Altar of Augustan Peace at Narbo (CIL XII, 4335)

CIL 12, 4335

[1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Dedication
Original Location/Place: Unknown
Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Musée Lapidaire of Notre Dame de Lamourgier, Narbonne, France, cat. no. 869.1.1
Date: 26 BCE to 25 BCE
Material: Small marble altar with an inscription on the front, set within an oak garland. A relief of a *bucranium* at the back, and laurel trees on the sides.
Measurements: Height: 95 cm
Width: 70 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications:
CIL XII, 4335

Commentary: This altar from ancient Narbo demonstrates the speed with which the message of the *ara Pacis Augustae* spread in the provinces, and how the concept of Augustan Peace was disseminated outside of the political sphere. It also reveals the extent to which local, provincial communities were aware of the relevance of this message, and the manner in which they engaged in its rhetoric.
The altar was dedicated by Titus Domitius Romulus, whose Roman citizenship is indicated by his use of the *tria nomina*. He dedicated it in fulfilment of a vow (*votum posuit*), to *pax Augusta*, because of a change in the status of his relationship with "Phoebus," whom he had received *fide(i)commissum*, as a "bequest". Theodor Mommsen's explanation for this was that Romulus was the father of Phoebus, was manumitted himself and given his son by the will of his patron with a fideicommissum to manumit him, so that he became the patron of his son himself and dedicated the altar in celebration of this (*CIL* XII, 4335: Mommsen: "*Phoebum crediderim Romuli filium naturalem fuisse eumque a domino patri ita legatum esse, ut eum per fideicommissum manumitti iuberet itque patrem eum patroni iure quodammodo recepisse*"). Aside from this interesting familial and legal relationship, it is Titus Domitius Romulus's selection of *pax Augusta* as the deity to whom the vow is offered that requires further attention. *Pax Augusta* is inscribed within what appears to be a relief of a civic crown (*corona civica*) on the front of the altar, with the rest of the text placed below it. On the sides of the altar are laurel trees in relief. Both motifs immediately call to mind the honours awarded to Augustus by the Senate in 27 BCE, and which were described in chapter 34 of the *Res Gestae*. Due to the similarity of the iconography of the altar with the honours awarded to Augustus in 27 BCE Michele Gayraud has dated it to 26/25 BCE, but noted that it was not representative of the establishment of an official cult. Instead, she argues, the altar at Narbo is a private dedication that demonstrates the popular reception of the idea of an imperial cult, even if it did not formally yet exist (Gayraud, *Narbonne Antique*, p. 356). In spite of the "informal" nature of a private dedication, the message of imperial ideology can still be felt. By imitating the visual language of Rome, Titus Domitius Romulus demonstrated his familiarity with her monumental

landscape and responded to the concepts built within the physical structures; he was, as Louise Revell has stated, "buying into" a Roman display of empire, participating in the visual programme of imperial ideology (Revell, *Roman imperialism*, p. xi; see also Cornwell, *Pax and the Politics of Peace*, p. 183-186). The motifs were reminiscent of those visible in Augustan Rome, and the language of the inscription boldly stated acceptance of and adherence to the *pax Romana*. This is perhaps surprising if we consider that Narbo was a relatively new Roman province. Transalpine Gaul had only recently undergone a programme of pacification and organisation into colonies, following Octavian's possession of the province in 39 BCE; previously under Marc Antony's control, Octavian was hailed as a "liberator" in the entire region, which Michele Gayraud has used to explain the "spontaneous appearance" of the imperial cult in so many cities of the province (*Narbonne Antique*, p. 355). The setting up of the altar to *pax Augusta* by Titus Romulus can, therefore, be understood as how the concept of peace was used in the West to express acceptance of Roman expansion and imperialism following the pacification of the area (Cornwell, *Pax and Politics of Peace*, p. 183-186). When compared with the emergence of the compital altars to the *Lares Augusti* throughout Rome and the cities of Italy, and even the construction of the altar to *pax Augusta* in Praeneste, it is clear that this participation in, or "'buying into' of Roman culture on the part of…provincial communities became one of the ways in which the Roman empire was maintained" (Revell, *Roman imperialism*, p. xi).

Keywords in the original language:

- pax augusta [2]
- fideicommissus [3]
- votum [4]

Thematic keywords:

- Pax Romana [5]
- peace [6]
- Augustus [7]
- Roman power [8]
- Roman empire [9]
- conquest [10]
- expansion [11]
- provinces [12]
- Gaul [13]
- Narbonensis [14]
- loyalty [15]
- altar [16]

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[Pax and the Ara Pacis](https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/pax-and-ara-pacis) [21]

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