

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

The Pantheon

From Rome with Love

Robert and Karla

Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

Plate 01

The Pantheon

Location: Piazza della Rotonda, Rome



Description

The front portico of an ancient temple, with tall granite Corinthian columns supporting a triangular pediment, fronting a great domed rotunda. An Egyptian obelisk raised on a fountain stands to the right of the square, which is busy with visitors and café tables.

Inscription & Translation

M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT

“Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, consul for the third time, made this.”

Date & Age

Rebuilt by the Emperor Hadrian c. 113–125 AD, making it roughly 1,900 years old. It replaced an earlier temple built by Marcus Agrippa c. 27–25 BC, which was destroyed by fire; Hadrian kept Agrippa’s original dedication on the new building.

Artist / Creators

Commissioned by the Emperor Hadrian (the architect is unknown). The obelisk dates to the reign of Ramesses II (13th century BC), Egypt. The fountain below it — the Fontana del Pantheon — was designed by Giacomo della Porta (1575) and carved in marble by Leonardo Sormani; the obelisk was added in 1711 under Pope Clement XI.

Significance

The best-preserved monument of ancient Rome. Its concrete dome is still the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world, with a central opening, the oculus, open to the sky. It survived the centuries largely because it was consecrated as a Christian church in 609 AD.

The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, with a Marble Angel

Location: Seventh Chapel (Chapel of the Annunciation), Pantheon, Rome



Description

Two views of the right-hand side of the Pantheon's Seventh Chapel. A large framed oil painting shows the risen Christ drawing back his white cloth to reveal the wound in his side, while the kneeling Saint Thomas reaches out to touch it and a group of apostles looks on. Beside and below it stands a life-size white marble angel poised on a swirl of cloud, its wings raised and its drapery caught in motion. A small 15th-century marble tomb tablet is set into the wall between the two works.

Inscription & Translation

... DE BERGOMO ... D·M·CCCC·LXXIII ... MARTII

The small marble wall tablet is a sepulchral inscription, worn and heavily abbreviated. The clearly legible portions name a noble family “of Bergamo” and give the date “in the year of the Lord 1474 ... of March.” The remaining lines are too weathered to transcribe with confidence from a photograph.

Date & Age

The painting was completed in 1633. The marble angel is later — the pair of angels was given to the church in 1696, placing it in the late 17th century. The small tomb tablet between them is dated 1474. (The chapel’s altar wall behind these works holds an even older Annunciation fresco from the 15th century.)

Artist / Creators

The painting, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, is by Pietro Paolo Bonzi (c. 1576–1636), an Italian Baroque painter active in Rome and nicknamed ‘il Gobbo dei Carracci.’ The marble angel is one of a pair from the workshop of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), the defining sculptor of the Roman Baroque; the angels were donated to the Pantheon by Cardinal B. Tomasi in 1696.

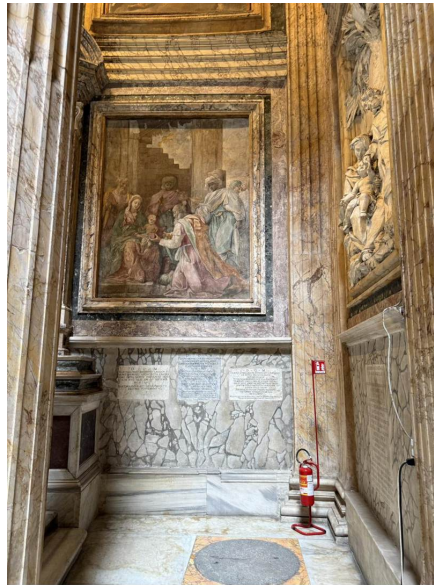
Significance

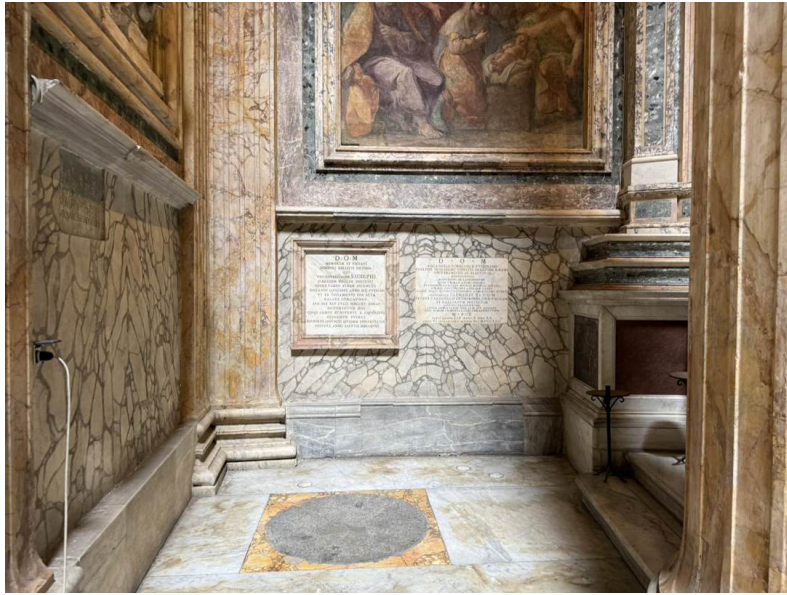
The subject — the apostle Thomas doubting the Resurrection until he touches Christ’s wounds (John 20:24–29) — was a favourite of Counter-Reformation art, dramatising faith confirmed by physical evidence. The flanking angels reflect the pervasive influence of Bernini, whose workshop shaped much of Rome’s Baroque church decoration. Together they show how the ancient pagan temple was steadily layered, century after century, with Christian art once it became a church in 609 AD.

Plate 03

Chapel of St. Joseph in the Holy Land (Chapel of the Virtuosi)

Location: First chapel on the left, Pantheon, Rome





Description

Three views of the chapel belonging to the Congregation of the Virtuosi — the Pantheon’s historic confraternity of artists and musicians. Above the altar, set in a niche beneath a gilded sunburst and the dove of the Holy Spirit, is a marble group of St. Joseph seated with the standing Christ Child (the base is inscribed JESVS). Flanking the niche are two large paintings: the Adoration of the Shepherds on the left and the Adoration of the Magi on the right. A stucco relief of the Holy Family is set into the right-hand wall. Below, two inscribed marble tablets commemorate members of the confraternity, and a porphyry roundel marks the floor.

Inscription & Translation

Right tablet: “D·O·M ... ARCANGELO CORELLIO E FVSIGNANO ... OBIIT VI ID· IANVARIII ANNO SAL· MDCCXIII” — Left tablet: “D·O·M MEMORIAE ET PIETATI DOMINICI BELLETTI PICTORIS ... ANNO SALVTIS MDCCXVIII”

Right tablet (the monument to the composer Arcangelo Corelli): “To God, the Best and Greatest. To Arcangelo Corelli of Fusignano, esteemed servant of Philipp Wilhelm, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Prince and Elector ... With the favour of Pope Clement XI, Pietro Cardinal Ottoboni, Vice-Chancellor of the Holy Roman Church and Protector of France, who had long counted him among his household, set up this monument. He lived 59 years, 10 months, 20 days; he died on the 8th of January, in the year of salvation 1713.” Left tablet: “To God, the Best and Greatest. To the memory and devotion of Domenico Belletti, painter,” who left a bequest to the Venerable Confraternity of St. Joseph to provide a yearly dowry for six girls; erected by the confraternity in the year of salvation 1718. (Both tablets are abbreviated and partly worn; the readings above give their substance rather than every word.)

Date & Age

The marble St. Joseph group dates to about 1548. The two side paintings were completed in 1661. The Corelli memorial tablet was set up after his death in 1713, and the Belletti tablet in 1718. All of this sits inside the ancient Pantheon (rebuilt c. 113–125 AD), which the confraternity adopted as its chapel

from the 1540s.

Artist / Creators

The statue of St. Joseph and the Holy Child is by Vincenzo de' Rossi (1525–1587), a Florentine sculptor trained under Baccio Bandinelli, whose work was at times mistaken for Michelangelo's. The two paintings — Adoration of the Shepherds (left) and Adoration of the Magi (right) — are by Francesco Cozza (1605–1682), a pupil of Domenichino and himself a member of the Virtuosi, both painted in 1661. The two flanking stucco reliefs are the Dream of St. Joseph by Paolo Benaglia and the Rest on the Flight into Egypt by Carlo Monaldi. Corelli's monument was raised by his patron, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni.

Significance

This is the chapel of the Congregazione dei Virtuosi al Pantheon, a brotherhood of artists, architects and musicians founded in the 1540s by the canon Desiderio da Segni. Its members ranged from Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and the Zuccari to, later, Bernini, Pietro da Cortona and Algardi; the body still exists today as the Pontifical Academy of Fine Arts. The chapel doubles as a memorial to its most distinguished members — above all the composer Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713), a founding figure of the concerto grosso and the modern school of violin playing, who is buried here.