

# Dating the Pantheon

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The Hadrianic date of the Pantheon is today considered a definitive fact based on firm evidence. Thus it may seem strange to attempt to disassociate it from the sphere of Hadrianic architecture. Many of the assumptions surrounding the building go back to antiquity; others have been created much later. One example of a long-lived assumption was that the present Pantheon was built under Augustus by M. Vipsanius Agrippa, in c.25 B.C., as stated on the inscription on the epistyle of the portico.<sup>1</sup> The idea may also have stemmed from Cassius Dio's words in the 3rd c.:<sup>2</sup>

Also he [Agrippa] completed the building called the Pantheon. It has this name perhaps because it received among the images which decorated it the statues of many gods, including [or 'besides'] Mars and Venus; but my opinion of the name is that, because of its vaulted roof, it resembles the heavens. Agrippa for his part wished to place a statue of Augustus there also and to bestow upon him the honour of having the structure named after him; but when the emperor would not accept either honour, he placed in the temple itself a statue of the former Caesar, and in the pronaos statues of Augustus and himself

It is not entirely clear to what extent the Pantheon was restored or rebuilt after the great fire of A.D. 80<sup>3</sup> damaged Agrippa's Pantheon. Dio (66.24) gives some details of the fire:

However, a second conflagration, above ground, in the following year spread over very large sections of Rome while Titus was absent in Campania attending to the catastrophe that had befallen that region. It consumed the temple of Serapis, the temple of Isis, the Saepta, the temple of Neptune, the Baths of Agrippa, the Pantheon, the Diribitorium, the theatre of Balbus, the stage building of Pompey's theatre, the ... Octavian buildings ... together with their books, and the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus with its surrounding temples.

Repairs were carried out during the reign of Domitian: 'many public buildings were erected in Domitian's reign: ... and the Pantheon.'<sup>4</sup> Then lightning struck the building in 110: 'the Pantheon was struck by lightning and burned' (*Pantheum Romae fulmine concrematum*).<sup>5</sup>

This brings us to our topic: the supposition that the entire construction of the existing Pantheon was carried out during the first years of Hadrian. Almost all scholars believe that the creation of the Pantheon, from conception through design and building process, was initiated and completed under Hadrian. They may not agree when construction was completed, but they believe that construction was not initiated before 118. The period in question runs more or less from 118/119 to 125/128.<sup>6</sup> Here it will be argued, on the basis of the work by J. Guey and H. Bloch, that it is possible to conclude that the works of constructing the rotunda of the present Pantheon were initiated sometime after 110. Taking the evidence of the brickstamps at face value, I shall suggest that construction of the rotunda was well under way in 114 and 115.

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1 *CIL* VI 896, commented on by G. Alföldy in *CIL* vol. VI/8. The inscription M. AGRIPPA. L. F. COS. TERTIVM. FECIT may be understood as 'the Pantheon was built [or dedicated] in the year when Agrippa was appointed consul for the third time', that is, in 27 B.C. However, inscriptions on some coins issued by (or posthumously in honour of) Agrippa use the same legend M. AGRIPPA. L.F. COS. III long after 27 B.C. (Romeo 1998, 19-45; Vagi 1999, 233-34). Consequently, the inscription may also be understood as 'built by M. Agrippa, son of Lucius, consul three times'.

2 Cass. Dio 53.27.1-2. K. Ziegler (1949, 732) argues that this particular passage is "seltsam und rätselhaft"

3 All dates are A.D. unless stated otherwise. Translations of Dio are from the Loeb edition.

4 *Chronogr. a.* 354; Hieron., *Chron. a. Abr.* 2105, describing the rebuilding under Domitian. In a forthcoming book on the Pantheon (Cambridge University Press) E. La Rocca, argues that the Domitianic intervention had the character of a repair, and that it was not a rebuilding.

5 Oros., *Hist. adv. pag.* 7.12.5. Cf. Bloch 1937-38, 112, and Eusebius and Jerome, who dates this to the year 2126 after Abraham, that is, A.D. 110).

6 A. Ziolkowski (1999, 56) argues for a date of completion some time in the period 125-128, based on the date of the brickstamps found and dated by Bloch (1959). No literary or other evidence provides a specific date for the completion of the Pantheon.