

Vocabulary List—Etruscans and ancient Rome

aisle: passage or open corridor of a building that parallels the main space, usually on both sides, and is delineated by a row or arcade of columns or piers. Called side aisles when they flank the nave of a church.

amphitheatre: an oval arena for athletic events and spectacles developed by ancient Roman architects from the idea of two theatres placed facing each other, with ascending tiers of seats for the audience.

apotheosis: deification of an individual.

aqueduct: irrigation or water-transport system characterized by a trough, usually supported by arches, which carries water through gravity.

arcade: a series of arches, carried by columns or piers and supporting a common wall or lintel.

arch: a curved structural element that spans an open space. Built from wedge-shaped stone blocks called voussoirs which form a space-spanning and weight-bearing unit.

atrium: an unroofed interior courtyard or room in a Roman house, sometimes having a pool or garden. Also the open courtyard in front of a Christian church or an entrance area in modern architecture.

basilica: a large, rectangular building often built with a clerestory, side aisles separated from the central nave by colonnades, and an apse at one or both ends. Originally used for Roman administrative centers and later adapted for Christian churches.

coffer: a recessed decorative panel that is used to decorate ceilings or vaults; the use of coffers is called coffering.

dome: a curved masonry vault, sometimes crowned by an open space (oculus) and/or and exterior lantern and may rest on a vertical wall (drum). When a dome is built over a square space, an intermediate element (pendentive or squinch) is required to make the transition to a circular dome.

drum: the wall that supports a dome; also a segment of the circular shaft of a column.

forum: a Roman town center, the site of temples, administrative buildings and markets.

nave: the central aisle of a basilica, two or three stories high and flanked by side aisles.

oculus: a circular opening usually found at the apex of a dome, either open to the sky or covered by an exterior lantern.

podium: a raised platform that acts as the foundation for a building, most often used Etruscan, Greek or Roman temples.

sarcophagus: a rectangular stone coffin often decorated with relief sculpture.

springing: the point at which the curve of an arch or vault meets with and rises from its support.

tessera (tesserae): small cubes of stone, glass or other objects that are pieced together to create a mosaic.

triumphal arch: a freestanding, massive stone gateway with a large central arch built as an urban ornament to celebrate military victories.

vault: an arched masonry structure that spans an interior space. A barrel or tunnel vault is an elongated or continuous vault; a groin vault is created by the intersection of two barrel vaults of equal size.

Works Referenced:

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