

The Pantheon (temple of all the gods) is a former Roman temple and since the year 609 a Catholic church in Rome, Italy, on the site of an earlier temple commissioned by Marcus Agrippa during the reign of Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD). It was rebuilt by the emperor Hadrian and probably dedicated 126 AD. Its date of construction is uncertain, because Hadrian chose not to inscribe the new temple but rather to retain the inscription of Agrippa's older temple, which had burned down. The building is cylindrical with a portico of large granite Corinthian columns (eight in the first rank and two groups of four behind) under a pediment. A rectangular vestibule links the porch to the rotunda, which is under a coffered concrete dome, with a central opening (oculus) to the sky. Almost two thousand years after it was built, the Pantheon's dome is still the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome. The height to the oculus and the diameter of the interior circle are the same, 142 feet. It is one of the best-preserved of all Ancient Roman buildings, in large part because it has been in continuous use throughout its history and, since the 7th century, the Pantheon has been in use as a church dedicated to "St. Mary and the Martyrs" but informally known as "Santa Maria Rotonda". The square in front of the Pantheon is called Piazza della Rotonda. The Pantheon is a state property, managed by Italy's Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism. In 2013, it was visited by over 6 million people. The Pantheon's large circular domed cella, with a conventional temple portico front, was unique in Roman architecture. Nevertheless, it became a standard exemplar when classical styles were revived, and has been copied many times by later architects.

In 609, the Byzantine emperor Phocas gave the building to Pope Boniface IV, who converted it into a Christian church and consecrated it to St. Mary and the Martyrs on May 13, 609: "Another Pope, Boniface, asked the same [Emperor Phocas, in Constantinople] to order that in the old temple called the Pantheon, after the pagan filth was removed, a church should be made, to the holy virgin Mary and all the martyrs, so that the commemoration of the saints would take place henceforth where not gods but demons were formerly worshipped." Twenty-eight cartloads of holy relics of martyrs were said to have been removed from the catacombs and placed in a porphyry basin beneath the high altar. On its consecration, Boniface placed an icon of the Mother of God as within the new sanctuary. The building's consecration as a church saved it from the abandonment, destruction, and the worst of the spoliation that befell the majority of ancient Rome's buildings during the early medieval period. However, Paul the Deacon records the spoliation of the building by the Emperor Constans II, who visited Rome in July 663: Remaining at Rome twelve days he pulled down everything that in ancient times had been made of metal for the ornament of the city, to such an extent that he even stripped off the roof of the church, which at one time was called the Pantheon, and had been founded in honor of all the gods and was now by the consent of the former rulers the place of all the martyrs; and he took away from there the bronze tiles and sent them with all the other ornaments to Constantinople. Much fine external marble has been removed over the centuries – for example, capitals from some of the pilasters are in the British Museum. Two columns were swallowed up in the medieval buildings that abutted the Pantheon on the east and were lost. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Urban VIII Barberini tore away the bronze ceiling of the portico, and replaced the medieval campanile with the famous twin towers (often wrongly attributed to Bernini) which were not removed until the late 19th century. The only other loss has been the external sculptures, which adorned the pediment above Agrippa's inscription. The marble interior has largely survived, although with extensive restoration.

