The Roman Pantheon

Located in Rome, Italy, the Pantheon is one of the most famous buildings remaining from ancient civilizations. Most ancient temples were dedicated to a single god or goddess, such as the Greek Parthenon in Athens which was dedicated solely to the goddess Athena. However, the Pantheon once was the temple that honored all of the Roman gods as indicated by its name. The name derives from the Greek word *pan* which means "all" and the Greek word *theos* meaning "gods."

The original Pantheon was built by Marcus Agrippa, a famous general and statesman during the reign of Octavian who ruled the Roman Empire using the name Caesar Augustus. Agrippa's Pantheon was constructed in 25 B.C. Hadrian, the fourteenth emperor of the Roman Empire, succeeded his adoptive father, Emperor Trajan, in 117 A.D. Hadrian decided to construct a new Pantheon because Agrippa's Pantheon was struck by lightning and destroyed during Trajan's reign.

Hadrian was an unpopular ruler, perhaps because Romans questioned his right to rule as an adopted son. To gain favor with Romans and provide work, Hadrian began a construction plan to beautify Rome with new buildings which included reconstructing the Pantheon on a grand scale. Hadrian's new Pantheon, which still stands today, features a perfectly rounded dome, a construction feat unequaled in its time. The impressive dome symbolized the perfect ideal of the Roman Empire as an umbrella over the vast lands until Roman control.

Prior civilizations, especially the Ancient Greeks, constructed buildings piecemeal with post-and-lintel construction. In this system, individual pieces of stone were joined together like a giant puzzle. The Romans somehow invented concrete which was highly durable and could be poured into a mold to create the desired shape. Concrete was used to create vaulted ceilings and the dome of the Pantheon.

Modern architects and structural engineers marvel at the strength of Roman concrete which built structures that have endured for over 2,000 years.