Naiad, see Nymph.

Narthex. A large variety of the fennel plant with a long straight stalk which was carried in Dionysiac processions. It was later developed into the Dionysiac thyrsus. It was also used for scourging Christian penitents, so in Christian architecture the word came to be used as the name of a lobby or railed-off area at the west end of a church, not considered part of the church itself, and therefore sometimes reserved for persons who were not thought suitable to be allowed into the church itself, and used for baptisms.

Naumachia. ‘Sea battle’. This name was given to a naval battle presented as a public spectacle for entertainment by the Romans, either on an existing stretch of water or on an artificial lake constructed for this purpose. Amphitheatres could be flooded (it is known that this happened in the Colosseum and in the amphitheatre at Nîmes in Gaul), and the naumachia provided a splendid variation on the normal gladiatorial combats. when emperors were willing to spend the extra sums required to entertain the populace in this way. Augustus excavated a site at Rome for a naumachia approximately 50m by 350 m, with an island in the centre, fed by its own aqueduct.

Naval crown, see Corona.

Necking. The top of a column just below the capital, when it is differentiated from the shaft by the cessation of fluting or by horizontal grooves (necking rings) or by a convex moulding. It may be decorated with ornaments, carved or painted.

Necropolis. City of the dead’, a word sometimes used for a cemetery.

Neo-Attic. This term is used by modern writers as a label to describe a class of sculpture produced in large quantities between the later 2nd century B.C. and the 2nd century A.D. Some of it may have been produced in Athens, but there will have been many workshops, some of them even in Italy, since the principal aim of its producers was to satisfy the taste of Roman patrons. Neo-Attic work is first and foremost decorative, usually in the style of the Hellenistic period (but cf. Archaising, Classicising). Mythological or religious subjects are favoured, but not because the works of art were intended to be placed in a religious setting or to form part of the furniture of a cult. The most popular subjects are Dionysiac.

Nereid, see Nymph.

Nike. ‘Victory’, the Greek personification of Victory (cf. Victoria). In Greek art Nike is winged, wears a long robe, and sometimes bears a wreath which she offers to the victor. Two well known representations of Nike in Greek art are the Nike made by Paeonius which was set up at Olympia, probably to commemorate a victory which was won in 424 B.C., and the Nike of Samothrace, a work of the Hellenistic period which cannot be closely dated, but probably belongs to the 2nd century B.C. In each case the figures are notable for the exceptionally fine treatment of the drapery that they display.

Nikosthenic, see Amphora.

Nimbus. ‘Cloud’, a circle (sometimes called a halo or a glory) encircling the head of a figure. It was intended to suggest an aura of power. The sun god (Sol) is sometimes represented in Roman art with a nimbus instead of a radiate crown. Roman emperors from Antoninus Pius (2nd century A.D.) to Phocas and angels.

Nymph and Nymphaeum. In Greek and Roman mythology nymphs were junior divinities, often born of the union between a god and a mortal. They were usually associated with one aspect or another of nature: Dryads were tree nymphs, Naiads were fresh water nymphs and Nereids were sea nymphs. In the Roman period many fanciful architectural works were built as nymphaea, or shrines to the nymphs. They follow no standard pattern, but frequently incorporated fountains. They had no serious religious purpose, and simply combined architectural extravagance with the provision of water on a modest scale.