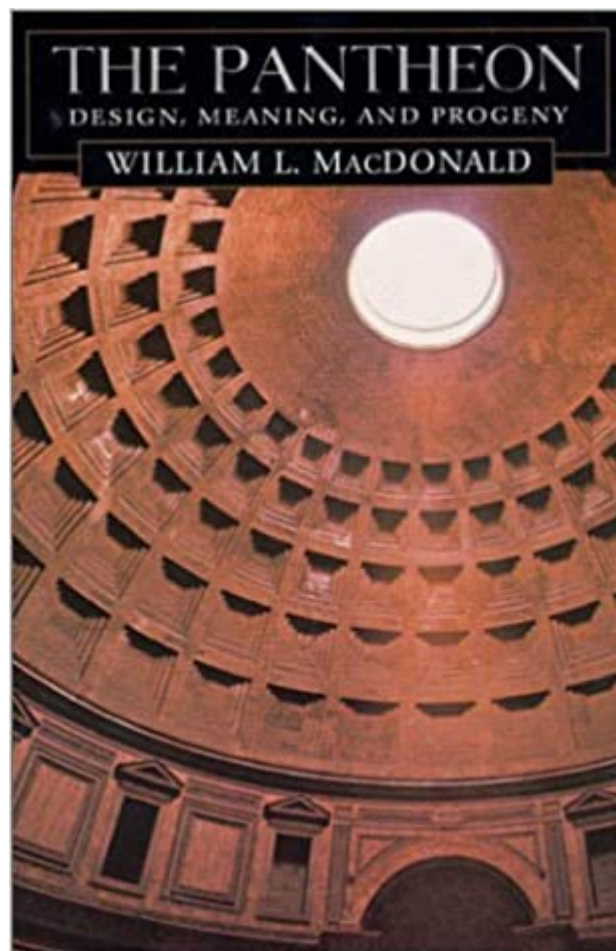




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The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, And Progeny, With A New Foreword By John Pinto, Second Edition



Synopsis

The Pantheon in Rome is one of the grand architectural statements of all ages. This richly illustrated book isolates the reasons for its extraordinary impact on Western architecture, discussing the Pantheon as a building in its time but also as a building for all time. Mr. MacDonald traces the history of the structure since its completion and examines its progeny--domed rotundas with temple-fronted porches built from the second century to the twentieth--relating them to the original. He analyzes the Pantheon's design and the details of its technology and construction, and explores the meaning of the building on the basis of ancient texts, formal symbolism, and architectural analogy. He sees the immense unobstructed interior, with its disk of light that marks the sun's passage through the day, as an architectural metaphor for the ecumenical pretensions of the Roman Empire. Past discussions of the Pantheon have tended to center on design and structure. These are but the starting point for Mr. MacDonald, who goes on to show why it ranks--along with Cheops's pyramid, the Parthenon, Wren's churches, Mansard's palaces--as an architectural archetype.

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Customer Reviews

The Pantheon is an informative and extremely well organized [book on] one of the most important and influential buildings in world history. Throughout, the language is appealing...Not only a coherent summary of the history, description, and analysis of the building, but also a discussion of the relevant architectural issues within a larger framework. (Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians) MacDonald describes the Pantheon's structure in some detail, against the background of

contemporary architecture and building methods...and he gives a brilliant resume of its influence on other architects from just after its building to the 1950s...an exceptionally well constructed and readable book. (The Economist)

William L. MacDonald was Alice Pratt Brown Professor of Art History at Smith College.

The Pantheon is brilliant in its simplicity, a combining of the circle and the square, with man as part of the equation. *“The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, and Progeny”* by William L. MacDonald, discusses this idea as well as the dome’s place in the ancient and modern world, why and how it was built, and its influence on architecture down to our day. While short (132 pages) and well illustrated (b&w photos), it’s not a book to breeze through. It’s a book that rewards careful reading. It was the Roman architect Vitruvius, who lived approximately 130 before the Pantheon was built, who first wrote about the relationship between man and architecture. MacDonald writes: *“(Vitruvius) speculated about proportions in both architecture and the human figure . . . in something like circle-and-square terms: Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing of these Vitruvian suppositions is famous (and illustrates) reciprocities between the circle and the square, on the one hand, and the reach and theoretical spatial envelope of an idealized human figure, on the other. These concepts appear dramatically enlarged in the Pantheon, where sweep of the limbs of the Vitruvian figure are expanded to colossal dimensions. This sympathy between the forms of Roman vaulted architecture and the spatial potential of the human figure is perhaps one of the principle keys to understanding the long life and continuing influence of that architecture.”* Around 117 A.D. Roman emperor Hadrian commissioned the building of the Pantheon. While the architect’s name is not known, he was the first Roman to break with Greek architectural influence and design something wholly original—a domed rotunda. It was built as a temple, possibly to honor the planetary deities—Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, the Moon, the Sun, and Saturn. Historian Cassius Dio thought so, and the void seen through the oculus, the round hole in the center of the dome, would make it appear so. Later, after the fall of Rome, the Pantheon became a Christian church, which helped preserve it. Remarkably, it has stayed preserved, and is one of the few buildings of antiquity that has survived complete. Its influence on architecture is universal, most notably in the dome of Saint Maria de Fiore in Florence, the dome St. Peter’s in Rome, and the buildings of Palladio. Thomas Jefferson was entranced by the dome, and adopted it in the design of Monticello, and particularly in the Library Rotunda at the University of Virginia. The Jefferson Memorial in Washington D.C. is a near

duplication of the Pantheon, on a smaller scale. "Angelic, not human," is how Michelangelo described the Pantheon. Indeed, as with all great domes, the Pantheon draws the eye heavenward, especially when viewed from the inside. The oculus lets in light and lifts our thoughts upward and outward, towards the heavens. Like all great art, the Pantheon inspires the imagination and invites us to comprehend things celestial, to a world free of restraint where anything seems possible. Five stars.

A paper back reprint of a book published originally the '70's. Smallish print, but loads of photographs. Not the best printing job in the world.

This small volume on the world's most famous building is the perfect introduction. Highly readable and multifaceted in its examination of its place and importance in world architectural history.

Although written 30 years ago the survey is still interesting. As an eng. myself I hoped to find more structural inputs

I bought this book to improve my understanding of the pantheon. This it certainly did. The pleasant surprise is the explanation of circular building from tombs through to San Stefano Rotundo. It tied all of these building together for me for the first time.

I have had the opportunity to visit this incredibly remarkable and ancient building twice. This book is well written and informative and helped me to better understand it's meaning, construction and function through the ages....It's a must see and should be on everyone's "bucket" list...

In March 2013, I visited the Pantheon in Rome. It was a short afternoon visit coming after a long morning tour of the Colosseum and Forum. My wife and I were tired; we spent just about a hour trying to take in one of the greatest architectural marvels in western civilization, a temple to all the gods. (Our more energetic son was interested in seeing other things.) But the image of that vast concrete vault rising over my head to the blank oculus above has stayed with me. That dome is almost two thousand years old, yet it looks as if the concrete had been poured just a few decades ago. The interior walls of that grand rotunda were of rich, shining, multicolored marble. Every aspect of that enclosed space testified to wealth, beauty, permanence, and power. How could this place be a remnant of the fallen glory of Rome? So I turned to this book to help satisfy my

curiosity. Unfortunately, I was immediately attacked by the opening sentence: "Hadrian's Pantheon is one of the grand architectural creations of all time: original, utterly bold, many-layered in associations and meaning, the container of a kind of immanent universality." (p. 11) Such verbosity is used by a writer who feels a need to charge at his reader with trumpets blaring and cannon booming. His reader is someone who has to be overwhelmed and conquered---or maybe just someone whom he hopes to wake up. "All time"? What is that? Two thousand years is a long time, but it is not "all time." And what the heck is "immanent universality"? Sigh. I knew at once that reading this book was going to be a chore, that is, if I stuck with it. I did stay with it, right to the end. It is a mercifully short book---160 pages, counting notes and index. Its saving grace is that there are a lot of pictures, but unfortunately they are all black and white and not of the highest quality. And the placement of the photos is not friendly to the reader. One finds oneself constantly flipping pages to find a picture that is cited in the text. I realize that is inevitable to a certain extent with a book like this, but the illustration and page layout here was not intelligently done. This book is full of information and detail about the Pantheon. It answered a lot of my questions. I do not criticize the architectural competence of the author. What I do criticize him for is that he made his book needlessly difficult. The book is divided into five chapters: Chapter 1. In the Temple of the Whole World. Presents the history of the building. Chapter 2. The Building Proper. Describes the structure of the building and the technology that made it possible. Chapter 3. Background and Principles of Design. Looks at the evolution of the rotunda and dome in western architecture leading up to the building of the Pantheon. Chapter 4. The Problem of Meaning. Attempts to determine the religious, political, and artistic significance of the Pantheon. Chapter 5. "The Most Celebrated Edifice." Traces the progeny or offspring of the Pantheon design through architectural history. If one is truly interested in architectural history, then this book, stuffy and intimidating though its tone may be, is worth plodding through.

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