U

**Umbilicus** (‘navel’). A monument erected in Rome in the Forum Romanum in the 3rd century A.D., imitating the Omphalus of Delphi. It took the form of a truncated cone 5m in diameter at the base diminishing to 3m at the top.

**Ustrinum.** A place for cremating the bodies of the dead. The word implies a more formal and monumental structure than *rogus*, the general name for a funeral pyre, and was used to refer to the imperial crematoria which were built in the Campus Martius at Rome.

V

**Vallum.** From vallus, ‘stake’, the name for a palisade of branches or stakes placed on top of the embankment (*agger*) surrounding a Roman military camp.

**Vanishing point.** In formal perspective, the point to which all lines which represent horizontal lines in the subject are directed. Unless they have some reason for creating a distortion, most European artists since the late Middle Ages have designed their work with a single vanishing point. It is clear from Vitruvius that the concept had at least been theoretically formulated in antiquity, but it is applied in only a very few surviving works of painting and relief sculpture.

**Vaulting tubes.** In the later Roman Empire, instead of erecting a timber framework or centring to support a concrete vault while it was being constructed, before the concrete had set, it was sometimes the practice to build a framework of small clay tubes, wider at one end than the other, which could be joined to each other at a slight angle and so make a curved support on which the vault could be built. These arches of vaulting tubes, which could be covered with a mortar rendering when the vault was finished, are particularly likely to be found in places where building timber was in short supply.

**Velarium.** From velum, ‘sail, awning’, an awning stretched over a theatre or amphitheatre.

**Venatio.** ‘Hunting’, the name given to a kind of display which was popular in the Roman world, when wild beasts were hunted in the amphitheatres (cf. Bestiarius).

**Venus.** ‘Charm’, the name of a personification or goddess of Italian origin who was treated as an equivalent of the Greek Aphrodite. Since in Greek mythology Aphrodite was the mother of Aeneas, who came to Italy and was the founder of the Roman nation, Venus was an important goddess to the Romans, and the *gens Julia* or Julian family to which Julius Caesar and the first Roman emperors belonged claimed to be descended from her. A temple to this goddess, Venus Genetrix, was built by Caesar in the new forum which he began building at Rome before his death. Later Hadrian built a very large temple between the Forum Romanum and the Colosseum which was dedicated to Venus and to Roma. It had twin cellas, back to back, with a statue of one of the goddesses in each; this arrangement has inspired the jest that it is an architectural palindrome, i.e. that the arrangement expresses the idea ROMA-AMOR. Elsewhere in the Roman world there were other temples to Venus, some of them circular in form. In Roman art Venus is sometimes represented nude and sometimes tastefully clothed. Her attributes are a dove, a Cupid or putto, a dolphin or a mirror. Many copies of Greek Aphrodite types survive, several of which were discovered in Rome, and it is customary to use the name of ‘Venus’ to describe them, together with some indication of the place of discovery, the pose or the original owner, in order to distinguish one from another. So we have the Capitoline and Esquiline and Medici Venuses, or the Venus Anadyomene (‘Rising’, a title which alludes to the Greek myth that Aphrodite was born from the waves).

**Verde antico.** A marble, mottled with green serpentine patterns, found near Sparta in Greece.

**Veristic.** Although this word means no more than ‘realistic’, it is popular among art historians as a description of the very lifelike manner in which many Roman portraits of the late Republic and early Empire are rendered.

**Vermiculatum,** see Opus.

**Vesta.** A daughter of Saturn, and goddess of the home and in particular of the hearth. She was considered by the Romans to be equivalent to the Greek Hestia. She was worshipped as a goddess of the state as well
as by individual families, and her shrine in the Forum Romanum consisted of a circular structure which was perhaps inspired by the primitive hut-with-hearth in which her cult would have been of such importance in early times. The maintenance of her sacred fire there, and other ceremonies connected with her worship, were carried out by six Vestal Virgins, women chosen from leading families who performed their duties under the direction of the Pontifex Maximus. Vesta is represented in art as a draped and veiled female figure with a variety of attributes (simpulum, patera, sceptre, trophy and torch). Augustus built a second temple in her honour on the Palatine Hill near his own house, and a Palladium was kept there. When Vesta is shown bearing a Palladium, it is this Vesta of the Palatine who is represented.

**Vestibulum.** An entrance hall or passage, or porch.

**Vexillum.** A diminutive form of *velum* (cf. Velarium), used to describe a flag in the form of a rectangular piece of material suspended from a horizontal bar which might form part of a military standard, or be a standard in its own right (for the combination of a vexillum with a christogram, see Labarum). At different times a vexillum was used as the standard of cavalry attached to a legion, of a detachment of troops (a *vexillatio*), of a corps of veterans whose period of service had been completed or in the later Roman Empire as a substitute for the earlier form of *signum* or standard, the staff with ornaments attached to it. Military or naval commanders also had their own vexilla.

**Via.** ‘Way’, a Latin word which may be part of the name of a street in a town or a road in the countryside; also the path between the mutules on the soffit under the cornice in the Doric order.

**Vicennalia,** see Votum.

**Victoria.** The Roman equivalent of the Greek Nike, represented in art in the same way. She is winged and clothed in a long robe, is sometimes armed, and may bear a wreath of victory, a round shield a palm branch, a trophy or a palladium. In Christian art the figure of Nike or Victory, which survived in official Imperial art longer than any other pagan deity or personification, was used to represent the winged messenger (in Greek *angelos*) or angel, of God.

**Victoriate.** A name given by the Romans to a coin which began to be struck late in the 2nd century B.C. at the time of the Second Punic War, and continued to be issued for a number of years. Its reverse type consisted of a figure of Victory crowning a trophy.

**Villa.** The Latin word commonly used to describe a house standing alone in the countryside, as opposed to a domus, a house in a town. A villa might be a simple farm house, a more luxurious establishment used as an out-of-town residence, or a much larger establishment with many buildings such as might be owned by an emperor or other person of great wealth or exalted position. Examples of the second type are the Villa of the Mysteries and the Villa of the Papyri outside Pompeii and Herculaneum, and of the third type the villa at Casale outside Piazza Armerina in Sicily and Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli outside Rome. There is no specific architectural form which is associated exclusively with the villa, but it often contains some of the same features as the domus.

**Vindicta.** A rod with which, according to the Roman custom, a slave was touched during the ceremony of liberation.(cf. Libertas).

**Virtus.** Derived from vir, ‘man’, this word has a basic meaning of ‘valour, bravery’ in Latin, although the more general senses of excellence or virtue are often present. In Roman thought the personifications of Honos and Virtus were often combined, and they shared a temple at Rome. Virtus appears frequently on coins, but is rare elsewhere in Roman art. The word is feminine in Latin grammar, and the personification therefore, in spite of its supposed masculine qualities, takes the form of a draped female figure, reminiscent of an Amazon, wearing a helmet and holding a spear and a parazonium. She may also bear a figure of Victory, or a palm branch as a symbol of victory.

**Vitruvius.** The author of a Roman treatise on architecture, written about 30 B.C. It is a mixture of his own experience, gained while he was a military engineer, and a great deal of theoretical information gained from earlier writings on Greek architecture which he had studied, perhaps with the assistance of Greek teachers. Because of its early date, it has nothing to say about the great architectural achievements of the Roman Empire. It is not likely that he ever visited Greece, and what he has to say about Greek
architecture is clearly taken from the work of others. Vitruvius does not seem to have won any important commissions as an architect; his largest undertaking was a basilica at the town of Fano.

**Volumen.** A book or document in the form of a scroll, instead of separate pages bound together like a modern book. This latter form (which is called a codex) did not begin to replace the volumen until quite late in the Roman period.

**Volute.** A spiralling flat curve, two of which are used to decorate each face of the capital of the Ionic column. It became customary to make the volutes project at an angle of forty-five degrees at the corners of a building, and this feature was combined with the acanthus leaves of the Corinthian capital in Roman architecture to make the Composite capital (see also Ionic).

**Vomitorium.** An exit from a large Roman public building, from which crowds would stream at the end of a performance. Because of the stories of Roman gluttony which survive in some ancient authors, the word has been misinterpreted in modern times as the name of a room next to a dining room in which vomiting could be induced by greedy persons who wished to be able to eat more. This is a figment of the imagination.

**Votive offering.** A votive offering is one which is made *ex voto*, ‘from a vow’, i.e. one which is given to a deity to whom one has prayed for help, and promised a sacrifice, a statue or some other gift, if some condition is fulfilled. Often an inscription on the base on which a statue stands will indicate that it is a votive offering. It is clear from ancient literature that the practice was so widespread that a large number of the works of art found in religious sanctuaries must have been placed there for this reason.

**Votum.** ‘Vow’, a term which was increasingly used during the Roman Empire as the practice of taking formal and ceremonial vows for the welfare of an emperor became more and more common. In the later Roman Empire decennial vows were taken at the accession of an emperor, and paid off with the appropriate ceremonies, including renewal, at the expiry of the ten-year period, the *decennalia*. *Vicennalia* and *tricennalia*, vows for a second and third ten-year period, were occasionally made, and there are occasional instances of *quinquennalia*, vows for five years. All of these are likely to be commemorated on coins, and sometimes on other works of art.

**Voussoir.** A wedge-shaped block forming part of an arch. The block at the centre of a voussoir arch is called a key-stone.

**W**

**White ground.** In black and red figure vase painting on some occasions the background to the picture is rendered in white rather than in red or black. Also in the 5th century B.C. Attic vases were sometimes decorated with polychrome paintings, or in a mixture of polychrome and red figure techniques, with a white background. This kind of decoration, which was less able to withstand wear than the basic black and red produced by three-stage firing in a kiln, was most popular on the kind of lekythos which was used as a traditional tomb offering.

**Wappenmünzen.** ‘Blazon coins’, a name which is applied to the earliest coins of Athens, which unlike the coins of other Greek mints present a wide variety of different coin types. The term implies acceptance of the theory that these different coin types are the blazons of the noble families of Attica, but although some of them can be shown to have been used for this purpose, it is inherently improbable that any individual family or clan would have been allowed to place its blazon upon the coinage of the city. It is therefore more likely that the types which appear on the coins (gorgoneion, wheel, horse, triskeles etc.) are of religious significance, but the term Wappenmünzen continues to be used.

**X**

**Xoanon.** A term used by ancient Greek writers to describe an image, particularly of a god, carved in wood. Such figures, of which hardly any remains survive, are characteristic of the earlier stages of Greek art before stone and metal began to be commonly used for such purposes, and before the most lavishly
constructed works began to be made in the chryselephantine technique. In later times they were revered because of their antiquity. They may sometimes be recognised in representations in other media, particularly coins, because of their cylindrical appearance, revealing their origin in tree trunks. A notable example is the statue of Athena on the Acropolis of Athens for which a garment was made every four years and presented at the Great Panathenaea.

**Xystus.** ‘Shaved, trimmed’, a word used to describe a garden walk in a private residence, perhaps adorned with ornamental trees and statuary; also a covered colonnade in a gymnasium, suitable for taking exercise in inclement weather.

**Z**

**Zodiac.** A Greek word meaning ‘with animals’, the word ‘circle’ being implied. It was thought of as a ring or belt covering the part of the heavens which contains all the positions of the stars and the planets that were known to ancient astronomers. It was divided into twelve parts, each having its own sign. These zodiacal signs occasionally occur in Greek and Roman art.

**Zophoros.** ‘Bearing animals’, a Greek word which occasionally appears in ancient texts in the sense of a carved frieze, of the kind used in architectural decoration.