

# Glossary

**abbot** (Aramaic: “father”): The head of a male monastic community.

**acanthus** (Greek: “thorn, thistle, spine”): The *Acanthus spinosus* plant is believed to have been the main model for the curling leaf forms on the Corinthian capital. First invented by the ancient Greeks, the Corinthian capital was favored in Roman architecture, becoming the model for many medieval capitals.

**Adam** (Hebrew: “man”) and **Eve** (Hebrew: “to live”): According to the book of Genesis in the Bible, these are the first man and woman, who briefly occupied the Garden of Eden that had been created by God. After Adam and Eve ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, contrary to God’s command, God banished them from Eden so that they could not eat fruit from the Tree of Life, which would have given them immortality (Genesis 3:9–24).

**Alexander III (the Great)** (356–323 B.C.): Son of King Philip II of Macedon, he conquered the Persian empire. His conquests extended from the eastern Mediterranean to India, before he died at the age of thirty-three.

**altar frontal**: A decorated panel at the front of an altar, usually the width and height of the altar.

**antiquity**: The time and culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans, approximately the fifth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D.

**Apocalypse** (Greek: “revelation”): The last book of the New Testament, also known as the Book of Revelation, which reveals the events that, in Christian belief, will precede the end of the world.

**apocryphal** (Greek: “hidden things”): Referring to apocrypha, written works that in their title, form, and content resemble books of the Old and New Testaments but are not accepted as true biblical books.

**apostle** (Greek: “the one sent”): An emissary of Jesus and his teachings. The apostles included his twelve original students, or disciples: Peter, who became the leader of the group; Peter’s brother Andrew; James; James’ brother John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James (the Younger); Jude (Thaddeus); Simon Zelotes; and Judas Iscariot. After Judas’s betrayal and suicide, Matthias was chosen as his replacement. Other apostles who were not Jesus’ first disciples included Paul and Barnabas.

**apse**: A vaulted semicircular or polygonal structure; the focal point in a church, the apse houses the altar and is open at east end. A large church may have additional apses in its transepts, or arms.

**aquamanile** (Latin: “water of the hands”): A water pitcher, often in the shape of an animal, for washing the hands at the altar or at meals.

**ascetics**: Those who practice self-denial, especially for spiritual enhancement.

**Augustine of Hippo** (354–430): A professor of rhetoric who eventually became a priest and the bishop of Hippo. Through his writings, especially the *City of God*, Augustine influenced theology; in medieval times, his influence was particularly notable up to the thirteenth century.

**barbarian** (Greek: “foreign”): Originally any non-Greek people or culture; the Romans later applied the term to any non-Roman people or culture.

**barrel vault**: An arched masonry ceiling or roof; a continuous vault that must be buttressed its entire length.

**Beatus manuscript**: A text by Beatus of Liébana (ca. 730–798), a Spanish theologian and geographer, author of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (ca. 776). Frequently copied and illuminated, the *Commentary* consisted of passages from the Apocalypse that were accompanied by interpretations cast as Christian allegories.

**Benedict of Nursia (Norcia)** (ca. 480–ca. 550): Author of the *Rule* (ca. 535–45), governing monastic life and discipline. Schooled in Rome and disturbed by the immorality he witnessed there, Benedict fled to Subiaco, Italy, where he lived in a cave for three years. He eventually created a series of small communities of monks, before founding a monastery at Monte Cassino.

**Benedictine order**: Persons who live by the *Rule* drawn up by Saint Benedict of Nursia.

**bestiary**: A collection of stories in which the supposed characteristics of real and imaginary animals, plants, and stones serve as allegories for the purpose of moral and religious instruction.

**bishop** (Greek: “overseer”): In the early Christian church, the supervisor of a community of Christians. By the medieval period, bishops had evolved into powerful officials who oversaw a number of churches.

**Black Death:** A plague bacillus (*Yersinia pestis*) carried first by small rodents such as rats, then transmitted to humans through flea bites. The first outbreak in medieval Europe occurred in the sixth century, subsiding by 750. The next outbreak, known as the Black Death, occurred around 1348, followed by other waves in 1362, 1374, 1389, and 1400; smaller outbreaks continued until after 1650. The most common form of the illness was the bubonic plague, so called because of the swellings, or buboes, it caused.

**bliaud** or **bliaut:** An eleventh- and twelfth-century overdress with long, wide sleeves that was worn by both men and women. It was often laced up at the side and closed at the neck by a brooch. Girls wore the *bliaud*, without a belt, over a *chainse*, a pleated undergarment usually made of linen and having tight-fitting sleeves.

**book of hours:** An abbreviated version of the Divine Office used primarily by the laity for private prayer; it included a liturgical calendar, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the litany of saints, Penitential Psalms, Office of the Dead, and additional personal prayers. See *Divine Office*.

**Bosphorus:** A twenty-mile-long strait between Europe and Asia, joining the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. Istanbul, formerly Constantinople, lies on both sides of the Bosphorus.

**canting name** (Latin: “to sing”): In art, either the subject in a work of art or a representation in the work that refers to—or “sings out”—a family name. For instance, the subject on the coat of arms of Sir Nicholas Bacon is a hog.

**Carolingian:** The historical epoch named after its founder Charlemagne (768–814), which marked an attempt to revive late-classical Christian civilization. It continued under Charlemagne’s successors throughout much of the ninth century.

**casket:** A small chest or box, often used to hold precious items.

**cast:** The pouring of a liquid, such as metal or plaster, into a hollow mold, then removing the mold when the liquid hardens.

**Castle of Love:** A symbolic castle populated by women. In chivalric terms, the knights attacking the castle denoted courtship, and the roses used by the women as “defense” were a symbol of surrender.

**cathedral:** The church containing the bishop’s *cathedra*, his official chair or throne, thus marking it as his principal church.

**censer:** An incense burner, also called a thurible, usually attached to chains so that it can be swung, thus releasing the smoke of the burning incense, usually frankincense.

**chapel:** A small place of worship, often with its own altar, that is usually part of a larger church.

**chip carving:** A technique of metalworking in which the faceting of its carved design is similar to Germanic woodworking.

**Cistercian:** A reformed Benedictine monastic order founded in 1098 by Saint Robert of Molesme at Cîteaux in Burgundy, eastern France. It practiced austerity and a rigid adherence to the Rule of Saint Benedict.

**classical:** Characteristic of ancient Greek and Roman culture.

**cloister** (Latin: “barrier”): A four-sided covered walkway, with a garden and fountain at its core, that functioned as the physical center of a monastery, closed off from the outside world. Usually the church, dining area (refectory), dormitory, and gathering area (chapter house) of a monastery opened onto the cloister so that its passageways provided access from one structure to another.

**Constantine I (the Great) (?274–337):** Son of Constantius I and Helena, Constantine eventually emerged from a power struggle as the sole Roman emperor. Although he declared Christianity to be the legal religion of the Roman empire in 335, Constantine himself did not officially become a Christian until he was on his deathbed.

**control stamps:** In Byzantium, silver stamps that identified state officials, including the emperor, at the time of an object’s creation. Sometimes the stamps also recorded the object’s place of manufacture. Used between the fourth and eighth centuries, these stamps did not certify an object’s metallic purity.

**Coptic:** The term is a later Arab simplification of the Greek word for Egypt, *Aigyptos*, itself a transformation of its pharaonic name, *Ekepta*. In the Middle Ages, Copts were the native Christians of the independent Egyptian church.

**crossbow:** A powerful bow mounted transversely at the front of a stock of wood or metal; its string usually had to be pulled to its full drawn position with a mechanical aid. Though the crossbow had a slower rate of fire than the hand bow, it had a greater range and required less skill in its operation. Its ability to penetrate mail armor led to the development of more resistant plate armor.

**corbel:** An architectural element that supports weight, usually it looks like upside-down steps projecting from a wall.

**dalmatic:** The traditional liturgical vestment of a deacon. A long-sleeved outer tunic with a long slit at the sides, the dalmatic symbolized joy, salvation, and justice, and its cross shape, when its sleeves are outstretched, referred to the crucifixion of Jesus.

**David** (ca. 1012–ca. 972 B.C.) (Hebrew: “beloved”): Anointed the future king of Israel by the prophet Samuel, David helped the Israelite army defeat the Philistines by slaying their champion, Goliath. During his thirty-three-year reign as the second king of Israel, he captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of his kingdom. Under David, Jews changed from a loose confederation of tribes into a strong national state.

**deacon** (Greek: “servant, minister, assistant”): A cleric who assists a priest, acts as reader, leads prayer, distributes communion, receives offerings, and distributes alms. In the Roman Catholic Church, the cleric serving as deacon ranks second after the priest.

**Deesis** (Greek: “entreaty”): In Byzantine art, the representation of Jesus flanked by the intercessory figures of Mary and John the Baptist.

**disciple**: In Christian belief, a follower of Jesus and student of his teachings. See apostle.

**diadem**: A royal crown.

**Divine Office**: Daily public prayer. Monastic communities usually say prayers eight times over a twenty-four period: Laudes (morning prayers, done on rising), Prime (6:00 A.M.), Terce (9:00 A.M.), Sext (noon), None (3:00 P.M.), Vespers (originally variable but before sunset; now about 4:30 P.M.), Compline (variable, said just before retiring for sleep), and Matins (2:30 A.M.). Mass is celebrated between Terce and Sext.

**Dominicans**: A mendicant (begging) preaching and teaching order founded at Toulouse, France, in 1206–16 by the Spaniard Domenico Guzmán (ca. 1170–ca. 1221).

**eucharistic, Eucharist** (Greek: “thanksgiving”): Pertaining to the central act of Christian worship. The ceremony is based upon the Last Supper, the last meal Jesus had with his followers (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:17–20). The term *eucharist* comes either from the fact that Jesus “gave thanks” at this last meal or that the institution of the Eucharist is an occasion for Christian thanksgiving. The Eucharist is part of a service called the mass, in which bread and wine are consecrated and distributed.

**evangelists**: The traditional authors of the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The evangelists’ symbols are the winged man or angel for Matthew, the lion for Mark, the bull or ox for Luke, and the eagle for John.

**fleur-de-lis**: A conventionalized representation of an iris flower, the traditional symbol of French royalty.

**flying buttress**: An exterior masonry structure that typically consists of a straight inclined bar carried on an arch and a solid pier or buttress against which it abuts and that receives the thrust of a roof or vault.

**Franciscans**: A mendicant (begging) order founded in 1209 at Assisi, Italy, by Saint Francis (Giovanni di Bernadone, ca. 1182–1226, canonized 1230).

**friar**: A member of a mendicant (begging) order, such as the Dominicans or Franciscans.

**Galahad**: The illegitimate son of Lancelot, Galahad became a knight and entered the court of King Arthur of Britain. Eventually he devoted himself to discovering the Holy Grail, the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper (see eucharistic, Eucharist), and died beholding it.

**Gawain**: The son of King Lot of Lothian and Morgause, the half-sister of King Arthur of Britain. Gawain became a knight in King Arthur’s court, as well as a counselor to him.

**gesso**: In Italy, gesso was white ground applied on a surface for painting or gilding, which commonly had gypsum (calcium sulphate) as the inert additive; north of the Alps, chalk (calcium carbonate) was the additive. The white ground was applied in many layers, each time carefully smoothed with knives or sanded.

**The Golden Legend**: A book recounting saints’ lives and stories connected to Christian feasts, written around 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1230–1298), a Dominican friar who became the archbishop of Genoa and was later made a saint.

**gospels** (Old English: “good news”): The term came to be used for the first four books of the New Testament in which the evangelists record the life of Jesus, starting with Mark around the year 70 A.D.

**Gothic**: Originally a pejorative term coined during the Renaissance to designate the art and architecture of medieval Europe—and, for the fifteenth century, just Northern Europe—from ca. 1150 to ca. 1500. In architecture, soaring buildings were created with relatively thin walls, ribbed vaults, flying buttresses, and stained glass. In art, the Gothic style was naturalistic, with an emphasis on narrative and organized decorative programs.

**halberd**: A pole weapon with a metal head consisting of a combined ax blade, stabbing point, and tearing hook.

**halo**: The representation of light surrounding a figure’s head, indicating sanctity.

**hanaps**: A cup whose cover was another cup; also called a double cup.

**Holy Land**: The land on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, including sites holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, such as Jerusalem.

**Holy Spirit** or **Holy Ghost**: According to the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit, sent by God, is the divine principle of activity in the world. For Christians, the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity—the three aspects of God, consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Able to bestow gifts on individuals, especially that of prophecy, the Holy Spirit is often represented as seven doves, symbolizing the gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2).

**Hundred Years’ War** (1337–1453): A series of conflicts between France and England, fought mostly on French soil, that ended with England losing almost all of its possessions in France, except for the coastal town of Calais.

**icon** (Greek: “image”): In Byzantium, any image of a sacred personage or sacred scene; the term now usually refers to a representation on a portable panel.

**iconography**: The conventional images or symbols used to depict a religious or legendary subject.

**Iliad**: One of the Homeric epics, which originated as oral poems and are believed to have been recorded in the form we now know them about 750–700 B.C. The *Iliad*, which had a profound impact on ancient Greek society, art, and literature, is the story of fifty days in the ten-year war between the Greeks and Trojans, which occurred during the twelfth century B.C. in northwestern Turkey.

**Lancelot**: Lover of Queen Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur of Britain. Lancelot is the central hero in medieval romances and prominent in several other works of literature, such as *Le chevalier de la charrete* (ca. 1150–75), by Chrétien de Troyes. The prose *Lancelot* (ca. 1225) associates him with the Lady of the Lake and tells of how Lancelot’s affair with Guinevere cost him the chance to search for the Holy Grail—the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper. However, his son, Galahad, completed this task.

**lancet window**: A tall pointed window without internal tracery.

**laver**: A vessel to hold water for washing, with one or more spouts to pour out the water and often equipped with a suspension chain.

**legate**: An official representative of a person in power or authority.

**liberal arts**: The arts devoted to developing general intellectual capabilities. In the Middle Ages, the liberal arts were the basic education of the learned elite. By the Carolingian period, the liberal arts consisted of the Trivium (the three-part road) of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric, which developed the language skills necessary for careers in both the church and secular government; and the Quadrivium, (the four-part road), which included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.

**line of sight**: An imaginary line that can be drawn from a figure’s eyes to indicate what the figure is looking at.

**liturgical**: Referring to the public services or rites of worship in the church, the principal one of which is the mass or Eucharist; it also refers to the written texts giving the order of service. In Byzantium this term referred specifically to the eucharistic rite. See eucharistic, Eucharist.

**Lombards** (Latin: “long axes”): A Germanic people who invaded Italy in 568 and established a kingdom in northern Italy, with Pavia as its capital. Expanding their conquests into most of Italy, they absorbed Latin culture and became Christians. In 774, they were subjugated by the Frankish king Charlemagne.

**longbow**: A bow made of wood, held vertically, whose string and arrow are pulled back by the hand and then released.

**Louis IX** (1214–1270; canonized 1297): Son of Louis VIII and Blanche of Castile, King Louis IX of France was renowned for personal piety and impartial justice.

**magi** (sing. *magus*): The three magi, or wise men, paid homage to Jesus as an infant (Luke 2:10–12). Known as Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar, they were often depicted with differing ages—one of them young, one middle-aged, one old—and one of them often appeared with dark skin. Their gifts of gold and frankincense were linked to Jesus as king (gold) and as someone divine (frankincense for the incense of the worship service); the myrrh was connected to his suffering and death (myrrh was used to anoint a dead body). The magi were later represented as kings, following passages such as Isaiah 60:3 and Psalms 72:10–11.

**mail**: Flexible armor fashioned from interlocking rings that was commonly used throughout Europe until it was replaced by plate armor in the fourteenth century.

**martyr** (Greek: “witness”): One who has suffered death for Christianity; until 1969, a relic of a martyr had to be placed in every consecrated altar in the Catholic church. See saint.

**mass** (Latin: *Ite, missa est*, the dismissal of the congregation after the service): The central eucharistic rite of the Western church; it includes readings from one gospel and one epistle (a book of the Bible written in the form of a letter), and the liturgy of prayers and ceremonies. See eucharistic, Eucharist; liturgical.

**mechanical arts**: Vocational or trade crafts, such as metal- and woodworking, enamel working, and making of stained glass.

**miter** (Greek: “headdress”): A ceremonial headdress worn by the pope, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and, with special permission, some abbots. Originally a raised cap with a band around the edge, the mitre was divided into two peaks front and back after the thirteenth century. Two bands of embroidered material hanging down the back of the mitre are called *insulae* (islands). Originally tied under the chin to keep the mitre firmly on the head, by the thirteenth century the *insulae* had become ornamental.

**monastery**: A community of monks or nuns, or the buildings housing the community. In addition to the church, a large self-sufficient monastery could have a cloister, chapter house (meeting room), scriptorium (copyist area) and library, dormitory, refectory (dining hall), kitchen, hostelry or guesthouse, infirmary, novitiate (area for those learning to be monks or nuns), and supporting farm buildings, workshops, and storerooms.

**naturalistic, naturalism**: The imitation of nature in art.

**nave**: The main part of a church, especially the long central area of a cross-shaped church.

**niello**: Decoration of metal surfaces in which incised designs are filled with an alloy that includes sulfur, which is then fused by heat to form a dark pattern.

**Norman** (Anglo Saxon: “northman”): From the area of Normandy, a region in northern France rich in agriculture, shipping, and fishing. The Vikings, also known as Norsemen or Normans, invaded and conquered the region and King Charles III of the Franks made their leader, Rollo, a duke in 911.

**order (monastic)**: A group of people united by a rule or aim, such as a monastic institution. See rule.

**papacy** (Latin: “papa”): The office or jurisdiction of the pope, the successor of Peter, the first bishop of Rome. With the decline of the Roman empire in the West, the pope became an important political leader.

**paradise** (Persian: “enclosed park”): In this context, the Garden of Eden made by God for Adam and Eve. Paradise came to be equated with heaven, the place for the blessed to see God face to face.

**pike**: A pole weapon with a metal stabbing point, most useful in the bristling mass of a square of pikemen.

**pilgrimage church**: A church visited during the journey to a holy place made as an act of piety or penance.

**plainchant**: The vocal music of the early Christian church, consisting of biblical texts sung in Latin to modal tunes. (Modes are scale systems based on the note they begin on.) Plainchant was sung in unison, without harmonies or instrumental accompaniment.

**potsherds**: Broken pieces of pottery.

**proconsul**: A governor or military commander in ancient Rome.

**psalms**: (Greek: “song sung with a harp”): A collection of 150 religious poems or praises employed in both Jewish and Christian worship. A book containing only the text of the psalms is called a psalter.

**pyxis** (Latin: “box”): A small box, in Medieval Europe specifically used to hold eucharistic bread.

**register**: In art, a horizontal division, separating portions of an image.

**reliquary**: A container for relics.

**Renaissance** (French: “rebirth”): A period in which Italy—and in the fifteenth century, Florence above all—was the seat of an artistic, humanistic, technological, and scientific flowering. Based primarily on the rediscovery of classical texts and artifacts, Renaissance culture looked to heroic ideals from antiquity and promoted the study of the liberal arts, centering largely upon the individual’s intellectual potential. The visual arts were characterized by the humanistic treatment of subject matter and an emphasis on rational space, proportion, and perspective. See liberal arts.

**Romanesque**: A style of European medieval art that dates from ca. 1000 to ca. 1150. In architecture, the rounded arches, thick walls, and roof systems are “Roman-like.” In art, the style is characterized by an emphasis on two-dimensionality and pattern.

**roundel**: A circular panel or framed portion of a work of art.

**rule**: Regulations drawn up to govern the life and observances of a community. The author was often the founder of a religious order, such as Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–ca. 550). See Benedict of Nursia (Norcia).

**saint(s)** (Latin: “holy”): People with divine supernatural gifts that earn them eternal life in heaven and to whom worshippers direct their prayers. In Christian belief, saints include those who died for their faith—martyrs—and those who led a life of heroic virtue—confessors.

**saltcellar**: A container for salt at the table.

**sarcophagi** (sing. *sarcophagus*): A coffin made of stone.

**Scythian**: Pertaining to a culture of expert horse riders who spoke an Indo-Iranian language. The Scythians occupied much of the north shore of the Black Sea from the ninth to third century B.C., although their area of control was fluid.

**tesserae** (sing. *tessera*) (Greek: “four”): Cut and smoothed cubes of marble, glass, or other material used in making mosaics.

**Three Women at the Tomb**: In Christian belief, the event, following Jesus’ death, in which three women, Mary Magdalen, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, came to his tomb with spices to prepare his body and found the tomb empty (Matthew 28:1–4).

**thurible**: See censer.

**tonsure**: A shaved circle at the top of the head indicating a monk or cleric.

**Torah** (Hebrew: “a law”): The first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Also known as the Pentateuch (“five books”).

**Tristan and Isolde**: A medieval romance featuring Tristan, who was sent to Ireland to bring Isolde back as the bride of King Mark of Cornwall. Tristan drank a love potion with Isolde and their subsequent irresistible passion led to their deaths. Thomas of Britain wrote an Anglo-Norman verse account of them about 1185, and Gottfried von Strassburg wrote a German version about 1210. In the fifteenth century, Sir Thomas Malory included the story in his *Morte d’Arthur*.

**triptych** (Greek: “three-fold”): Three hinged panels; the narrower outer panels can be folded over the inner panel to protect it.

**troubadours** (Provençal: “to find, compose verse”): Poets of southern France who both composed and sang their works in the *langue d’oc* dialect of French; these works were mostly aristocratic in tone and often had a theme of romantic love.

**typology**: The Old Testament prefigurations, or precursors, of events in the New Testament; for example, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in the Old Testament was thought to foreshadow the crucifixion of Jesus in the New Testament.

**vault:** A masonry ceiling built on the principle of the arch; its two simplest forms are the barrel vault, a tunnel-like extension of the arch, and the groin vault, in which two barrel vaults of equal size intersect at right angles. In a ribbed vault, masonry ribs are constructed to concentrate the load and thrust onto just a few reinforced points and to reduce the amount of centering needed for construction.

**vestment:** The distinctive dress worn by the clergy when performing church rituals.

**votive image:** An image, often a painting, that served as a focus for prayers asking for aid or of gratitude.

**Vulgate:** An edition of the Bible commonly used in the Middle Ages. Translated into Latin by Saint Jerome (ca. 341–420), the Vulgate Bible includes apocryphal works from earlier Greek translations.

**wildman:** First mentioned by Herodotus in the fifth century B.C., stories of wildmen continued into the Middle Ages. Violent and aggressive against wild animals and his own kind, the wildman was also thought to be a skilled hunter, given his instinctual knowledge of the ways of wild beasts. He avoided all human contact, keeping to remote regions. With the collapse of feudal Europe and the rise of an urban middle class in the fifteenth century, the wildman emerged from disfavor into a kind of free spirit who was close to nature.

**woodcut:** produced by drawing a design on the smooth, flat surface of a block of wood, then cutting away the places that are to be left white in the print, leaving the design standing up in relief. After inking the surface of the block, a sheet of paper is pressed onto the block, thus transferring onto the sheet an image that is the reverse of the original design.