

ARTH401: Assessment 1.3 Guide to Responding

Since this is an essay assessment, there can be many acceptable approaches. Depending on which pair you chose to write about, please see the bullets below for some of the major points that should have made it into your essay. (These points are just some of the more obvious points. It is okay—indeed it is expected—that you will make points that are not listed below. Just use these as general guidelines for the kinds of points you will make in your essay.) Remember, a comparison essay requires more than just description or a listing of similarities and differences. You must use careful observations and comparisons to make a broader point about Early Christian art; your observations should help you argue the broader point you want to make.

1. Aula Palatina (AP) and Old St. Peter's Basilica (OSP)

Identifying Information

- A) Aula Palatina (Basilica of Constantine), AD 310, Trier, Germany, Roman
- B) Old St. Peter's Basilica, 4th Century AD, Rome, Italy, Early Christian

Similarities

- Both were commissioned under Emperor Constantine.
- Both had a basilican plan.
 - that is, an elongated plan with the focal point at one end
- They were built by the same culture around the same time.
- Both represented authority (albeit a different sort of authority).
- Both were large, imposing structures.

Differences

- Function: OSP was religious, AP was secular
- Location: OSP was in Rome (the capital), AP was in the provinces (Trier, Germany)
- AP was based on older Roman architectural tradition and was a continuation of that.
- OSP continued the older Roman basilican tradition, but re-imagined it in a new Christian style that would serve as the model for many later Christian churches.

Larger Ideas/Themes

- The AP represents the last gasp of old Roman secular power whereas OSP represents the emergence of a new power that would supplant Roman power.
- Shows the range of the basilican style that had emerged early in Ancient Rome.
- Shows the interconnectedness of Roman and Christian building traditions.

2. Ara Pacis Augustae (APA) and Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (SJB)

Identifying Information



- A) Ara Pacis Augustae, 13 BCE, Roman
- B) Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, AD 359, Early Christian

Similarities

- Both were decorated with relief sculpture.
- Both were created in the heart of Ancient Rome in the style of Roman relief sculpture.
- Both are carved in marble.
- Both use architectural features (columns, arches, pilasters) to separate scenes from one another.
- Both are full of human figures that tell different stories and suggest different ideas.

Differences

- APA was a public monument, while SJB was a private monument.
- APA was secular and civic, whereas SJB was religious and funerary.
- APA was made in first century Rome, whereas SJB was made in fourth century Rome.
- APA is much larger than SJB.
- SJB shows Christian imagery, while APA shows more ambiguous allegorical imagery.
- The human figures in APA are portrayed with greater attention to how the human body actually looks and with more interest in the physical form, whereas the figures in SJB are hidden beneath their clothes and less attention is paid to their physical form.

Larger Ideas/Themes

- The similarities in style, medium, and general conception show the inherent connection of Early Christian art to Roman art.
- The very specific Christian imagery and stories in SJB show the emergence of a new tradition.
- It is significant that the SJB is a funerary object, suggesting the greater importance of death and an afterlife in Christian art.

3. Distribution of Largesse from the Arch of Constantine (DL) and Christ from the Catacomb of Domitilla (C)

Identifying Information

- A) Distribution of Largesse, Arch of Constantine, AD 312-15, Rome, Roman
- B) Christ, Catacomb of Domitilla, 4th Century AD, Rome, Early Christian

Similarities

- Both were commissioned under Emperor Constantine around the same time in Rome.
- Both show an authority figure surrounded by his advisors/subordinates.
- Both images aim to suggest the importance of the central figure.
- Both images depict the most important figure (Christ and the emperor, respectively) in the center of the composition and slightly larger than the rest of the figures, to suggest his central importance.



-Both images have departed from the earlier Roman style that was “realistic” and paid careful attention to the human form, instead favoring a simplified—even symbolic—method of depicting human forms.

Differences

-C is religious, DL is civic/secular.

-DL is a public monument erected to celebrate the emperor, whereas C was painted in a private funerary space.

Larger Ideas/Themes

-The similarities in how these figures are depicted shows that images of Christ are indebted to images of Roman rulers. In other words, the visual tradition of Christ is rooted in imperial imagery.

-Similarities in depicting the human form show that even in civic imagery from this period, art was moving away from an interest in the physical world towards a greater interest in symbolism and abstract ideas.

