

Glossary for the Church of St. Savior in Chora (Kariye Camii)

Akathistos Hymn a poetic hymn to the Virgin, composed in the early seventh century. It is said to have been first sung after the delivery of Constantinople from the Avars in 626.

Anastasis (gr., “resurrection”): a term commonly used to refer to a representation of Christ breaking down the gates of hell and releasing the Old Testament figures who believed in him prior to his incarnation. This iconographic formula is the Easter image of the Orthodox church.

Bema the sanctuary of a Byzantine church that enclosed the altar. Access to this area, often with a raised floor level and separated from the rest of the church by a screen or chancel barrier, was restricted to the clergy.

Deesis (gr., “entreaty” or “petition”): a term commonly used to refer to a representation of Christ flanked by the intercessory figures of Saint John the Baptist and the Virgin. In the case of the Kariye Camii, Deesis refers to the mosaic located in the inner narthex depicting a standing figure of Christ with the interceding Virgin and two previous benefactors, or founders, of the monastery kneeling at their feet.

Diakonikon (gr., “space used by deacons”): an ancillary space or chapel that functioned as a sacristy usually located to the right of the bema, or sanctuary, of a Byzantine church.

Dodekaorton (gr., “twelve feasts”): a term that refers to the liturgical cycle of the twelve most important feasts in the Orthodox church. The term also applies to the iconographic representation of these twelve feasts in a cycle of twelve images from the lives of Christ and the Virgin.

Eleousa (gr., “the compassionate”): an epithet of the Virgin and term that refers to a representation of the Virgin Mary as a tenderly loving mother whose cheek touches that of the Christ child.

Enkolpion (gr., “on the chest”): a reliquary or protective emblem worn around the neck and “on the chest.” Usually a small cross, it may contain a relic.

Esonarthex the inner narthex, or transverse vestibule of a Byzantine church. See narthex.

Exonarthex the outer narthex, or transverse vestibule of a Byzantine church. See narthex.

Koimesis (gr., “falling asleep”): a term commonly used in the Orthodox church to refer to the representation of the death, or “falling asleep,” of the Virgin. As such, it is the equivalent of the term “Dormition” in the Western tradition. Celebrated on 15 August, the feast of the Koimesis forms part of the liturgical cycle of the dodekaorton, or “twelve feasts.”

Ktetor (gr., “founder”): in the case of the Kariye Camii and other ecclesiastical buildings, the founder of a church or monastery.

Naos (gr., “temple”): the term can refer either to a church or, more commonly, to the central space for worship inside a Byzantine church.

Narthex (gr., “stair”): in Byzantine architecture, a term that refers to the transverse vestibule of a

church at its entrance facade.

Opus sectile (lat., “cut work”): in Byzantine art, an inlay technique common for both wall and floor decoration using cut pieces of marble.

Palladium in this context, a relic or holy image, particularly of the Virgin and child, that was considered a powerful protector of the empire and its capital.

Pantokrator (gr., “allsovereign”): an epithet of God. In Byzantine art, the term refers to the representation of the mature, bearded figure of Christ, who extends his right hand in blessing and holds a gospel book in his left.

Parekklesion (gr., “side chapel”): subsidiary chapel, usually attached to the side of a Byzantine church, which could serve a variety of different functions. At the Kariye Camii and the contemporary Fethiye Camii (Pammakaristos monastery), the parekklesion was used as a funerary chapel for the ktetor, or founder, of the church and his family.

Pastophoria a term designating the two auxiliary spaces or chapels that flank the bema, or sanctuary, in a Byzantine church. See also prothesis and diakonikon.

Proskynesis (gr., “prostration”): a gesture of reverence or supplication paid to the imperial ruler. The term also refers to a gesture of penance or intense prayer in front of holy images.

Prothesis (gr., “offering”): ancillary space or chapel, usually located to the left of the bema, or sanctuary, of a Byzantine church that was used to prepare the offerings for the liturgy.

Sebastokrator a Byzantine court title traditionally awarded by the emperor to his sons and other close relatives.

Theotokos (gr., “Godbearer”): an epithet officially assigned to the Virgin Mary at the Council of Ephesos in 431 that identifies her as the Mother of God.

Templon a usually waisthigh barrier or screen with columns and epistyle, or architrave, that separates the bema, or sanctuary, of a Byzantine church from the naos, or main space of worship. In the early Byzantine period, the templon was often decorated with curtains hung between the columns. These could be used to conceal or reveal the altar area when necessary. In the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, the screen became taller and was often adorned with icons that obstructed the view to the altar more permanently