

Learn about how Hadrian created the Pantheon as we know it today from the ruins of previous temples built by Marcus Agrippa and Domitian. A guest post by [Context Travel Tours](#).



Hadrian – the great unifier of the Roman Empire, the admirer of Athens, the architect, the poet, the visionary. As one of Rome’s most successful emperors, and one of the “five good emperors”, his accomplishments stretched to the furthest extremes of the Empire, and his name became associated with some of the most momentous building projects in the history of man.

Hadrian, of course, was responsible for the eponymous wall which marked the northern limits of Britannia. His love for Ancient Greece saw him rebuild and [regenerate huge portions of Athens](#), he constructed the vast Temple of Venus and Roma, and he built what is still today, the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world. The Pantheon, a structure that has been in almost continuous use for the last 2000 years.



View of the Pantheon facade, piazza and fountain.

The Site of the Pantheon

While Hadrian is credited with the iconic structure that stands today, he did not claim it as one of his works, choosing not to add his name to the building and to keep the inscription of Marcus Agrippa who first developed the site. The temple built by Agrippa was part of a larger complex, and it was thought to have been confined to his private residence. The original building burned down in a fire in around AD 80 but was restored by emperor Domitian. Sadly, this incarnation of the Pantheon was also destroyed by fire around AD 110.



Inscription fronting the portico of the Pantheon: M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT.

Hadrian's Unique Vision

After the second fire, Hadrian set about restoring the Pantheon according to his own unique vision. That vision was underpinned by hundreds of years of Roman technology, and the great leaps forward made by architects of the time ensured that the Pantheon would look like no other building that preceded it. The development of new materials allowed the 43.3-meter dome to sit atop a brick and concrete structure with an almost impossible weightlessness, and when combined with the original marble columns sourced from Upper Egypt by Marcus Agrippa, the Pantheon as we know it today began to take shape.



The Pantheon's porch was built in the traditional, Greek style of architecture, with columns holding up an entablature. Sixteen, monolithic columns form the monument's portico. The shafts are

made of Egyptian granite, while the capitals and bases were carved from white Greek marble.

The two main structures of the Pantheon may well have been constructed some 100 years apart, however, Hadrian's idea was to combine what was left of the original rectangular building with a new and much more spectacular domed rotunda. By combining the old with the new, Hadrian created an architectural archetype that retained its classical dimensions for something that would truly stand the test of time. At the very top of the dome, a large hole (the oculus) was left open to provide light, and during certain times of the year, Hadrian himself would have been bathed in glowing light when sunlight struck the metal grille above the doorway at the entrance as he held court.



Dome and oculus.

However, this was not the only heavenly touch added by the great emperor, and it is thought that this building was the first in human history where the interior was deliberately designed to outshine the exterior. Featuring seven alcoves set into the six-meter thick walls, the internal decoration is crafted from various colors of marble, with friezes representing the world of the Gods, all lighted further with five rings of 28 coffers that would most likely have been covered in bronze.



Interior view of the Pantheon.

Perhaps most fittingly, the influence that Pantheon has had on the architecture of the past 2000 years cannot be understated. The Hagia Sophia and the Suleymaniye Mosque, both of which are in Istanbul, have directly referenced Hadrian's vision, while the dome of the Basilica of St Peter in Rome, which was partly designed by Michelangelo, is also heavily influenced by the Pantheon's dome.

To learn more about the Pantheon and Hadrian's influence on its creation, then there's no substitute for visiting the Eternal City yourself. [Guided tours with historical experts](#) offer the ideal way to learn about the Roman's how they shaped not only Italy, but the whole world as we know it today. You can also discover the rich history of the Pantheon and enter the world of Hadrian's Rome through the many [documentaries available online](#).



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