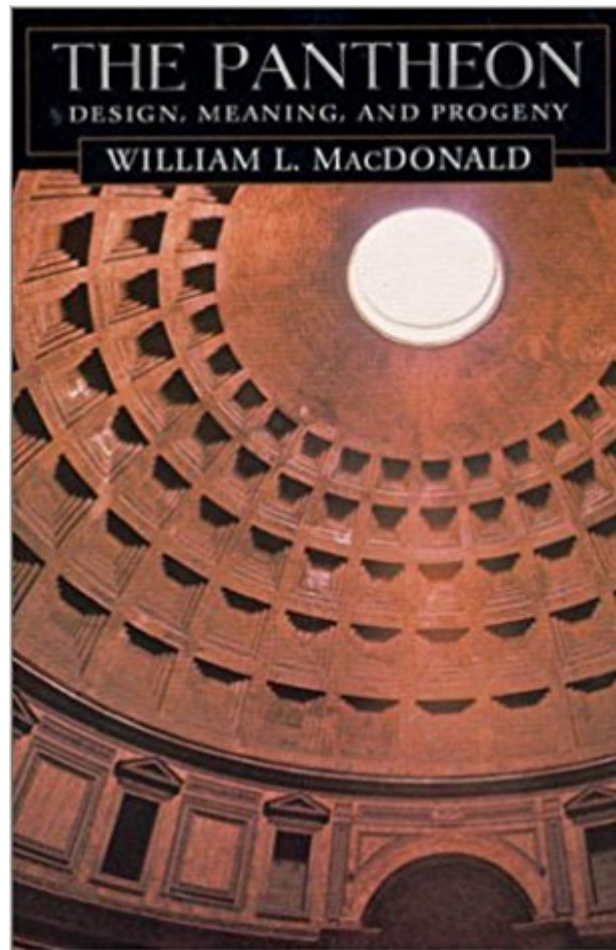


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The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, And Progeny, With A New Foreword By John Pinto, Second Edition



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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