Labarum. A word of unknown meaning, used to describe a banner ornamented with the Christogram, the latter being the sign under which Constantine the Great fought when he defeated his rival Maxentius in A.D. 312. The labarum appears first on a coin of A.D. 327, and takes the form of a vexillum or banner on top of which a Christogram is set. Later versions show the Christogram on the vexillum instead of on top of it.

Labyrinth. A word which first gained currency with reference to Minos the legendary king of Crete. It may be derived from labrys, a double axe. Finds at the palace at Cnossus and at other Cretan sites show that the double axe was in fact prominent as a decorative device, and this may have given rise to the story (see also Daedalus).

Laconian. The word used to describe the artistic production of Sparta, which in the archaic period was often the home of artists who showed a considerable degree of individuality (distinguish from ‘laconic’, which in English is used to describe speech which, like the speech of the ancient Spartans, uses few words.

Laconicum. The word used by both Greeks and Romans for a room in public baths where bathers sweated in dry heat. It was so called because it was the only kind of warm bathing that the Spartans, who were renowned for their strength and fortitude, allowed (or so, at any rate, was the traditional tale).

Lacunar. A ceiling coffer.

Lararium. In Roman mythology a Lar (more usually found in the plural form Lares) was originally a spirit which protected farm land. But the Lares were also worshipped in houses, and so in the course of time they, like the Penates, became the deities to which a Roman household looked for protection. The shrine which was dedicated to them in a Roman house consisted of a small bench, perhaps with a picture or statue of a Lar or Lares, on which offerings might be placed to them. Sometimes a house might have more than one lararium. This is probably a sign that it was created by joining together more than one house.

Larnax. In ancient Greek this word has the general meaning of chest or coffer, but in modern writing it is used specifically to refer to a container for the ashes or the body of a dead person. By convention it is usually employed with reference to coffins or cinerary vessels of the archaic period or earlier in Greece, while the word ‘sarcophagus’ is more often used to refer to later coffins, particularly those in stone and with carved or modelled decoration, of the kind found in the Etruscan and Roman worlds.

Late Antique. The term most commonly used (in preference to Late Roman or Late Classical) to describe the artistic conventions which developed in the later Roman Empire, and form a bridge between the realistic and classicising styles of earlier times and Mediaeval and Byzantine art. Proportions are no longer classical, forms are less modelled, figures are more often represented frontally and the established conventions governing the representation of drapery are disregarded. Some of these features may be observed in the art of the Roman Republic and early Empire, but they do not begin to develop fully until the later part of the 3rd century A.D.

Laureate. Of a figure or object wearing or decorated with a laurel wreath. The laurel is associated with Apollo and was also a symbol of victory to the Romans, since the fasces of a victorious general were decorated with laurel by his soldiers. For this reason Roman emperors were frequently represented in works of art as wearing a laurel wreath.

Leaf and dart. A decorative pattern which appears regularly, either painted or carved, in the Ionic order of Greek architecture or to frame Greek vase paintings (see Cyma).

Lebes. A rounded bowl, lacking handles in most versions, which might be made in clay or in metal, and was normally associated with a tripod. The combination of lebes and tripod is often called a tripod-lebes. One unusually ornate type is associated with weddings, and is therefore called a wedding lebes, or lebes gamikos.

Legend. Literally ‘what is to be read’, the writing or inscription which appears on a coin or other object.

Lekane and Lekanis. Names given by modern writers to several shapes of shallow bowl which usually were fitted with lids.

Lekythos. A container, traditionally used to hold oil which was employed for cosmetic rather than for other purposes. It was tall and slim, usually with a foot rather than a cylindrical base, and had a single handle at the side of its narrow neck. Because of its shape it was popular with artists. A lekythos was a traditional tomb offering at Athens and occasionally at other Greek sites in the archaic and classical periods, and this is why
many decorated ones survive. The funerary lekythos is particularly associated with the white ground technique, which because of its fugitive nature was more suited to grave furniture than to objects of daily use.

Lesche. ‘Relaxation, idleness’, a word which was also used as the name of a building at Delphi built by the citizens of Cnidus. This was a large room in which it was possible to sit and converse, and the Lesche of the Cnidians was decorated with wall paintings by the famous 5th century painter Polygnotus.

Liberalitas. ‘Liberality’, a theme which is often the subject of propaganda in the art of the Roman Empire. Many works of art survive which advertise the liberality of an emperor. They show the emperor distributing money or its equivalent to the people or to the army (see Congiarium, Donative).

Libertas. The personification of liberty, represented in Roman art as a female figure, who sometimes wears a pileus as a symbol of freedom, or carries a vindicta.

Lictor. A Roman official who accompanied certain higher magistrates when they appeared in public on formal occasions. His title was probably derived from ligo, ‘bind’, and referred to the bundle of twigs bound together which the lictors carried (see Fasces).

Lip cup. The name given to a kind of kylix made at Athens and decorated in the black figure technique in the middle of the 6th century B.C. (see Little Master cups). It takes its name from the fact that the band on which the decoration is placed is on the lip of the cup.

Lipari ware. A kind of pottery with rather gaudy polychrome decoration which was produced on the island of Lipari off the coast of Sicily, and some other centres, in the late 4th century B.C. It is a predecessor of Centuripae ware.

Lithostroton. ‘stone-strewn’, a Greek word which is occasionally used in ancient texts to describe a mosaic floor.

Little Master cups. A name given to a number of different kinds of black figure kylix (lip cups, band cups and Droop cups) made at Athens in the middle of the 6th century B.C. and decorated by a number of artists (some of whom are known to us also from larger works) in a miniaturist style.

Lost wax, see Cire perdue.

Lotus. A stylised version of the lotus bud became a regular decorative element in Greek vase painting during the Orientalising period. It was then regularly used in sculpture and architecture as a decorative element, usually alternating with palmettes (see also Cymatium).

Loutrophoros. ‘Water carrier’, the name used by modern writers to describe a rare and ornamental form of Greek vase with a slim body and a long handle on each side.

Love name, see Kalos name.

Ludovisi collection. In the earlier part of the 17th century, Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, a nephew of Pope Gregory XV, formed a collection of ancient sculpture which is now mainly in the National Archaeological Museum (Museo delle Terme) at Rome. Three of the best known works which it contained are the so-called ‘Ludovisi Throne’, a three-sided arrangement of panels decorated with relief sculpture, of uncertain purpose, a group of a Gaul slaying himself and his wife (copy of part of a victory group from Pergamum) and the Ludovisi sarcophagus (3rd century A.D.).

Lyre. This is a generic term for several string instruments. The lyre in the strictest sense has a rounded sound box which was originally, according to tradition, the shell of a tortoise, and thin arms. These characteristics distinguish the lyra from the cithara/kithara, which has a wooden sound box, usually straight at the bottom, and thick arms on each side of the strings, prolonging the sound box upwards. The latter is often described as a lyre, and this is not totally incorrect since ‘lyre’ is, as has already been said, a generic term; but more precision is desirable in technical writing. The less common word phorminx is also imprecise in its meaning, but seems to have described the cithara rather than the lyre, while chelys and barbiton are more likely to refer to a lyre. The latter word is sometimes used by modern writers to describe a lyre with extremely long arms.