Pantheon

Whereas the sanctuary in Pella is the first major treatment of active interior space, the Roman Pantheon introduces interior space as an expression of a new existential dimension. The building standing today was erected by Hadrian (AD 117-138), and its dedication to the gods apotheosis indicates a general principle rather than a particular, individual force. The Pantheon, in fact, has always impressed visitors by its cosmic character. "It resembles heaven," Dio Cassius said, and recent studies subscribe to this similarity.

The Pantheon consists of two major elements: a huge domed rotunda and a large columnar porch. The general effect of the exterior did not differ from that of other Roman temples: the porch resembles the portico of a normal Roman temple, and was originally preceded by a flight of steps, as the ground level was considerably lower in antiquity than now. It was flanked by lower colonnades concealing the two sides of the monumental porch, as a continuous colonnade extending toward the nave of the building. The colonnade was not conceived as a plastic body, but as a shell containing the great area, which seems to manifest a new image of man's universe. These two major parts of the Pantheon apparently do not form an integrated space. The transitional porch and the revolutionary rotunda seem added together without inner necessity. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals formal traits which contradict this (rather common) interpretation. A rectangular volume has been introduced between the porch and the rotunda, which serves as a natural transition. The oblongities of the two main volumes do not correspond, but both continue across the transitional element, producing an integrated generation of forms, which can only be due to a real conception of the building. Furthermore, a longitudinal axis runs from the pavilion through the transitional volume and across the rotunda to end in an apse. This axis is flanked by columns which through breaks in the colonnades are continued visualy with an arch purifying the upper zone of the column. When isolated, however, the axis is less evident than the centralizing effect of the concave spaces and the hemispherical dome. It has been pointed out that a sphere, with a diameter of 43.5 meters (142 feet), could be described within the space, but it is important to note that the walls of the dome are not related to the centre of the sphere, but to the centre of the front and to the spectator who would stand there. A vertical axis is clearly defined, which leads directly towards heaven through the large opening in the dome, means that the Pantheon integrates the second dimension of the vertical in the organization of interior space.

The Pantheon unifies a theatrical dome and a longitudinal, extended axis into a meaningful whole. It unifies cosmic order and living history, and makes man experience himself as a god-inspired explorer and conserver, as a god's children and not merely as a cosmic pawn. This is also evident in the horizontal division of the space. The drum consists of two zones, and both are articulated by means of the classical members: large Corinthian pilasters and columns below and small pilasters above. These members, two antitheses, and the columns of the dome itself, are placed in such a way as to balance and harmonize the radiant concave, convex order. The lowest zone has a rich and plastic articulation with deep niches and intercolumniations, representing, so to speak, action in space. The upper zone presents a simple order of octagonal members, and the dome the heaven-