet. *Calig.* 35.1.

17 Suet. *Ner.* 32.3.

18 BRADLEY 2009, 206-208.

19 Stat. *Silv.* 5.2.29-230, 5.3.119-120.

senator's political bias and character from the shade of purple on his *toga*. Some Roman politicians associated light, reddish shades with the *populares* in contrast to the darker shades of the *optimates*. One *genus* probably with lighter shade could be accused of radicalism and political immaturity. Macrobius, for instance, preserved a joke ascribed to Augustus, where he mocks the importance given by Cato and the likes to the dark shades of purple as a symbol of Roman tradition and values.<sup>20</sup> In a culture, where purple was so ingrained in its political medium, a Roman could extract abundant cultural and political information from the shades of purple. In the tumultuous years of the Late Republic, however, these elaborate distinctions lost their significance and use of purple in any occasion but the most ritualized political contexts was considered as a sign of regal or tyrannical aspirations.<sup>21</sup> Dio claims that in 36 BC Octavian restricted purple garments to senators holding magistracies.<sup>22</sup>

As might be expected, purple was also a significant colour in military. Among the regalia presented to Tarquinius Priscus by the Etruscan envoys was a purple tunic with golden embroidery, which later became traditional accessory along with the other items of the Roman triumphal processions.<sup>23</sup> The victorious general wore a purple toga (*toga purpurea*) over an embroidered tunic (*tunica palmata*).<sup>24</sup> Romans associated him with gold and purple to the extent that the ancient sources preferred "purple", "gold" or "purple and gold" to designate the general rather than mentioning his actual name.<sup>25</sup> The connection between the purple garment and related regalia with Jupiter, and whether the triumphator assumed the identity of the god is still a matter of debate though some kind of religious connection is evident.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, purple on Aeneas might have meant more than his ancestry or status. While in the *Aeneid* Vergil's mention of Aeneas' "Tyrian purple" garment hanging from his shoulder is surely a sign of nobility<sup>27</sup>, it might have also symbolised the golden age he heralded, and his piety, two concepts that link Augustus to the hero. A reader of Vergil's fourth eclogue, for example, where the poet dreams of a golden era that would change the colour of the fleeces to murex or saffron (thus saving workers from dyeing the textiles), might have associated purple with peace and prosperity. Other Augustan writers repeated the formula and under Augustus purple became a symbol of moderation, simplicity and civilization. Poets associated the colour and related objects (flowers, fruits etc.) with the Augustan peace

<sup>20</sup> Macrobius 2.4.14; BRADLEY 2009, 200-201.

<sup>21</sup> BRADLEY 2009, 197-199.

<sup>22</sup> This might be merely a reactionary legislation against Antony's use of the colour in fashion of the Hellenistic courts (Flor. 4.11.7; BRADLEY 2009, 199, fn. 24). The problems posed by the ban is covered by REINHOLD 1976, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.62, 4.74; Flor. 1.1.5.

<sup>24</sup> BEARD 2007, 81.

<sup>25</sup> The scientific work on the Alexander Sarcophagus has revealed that one of the purple hues used was from a sea snail (*Murex bandaris* L.), a very prized and expensive source of purple, which interestingly was applied only on the garments of the high-ranking officers (BRINKMANN 2006, 133).

<sup>26</sup> On the divinity of the triumphator see BEARD 2007, 225-233. On the other hand, despite the approval of the senate and Roman people purple worn in public by Metellus, Pompey and Marius was regarded as an outrageous act (BEARD 2007, 273-274).

<sup>27</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 4.262-263.

and prosperity.<sup>28</sup> In this context, it must be noted that purple is also associated with Apollo, who was Augustus' guardian deity.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from these implications, purple seems to have served a more practical purpose. While describing an imaginary triumph celebrating the victory over the Germans, Ovid depicts the German chief in "Sidonian purple."<sup>30</sup> This would make it easier for an ordinary Roman to identify the enemy leader among other captives in the procession. We may expect that purple assumed the same function on the crowded space of the column of Trajan and other monuments, highlighting the barbarian chiefs, princes or rulers for the viewers. In general, purple contributed the overall grandeur of the procession. Florus describes how spectacular was the sight of Marcus Curius Dentatus' triumphal procession in 275 BC with gold, purple (probably garments, robes etc.), statues and pictures in the eyes of ordinary Romans, who had used to see the oxen of the Volsci, herds of the Sabines, carts of the Celts and weapons of the Samnites.<sup>31</sup> The purple hangings of the Jewish temple in Titus' procession in AD 71, which were later kept in the imperial palace, had a similar effect on the audience.<sup>32</sup>

Yet in the eyes of some writers, purple was the colour of negative values such as excess, luxury and lust for power. For Lucretius not only did it create an illusion of an ostentatious hollow nobility, but it was also the colour of barbarians.<sup>33</sup> Since his *De Rerum Natura* was written as an Epicurean criticism of political life, Lucretius' reaction is understandable. Vergil too makes a similar comment: While for the readers of the *Aeneid* and the viewers of Ara Pacis purple was an explicit code for political, martial and religious privilege, in the *Georgics* he writes that he who cannot be seduced by the royal purple (*purpura regum*) is a blessed person, while others sleep on purple beds.<sup>34</sup> In an almost a direct reply to them, Seneca lists Alexander the Great and their "impersonators" Pompey, Caesar and Marius among the people whom Vergil and Lucretius associate with the purple, using very similar expressions including the term *purpurea cultus*.<sup>35</sup> Vergil, however, sees Octavian as an antithesis to Alexander and his imitators (and himself to Lucretius and his mentor Epicurus).<sup>36</sup> Here, purple has a double meaning we encounter in other contemporary works<sup>37</sup>; one associated with luxury, vulgarity, barbarism and lust for power, and other with Aeneas' nobility and piety.

28 For example in Hor. *Carm.* 1.35.12.

29 Ov. *Met.* 2.23.

30 Ov. *Tr.* 4.2.

31 Flor. 1.13.26.

32 Joseph. *BJ* 7.5.7.

33 Lucr. 2.50-52, 500-501.

34 Verg. *Georg.* 2.495vd., 505 ff.

35 Sen. *Ben.* 7.2.5-7.4.1, *Ep.* 94.

36 BUCHHEIT 2007, 127-130.

37 In the *Aeneid* Numanus uses "glittering *murex*" and saffron yellow as an insult towards the Phrygians (Verg. *Aen.* 9.614-616). Although Martial loves purple, elsewhere he treats it in a negative way, remarking that purple garments disgrace *toga*. Their owners abandon *dignitas* in favour of the trend of the day (Mart. 10.10.2). Likewise, Caligula's distribution of *toga* to men and purple and red garments to women and children was regarded as a display of love for the Roman people on the one hand, an act of excess on the other. (Suet. *Calig.* 17.2).

As far as we can deduce from the reconstruction, for Ascanius' attire a sort of light purple, probably what Romans call *amethystinus* from amethyst, was preferred. As a dye, it first appeared in the Augustan period, when new pigments became accessible to a wider population and was used as an status marker.<sup>38</sup> I have already mentioned that Nero banned *amethystinus* along with *purpura*.<sup>39</sup> On Ara Pacis, it would obviously signify Ascanius' royal lineage and his status as the legal successor to his father. We may speculate further: Pliny tells that amethyst was named by some as the "Venus' eyelid." In this respect the colour would allude to the Julio-Claudians, who traced their mythological past back to the goddess and linked their name to Ascanius (Iulius).<sup>40</sup> Its affiliation with royalty is further reinforced by its use as an amulet, which makes the bearer appear before the kings.<sup>41</sup> Just as "Trojan" hero Aeneas covers his head during the ritual in accordance with the "Roman" tradition or his son Ascanius wears a *toga* without tunic in Roman manner, so the young attendants of the cult emphasize the Romanness of the ritual with their plain white tunics.<sup>42</sup> Since it is the preferred colour for joyful events due to its association with good fortune and celestial divinities (in contrary to the chthonic gods), it suits perfectly to this occasion, which celebrates the hero's safe and sound landing on Italian soil. One of the youths holds the white sow that showed the site for Lavinium, where it bore thirty white piglets. The white (*albus*) colour of the pig etymologically connects the animal with the foundation of Alba Longa ten years later<sup>43</sup>. The importance of the scene is also stressed by the colour itself: Where in the *Iliad* Helios receives a white sheep in accordance with his brightness, a black one is spared for Gaia representing the goddess' association with darkness.<sup>44</sup> The uniform and flawless colour of an animal and its offspring was believed to show the quality of breed. Thus, the pure white colour of the pigs (*cum feto concolor albo*) signifies their purity and magical nature, making them worthy sacrifices for this significant event in the history of Rome.<sup>45</sup>

The opposite panel depicting the discovery of Remus and Romulus by Mars in the presence of Faustulus is quite fragmentary. Mars, as expected, wears a cloak, whose red colour matches the colour of the Roman officers' *paludamentum*.<sup>46</sup> Faustulus'

38 GOLDMAN 2013, 51.

39 Suet. *Ner.* 32.3.

40 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.70; Suet. *Caes.* 6.

41 Plin. *NH* 37.40.

42 For instance, one of the aspects of the cult of Magna Mater that characterized its foreignness was the colourful garments worn by its priests (*galli*), who were banned from participating the processions with them (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19). Although in Apuleius white, which is defined by the term *candore* (bright white) used for the Roman *toga*, is the dominant colour of the garments worn in foreign rituals, this might be due to the poet's desire as a North African to create for these cults a more respectable image (GOLDMAN 2013, 62-63). Persius addresses Jupiter requesting that he should not accept the prayers of a certain woman "even she wears white" (Pers. 2.31-40).

43 Liv. 8.43-49. Although an earlier Greek source mentions a black pig (Lycoph. *Alex.* 1226-1280), this must be taken as a mere variance on an essentially Latin story (CASALI 2010, 45.)

44 Hom. *Il.* 3.103. Vergil speaks of white bulls bred for sacrifices around the river Clitumnus (Verg. *Georg.* 2.146).

45 Verg. *Aen.* 8.82; cf. Colum. *Rust.* 7.3.1; Sil. *Pun.* 16.348-349.

46 GOLDMAN 2013, 52.



cloth is brown, though it is hard to be specific about the hue. *Furvus* denotes brown in general, whereas *fuscus* dark brown and *myrtus* hazel. The latter has a negative meaning in *Satyricon*, where it is used in association with a homosexual and the freedman Trimalchio. The colour is also a derogatory term for non-white people.<sup>47</sup> Obviously Faustulus is not that kind of man, and brown was just a practical choice for the farmers in the Classical world for they concealed dirt.<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to the other panels, the dominant figures in Tellus panel, which symbolizes the Augustan peace and prosperity, are women, and colours of their garments were picked accordingly. The yellow of Tellus' garment is in line with Roman tradition, since it is a colour associated exclusively with women in the ancient sources, which treat men wearing yellow garments as an object of ridicule.<sup>49</sup> It is also the most conspicuous colour we see on female dresses on the wall paintings of Pompeii and Herculaneum. A blue or bluish gray *stola* covers Tellus' legs. Ancient sources indicate that the *stolae* were dyed in white, green, red and blue hues.<sup>50</sup> If we follow the reconstruction team's preference, for some Romans a blue *stola* could have meant more than a mere choice of fashion. Latin has several terms for blue: *venetus* was generally associated with sea and sky, and *caesis* with gods and animals.<sup>51</sup> Tellus as mother earth seems to have little connection with blue, but it might have been meaningful to the eyes of the viewer as a symbol of another related goddess. We know that married women observed the rituals of Bona Dea, a goddess of chastity and fertility, wearing exclusively green and blue garments.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, a snake, an animal associated with earth, was believed to have raped the goddess, and both Tellus and Bona Dea received a sow as sacrifice. It is also worth-noting that snakes can be described as *caeruleus* probably because of their coiling and twirling movements.<sup>53</sup> Due to these similarities in function and cult, Romans saw them identical deities.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in the eyes of some Roman viewers, Tellus' message would further be reinforced by the blue colour of the *stola*.

Although the modern reconstruction gives full colours to goddess Roma panel, I am not going to deal with its colours due to the very fragmentary nature of the relief, hence potentially unfaithful interpretations. The mostly complete procession frieze, on the other hand, is marked with the white *togas* of the male observers. I have already commented on it above, but a few more things can be said within this specific context. Ovid uses the term *concolor* for the homogenous appearance of the white garments worn by the observers of the cult of Janus<sup>55</sup>, and in this respect, just as the uniform white colour of the sacrificial animals, it bears a special meaning. But its message is more effective when we think the uniformity of white in the scene together with two other terms, namely *discolor* and *versicolor*. When used

47 GOLDMAN 2013, 65, 131-132.

48 PANDERGAST – PANDERGAST 2004, 121.

49 Juv. 2.97; Varr. *Ling.* 7.53; Cic. *Har. resp.* 21.44; Pers. 6.45-47; GOLDMAN 2013, 57.

50 PANDERGAST – PANDERGAST 2004, 176.

51 Catull. 45.6-7; Gell. *NA* 2.26.

52 Juv. 2.95-97.

53 Verg. *Georg.* 4.482; Ov. *Met.* 3.38; Sen. *Oed.* 729; BRADLEY 2009, 11.

54 BROUWER 1989, 348-349.

55 Ov. *Fast.* 1.79-80.

for the objects in nature and animals, the former carries a neutral tone.<sup>56</sup> It does, however, acquire negative connotations, especially when speaking of non-Romans that are racially, culturally or ethically different, or of people of colour. Roman general L. Papirius Cursor disdained the colorful (*versicolor*) and showy dresses of the Samnites saying that they are only worthy as spoils and courage is a soldier's attire.<sup>57</sup> Vergil uses the term for Aeneas' Etruscan allies: Their commander Astyr relies on his bright and colorful dress instead of his intelligence, and eventually prepares his own end.<sup>58</sup> According to Pliny the Elder famous painter Polygnotos indicated courtesans with their colorful headscarves and transparent dresses.<sup>59</sup>

*Discolor* is used to describe rich, lustful and extravagant Ascyllus in *Satyricon*.<sup>60</sup> Cicero prefers it to define the revealing colored wax ballots used instead of uniform ones (*ut discoloribus signis iuratorum hominum sententiae notarentur*), associating the term with political corruption.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Romanness on Ara Pacis frieze is not only represented by the *togas*. Their homogenous white colour is a distinctive mark that further separates the Romans from other peoples and cultures.

There is an interesting connection worth exploring, I believe, between the narrative choices of the monument and the way they are related to the use of colour terminology in Classical rhetoric. A recent study on Ara Pacis examines it as a visual rhetorical work and claims that each scene corresponds to a component of an oration (see below). One common characteristic of ancient works on rhetoric is their tendency to use visual arts, especially paintings and colours, as metaphors to interpret rhetorical techniques and to adapt colour terms for their jargon.<sup>62</sup> This use of colour is already evident in Plato's *Gorgias*, where *chroma* refers to different writing styles particularly in terms of embellishment and ornament.<sup>63</sup> Theorists of rhetoric compare the process of memorization of a speech to visualization of a house, public buildings and painting in mind.

Cicero, gives the works of the painters such as Protogenes, Apelles, along with Pheidias and Polykleitos as examples for perfectness in rhetoric. Just as painters and sculptors design their work down to the last detail, so the orator should not overlook even the tiniest detail. He contrasts Asiatic and Attic styles with sculpture: The elegance and orderliness of early rhetoric resembles the simplicity of early sculptures, while later rhetorical works are like the sculptures of Pheidias that combine splendor and grace. Rhetoric even adapted the word *colores* as a term that denote the genuine additions (such as aphorisms that reflect a striking idea) to a speech by the orator for attack or defense purposes.<sup>64</sup>

In the handbooks on rhetoric paintings and colours serve as visual metaphors in exploring the language and truth. Cicero likens the way the sophists use exag-

<sup>56</sup> GOLDMAN 2015, 99.

<sup>57</sup> Liv. 9.40.3.

<sup>58</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 10. 181.

<sup>59</sup> Plin. *NH* 35.35.58.

<sup>60</sup> Petron. *Sat.* 97.

<sup>61</sup> Cic. *Verr.* 1.13.40; GOLDMAN 2015, 18.

<sup>62</sup> BRADLEY 2009, 111-127.

<sup>63</sup> BRADLEY 2009, 69.

<sup>64</sup> ELSNER 2014, 23-30.



gerated metaphors to a painter's arrangement of various colours.<sup>65</sup> Here, colour as a surface treatment represents the orator's talent to deceive or desire to embellish. Elsewhere, *mimesis* of a painting is compared to the orator's ability to persuade: "...Similarly an orator, when he substitutes falsehood for the truth, is aware of the falsehood and of the fact that he is substituting it for the truth... When Cicero boasted that he had thrown dust in the eyes of the jury in the case of Cluentius, he was far from being blinded himself. And when a painter by his artistic skill makes us believe that certain objects project from the picture, while others are withdrawn into the background, he knows perfectly well that they are really all in the same plane."<sup>66</sup> The analogy is between painting's ability to imitate the reality on a two-dimensional plane and rhetoric's role as representation of truth (*mimesis*). When commenting on the rhetorical style of his peer Hortensius, Cicero says that his rival has lost his sharpness, hence rhetorical prowess just like a painting that tends to lose its vivid colours in the course of time.<sup>67</sup> Yet, when Quintilian describes a speech as "multi-coloured" it stresses the unconvincing nature of the text.<sup>68</sup> For Philostratus, colour not only reflects volume and dimension but also *pathos*: it emphasizes the *mimesis* of the painting, inviting the viewer to appreciate the painter's command on the medium and to relate with the dramatic content of the scene. In this respect, it comes close to rhetoric's purpose to attract and to persuade. Accordingly, the term *color* in rhetoric defines the techniques that manipulate the material presented with "polish, brightness and hues" to reinforce orator's point of view.<sup>69</sup> Painting's power to say more than orator's *colores* despite its stillness and silence, is what rhetoric is after.<sup>70</sup>

Lamp treats the Ara Pacis scenes as rhetorical devices: the foundation myths on the west façade function as a reminder of the past. According to *Rhetorica ad Herennium* the orator should take the "external assests" of the subject such as his ancestors and illustrious lineage.<sup>71</sup> Quintilian too, advises orator to praise subject together with his ancestors.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, these scenes on the monument carry a message through reminding of the past that unites Roman people on common grounds of honour, legacy and patriotism. The implied connection between Aeneas and Augustus reminds the rhetorical technique Aristotle calls "amplification" or "enrichment", which aims to exalt the subject by comparing him to more famous men.<sup>73</sup> Thus, Scipio is elevated by praising Hannibal's unmatched military skills.<sup>74</sup> Ara Pacis adopts both techniques comparing Augustus with his illustrious ancestor and highlighting hero's deeds to praise the achievements of Augustus.<sup>75</sup> Tellus

65 Cic. Or. 65.

66 Quint. Inst. 2.17.20-21.

67 Cic. Or. 320.

68 LOPEZ 2007, 313.

69 PLATT 2014, 221.

70 Quint. Inst. 11.3.67.

71 Cic. Rhet. Her. 3.7.13.

72 Quint. Inst. 3.7.10.

73 Arist. Rhet. 1368a.

74 Quint. Inst. 8.4.20.

75 LAMP 2009, 11-15.

and goddess Roma reliefs function in a similar way representing the golden age the emperor brought to the Roman world.

In sum, the Ara Pacis scenes can be viewed as a prologue to a panegyric, each corresponding to a certain rhetorical technique: comparison between Aeneas and Augustus (amplification or exaltation); depiction of Aeneas as an example for Augustus' piety (emulation); encouragement of the viewer to complete the gaps between the scenes to see the whole monument as a single narrative, positioning him as an active agent in establishing that narrative (operating of *enthymeme*).<sup>76</sup>

The colour in rhetoric was not a separate area from the colour in physical world. This rhetorical *color* was something one could detect on an individual's face and was semantically interchangeable with complexion (blush of embarrassment and anger, pallor of fear etc.). Basically, this relation was due to the metaphorical conceptualisation of speech with body. Thus, as a visual work of rhetoric, the physical colours on Ara Pacis might have inspired comparison with rhetorical *color*, further underlining the ethical and moral quality of the scenes of the monument in terms of rhetoric. In the first century AD, this semantic link was particularly used by contemporary plays, where actors used colour-coded masks to denote the characters.<sup>77</sup> In this respect, when viewed as a visual work of rhetoric, Ara Pacis with its colours might well have been compared by the learned Romans to rhetorical colours, which would invite them to contemplate on the moral messages reflected by the scenes from another perspective.

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<sup>76</sup> LAMP 2009, 21.

<sup>77</sup> BRADLEY 2009, 124-127

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