Obelisk. ‘Little spit’, a diminutive form of the Greek obelos (cf. Obol). The word has been used since Roman times to describe the kind of tall tapering granite shaft with a pyramidal tip which was erected in honour of the Sun God at a number of temple sites in Egypt. Many were brought to Rome at different times between the 1st century B.C. and the time of Constantine the great, and Theodosius I had one brought to Constantinople. Some were set up on the spina or euripus of the Circus Maximus at Rome, and others at various other sites around the city.

Obol. A variant form (obolos) of obelos, which came to be used as the name of a Greek coin, one-sixth of a drachma.

Octastyle. With eight columns at the front (see -style).

Odeum/Odeion. ‘Singing place’ (cf. Theatre). A roofed building used for musical competitions and other kinds of public assembly. The earliest Odeum of which we have knowledge was the Odeum of Pericles at Athens, a square building with a pyramidal roof supported on a large number of columns. The nearby Odeum of Herodes Atticus, built six centuries later, has a quite different plan, following the pattern of a Roman theatre with steeply raked seating and a high stage background. Another Odeum was built in the Agora of Athens by Marcus Agrippa during the reign of Augustus. This was remarkable for its uninterrupted roof span of 27 metres; it is not surprising that when the building collapsed late in the 2nd century A.D. it was rebuilt on a smaller scale.

Oecumene/Oikoumene. ‘Inhabited (world)’, a personification occasionally found in Greek and Roman art. She is represented as a draped female figure, and may be identified because she is so described in an inscription on a relief in the British Museum representing the apotheosis of Homer.

Oecus. The Latin spelling of the Greek oikos, which has a number of meanings, house, temple, household or room. Vitruvius uses it in the last sense, to signify an important room in a private house which has no obvious purpose, and cannot be identified as, for example, a cubiculum or a triclinium

Oenochoe. ‘Wine pourer’, the name used by modern writers to describe a number of different types of Greek vase. The features which most of them have in common are that they are of small to medium size, and have a single handle, a body which is widest at a point slightly above the middle, and at least one pouring lip (cf. Olpe).

Officina. A workshop; in particular, the word is used by numismatists to describe a separate workshop operating within a mint, producing coins which can be distinguished in some way from other products of the same mint.

Olpe. A name given by modern writers to various kinds of jug, which have a body which is widest at a point below the middle. Some have a handle which is higher than the top of the jug.

Olympia. The sanctuary of Olympian Zeus (the Zeus of Mount Olympus), located in an area of Elis in the western Peloponnese. A major festival was held there every four years, of which athletic contests and chariot racing formed a major part. The first official ‘Olympiad’ for dating purposes began in 776 B.C., although archaeological evidence shows that the site was a major venue earlier than this. The games continued to be held until they were discontinued by the Christian emperor Theodosius I in A.D. 393.

The site has been the subject of extensive excavations since 1881. The stadium has been uncovered (most of the hippodrome was washed away after a change in course of the river Alpheius), together with the gymnasion and palaestra, and a great range of monuments in the walled enclosure known as the Altis (‘grove’). The most important of these are the great temple of Zeus, which contained the famous statue of Zeus by Pheidias and was decorated with a striking array of metopes at the front and rear, and with two pediments showing the battle of the Lapiths and the centaurs and the start of the chariot race between Pelops and Oenomaus, the temple of Hera, an important early landmark in the history of Greek architecture, originally built with wooden columns, in which the statue of Hermes and the infant Dionysus attributed to Praxiteles was discovered, the Philippeum, a circular building erected in honour of Philip II of Macedon and eleven Treasuries built by different Greek states.
Omphalus/omphalos. ‘Navel’, the name given to various navel-shaped objects which were associated with various cults. The most famous was the omphalus or navel-stone of Delphi, which was supposed to mark the centre of the world. The original one has not been found (although a Roman copy exists), but it is represented in ancient works of art as a tall stone with a rounded top, decorated with fillets, and Apollo when he is represented as the god of prophecy is sometimes shown seated upon it.

Onkos. ‘Bulk, mass’, a name given to the upward projection of the top of a tragic actor’s mask, in the form in which it was developed after the classical period.

Opaion. ‘Lantern’, the name given in Greek architecture to a tile which had been pierced to allow the entry of a certain amount of light; also to a partial clerestory arrangement, in which a section of a roof was raised with a gap left at the sides to provide lighting.

Opisthodomus/opistodomos. ‘Back room’, a word generally applied to a false porch at the rear of a building, offering no access to other rooms, although some have used it in the same sense as ‘adytum’.

Optical correction, see Refinement.

Opus. ‘Work’, a word which appears in a number of expressions used by modern writers to describe various kinds of Roman building or decorative work. Some are found in ancient texts, and others have been developed as a modern jargon, usually useful. The most common are opus reticulatum and opus incertum, which describe the kind of ‘net-like’ arrangement of facing stones used in the building of concrete walls in central Italy in the late 1st century B.C. and the 1st century A.D., and its ‘uncertain’, less regular predecessor. Some other terms may be defined as follows:

(Opus) Africanum: Walls built in stone with a framework of long stones arranged vertically and horizontally, leaving rectangular gaps to be filled with smaller stones. albarium: a smooth white lime plaster for walls and ceilings. Alexandrinum: a floor paved with slabs of red and green porphyry (said to have been named after the Roman emperor Severus Alexander, although it is more likely that Alexandria, a major source of all kinds of decorative work, was the place of its origin). caementicum: an expression used rather imprecisely to denote concrete walling of all kinds (the Latin caementa, ‘chippings’) is the origin of our word ‘cement’, although the sense of it has changed). concretum: a modern expression, used in the same sense as the foregoing. craticium: ‘wicker work’, which describes walls made of interwoven flexible branches plastered over with clay or some kind of mortar (the old English ‘wattle and daub’). latericum: from later, an oven-baked brick, used to describe concrete walls with brick facings. mixtum: a combination of the foregoing with reticulate work in alternating bands. musivum: mosaic work (cf. Tesellatum, Vermiculatum). quadratum: work in squared stone, or wall facings of squared stone. Sectile: decorative panels with designs made from slices of coloured stones cut to the required shapes. signinum: a lining for cisterns and water reservoirs consisting of a lime mortar containing quantities of pounded brick or tile (named after the town of Signia, but found everywhere). spicatum: a wall or floor treatment consisting of bricks laid in a herring-bone or ear-of-grain pattern. tesellatum: mosaic work (cf. Musivum, Vermiculatum). testaceum: concrete walling faced with brickwork. vermiculatum: mosaic work with especially small tesserae (either because the thin lines which were produced in this way looked like vermi, worms, or because in some cases thin glass tesserae of rod-like form were used).

Orchestra. ‘Dancing place’, the circular area in which choral and dancing performances took place before the development of drama as we know it. In the Greek theatre of the classical period the circular form of the orchestra was retained in front of the stage as the latter developed, but in later times, because of the reduced importance of the chorus, the orchestra was reduced to a D-shape.

Order. This word has been used by writers since Renaissance times to describe a formal arrangement of the parts of a building between floor and cornice, and in Renaissance terminology five Orders of Architecture were defined, the Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Composite and Tuscan. The Doric and Ionic are completely different, with different origins. The Corinthian and the Composite are not fully separate, but differ from the Ionic in the form of their capitals. The Tuscan is a Renaissance development from the Etruscan type of column, with a torus at the base.
**Orichalcum.** A variety of bronze, which after the addition of zinc develops a golden or brassy colour when fresh. The original Greek word was oreichalkon, meaning ‘mountain bronze’, but in Latin this usually became aurichalcum, meaning ‘gold-bronze’. It was used for a very few Greek coins, and then adopted for the larger bronze coins issued at the end of the Republic and in the early Roman empire.

**Orientalising.** The name given to a stage in Greek art from c.700 B.C. onwards in which the artistic styles and decorative motifs of the end of the Geometric period are clearly being influenced by the artistic conventions of the Levant and Egypt. The Geometric conventions of artistic representation are relaxed, and new vegetable and animal forms and subjects appear, such as the lotus, the palmette and the lion, together with such hybrid creatures as the sphinx, griffin and centaur.

**Orthostat.** A large stone slab set at the base of a wall or on its outside face. The use of a row of orthostats seems to be an anachronism in stone architecture, although it suits building in sun-dried brick where it would have been important to keep the lowest row of bricks from contact with moisture in the soil.

**Ossuary.** A receptacle for the bones of the dead, whether in the sense of a whole room (a charnel house) or a small container in which ashes and the remains of bones could be placed after cremation.

**Ostrakon.** A potsherd. The use of the word is usually restricted to sherds on which writing or drawing appears. It was a common practice to use sherds for this purpose in the ancient world, because writing materials were expensive. From this we have the term ‘ostracism’ as the name of a practice which was used for a while at Athens and in some other Greek states. When competition between political leaders seemed to be reaching dangerous levels, it was the custom to invite the citizens to vote, by writing names on ostraka, in order to decide which of the competitors should be banished from the city for a limited period. The person thus banished did not lose his property, and was not considered to have suffered disgrace, but was simply prevented from being active in politics for a stated period. Deposits of ostraka have been found at Athens bearing the names of persons known to history. Many ostraka also survive from Egypt, where they were used for such purposes as tax receipts and keeping notes of all kinds.

**Ovation,** see Triumph.

**Ovolo.** An architectural moulding occupying a quarter of a circle, but with an egg-shaped profile, normally decorated with an egg-and-dart-pattern.

**Oxygenating fire.** A fire which is stoked with dry fuel and allowed ample air, so that a good supply of oxygen is maintained, as opposed to a reducing fire. In the production of Attic black and red figure pottery, the oxygenating fire was used in the first and third stages of firing the vase. In the final stage, those areas of the pot which had not sintered during the second or reducing phase turned back to red.