

Giulia Caneva

IL CODICE BOTANICO DI AUGUSTO

ROMA - ARA PACIS

PARLARE AL POPOLO ATTRAVERSO LE IMMAGINI DELLA NATURA

THE AUGUSTUS BOTANICAL CODE

ROME - ARA PACIS

SPEAKING TO THE PEOPLE THROUGH THE IMAGES OF NATURE



GANGEMI EDITORE

To have the opportunity to read this book: *The Augustus Botanical Code*, written by Dr Giulia Caneva, is certainly a great fortune for plant-lovers and those who love the ancient world. For me, as I live in the city of Rome surrounded by hundred of monuments and archaeological sites, there is also the possibility to see and touch the way in which the meaning of the botanic world was important for my ancestors.

In Rome, near the banks of the River Tiber, it is possible to visit the *Ara Pacis*, an altar built by order of the Roman Senate to celebrate the peace restored to the Roman Empire by the Emperor Augustus.

It was commissioned in 13 B.C. There had been two civil wars, as well as campaigns to conquer and stabilize all the new territories. From Caesar to Pompeus and Marcus Antonius there had been a long period of wars that Augustus, with the help of Agrippa, finally succeeded in stopping, thus consolidating the borders of the Empire.

This monument sanctions the desire to maintain the peace, and is, in fact, an altar where every year they used to make sacrifice.

The structure is built with an upper and lower part. In the upper section you can see a procession of historical personages within the Augustus family: Gens Julia and mythical characters.

The lower part is wider and shows an incredible quantity of plants: hundreds of flowers, pistils, berries, leaves, that develop in spirals supported by acanthus leaves.

Watching this harmonic geometry, it is easy to imagine that all the lower section expresses a message to the visitor. It is clear that the drawing and the choice of species do not have a merely decorative function, but speak to the people. Here we have proof of the deep knowledge of plants possessed by the ancients: with all the infinite possibilities, they chose those species that through their growth and form are connected with the fertility of the earth, the capacity to spring up again, with strength and the generative power both female and male.

This part of the monument gives prominence to the fact that life expresses itself through forms and different qualities that coexist in harmony in their variety, celebrating the beauty of creation and its prosperity.

We have to thank the very precious work of Dr Caneva, because her research has made it possible to identify all the species and understand the message of the monument and its connection with the Latin and Greek thought. All is expressed in the book: *The Augustus Botanical Code*, which is also accompanied by very beautiful photos.

One interesting thing connected with *Ara Pacis* is that although the purpose of the monument was to celebrate the Augustus' grandeur and the peace reestablished in the Empire, the message is extremely contemporary.

How many of us go into nature to find inspiration or simply to find peace?

How many of us are really enraptured walking in a beautiful landscape and may also feel a sense of gratitude to be part of this divine unity?

It is beautiful to find all these elements drawn together in harmony. It is a testimony that our ancestors were also perfectly aware of our sensations and most probably more in contact than us with the plant-world.

For those who love Dr Bach's flowers and the botanical world, here could be testimony that the study of plant morphology and a plant's behaviour, typical of its 'Signature', was already known in olden times and used to discover its use and meaning.

It is interesting to notice how, in this context, they have mostly chosen the flowers as an expression of transformation in the life of the plant, just as Bach chose the flower to transmit the message.

It is also very beautiful to see how many times the spiral is represented: this reminds us that life energy runs from the earth to the universe, from buds to galaxies, because all flows and it is in constant evolution.

Laura Paesano

Presidente Unione di Floriterapia di Rome – Italy

Il Codice Botanico di Augusto, Giulia Caneva, Gangemi Editore, 2011

The Augustus Botanical Code, Giulia Caneva, Gangemi Editore, 2011

La ricchezza degli elementi vegetali scelti in un monumento di così grande rilievo storico e la loro ben precisa disposizione evidenziano come essi abbiano non solo un effetto decorativo, ma che siano lo strumento di ben preciso intento simbolico-allegorico, collegato al manifesto politico del costituendo impero. Nel volume vengono illustrati gli elementi costitutivi di questo alfabeto botanico, le regole di organizzazione del linguaggio iconografico e infine si propone la lettura del messaggio augusteo di nuova prosperità, in un processo di rinascita possibile grazie alla pace, attraverso una continua trasformazione, che si proietta verso l'eternità.



The richness of the chosen vegetational elements of such an historically important monument, and their accurate disposition, highlight how they do not play only an ornamental role, but appear to be tools of a clear symbolic-allegoric intention linked to the political manifesto of the becoming empire. In this volume the constitutive elements of this botanical alphabet and the rules of organization of the iconographic language are illustrated and finally it is suggested the reading of the Augustus' message of a new prosperity, in a rebirth process, possible thanks to peace, through a never ending transformation which is projected onto eternity.



Giulia Caneva, professore ordinario di Botanica ed Ecologia vegetale presso il Dipartimento di Biologia Ambientale dell'Università degli Studi di Roma Tre. Autrice di oltre 150 pubblicazioni in ambito nazionale ed internazionale e di quindici monografie nel campo della vegetazione termofila mediterranea e della biologia vegetale applicata alla conservazione e valorizzazione delle opere d'arte.

Giulia Caneva, full Professor of Botany and Plant Ecology at the Department of Environmental Biology of the University Roma Tre. Author of more than 150 national and international publications and of fifteen books in the field of the thermophilous Mediterranean vegetation and of plant biology applied to the conservation and enhancement of works of art.