During the last three decades of the last century BCE, a Roman world empire took shape. In a rather slow but steady and persistent process a world empire was built around the Mediterranean Basin. Alexander the Great’s dream was seemingly realized not through a mighty march of conquest but rather through political perspicacity, subtly and often even without recourse to military force. A multi-national empire was consolidated that, for the first time in the history of nations, contained almost entire contemporary civilized world.

There is no doubt that the two ethnic and cultural foundations of greatest importance to this world empire were the Greek in the East and the Latin in the West. A look at the map of the Roman Empire indicates this clear division: the eastern part of the Mediterranean Basin thought, spoke and created in Greek, whereas most of the western region was primarily Latin. The historical, ethnic and cultural roots of this division are known and no real changes took place until the latter stages of the ancient era.

In the history of the Roman Empire, as both the historians and the scholars of art history well know, the reigns of the Emperors Augustus and Hadrian were the two periods in which a clear attempt was made to crystallize, define and shape a single culture that would provide a common conceptual-cultural base for both parts of the Empire, the Greek and the Latin alike.

In this review, we shall concentrate on the period of the reign of Augustus, who gathered about himself a circle of people of every creative area through whom he hoped to unite the two cultural bases of the Empire: to find a cultural common denominator which would bring them closer to one another, unify them and perhaps even syncretize them. And, indeed, the Greek culture was destined to serve as such for the new world empire. Hence, the Augustan period is the first ‘neo-classical’ period in the history of Western culture. This neo-classical culture would provide the common language and symbols clearly intelligible to all, in the areas of both literary and material productivity. And, indeed, deliberated direction is very clear in the Roman creativity of the Augustan period. A few examples will suffice. Virgil’s Aeneid provided the mythological background which connected Aeneas of Troy with Italy and the beginnings of Rome. The tradition of the Roman portrait in Hellenistic garb served the worship of the Emperor very well, particularly in the provinces. The clear, unmistakable figure of Augustus that stood in every city square throughout the Empire, or

1 On the theoretical, social and cultural significances of the period of Augustus’s rule which created new regime – that of the Principate – and the far-reaching ramifications of this process for the history of the Roman Empire, see R. Syme, The Roman Revolution, Oxford 1939. In spite of the fact that this study was written almost seventy five years ago, it is still undoubtedly the most comprehensive and in-depth study on the subject. Also, see H. Galsterer, A Man, a Book, and a Method: Sir Ronald Syme’s Roman Revolution after Fifty Years, [in:] K. Raafaub, M. Toher (Eds), Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate, Berkeley 1990, pp. 1–20; J. Geiger, The First Hall of Fame: A Study of Statues in the Forum Augustum, Leiden 2008 [= The First Hall of Fame].

his face which appeared on each and every coin, rallied the provincial populations round
the image of the one beneficent ruler they all shared. These were simple, direct messages
understood by all.3

The *Ara Pacis* (‘Altar of Peace’) is a clearly neo-classical creation. Though it was
produced by Greek artists, it most of all expresses the Roman spirit and is an ideological-
cultural manifesto, clear and intelligible to all. In addition to the political and ideological
messages, a creation such as the *Ara Pacis* also provided a language of artistic, sculptural
symbols.4

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3 E. Simon, Augustus, Kunst und Leben in Rom um die Zeitenwende, München 1968 [= Augustus];
J. Breckenridge, Origins of Roman Republican Portraiture: Relations with the Hellenistic World, *ANRW* I.4,
1973, pp. 826–854; G. KoeppeL, The Grand Pictorial Tradition of Roman Historical Representation during the
Early Empire, *ANRW* II.12.1, 1982, pp. 509–535; J. Breckenridge, Roman Imperial Portraiture from Augustus
H. Kähler, Die Augustusstatue von Primaporta, Köln 1959; D.E. Strong, Roman Imperial Sculpture, London

4 There is a very rich literature about Augustus’ *Ara Pacis*. We indicate here only some more recent studies,
see E. La Rocca, *Ara Pacis Augustae*, Roma 1986; J.M.C. Toynbee, The *Ara Pacis* Reconsidered and Historical
It seems to us, however, that for the architectural creativity in particular, there was a special, central place preserved for the crystallization of a new language of symbols through which the ideology of the Principate would be disseminated. After decades of civil


A new find should be brought here that sheds light upon the worship of Augustus in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The reliefs that have been published during the past three decades from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias are instructive testimony to the shaping of his image for propagandistic-ideological needs in the provinces during the period of the Principate, in spite of the fact, that these reliefs were completed during the seventh decade of the first century CE, see R.R.R. Smith, The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, JRS LXXXVII, 1987, pp. 88–138; Id., Roman portraits and marble Production at Aphrodisias, [in:] R.R.R. Smith, J.L. Lenaghan (Eds), Roman Portraits from Aphrodisias, Istanbul 2008, pp. 9–33. See also S.R.F. Price, Rituals and Power – The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, Cambridge 1984.

Many studies have been written about the building activities of Augustus, part architectonic, archaeological and part historical. And again, because of the great number of books and articles on the subject, we shall indicate only the more recent ones that shed light upon the role of architecture as one of the central vehicles for disseminating the ideology of the Principate, see O.R. Dudley, Urbs Roma, Aberdeen 1967; P.A. Brunt, Free Labour and Public Works at Rome, JRS LXX, 1980, pp. 81–100; D.E. Strong, The Administrations of Public

2. Rome, Campus Martius, The Ara Pacis Augustae, set up between 13 and 9 BCE (after: Simon, Augustus, p. 33, Fig. 29).
war which had swept over Italy and the provinces, the very act of construction was a sign of renewal and creativity in face of the destruction. The building projects symbolized the growth and prosperity that came with the new regime. Augustus was portrayed as a builder, as a renewer of the ruined, as a benefactor of the provinces along with Italy and Rome.

Architecture was the chief provider of symbols that expressed the Empire’s spirit and its universal, world-wide character. All that remained now was to attempt to define the architecture suited to serving the new empire: its character, essence, lexicon of forms and choice of symbols. Vitruvius was chosen for this important and responsible task, as the one to define and formulate the ‘architectural manifesto’ of the Augustan period.

DE ARCHITECTURA

We have been somewhat lengthy in our general introduction, but an understanding of the historical and cultural background of the Augustan period is vital to an understanding of
Vitruvius’ composition, for we do not see it as a guide for the architect or a book along the lines of ‘Everything you wanted to know about...’ but rather as a commissioned work faithfully expressing the spirit of the Augustan period. As in other areas of productivity, Vitruvius’ book was written after he had been granted especially comfortable working conditions which exempt him from everyday burdens and unable him to devote himself completely to producing the work. In the introduction to his book De Architectura (On Architecture) the author thanks his benefactors – Emperor Octavian and his sister Octavia – for the good conditions they had bestowed upon him. Hence, first and foremost, Vitruvius’ book is commissioned and, unrelated to its content, is to be seen as a clear expression of the importance that the new regime attributed to architecture.\(^6\)

About Vitruvius himself very little is known. To be sure, his work is mentioned in Frontinus and Pliny and he himself provided a few details in his book.\(^7\) He was born about 70 BCE. His best years were spent in the service of Julius Caesar as military architect. We also know that he continued to serve Caesar’s adopted son, Octavian, the future Octavianus Augustus. At a later stage in his life he was part of the staff of city planners and architects that was responsible for the building projects in Rome itself. He apparently finished his book before or perhaps a bit after 27 BCE. This work, the only one of its kind which has survived from antiquity, has been preserved almost intact, though a few sections has been distorted and the original illustrations which accompanied the text have been lost. The uniqueness of this work is that despite its clear structure i.e., its division by subject into ten books (an original Vitruvian division and not that of later copyists), it incorporates purely ‘technical’ information such as the instructions for preparing whitewash for covering

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4. Rome, *Theatrum Marcelli* (the Theatre of Marcellus), exterior view. Dedicated in 13 BCE (after: Nash, Pictorial Dictionary II, Fig. 1210).

5. Rome, The Theatre of Marcellus, restored section (after: Boethius, Ward-Perkins, Architecture, p. 187, Fig. 83).
interior walls; legends and anecdotes, such as the story about the fate of the caryatids; and, finally, summaries of the views of the Greek philosophers on the source of existence and the creation of the world.

In our brief review we will mention those chapters in Vitruvius’ book that deal with architecture directly; but in these chapters too one can distinguish two clear subject units; one concentrates information about classical Greek architecture while the other deals with Roman architecture. As to the first unit, Vitruvius admits that he had at his disposal treatises of Greek architects. He even indicated some specifically, such as that of Pytheos, a fourth-century BCE Greek architect who wrote a book on the Temple of Athena in Priene, which he had planned. The main part of the second unit is Roman architecture and here Vitruvius draws first and foremost upon his personal experience, at least in part, gained from his work as an architect and, in part, from his observations on his journeys in the service of Julius Caesar and Octavian. These two subject units, as indicated above, vary greatly in their character and scope, and, in the nature of things, had a very different influence upon the architecture of the later periods.

Let us now examine the extent to which the building projects of the Augustan period reflect Roman architecture’s connection with an inclination to the Classical Greek sources of inspiration as they are detailed and analyzed in the work of Vitruvius. In other words – does Vitruvius’ work faithfully reflect the contemporary Roman reality? It seems to us that the answer must be divided into two – as to the first subject unit, dealing primarily with materials and methods of construction and reflecting Vitruvius’s personal experience, the answer is quite simple. It is completely reasonable to assume that Vitruvius relied upon his personal experience and described what he knew well. As for the second unit, in which Vitruvius presents the principles of Classical Greek architecture, the answer is not so unambiguous. Did Greek architecture indeed serve as a real source of inspiration, as an ideal to which the architects of the Augustan period aspired? To attempt to answer this question we shall have to survey the main building projects erected in Italy in general and in Rome in particular during the forty-five years of Augustus’s reign. This is one of the most documented periods of the ancient world. Furthermore, many edifices of this period that are mentioned in the Augustus’s will, Res Gestae Divi Augusti (‘The Deeds of the Divine Augustus’), have survived and can be examined. In this brief review we shall only concentrate in some detail upon a few edifices.

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7. The Forum of Augustus and the Temple of Mars Ultor, suggested reconstruction (after: Boethius, Ward-Perkins, op. cit., p. 190, Fig. 85).
THE BUILDING PROJECTS

1. Theatrum Marcelli – The construction of this theatre apparently was completed in 13 BCE. The nature of the edifice and the materials and methods of its construction are characteristic of the period of the Republic. The lexicon of classical forms is expressed only in the use of pilasters bearing Doric (first story) and Ionic (second story) capitals as ornamentation for the outer wall around the seating complex (cavea). Here both concrete and local stone (tufa and travertine) were used.

2. Mausoleum Augusti – Its construction was begun in 28 BCE and completed in 23 BCE. The Mausoleum is cone-shaped, 88m in diameter, built of poured concrete concentric circles. It was covered with a pile of earth. Thus creating the form of an Etruscan tumulus of huge dimensions. Atop the cone a giant bronze statue of Augustus was placed. There is no doubt that in its design manner of construction, and the building materials used, there is no trace whatever of Hellenistic influence: the inspiration for the structure derives from the Etruscan-Italian world.

3. Forum Augustum – the greatest and most important of Augustus’s building projects. The forum was completed only in 2 BCE. The temple of Mars Ultor (‘Mars the Avenger’) was completed even later. The plan of this impressive compound recalls the Forum Iulium which was also completed by Augustus. The Forum of Augustus has a master plan typical of the Italian sanctuaries used for worship from the period of the Republic: a rectangle upon one of whose shorter walls the rear wall of the temple rests. The enclosure’s long walls have roofed colonnades that provide shaded walkways. The colonnades, the courtyard and the temple at the end, standing upon a high platform, all form an uncompromising axial, frontal and symmetrical composition, yet full of majesty and might. At the rear of the enclosure, on both sides of the temple, there extend two semi-circular exedrae that add to the harsh symmetrical feeling. The entire complex, impressive in its dimensions and its clear plan, is unquestionably Roman and the source of its inspiration is clear. At the same time, its architectural ornamentation bears the seal of the new styles, ‘neo-classical’ in spirit. This is expressed, first and foremost, in the use of classical elements such as the caryatids that decorated the second – story façade above the enclosure’s colonnades.

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Undoubtedly, Greek artisans from Attica and Asia Minor were employed in executing the details of the rich architectural decoration of the enclosure and its temple. The letter, as we have said, was elevated on a high platform with a marble staircase before it. What we have is a \textit{peripteros sine postico} of eight columns in front and nine along the length. It seems to us that this compound, more than any other of the constructions expresses the nature and essence of Roman architecture in the Augustan period.\textsuperscript{13}

From this concise summary, it is also clear that in the first century BCE there are two basic trends in Roman architecture: one, the original Roman, as it developed over the last three centuries BCE. Its perception of architectonic space and methods of construction all grew, were crystallized and shaped upon Italian soil. Parallel to this there is another trend, one which draws its inspiration from Greek architecture in its Hellenistic garb. The Romans first met Greek architecture when Sicily and southern Italy fell to them during the Punic Wars. Shortly thereafter, during the second century BCE, with the conquest of Greece, Macedonia and considerable portions of Asia Minor, the Romans were able, at first hand, to learn about the Classical Greek and Hellenistic architectural achievements. Furthermore, the accelerated use of the excellent marble from the quarries of Carrara (Luna) begins in

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\textsuperscript{13} A. \textsc{Boëthius, J.B. Ward-Perkins}, Etruscan and Roman Architecture, Hammondsworth, Middlesex 1970 [= Architecture], pp. 190–191, Fig. 85, Pls 106, 108; \textsc{Nash}, Pictorial Dictionary I, pp. 401–410, Figs 490–502.
\end{flushright}

10. Rome, the Pantheon compound, suggested reconstruction (after: BOËTHIUS, WARD-PERKINS, Architecture, Fig. 101).
the second half of the second century BCE. The introduction of this new building material to the construction sites of Augustan period Rome brought in its wake the importation of Greek builders and stonecutters from Greece and Asia Minor. All this surely increased the Greek-Hellenistic influence on Roman architecture.

A study of the construction work of Augustan period, however, indicates that architecture in first-century BCE Rome and Italy nevertheless remained undeniably Roman and the Greek-Hellenistic influence remained limited mainly to the realm of architectonic ornamentation. The Romans never adopted for themselves the Greek or Hellenistic methods of construction. As we have stated, the ‘classical’ found expression only in superficial, external, ornamental components. It seems that the Romans did not understand, or perhaps simply did not wish to understand, the essence of Classical Greek architecture.

For the Roman, the column was a vertical support carrying a system of beams and nothing more; or, at the other extreme, a decorative element to break the boredom of the flat wall behind it. As for anything related to the essentials, such as the perception of architectonic space and man’s place therein; the dialogue between structure and landscape; proportions; the modul and even anything related to construction methods and materials – in all of these there was no rapprochement whatsoever between the ‘Greek’ and the ‘Roman’.

In these essential areas, Roman architecture, even in the days of Augustus, followed an independent course as it had done previously and would continue to do thereafter, with no real dependence upon Classical architecture.

Greek architecture, the architecture of wonderfully divisible and balanced spaces carefully built according to the *modul*, was unsuitable and could not serve as an inspirational source for an architecture that built daring architectonic spaces cast in cement. The abyss between them was too great to be bridged.¹⁵

CLOSING REMARKS

In the days of Augustus and, indeed, at an even greater pace, in Hadrian’s time, monuments were built in which there were attempts to integrate the two worlds. Suffice it to look at the small temple in Pula (Croatia), dated to the time of Augustus, or the temple of ‘Venus and Rome’ (from the time of Hadrian) near the *Forum Romanum*, to realize how plain and unattractive these edifices were.¹⁶

In their insensitivity to the essence of classical Greek architecture, we feel that the Romans are very close to us, very modern. The cities of Europe abound in ‘neo-classical’ buildings erected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These structures bear an astounding similarity to the Roman ‘neo-classical’ ones. The graceless shape of the ‘Venus and Rome’ temple is no whit different from that of the ‘Madeleine’ church in Paris. Whereas the incompatibility of the ‘Greek’ octastylon-prostylon portico attached to the huge, poured concrete rotunda of the *Pantheon*, is realized to the same extent as in a number of London churches that have a similar ‘classical’ façade at the base of a Gothic bell tower.¹⁷

We now return to Vitruvius. If we had to learn about first-century BCE Roman architecture from the work of Vitruvius only, without the possibility of examining the archaeological evidence, we would likely paint ourselves a picture very far from the reality. Vitruvius’ work, as we have seen, only partially reflects the reality and its central purpose is theoretical. True, in his work one can find a summary of the architectonic knowledge in its various categories, but it contains more – it is a fascinating theoretical manifesto that documents


¹⁶ On the temple at Pula [Pola], see H. KAHLER, Der Römische Tempel, Berlin 1970 [= Röm.Tempel], p. 38, Fig. 41; G. PAVAN, Il tempio d’Augusto di Pola, Trieste 2000. Having said that, I should add that at the end of the first century BCE and early in the first century CE two most attractive temples were erected in *Gallia Narbonensis* (Provence of today). One of them is the Temple of Rome and Augustus erected in Vienne, called in ancient times *Colonia Julia Augusta Florentia* Vienna. Another temple that was dedicated to Augustus can be found in Nîmes, in ancient times called *Colonia Augusta Nemausus*. This temple is widely known by its modern name, *Maison Carrée*. On the temple in Nîmes, see R. AMY, P. GROSS, La Maison Carrée de Nîmes, Paris 1979; on the temple in Vienne, see H. KAHLER, Der römische Tempel, Berlin 1970, p. 37, Pls. 34–35; on the temple of ‘Venus and Rome’, see NASH, Pictorial Dictionary II, pp. 496–499, Figs 1314–1318.

a rare and especially fine hour in the history of western culture. The new regime of the Principate, very anxious to establish its world-wide, universal rule, desperately and speedily needed a unifying language of symbols that would speak to the various populations in a single language clearly understood by all, a language that would reach every corner of the Empire. Vitruvius was to provide the symbols for an important and central area, that of architecture and complete what had already been done in other areas of creativity. The reality, however, was otherwise. And Roman architecture, as it developed from the start of the time of Augustus and thereafter, proved to be vital and dynamic, but its very great achievements were the fruits of local, Italian development, and the ‘classical’ within it was slight, only external and ornamental.

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