

Vocabulary

Sacred Architecture

A

alternation of support – the sequence of support members is comprised of columns and piers. Typically, two columns, one pier, two columns, one pier.

altarpiece – a painted or carved panel or winged structure placed at the back or behind an altar. Contains religious imagery, often specific to the place of worship for which it was made.

ambulatory – the passage or aisle that leads around the apse of a Christian church. Developed for use in pilgrimage churches, an ambulatory usually allows general passage from the nave around to the east end of a church without giving access to the restricted areas of the choir and altar.

anthropomorphic – ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman things.

apse – a large semicircular or polygonal (and usually vaulted) niche protruding from the end wall of an axial building. Also, the eastern end of a Christian church, containing the altar.

arch – a typically curved structural member spanning an opening and serving as a support (as for the wall or other weight above the opening).

B

barrel vault – an arched structure, usually made of stones, concrete, or bricks, forming a ceiling or roof over a hall, room, or other wholly or partially enclosed construction. Comprised of a series of arches.

basilican plan – the floorplan of a meeting hall that is rectangular in form with a roofed hall, the building usually contains an interior colonnade, with an apse at one end or at each end. The central aisle tends to be wide and is higher than the flanking aisles, so that light can penetrate through the clerestory windows.

bay – one segment of a decorative system of a building. The bays divide the space of a building into regular spatial units and are usually marked by elements such as columns, piers, buttresses, windows or vaults.

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blind arcades – an arcade series where the arched openings are closed. An architectural decorative motif often found on the exterior of buildings.

C

campanile – from the Italian word meaning "bell tower." Usually, a freestanding structure found near a church entrance.

capital – the form, usually of stone, that supplies the visual transition between the top of the column and whatever the column supports.

central plan – any structure designed with a primary central space surrounded by symmetrical areas on each side.

chevet – the eastern most end of a church, including all sections east of the crossing (such as the apse, ambulatory, and radiating apsidal chapels).

chevron – a decorative motif made up of repeated inverted Vs.

Christus patiens – the suffering, or dead, Christ on the cross.

cloister – a square or rectangular courtyard, sometime with gardens, surrounded on all sides by a vaulted arcade. Typically devoted to spiritual contemplation or scholarly reflection, a cloister is usually part of a monastery, a church, or occasionally, a university.

coffer – a recessed decorative panel that, with many other similar ones, is used to decorate ceilings or vaults.

compound pier – typically found in a Romanesque or Gothic church, a pier or large column with multiple shafts, plasters, or colonnettes attached to it on one or all sides.

conch – a semicircular recess, such an apse or niche, with a half-dome vault.

Corinthian capital – the bell type of capital decorated with volutes and acanthus leaves, invented as a substitute for the Ionic.

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crockets – a leaf-like decorative element found in Gothic architecture, often on pinnacles, gables, and the open surfaces of roofs. A crocket is shaped like an open leaf which gently curves outward, its edges curling up.

crypt – vault or chamber beneath the main level of a church, used as a meeting place or burial place. It undoubtedly developed from the catacombs used by early Christians as places of worship. Early churches were commonly built over the tombs of martyrs. Such vaults, located beneath the main altar, developed into the extensive crypts of the Middle Ages that in many churches of the 11th and 12th cent. occupied the entire space beneath the sanctuary. At Canterbury the 12th-century crypt forms a large and complete lower church in itself. The crypt of the Rochester Cathedral is partly above ground. The cathedrals at Chartres and at Bourges have crypts typical of the Gothic development.

D

diptych – a form created when two images (usually paintings on panels or reliefs) are hinged together.

drum – the wall that supports a dome. Also: a segment of the circular shaft or column.

E

elevation – the arrangement, proportions, and details of any vertical side or face of a building.

engaged column – a column that is attached to a background wall.

entablature – the entire unit of horizontal members above the columns or pilasters in classical architecture (Greek, or Roman). The height of the entablature in relation to the column supporting it varies with the three orders, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, but in Roman interpretations it is generally about one fourth the column height. The entablature's component members are the architrave, which rests directly upon the abacus, or top member of the column cap; the frieze; and the cornice, or topmost member. Essentially the entablature is a development

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from the primitive lintel, which spans two posts and supports the ends of the roof rafters.

evangelist symbols – Matthew = winged man; Mark = winged Lion; Luke = winged ox; John = eagle.

F

façade – the front of a building, esp. an imposing or decorative one. Also, any side of a building facing a public way or space and finished accordingly.

flying buttress – a stone that carries the thrust of the vault to the buttress.

frieze – the middle member of the entablature. Applied also to any horizontal band enriches with sculpture.

G

gallery – a raised, balcony-like platform or passageway running along the exterior wall of a building inside or outside.

Good Shepherd – the representation in art of Jesus with a sheep around his shoulders or at his side, based on the biblical parable of the Good Shepherd.

groin vault – the intersection of two barrel vaults.

H

hall church – a church (typified by those in the Gothic style, in Germany), with a nave and aisles that are all the same height, giving the impression of a large, open hall.

hierarchic scale – the arrangement of human figures that reflects social standing, the most important figure is represented as the tallest.

high relief – in sculpture, three-dimensional projection from a flat background. In alto-relievo, or high relief, the protrusion is great; basso-relievo, or bas-relief, protrudes only slightly; and mezz-relievo is intermediate between the two.

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historiated crucifix – a crucifix with narrative scenes flanking the corpus.

I

icon – a panel painting representing a sacred figure of the Eastern Orthodox Church according to ancient established pictorial conventions.

J

jamb figure (column figure) – sculptures carved either on the columns that flank the portal of a church, or they are attached to the columns.

K

kore (korai) – an archaic Greek statue of a young woman.

kouros (kouroi) – an archaic Greek statue of a young man.

L

lancet window – a high, narrow window terminating in a lancet arch which is an arch having a head that is acutely pointed.

lectionary – an ecclesiastical book. A lectionary is part of the fittings of a church and contains readings from Christian Scripture. It is the book from which the officiant reads to the congregation during holy services.

lintel – the horizontal beam covering a door or window opening, or spanning the interval between two columns or piers.

loculi – a niche in a tomb or catacomb in which a sarcophagus was placed.

M

mandorla – an almond- or womb-shaped area in which a sacred figure, such as Christ in Heaven, is represented.

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menorah – a Jewish lamp, usually in the form of a candelabrum, divided into seven or nine branches; the nine-branched menorah is used during the celebration of Hanukkah. Representations of the seven-branched menorah, once used in the Temple of Jerusalem, became in general a symbol of Judaism.

mosaic – a method of creating designs with small colored stone or glass pieces, which are affixed to a cement surface.

N

nave – the long central space of a Christian church, usually rectangular in shape and often separated from the side aisles by colonnades.

O

occidented – when the focal point of the architectural structure faces west.

oculus – a circular opening, especially one at the apex of a dome.

orant (orans) – the representation, usually in ancient or Early Christian art, of a standing figure praying with outstretched arms.

oriented – when the focal point of the architectural structure faces east.

P

pediment – the triangular termination of a ridge roof, including the tympanum and the raking cornice above.

pendentives – the concave triangular section of a wall that forms the transition between a square or polygonal space and the circular base of a dome.

R

rose window – a round window, often made of stained glass, with tracery patterns in the form of wheel spokes. Large, elaborate, and finely crafted, rose windows are usually a central element of the facade of Gothic cathedrals.

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S

sanctuary – in Greek architecture, a sacred or holy enclosure used for worship consisting of one or more temples and an altar. Also: the space around the altar in a church, usually at the east end (and also called the chancel or presbytery).

sarcophagus (sarcophagi) – a rectangular stone coffin, used by ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and others. Often decorated with relief sculpture in side panels.

scriptorium – a room in a monastery for writing or copying manuscripts.

sculpture in the round – three-dimensional sculpture that is carved free of any attaching background or block.

separtite vaults – a vaulting system that divides two bays into seven parts by the use of ribs.

sexpartite vaults – a vaulting system that divides two bays into six parts by the use of ribs.

stylobate – the upper step of a temple, which formed the platform for the columns

sunken relief – a sculpted image or design whose image is modeled below the original surface of the background, which is not cut away.

swastika – a figure used as a symbol or an ornament in the Old World and in America since prehistoric times, consisting of a cross with arms of equal length, each arm having a continuation at right angles.

T

tracery – the thin stone or wooden bars in a Gothic window, screen, or panel, which create an elaborate decorative matrix or pattern.

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transept – the entire arm of a cruciform church, perpendicular to the nave. The transept includes the crossing and often marks the beginning of the apse.

triforium – an arcaded element of the interior elevation of a Gothic church, usually found directly below the clerestory and consisting of a series of arched openings. The triforium can be made up of openings from a passageway or gallery, or can be purely decorative device built into the wall.

triskele – a symbolic figure consisting of three legs, arms, or branches radiating from a common center.

triumphal arch – a freestanding, massive stone gateway with a large central arch, built as urban ornament and/or to celebrate military victories (as by the Romans).

trumeau – a column, pier, or post found at the center of a large portal or doorway, supporting the lintel.

tympanum – the triangular wall enclosed by the raking cornices of the pediment and the horizontal cornice of the entablature beneath.

V

volute – the spiral scroll of the Ionic capital.

votive figure – an image created as a devotional offering to a god or other deity.

W

westwork – the monumental west-facing entrance section of a Carolingian, Ottonian, or Romanesque church. The exterior consists of multiple stories between two towers; the interior includes an entrance vestibule, a chapel, and a series of galleries overlooking the nave.