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**Archiphany: Architecture as Manifestation. Four Visions of the  
Pantheon**

José Ángel Hidalgo Arellano

Athens Institute for Education and Research

8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10683 Athens, Greece

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José Ángel Hidalgo Arellano, Associate Professor, Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University, China

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**ABSTRACT**

Archiphany: architecture and epiphany. The objective of the present article is to unravel the protagonists and the scenario of the revelation of knowledge that takes place during a building's long life. It stems from a double interest: the relationship between literature, painting and architecture and the discovery of something incommensurable in architecture. Over the centuries, architectural theory has made a great effort in order to rationalise all aspects of this discipline. However, aspects of difficult quantification have been relegated in this path of rationalisation. Whereas the presence of immeasurable parameters is encountered in the daily experience of the architect, architectural theory has failed to systematically integrate this knowledge. This is the driving force of this article. Deepen, by analogy with the other arts, the concept of manifestation, it discusses how the architectural work manifests itself, making use of its autonomy, becoming the one leading the architect during the whole existence of the work: from its genesis in the designing time until the experience of the completed work in the historical time. In the present article, we choose the Roman Pantheon as an inexhaustible source of knowledge. Exploring four different visions (Giovanni da Sangallo, Antonio da Sangallo, Giovanni Paolo Panini and Hubert Robert: two from architecture, two from painting) we understand how an architectural work can enlighten the culture and can be enlightened but other creative arts beyond architecture. Looking attentively to this building, a topography, an atlas of revelations of architectural manifestations arises, summarizing what Percy B. Shelley wrote in 1819 about the Pantheon: 'It is, as it were, the visible image of the universe'.

Keywords: Archiphany, Architecture as manifestation, Roman Pantheon, Giovanni da Sangallo, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Giovanni Paolo Panini, Hubert Robert.

*It is, as it were, the visible image of the universe.*  
Percy B. Shelley, *Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1819.*<sup>1</sup>

"It is, as it were, the visible image of the universe". Shelley referred to the Pantheon in a letter of 1819 with these words. This is not just an evocation, but represents the highest distinction. A few years earlier Shelley had written, "in reality, I believe that the Universe is God."<sup>2</sup> The deification of the Pantheon is, therefore, a recognition of its infinite and inexhaustible character.

If William Blake found "the World in a Grain of Sand" and the "Infinity in the palm of your hand,"<sup>3</sup> Shelley, another English romantic poet, locates the architectural universe in a specific building, in the Roman *Rotonda*.

The fascination that the Roman Pantheon has awakened since its construction has been truly universal. Among the architects this fascination has been fed by continuous certainties, verifying its perfection constantly. Its geometric rigor, its technical and spatial audacity, its magnificence, its mysterious use of light and its ability to synthesize, together with its immutability, have overcome generations and generations of architects.

In his French trip, Bernini told the papal Nuncio in Paris that "the dome of St. Peter's is indeed beautiful, that none of that type is seen in the ancient works, but that there are a hundred faults in St. Peter's and not even one in the *Rotonda*."<sup>4</sup> Not a single fault in the Pantheon. Bernini, who had the audacity to place a double bell tower in the Pantheon, knew very well that, like Moses, he was treading sacred ground. "The Pantheon in Rome is yet the most perfect and magnificent temple now to be seen" said John Soane in the third one of the *Lessons* that he gave annually in the Royal Academy of London.<sup>5</sup>

The Pantheon capacity for evocation is so boundless that José Antonio Ramos states with absolute justice that "every project begins in the Pantheon of Rome, perfect symbol of creation."<sup>6</sup> There is no other work that contains in itself so much possibility of genesis. We could only compare it to the Parthenon. I cannot think of any more. Every architectural work seems to be the daughter of one or both.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Select Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co, 1882, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Miss Hitchener, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1812, Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> See the beginning of William Blake (1757-1827) well-known poem *Auguries of Innocence*: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand..."

<sup>4</sup> "que la coupole de Saint-Pierre, à la vérité, est belle, qu'on n'en voit aucune dans les ouvrages antiques, mais qu'il y acent fautes dans Saint-Pierre et qu'il n'y en a point dans la Rotonde". September 19th, 1665. M de Chantelou, *Journal du cavalier Bernin en France*. Paris: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1885.

<sup>5</sup> *Lecture III*. Soane, John. *Sir John Soane: The Royal Academy Lectures*. Edited by David Watkin. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> "todo proyecto empieza en el Panteón de Roma, símbolo perfecto de la creación." Ramos, José Antonio. *A través del pasado dibujando*. Madrid: A DE DESDE, 2009, p. 14.

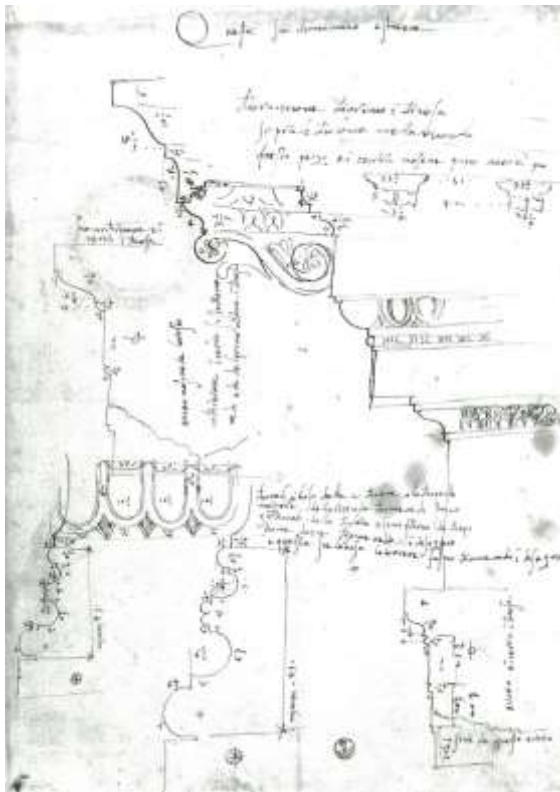
Although every work contains inexhaustible meanings, we can consider the Pantheon as the paradigm. It far surpasses this work to analyze the inexhaustible meanings that the Pantheon can provide. We have just chosen four visions that keep seeds of many others. As you pull the thread in every drawing, History of Architecture protagonists emerge naturally.

*A Study on Language by Giovanni Battista da Sangallo*

*Fragments. Or the anecdote as a form of knowledge. Yes.*  
Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*.<sup>7</sup>

Our first approach to the Pantheon is made through a fragment. These are sketches of cornices and portico's bases, realized around 1520 by Giovanni Battista da Sangallo. In the History of Art, the life of Giovanni Battista da Sangallo, called *il Gobbo* (the hunchback), runs in the shade of his older brother. Born twelve years after Antonio, he will be at his side when he would be appointed as architect for St. Peter in the Vatican works and he will survive only two years when his brother dies.

**Figure 1.** *Giovanni Battista da Sangallo, Study on the Pantheon Cornices, circa 1520*



Source: Adams, Nicholas, ed. *The Architectural Drawings of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and his circle*. Cambridge Mass: MIT press, 2000, p. 453.

<sup>7</sup> Auster, Paul. *The invention of Solitude*. New York: Sun Press, 1982, p. 108.

Although there are few testimonies of his works, we have his wonderful drawings. In the upper part of the drawing we are analyzing here is an inscription that reads as follows: "It has been made by me and it is right."<sup>8</sup> As if he were a public notary, Sangallo testifies to us what he sees. He is aware of the importance of faithfully transmitting what he observes. It is not an easy task. We have to admire here the tenacity (fed by the astonishment) that moved artists (from Donatello and Brunelleschi) to give due account of what the architectural work was offering them. "It is not seen because this is broken", "this piece is on the floor, there may be more", "it is broken and the rest cannot be seen", etc. These are the inscriptions accompanying the drawings.

The central drawings correspond to the cornice's Corinthian order. *Chornjione chorinto*, he writes. The lower ones are base's sections. We can understand his commitment because when in 1550 Vasari writes his *Lives*, he will say that among all the orders "much more beautiful is the Pantheon, that is to say, the Rotunda of Rome, whose Corinthian style is the richest and most ornate of all mentioned here."<sup>9</sup>

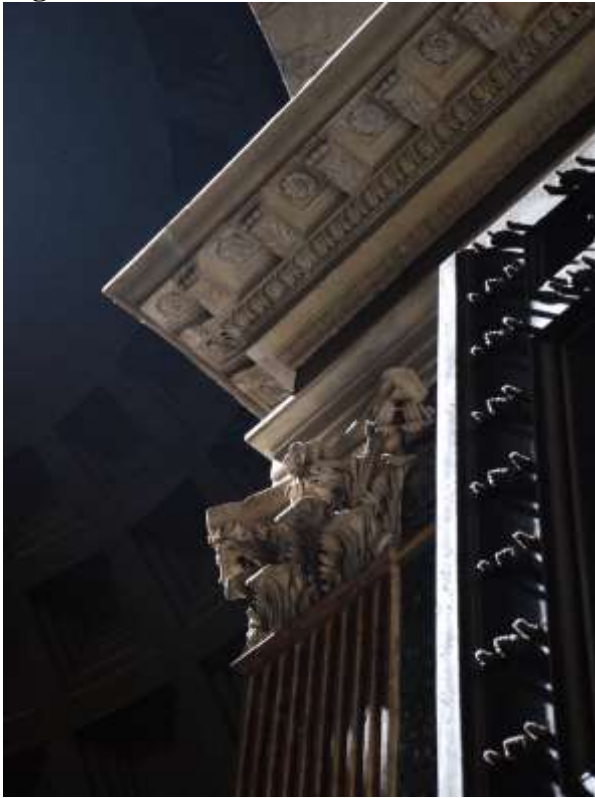
We have probably never admired the Pantheon's orders. When talking about it, we can speak about space, light, its decrepit outdoors textures, its indoors sparkling as the first day, its scale, its construction, its dimensions, its meaning... But perhaps we have not bothered in unraveling their language. At the beginning of the *Cinquecento*, Bramante has already brought language into the ancients *grande maniera*, and it is not uncommon for people in his circle to be concerned with learning the new language's keys directly from its very sources.

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<sup>8</sup> "Questa sie di mia mano e stabene". Transcription in Adams, Nicholas, ed. *The Architectural Drawings of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and his circle*. Cambridge Mass: MIT press, 2000, drawing U 1387 A.

<sup>9</sup> "ma molto più è bello il Panteon, cioè la Ritonda di Roma -, il quale è il più ricco e il più ornato di tutti dli ordini detti di sopra." Vasari, Giorgio. *Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*. Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 2007, p. 32.

**Figure 2.** *Pantheon Cornices, Details*



**Figure 3.** *Pantheon Cornices, Details*



**Figure 4.** *Pantheon Cornices, Details*



The drawing is delicate, made with a light line. The proportions are impeccable and all variations and cornice's section changes are noted. From the top of the frieze to the cornice, passing through delicate rounded denticles, the artist enjoys every detail of the entablature. Sangallo annotates the cornice's measurements with neatness. He does the same with the bases. He does not take measures of the architrave though.

What we describe as a texture of lines and shadows constitutes for him a great lesson full of small, concrete, definite, important teachings. Each section fold occupying the sheet is documented with care and reverence. Each of these measures seems to contain the best Corinthian order magic formula ever. Channels, lanceolate leaves, *lancette*; Each groove, each corrugation, each pleat, each groove. Everything is drawn. With some small *pentimenti*. Perhaps Sangallo was working in a draft of thinking about repeat it later. And that's why he finally decides "this is right", and he writes it down.

A Vitruvius incunabulum, the *Corsini Incunabulum*, with annotations and autograph drawings by Giovanni Battista da Sangallo is preserved in the Accademia dei Lincei, in Rome. It is a 1486 edition and it was carried out by Giovanni Sulpici da Veroli. Sulpici, professor at La Sapienza, reconstructs Vitruvius text knowing that ten from eleven drawings and three Greek poems have been lost. Part of the text arrives to him also illegible. It decides, for these reasons, to leave wide margins in the pages for the reader to add notes, drawings and corrections.

Figure 5. Vitruvius with Annotations by por Giovanni Battista da Sangallo



Source: <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.it/2014/02/i-magnifici-disegni-di-giovanni.html>.

Figure 6. Vitruvius with Annotations by por Giovanni Battista da Sangallo



Source: <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.it/2014/02/i-magnifici-disegni-di-giovanni.html>.



Figure 7. Vitruvius with Annotations by por Giovanni Battista da Sangallo



Source: <http://letteraturaartistica.blogspot.it/2014/02/i-magnifici-disegni-di-giovanni.html>.

Sangallo fills completely those margins with annotations and wonderful drawings. There are notes and translations. But we also find Roman *thermae* floorplans and sections, Rome streets recreations, galleys and other boats, etc. There is one plate, in particular, that reproduces a rectangular patio in five different versions, corresponding to different orders. Battista da Sangallo seems to recognize that different orders create different spaces. He implicitly

recognizes the importance of mastering the best Corinthian to ensure spatial quality.

The notes he has taken from the Pantheon Corinthian order, as well as Vitruvius teachings, are transformed into an acting living knowledge that he puts into practice at that same moment. Writing about this incunabulum, Ingrid Rowland argues that although Battista da Sangallo's academic background was scarce, she knew how to supply them with a powerful imagination: "Her city of the Caesars is not an archaeological abstraction, it is alive with people. Trees are carefully characterized according to their uses, as Vitruvius points out... His Roman streets do not belong to a dreamed world made by white columns: they are as hazardous and worn-out as the streets of their time."<sup>10</sup>

The fragment he copies from the Pantheon -as he would do in so many other places- configures a deep architectural knowledge that far from becoming erudition, allows the recreation and the creation of new architectures. Through the fragment and all what that means, the architecture is generated.

Sir John Soane kept in his own house one of the ancient capitals (from the former pilasters) from the Pantheon's attic.<sup>11</sup> Soane could find a living wisdom in the history contained in the ruins. He will simplify orders and reduce them to abstract geometric proportions in his country houses or in his house's facade. Undoubtedly, he knew how to appreciate and guard the wisdom enclosed in the lines of Giovanni Battista da Sangallo.

*The Social Universe in Giovanni Paolo Panini*

*In Grand Central Station the impression of space is so powerful,  
As stimulating as in the ruins of the basilica of Maxentius or inside the  
Pantheon:  
An unlimited and yet harmonious space, which does not crush with the scale of  
its dimensions,  
But rather gives a certain sense of weightlessness  
That the turned upward gaze spreads to the whole body,  
An impulse of joyful elevation, as when a Bach cantata is heard.  
Antonio Muñoz Molina, Windows on Manhattan.<sup>12</sup>*

Around 1740, Giovanni Paolo Panini paints the view of *The interior of the Pantheon*. At that time, he is almost at the top of his career. Since his birth in

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<sup>10</sup> Vitruvius. *Ten books on Architecture*. Edited by Ingrid Rowland. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> The Duke of St Albans had been the previous owner. Cf. Moleón, Pedro. *John Soane (1753-1837) y la arquitectura de la razón poética*. Madrid: Mairera Libros, 2001, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> "En Grand Central Station la impresión del espacio es tan poderosa, tan estimulante, como en las ruinas de la basílica de Majencio o en el interior del Panteón: un espacio desmedido y sin embargo armónico, que no aplasta con la escala de sus dimensiones, sino que da más bien una cierta sensación de ingravidez que la mirada vuelta hacia arriba contagia al cuerpo entero, un impulso de elevación gozosa, como cuando se escucha una cantata de Bach." Muñoz Molina, Antonio. *Ventanas de Manhattan*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2005, p. 16.

Piacenza in 1691 and his arrival in Rome at the age of twenty, he has been a member of the Congregazione dei Virtuosi al Pantheon, a professor at the Accademia di San Luca and a member of the Académie de France in Rome. His fame has crossed borders and reached the climax when he will be nominated Prince of the Accademia di San Luca in 1754.

**Figure 8.** *Giovanni Paolo Panini, The Interior of the Pantheon, circa 1740*



Source: Pasquali, Susanna. *Il Pantheon. Architettura e antiquaria nel Settecento a Roma*. Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1996, p. 19.

While in Battista da Sangallo drawing, we discover the Pantheon through the fragment, in the painting of Panini suddenly we surrender all his greatness. Panini is an accomplished scenographer and shows the building from the point of view that offers more information to us. We can see the dome, the central ring and the whole base with its chapels. We see the pavement, the *cassettoni* and the whole lower half in marble. We see the *oculus*, the sky, and a perfect circle reflected in the wall. We see the entrance with the *portico* and the obelisk of the square. Of eight niches, we see five, enough to recreate the whole.

Panini's painting offers to us an extraordinary vertical view of the Pantheon. The arch that frames the image –is he trying to recreate the main altar arch? - gives us a view of the dome with no limits. Something similar happens with the pavement, which seems to gain depth in front of the short width. These perspective effects give an extraordinary theatricality to the image.

Numerous figures appear in the scene. They are contemporaries of the painter. Two women in brightly complementary colored dresses chat excitedly in the foreground. A group of five gentlemen - two of them suspiciously looking at the painter - speak with theatrical gestures. A little further back, there are two friars with habit, scapular and cloak. In the perimeter, different people are kneeling before the images in the niches or the chapels. Everywhere you can see groups of two or three people chatting. This atmosphere seems to arrive to the space of the *portico*.

In spite of the so powerful resonances of the antiquity that the environment has, Panini seems to have wanted to paint a popular scene. Cassius Dio explains that Adriano imparted justice always publicly, sometimes in his palace, others in the Forum and others in the Pantheon.<sup>13</sup> Here it seems difficult to imagine such a solemn scene. In this scenario, worthy of the divine Hadrian judgments, it is difficult to feel too much recollection nor silence.

In the year 1758, Panini paints a *Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome*. The picture shows a gallery whose central space is occupied by Michelangelo's *Moses* and by Bernini's *David* and *Apollo and Daphne*. The walls are lined up with Roman views from top to bottom. The twin churches in Piazza del Popolo, the Campidoglio, the Trevi Fountain, the Quirinale Palace and many other works built in the last two centuries pack the walls.

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<sup>13</sup> "Hadrian [...] sat in judgement, with the assistance of the leading men of the day, sometimes in the Palace, at others in the Forum or the Pantheon or elsewhere: always he sat on a tribunal, so that all that was done was done in public." Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXIX. 7. I. Cfr. Dudley, Donald R. *Urbs Roma*. Aberdeen: Phaidon Press, 1967, p. 188.

**Figure 9.** *Giovanni Paolo Panini, Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome, 1758*



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni\\_Paolo\\_Panini\\_-\\_Modern\\_Rome.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_Paolo_Panini_-_Modern_Rome.jpg).

A year later, he will paint a *Picture Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome*. A similar space is now dominated in the foreground by *Laocoön* presence. We see on the walls images of the Colosseum, the Pantheon, the Arch of Constantine, the Basilica of Maxentius, the Roman Forum, etc. The layout of the space is identical to the previous one; the point of view is almost the same; the ambience light is similar. In both images, some characters draw and contemplate the views (are they the same people from the previous painting?).

**Figure 10.** *Giovanni Paolo Panini, Picture Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome, 1759*



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni\\_Paolo\\_Panini\\_-\\_Ancient\\_Rome.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_Paolo_Panini_-_Ancient_Rome.jpg).

Roman Modernity has found as much legitimacy as Antiquity. Antiquity is as present as Modernity. Both are represented in the same way. I do not know if Panini painted a third one mixing old and modern works. Needless: by juxtaposing these two paintings we acknowledge the confidence that Roman artists place in their own artworks and the way they use antiquity works, too.

So, we can say that in Panini's Pantheon, the building seems to become a meeting place, a society hall. Besides the uses accumulated throughout history (pagan temple, courtroom, Christian church...) it emerges now the consideration of a living current space, ready for Roman people to enjoy. Although these characters do not seem to deserve the space they receive and there is a certain mismatch between the stage and the described activity, the Pantheon surrenders.

Panini has achieved a perfect human scale as is very well described by Muñoz Molina in the headline quote, pointing out the affinity with New York Station. Its scale is human. Its dimensions do not overwhelm. And it causes an "impulse of joyful elevation" that spreads all who look up. Even those who - like the characters in the painting, like those who cross the station in search of a train they are about to lose - seem to be absent in front of so much beauty.

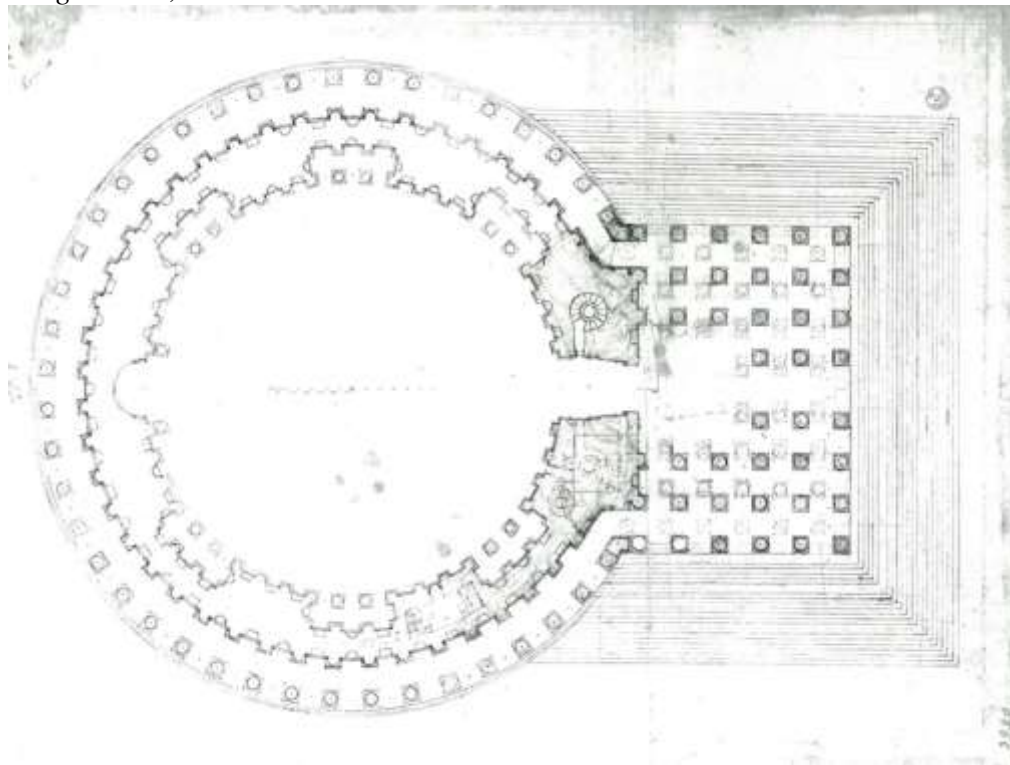
*Tectonics and Opening to the World in the Pantheon Sangallensis*

*He passed, dallying, the Windows of Brown Thomas,  
silk mercers. Cascades of ribbons. Flimsy China silks.  
James Joyce, Ulysses.<sup>14</sup>*

In 1520 Antonio da Sangallo the Younger had the honor to replace Bramante and Raphael in the direction of the Basilica of St. Peter's works. He had been working almost for ten years in Bramante's workshop and been Raphael's collaborator for four years. Vasari writes in Sangallo's biography that "it deserves a fame in no case less than that of any ancient or modern architect."

Towards 1535 Sangallo realizes a drawing representing the *Pantheon Sangallensis* floorplan. His aim does not seem to be a real reform of the Roman Pantheon but a theoretical study of the building that would allow him to carry out certain "corrections."<sup>15</sup> In the drawing *pentimenti* are observed, like those showing some columns bases whose position has been modified. Sangallo made different versions of the project and this one seems to be the final one.

**Figure 11.** Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, *Floorplan of the Pantheon Sangallensis, circa 1535*



Source: Adams, *Op. cit.*, p. 476.

<sup>14</sup> Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Vintage International, 1990, chapter 8. p. 227.

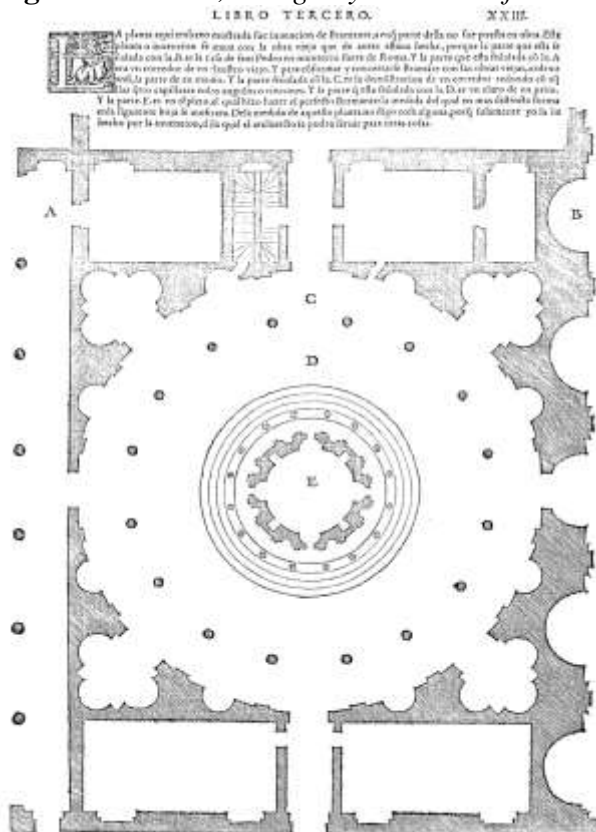
<sup>15</sup> Adams, Nicholas, ed. *The Architectural Drawings of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and his circle*. Cambridge Mass: MIT press, 2000, drawing U 3990 A.

Battista da Sangallo allowed himself free interpretations of Vitruvius and drew them on the book margins. His brother's audacity was even greater: take the most perfect temple in history and try to improve it.

Sangallo lifts the Pantheon on a podium of considerable height. Twenty-two steps have been added to the access *portico*, which means an added height of at least three meters. The whole exterior of the building - including the portico - has been surrounded by a ring of columns distributed according to a radial scheme, trying to match the outer columns with the interior columns.

The proposed arrangement had already been tried by his teacher Bramante in the *tempietto* in San Pietro in Montorio, matching the outer columns with the pilasters sculpted in the perimeter and with the internal modulation. It seems even more similar to the proposal of Bramante's dome for St. Peter's in the Vatican. In that proposal, three rings of columns are arranged again: the outer ring is made completely with columns and the two inner rings alternate columns and pilasters. Serlio says, criticizing the weight of the dome, that "Bramante should be more courageous than judicious", but "beyond this the intention is very beautiful and provides great embellishment."<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 12.** Serlio, *Design by Bramante for San Pietro in Montorio*

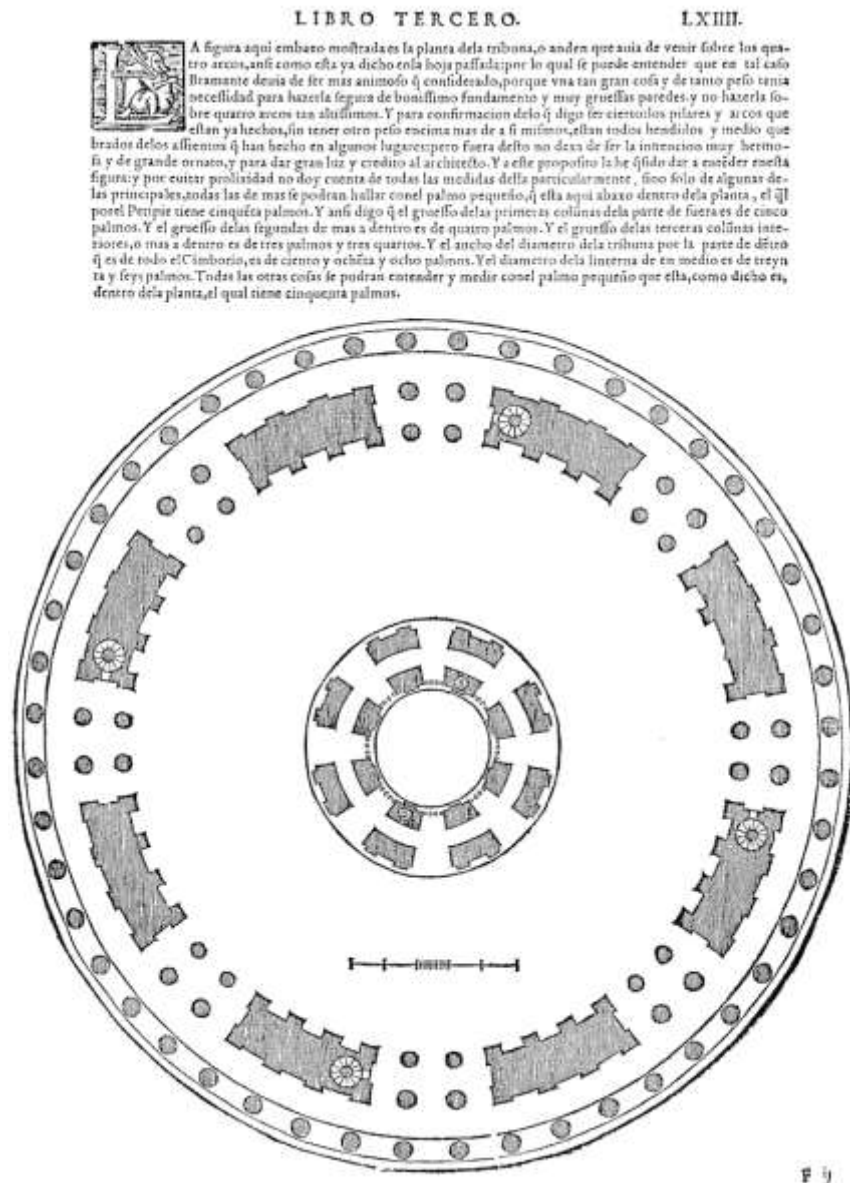


Source: Sebastián Serlio Boloñés, *Tercer y Quarto libro de Arquitectura*. Edición de Francisco de Villalpando. 1552, Lámina LXIII.

<sup>16</sup> Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture*. New York: Dover Publications, 1552. Plate LXIII.



Figure 13. Serlio, Design by Bramante for St Peter's in Vatican Dome



Source: Sebastián Serlio Boloñés, *Op. cit.*, Lámina XXIII.

In Sangallo's proposal, also "more courageous than judicious", the columns position on behalf to the center is unified and four concentric rings are generated. The inner ring, made by columns closing the chapels and pilasters in the inner face of the wall; the outer ring; an intermediate ring of pilasters attached to the outer face of the wall; and a fourth ring - discontinuous - formed by the pilasters of the walls of the chapels. This perfect quadruple ring has two exceptions: the main altar and the portico.

We usually read the Pantheon as a massive volume, perfect in its geometry, with an emphatic presence. This rotundity is emphasized by the contrast between a heavy wounded mass in the exterior, and a modulated sculpted interior, richly dressed and full of light. The exterior show signs of the

history in its skin and the eternal interior is governed by the sun cycle and becomes new every day through the light coming from the *oculus*.

In Sangallo's proposal, the temple has become a continuous surface that does not distinguish exterior and interior. The continuity of columns indoors and outdoors unify the temple by coating everything with a waving fabric. The *portico*, which plays a very important role in the relation between two different worlds and guards the interior secret in the original Pantheon, it seems here just a simple anecdote where columns gather in a particular way.

As in the windows in Joyce's headline, filled with an undulating fabric and cascades of ribbons, the Pantheon loses its weight here. Not only because in the final calculation the wall mass loses section in front of the emptiness growing importance, but also because the Pantheon seems to have lost its stereotomic nature. It seems that the inner skin had slipped out emptying the building, losing space and leaving only the shell.

Perhaps in the Bramante's proposal for a surrounding cloister in the *Tempietto* would have created a similar feeling. Currently the volume of the temple is the protagonist and stands out inside the square cloister, like a valuable stone exposed in the center of a case. In the proposal of a circular cloister, the space surrounding the temple (a symmetrical corridor formed by two concentric circles of columns) would have been emphasized more than the volume of the temple itself with its impeccable goldsmithing.

In the proposed facade by Sangallo for St. Peter in the Vatican, there is also a certain captivation with the facade and its modulation. This façade, which has been criticized for its lack of relationship with the interior of the building, emphasizes also a persistent rhythm of columns to create almost a continuous skin.

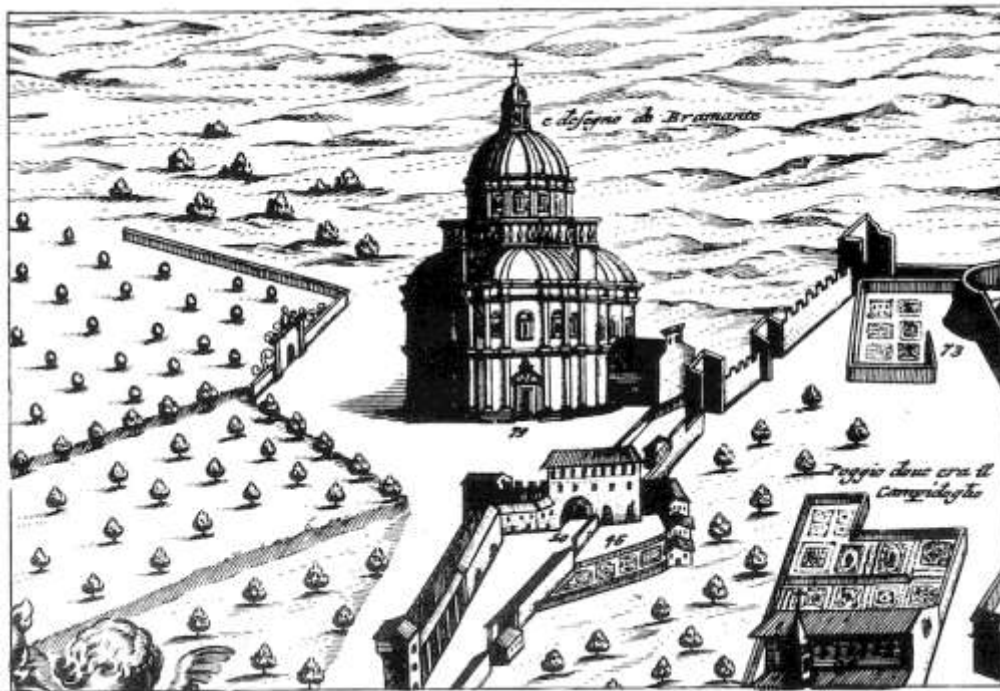
**Figure 14.** Antonio da Sangallo, *Design for St Peter's in Vatican Facade*



Source: [http://oscartenreiro.com/?attachment\\_id=2851](http://oscartenreiro.com/?attachment_id=2851).

Jose Antonio Ramos points out that in Santa Mariadella Consolazione in Todi, unlike what happens in the Pantheon, his exterior image is "perfectly coincident with its interior, the cast and the object are identical." The way showed by this "mountain of precision"<sup>17</sup> seems to have been followed by Sangallo unifying interior and exterior. As in Todi, in the *Pantheon Sangallensis* there is such an identity between the interior and the exterior that the work seems to be read only as a problem of skin, of surface, of coating.

**Figure 15.** *Santa Maria della Consolazione, Todi, Engraving by Jean Bleau, 1663*



Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/it/9/9d/Consolazione.Blaeu.Todi.jpg>.

<sup>17</sup> "perfectamente concordante con su interior el molde y el objeto son idénticos (...) montaña de precisión". Ramos, José Antonio. *A través del pasado dibujando*. Madrid: A DE DESDE, 2009, p. 30-31.

**Figure 16.** *Interior of Santa Maria della Consolazione, Todi*



We guess that in this proposal, full of megalomania, the gods have escaped from the space and the clarity of the structure has been lost although it is showed with insistence. Everything seems to be created in response to a previous ideology, a conquered language, a geometrical voluntarism. It destroys, to make it short, the whole mystery of the work.

*The Ideal Society by Hubert Robert*

*Et in Arcadia ego!*  
J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*.<sup>18</sup>

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1766, Hubert Robert presented the *View of the Port of Ripetta in Rome* at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris. He was received there as a "painter of architecture". Robert had lived for eleven years in Rome –he trained for a time with Panini– and with this painting he seems to culminate his formative stage and begin a successful career that will lead him to work in Versailles and to be part of the first founding committee of the Louvre Museum.

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<sup>18</sup> "Even in Arcadia, there am I." Heading of Goethe's *Italian Journey*. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Italian Journey*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

**Figure 17.** *Hubert Robert, Architectonic Capriccio with the Pantheon and the Port of Ripetta, 1761*



Source: Pasquali, *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

The painting shows an interpretation of the port of Ripetta. Contrary to the Pantheon's Corinthian order accurate drawings, we find here a *capriccio*: a representation corresponding not to reality but to imagination. However, Robert's drawing is almost as thorough as Sangallo's and the whole imaginary scene is created with real elements.

On the left side of the canvas a fragment of a palace appears. It is a replica of those built by Michelangelo on both sides in the Campidoglio. The giant order of the pilasters, the curved pediment of the upper window and the lintel of the lower opening, flanked by two columns, leave no room for doubt. It has also the balustrade that finishes the facade with sculptures at the cornice.

The port is represented as a curved convex elevated platform, to which two staircases surround both sides while ascending from the river to the city. Close to the circular hemicycle there is a steep high-stepped staircase, with high steps, linked to the activity of the fountain at the foot of the platform. Further away from this central platform, there is an urban staircase, with more sensible steps, very wide, which connects in a natural way the city with the boats loading and unloading area.

On the platform, set back, leaving a small square ahead, rises the Pantheon.

The port of Ripetta was opened at the beginning of the 18th century on the banks of the Tiber and was used to distribute city basic products such as wine, charcoal and wood. It had a domestic character that remains in the painting. Next to the dock there are two boats. One seems to be arriving at that moment and the other is tied. Next to the pier there is a group of three women and two men. Some of them exchange merchandise while others just observe. Along the stairs, the figures chat in groups or in pairs. Someone is leaning over the steps. Others walk. Many carry bales or small vessels. From the top of the platform, two women hold large canvases following the indications of a man gesturing from the stairs.

**Figure 18.** Piranesi, *View of the Port of Ripetta*, circa 1760



Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/71/Piranesi-16053.jpg>.

Piranesi, with whom Robert coincided in Rome, has an engraving that also represents this port. It looks like a fairly reliable historical document. Stairs (much like those painted by Robert) are approaching the water, where there are numerous barges, some of them laden with barrels. There is a certain disorder as the city approaches the river showing the facade of the Lungotevere. Piranesi points out the church of S. Girolamo, the palace of the Prince Borghese and that of his family and the Collegio Clementino. These buildings are clearly visible while others simply swirl and poke out behind some roofs.

Piranesi shows the din of the port, crowded with the unstoppable merchandise movements. Robert's vision is a paradise in which work is placid and quiet. One takes place as Rome, a particular and real fragment of the banks of the Tiber. The other is a *capriccio* in which a careful selection of Roman architecture sets the stage.

Robert's painting is impregnated with an epic, mythical silence. The characters seem to slide. The water is calm. The sky shows the absolute silence before the storm. The building's monumentality –among which the Pantheon stands out– creates a timeless atmosphere. There is daily activity though: there is a languid trade by the water, some characters are doing housework, there is even an awning in the window of the palace on the left that shows some everyday life.

Painted a year earlier, *The Artist's Studio* shows a painter working on a canvas in his workshop. In those years, Robert is living in Rome and presumably the represented workshop in the painting is located in the city. Arches over uneven columns like those used in many medieval churches in Rome support this space. The painter works next to the light and we see a familiar figure in the background. We have also seen her in the port: a woman laying out a canvas. The studio dimensions, the presence of heritage elements and the weight of its history, give it a character capable of overcoming disorder and certain misery.

**Figure 19.** *Hubert Robert, The Artist's Studio, 1760*



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1760\\_Robert\\_Das\\_Atelier\\_des\\_Künstlers\\_an\\_agoria.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1760_Robert_Das_Atelier_des_Künstlers_an_agoria.JPG).

Just as it happened in the vision of the port, the daily life is carried out in such a dignified environment that borders on the sacred. However, we cannot find here an atmosphere so full of unreality. In the painting of the workshop is showed the luxury of space. However, while painting the port, Robert has tried

to flag this luxury and to paint a manifesto. Robert paints a new Arcadia created by the harmony of the architecture.

Piranesi's engraving showed a fountain. Two pipes, on side and side of a central plate, feed the port activity. In Robert's painting, there is a single deep arch framing a fountain that seems to come from the heart of the Pantheon. Just as the Roman churches are built on sepulchers, guarding the saints' relics in crypts, the Pantheon seems here to be placed over a fountain that flows sacred water, flowing eternally, nourishing the visions that the Pantheon itself arouses, the archiphanies.

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