

# THE DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS IN --- WESTERN ART



SARAH CARR-GOMM



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Sarah Carr-Gomm



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## **For Solomon Sam Culling Poulos**

The Dictionary of Symbols in Western Art

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## How To Use This Book

This dictionary has entries on saints, martyrs, mythical, biblical and religious characters and episodes, and major symbols in art, all arranged in A–Z order. Interspersed alphabetically with these entries are highlighted feature panels on the treatment in art of major themes and general topics (Adam and Eve, Landscape, Zodiac and so on).

Cross-references in the margin relate to entries elsewhere that expand upon subjects to which reference is made in the text.

Footnotes in the margin refer to selected documentary sources. (*Met* is used as an abbreviation for

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.)

The illustrations are mostly inspired by works of art dating from the Middle Ages until the 19th century. In all cases the artist has simplified for the sake of clarity.

The Index of Artists (p.233), arranged in alphabetical order of artist, refers to all artists and works of art that are cited in the main dictionary. The Index of Supplementary Words (p.238) covers symbols, and minor characters and episodes that are not themselves subjects of a main entry in the dictionary.

# Foreword

The aim of this book is to serve as a useful introduction to the meanings of works of art. Most of the works covered date from the period of the late Middle Ages to modern times when figurative art predominated. It is the figures that often embody the principal message of a painting or sculpture: images and episodes from the lives of the saints, for example, were commissioned because they were considered exemplary and their lives worthy of imitation. Most of the entries in the book are, therefore, about individuals: religious, historical and mythological. Also included are fictitious characters and their authors, themes and topics of art-historical relevance, as well as symbols, emblems, attributes and personifications of abstract qualities.

A symbol may be defined as an object, living or material, that represents a concept. Many objects, however, take on symbolic meaning only within a certain context; the dove, for example, represents the Holy Spirit at Christ's baptism but when accompanied by Venus is associated with love. Thus, the symbolic meaning is not always the same. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that the object is *always* a symbol: it may be included for aesthetic or naturalistic reasons.

A figure that takes on a symbolic role is known as a personification, and is male or female according to the gender of the word. Thus Victory (*Victoria* in Latin) is female not because of any feminine qualities that the notion embodies, but because of grammar. Since the Renaissance, subjects drawn from classical antiquity became increasingly popular, especially figures from

mythology. In this book, their Roman titles, rather than Greek, are given because this is standard usage in the Renaissance and Baroque ages. The deities, especially Minerva, Diana, Apollo, Venus and Mercury, were often used as personifications – Minerva, for example, as Wisdom – and were thus useful references for allegory. The stories of gods and goddesses describe a vast range of human emotions and provided artists with a challenge to the imagination and the joy of portraying beautiful people in arcadian settings.

An attribute is an object that identifies a particular individual, such as the wheel of St Catherine or the shaggy tunic of St John the Baptist. Although the keys of St Peter may be seen to symbolize the Kingdom of Heaven, more importantly they are the objects by which the saint himself is recognized. Attributes usually derive from an episode in the life of the figure concerned and, unlike the keys of St Peter, they often have no symbolic meaning. Attributes are not necessarily objects; Tobias, for example, may be seen as the attribute of the Archangel Raphael. There are also collective attributes, which identify a type: the crown of regents, the palm of martyrs or the shell of pilgrims. These are an important part of iconography and are a direct clue to the subject of a painting. This book includes entries for many of the principal symbols, personifications and attributes, but the index should also be used.

It has been fashionable in art history to seek complex levels of meaning and erudite solutions for problematic paintings. Recently, however, scholars have pointed out that this not necessarily a fruitful

approach and have shown that when esoteric subjects were painted they often had an inscription to identify the subject or explain the message. However, there were certain conventions understood by the educated. One of these is the tradition known as type and anti-type, whereby many Old Testament figures and narratives were taken as prefigurations of those from the New. In his book *The City of God*, St Augustine explained that "The Old Testament is nothing but the New covered with a veil, and the New is nothing but the Old unveiled." Thus, for example, Isaac was seen as a "type" of Christ, because Abraham, his father, was prepared to sacrifice his son as evidence of his faith. There were also medieval bestiaries, developed from writings known as "Physiologus" (The Naturalist) which professed to describe the nature and habits of creatures, real and mythical, from which moral and religious lessons were drawn. Similarly, numerous flowers were likened to the Virgin or to the Passion of Christ.

Alongside many entries are footnotes on certain literary sources which, for the most part, are readily available today. Herein lies another fascinating question, as there were, and still are, variations of the same story and often numerous editions and translations of the same text. Some were very widely known. *The Golden Legend* of c.1260 by Jacobus de Voragine, for example, which tells the lives of the Virgin and the Saints, organized according to the feast days of the liturgical calendar, was widely read and was translated into many Western European languages. Until the production of several printed books on

iconography in the mid-16th century, there was no authoritative dictionary to explain the meanings of things; moreover, symbols and attributes were not standardized. Even since then, patrons, artists and their advisers have not been consistent in their choice of reference, more than one source might be used and there was always room for invention. The student of iconography must, therefore, be cautious in the quest for meanings.

Although ideas as to the original intention of a work of art can be formed from a knowledge of its subject matter, many other factors must be considered. These include artistic style and technique, social and political history, the original location of the work, and the intention of its patron; such topics are, however, beyond the scope of this book.

With so many questions to answer, the study of art history is never-ending, and the subject is a delight because it involves looking at, and thinking about, the splendid products of the human imagination.

Sarah Carr-Gomm







### Aaron

In the Old Testament, Aaron was the eloquent elder brother of Moses. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, Aaron fashioned the Golden Calf for idolatry, and in *The Adoration of the Golden Calf* Poussin shows him encouraging his people to worship. Yet God was forgiving and Aaron was chosen to be High Priest of his people. His elaborate vestments are described in detail.<sup>1</sup> The Levite Korah contested Aaron's position, but when Korah was asked to bring his followers and give incense as an offering to God, a rite reserved only for priests, "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods".<sup>2</sup> Aaron was considered the archetypal High Priest, and in *The Punishment of Korah* (Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome) Botticelli depicts him in a papal tiara, swinging his censer. The subject, therefore, is a warning to those who would contest Papal authority.

To confirm Aaron's primacy, the

leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel were each ordered to bring a rod and place it on the tabernacle. The next day, Aaron's rod was found to have miraculously flowered and yielded almonds. Aaron appears in paintings or cycles of the life of Moses, as either a priest or a patriarchal figure with a long beard. He may be seen carrying a rod or a censer.

### Abraham

A great Patriarch of the Old Testament and father of many Hebrew nations, Abraham was told by God to leave his birthplace and set out with Sarah, his wife, and Lot, his nephew.<sup>1</sup> Abraham settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in Sodom and had all his possessions seized. Abraham pursued the raiders, recovered the stolen loot and on his triumphal return to Canaan was blessed and given bread and wine by Melchizedek, king of Salem.

Sarah bore no children and offered her handmaid Hagar to Abraham so that he might have a son; thus Ishmael was conceived. However, Hagar

Aaron: *see*

Almond; Moses; Pig

<sup>1</sup> *Exodus* 28

<sup>2</sup> *Numbers* 16:32

Abraham: *see*

Lot

<sup>1</sup> *Genesis* 12:1–5

<sup>2</sup> *Genesis* 16:12

<sup>3</sup> *Genesis* 22:1–13

**Abstinence:** *see*

Alexander the Great;  
Antiochus and Stratonice;  
Chastity; Scipio

**Abundance:** *see*

Cornucopia

began to despise Sarah. As a result, Hagar was driven into the wilderness. An angel instructed her to return to her mistress, and predicted that Ishmael would be "a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him;"<sup>72</sup> yet God promised that he would beget 12 princes and rule a great nation.

Eventually, despite their old age, a son, Isaac, was born to Sarah and Abraham. The baby's arrival had been prophesied by three angels to whom Abraham had shown hospitality. Jealous of Isaac, Ishmael and his mother were banished. As they began to die of thirst, an angel led them to water.

To test his faith, God demanded that Abraham sacrifice Isaac and, early in the morning, Abraham saddled his ass with wood for the burnt offering, and took Isaac to the appointed place. Just as Abraham was about to slay his son on an altar, an angel intervened and a ram was substituted for the sacrifice.<sup>3</sup>

Artists have represented many episodes from the life of Abraham. Giambattista Tiepolo, in *The Angel Appearing to Sarah*, shows an aged Sarah before the angel; and Claude Lorrain painted picturesque landscapes with Hagar and the Angel. However, the Sacrifice of Isaac was the most frequently chosen theme, since Abraham was seen as the paragon of unquestioning faith in God, and Isaac as a "type" of Christ: God sacrificed his son as Abraham was prepared to, the wood of the burnt offering representing the Cross. In 1401 this was the subject of the competition to decorate the great portals of the Baptistery in Florence, for which both Ghiberti's and

Brunelleschi's panels still exist. Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* shows the scene with customary violence, while Ferdinand Olivier, in *Abraham and Isaac*, shows the two on their way to the sacrifice.

### **Absinthe**

This green liqueur flavoured with wormwood was first used medicinally by French troops in the 19th century. It is both addictive and poisonous; Zola describes the bitterness and sorrow it causes in his novel *L'Assommoir* (1877) and Degas painted the eternally depressing image of *The Absinthe Drinker*.

### **Abstinence**

Sexual continence is usually illustrated in art by figures from antiquity famous for their self-restraint. Seleucus, King of the Eastern Empire, gave his young wife to her step-son, who was dying of love for her; Alexander the Great did not take sexual advantage of the defeated family of Darius; the Roman general Scipio refused a young girl betrothed to another. In allegory, an adolescent Cupid (Eros) may be taken from the arms of a naked woman by wise Minerva (Athene), as in Pietro da Cortona's fresco in the Room of Venus (Pitti Palace, Florence).

### **Abundance**

The female figure of Abundance represents the prosperity brought about by peace and justice. Her attribute is a cornucopia, the horn of plenty, which may be full of ripe fruit and jewels. She may be shown near a sheaf of corn or surrounded by children and once-wild animals that have clearly been tamed.

### Academy

Named after the garden near Athens where Plato (c.427–347BC) taught philosophy, the term was loosely applied to any scholarly circle in the Renaissance. The first Academy of Art was founded in Florence in 1562 by Giorgio Vasari under Duke Cosimo I. An academy was established in Rome in 1593, in France in 1648, and in England in 1768, and by the end of the 18th century there were over 100 in Europe. Zoffany painted *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* in 1770, showing intellectuals discussing the merits of numerous masterpieces.

Academies promoted “history painting”, which derived in both style and subject matter from classical antiquity. Monumental, didactic, narrative painting was considered the highest form of art, since it contained universal moral truths and provided inspiration to noble ideals. The rigidity of the French academic system led the Impressionists to find alternative means of exhibiting their works from 1874. Since then respect for academic art has declined.

### Achilles

The legendary Greek hero of Homer’s *The Iliad*, a work that describes Achilles’ part in the Trojan War. Later writers added the story of how his mother, the sea-nymph Thetis, knew that his fate would be to die in this war, and so dipped him in the river Styx to render him invulnerable.<sup>1</sup> However, the heel by which she held him remained dry and he later died from an arrow wound to this one weak spot. Sources differ as to whether Paris or Apollo fired the

shot that finally killed him.

Achilles was educated by the centaur, Chiron.<sup>2</sup> Regnault’s *The Education of Achilles* shows him learning how to draw a bow. To prevent him from joining the Trojan War, his mother disguised him as a girl and hid him at the court of King Lycomedes. Here he fell in love with Deidamia, the King’s daughter, by whom he had a son, Neoptolemus. Achilles’ disguise was revealed by Ulysses (in Greek myth, Odysseus), who, laying gifts before the court, noticed his disregard for feminine luxuries and fondness for weapons.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1630s Rubens made *The Achilles Tapestries* of these scenes, together with others from the Trojan War, now hanging at the Boyamns-Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, and in Detroit.

### Actaeon

In mythology, Actaeon<sup>1</sup> was the grandson of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes. One day while out hunting he strayed deep into some woods, where lay a pool of clear spring water. Here he spied Diana, goddess of chastity (in Greek myth, Artemis), bathing with her nymphs. In punishment for having seen her naked, Diana turned him into a stag. He fled, amazed by his own speed, but as he paused to look at his new reflection in the water, his hounds caught him and gorged themselves on his flesh. Titian, in *Diana and Actaeon*, shows Actaeon astounded by Diana’s beauty; while in his *The Death of Actaeon* the hero, in the process of transformation, flees from the vengeful huntress.

### ADAM AND EVE

See panel on following page.

**Achilles:** see

Centaur; Polyxena; Thetis; Trojan War

<sup>1</sup> Statius, *Achilleid* 1:269 and Hyginus, *Fabulae* CVII

<sup>2</sup> Philostratus the Elder, *II*:2

<sup>3</sup> Hyginus, *Fabulae* XCVI

**Actaeon:** see

Cadmus; Diana; Stag

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Met* III: 138–252

**Adonis:** see

Venus

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Met* X:503–739

ADAM AND EVE: *see*

Apple; Creation; Fig Leaf;

NUDE; True Cross

<sup>1</sup> *Genesis 1:26*

<sup>2</sup> *Genesis 2:7–22*

<sup>3</sup> *Genesis 3*

Adonis: *see*

Cupid; Venus

### ADAM AND EVE

In the Old Testament, God created Adam in his own likeness to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”.<sup>1</sup>

Having formed Adam from the dust of the earth, God breathed life into him and he became a living soul; God then placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, and forbade him to eat of the Tree of Knowledge.

Adam named the animals and God created Eve from Adam’s rib, to be his companion.<sup>2</sup>

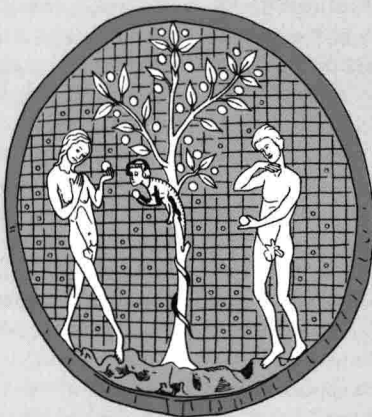
The cunning serpent tempted Eve to know good and evil by eating the forbidden fruit, and she in turn persuaded Adam to taste it. At once their eyes were opened and, ashamed, they took fig leaves to hide their nakedness. In punishment, God commanded the snake to go on its belly and eat dust,

and, for their Original Sin, expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Eve was to bear children in sorrow and Adam to toil the thorny ground.<sup>3</sup>

The Creation, Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve were highly

popular themes in medieval and Renaissance art because they represented Original Sin and mankind’s need, accordingly, for redemption through Christ.

These themes were illustrated on their own or as a cycle. The Temptation and the Expulsion from Paradise introduce the fresco cycle by



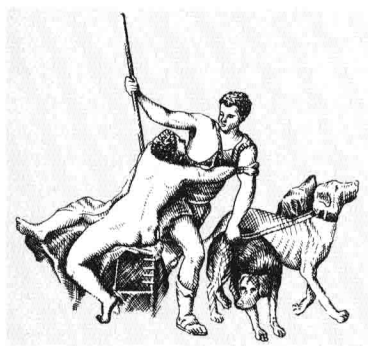
*Adam and Eve with the Tree of Knowledge, after a late 13th-century miniature found in a Hebrew Bible.*

Masolino and Masaccio, *The Life of St Peter* (Brancacci Chapel, Florence). The Fall may also be seen in the background of an Annunciation painting in reference to Christ’s mission to redeem mankind; similarly, Adam’s skull may appear at the foot of a Crucifixion scene.

### Adonis

In mythology, Adonis was the offspring of the incestuous relationship between Myrrha and her father, Cinyras, king of Cyprus. Myrrha begged to be released from her guilt and was turned into the tree

that bears her name; Adonis was born from its trunk. He grew into an extremely beautiful youth, and Venus (in Greek myth, Aphrodite), pierced accidentally by Cupid’s arrow, fell passionately in love with him. She knew he would die while hunting and



A detail showing Adonis, after Venus and Adonis by Titian (1553–1554, Prado, Madrid).

tried to dissuade him from this pursuit. Titian's *Venus and Adonis* shows a naked Venus clinging to the hunter as he sets off to meet his fate. Adonis was killed by a wild boar and, as Venus found him dying, she turned the blood flowing from his wound into an anemone, which became associated with sorrow and death.

### Aeneas

The legendary Trojan hero of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, Aeneas was to become the forefather of the Romans.

The subject was sculpted by Bernini and was popular in Rome because it illustrated the city's Trojan origins as well as noble values of family respect and piety.

The son of Venus (in Greek myth, Aphrodite) and Anchises, he was variously aided and thwarted by the gods, especially the vengeful Juno (Hera), who had sided with the Greeks against the Trojans. The difficulties thrown in his way were often offset by Jupiter's (Zeus') guidance, which Virgil used as proof that the origins of Rome were divinely

sanctioned. The story tells of Aeneas' flight from burning Troy, leading his son, Ascanius, and carrying his father, with the sacred relics and images of their household gods.<sup>1</sup>

Aeneas' quest for Italy led him over land and sea, through storms whipped up by Juno and calmed by Neptune (Poseidon), to the island of Delos. Here the king and priest, Anius,<sup>2</sup> showed Aeneas and his father, son and companions the holy site where Apollo was born. The scene is the subject of Claude Lorrain's *Coast View of Delos with Aeneas*. Aeneas and his company later landed at Carthage where Venus told him how Queen Dido founded the city.<sup>3</sup> Fearing an outbreak of war between Aeneas and Carthage, Venus engaged Cupid (Eros) to contrive a love affair between Dido and Aeneas.<sup>4</sup> In *Dido Receiving Aeneas and Cupid Disguised as Ascanius*, Francesco Solimena shows the stately Dido welcoming Aeneas and his son to a banquet in their honour. Cupid, disguised as Ascanius, kisses her hand to make her fall in love with Aeneas.

Turner's *Dido and Aeneas* shows them setting out to hunt with a magnificent re-creation of Carthage in the distance. Their affair began during a storm, and Giovanni Romanelli's *Dido and Aeneas* illustrates them hurrying to shelter in a cave where their love was consummated.<sup>5</sup> Forgetting their duties, they spent the winter together until Jupiter sent Mercury (Hermes) to rebuke Aeneas and remind him of his destiny. A distraught Dido pleaded with Aeneas to remain, but he was resolute. She constructed her own funeral pyre, aided by her sister, Anna, and after watching Aeneas and

Aeneas: see

Cupid; Juno; Romulus and Remus; Stag; Venus; Virgil; Trojan War

<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* II: 705–730

<sup>2</sup> Ovid, *Met* XIII: 625–635

<sup>3</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* I: 335–370

<sup>4</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* I: 657–723

<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* IV: 160–173

<sup>6</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* IV: 634–705

<sup>7</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* V

<sup>8</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* VI

## Aesculapius

**Aesculapius:** *see*

Apollo; Caduceus

<sup>1</sup>Ovid, *Met II*: 628–632

<sup>2</sup>Ovid, *Met XV*: 622–744

**Agatha, Saint:** *see*

Martyrs

<sup>1</sup>*Golden Legend, St Agatha*

his fleet sail out of Carthage, fell on the sword left by her heartless lover. Juno took pity on her and sent Iris, goddess of the rainbow, to release her spirit. As she flew across the sky, Iris trailed a thousand colours sparkling like dew in the light of the sun.<sup>6</sup> As he headed away, Aeneas looked back to see the city aglow with the flames of Dido's funeral pyre.

Aeneas landed on Sicily where he held games in honour of the first anniversary of his father's death.<sup>7</sup> Having reached the Italian mainland, Aeneas visited the Cumaean Sibyl and requested to see Anchises once more.<sup>8</sup> Accompanied by the Sibyl and bearing a gift of a golden bough for Proserpina (Persephone), queen of the Underworld, Aeneas descended into its shadows. He passed disease, fear, hunger, evil, poverty, sin and war, and saw a multitude, including his kinsmen, who had been denied burial. These souls were destined to roam aimlessly for a hundred years before they could be put to rest. Aeneas was rowed by Charon across the Styx, and, in a myrtle wood, he saw Dido reunited with her former husband. Finally he reached the Land of the Blessed in the Fields of Elysium, where he found his father. Anchises foretold how Aeneas would marry Lavinia, who would bear him a son, Silvius, and how his destiny would be fulfilled through his descendant Romulus, the founder of Rome, and illustrious figures in Roman history, until Virgil's own day.

Aeneas and the Trojans continued their journey to the mouth of the Tiber in Latium and were welcomed by King Latinus, father of Lavinia. However, at Juno's intervention, the Fury Allecto whipped up hatred for

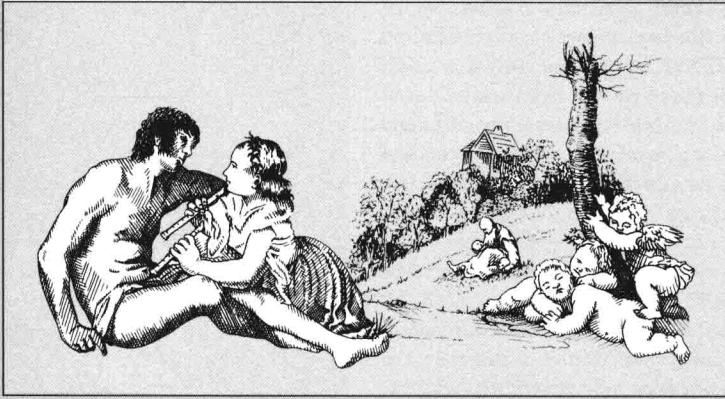
the Trojans. Hostilities began when Ascanius shot a stag from the royal herd, tamed by Princess Silvia, a scene depicted by Claude Lorrain in *Landscape with Aeneas Shooting the Stag of Silvia*. Aeneas then reluctantly engaged in a series of wars, and as Boucher shows in *Venus Requesting Arms for Aeneas from Vulcan*, Venus asked Vulcan, the god of fire, to make a set of armour for him. This included a shield embellished with the events that would shape the future of Rome.

### Aesculapius

Aesculapius (in Greek myth, Asklepios) was the god of medicine and the son of Apollo. His mother, Coronis, was loved by Apollo but was unfaithful to him. A raven informed the god who, in a jealous rage, shot her with his deadly arrow and learned as she died that she was about to bear his child. Apollo turned his anger on the raven who became black for ever more;<sup>1</sup> and he snatched the child from his mother's womb as she lay on her funeral pyre. Aesculapius was brought up by the wise centaur Chiron, from whom he learned the art of healing.<sup>1</sup> He was introduced to Rome from Greece during a severe plague, arriving disguised as a snake. He resumed his divine appearance on the Tiber Island, and the plague ceased. The caduceus, a serpent twined around a staff, is his attribute.<sup>2</sup>

### Agatha, Saint

Legend<sup>1</sup> claims that in the 3rd century AD the noble Agatha was pursued by Quintianus, the lecherous Roman consular official in Sicily, but nothing would persuade her to give in to his demands, as her resolve was with



#### AGES OF MAN

The span of human life may be divided into several ages, and these ages of man were popular themes in Renaissance art. Sometimes there are four, corresponding to the seasons, and sometimes three. Children may play near a dead tree to represent the cycle of life; youth may be shown as a soldier or pair of lovers; and old age may be a man contemplating a skull. Where there is a fourth figure, it is usually that of the mature man, placed somewhere between youth and age. Usually it is

*A detail after The Three Ages of Man, painted by Titian in 1516 (private collection).*

the transience of life that is implied, but Titian's painting of the subject uses the three ages of man as an allegory of prudence. In this work, the faces of three different generations are placed above those of a dog, lion and wolf to suggest that the present should learn from the past in order that it might profit for the future.

AGES OF MAN: *see*  
Ages of the World;  
SEASONS

Christ. Infuriated, Quintianus threw her in prison, tortured her cruelly and cut off her breasts. St Peter appeared and restored her, but she was then rolled naked over live coals strewn on the ground, and a tremendous earthquake shook the city of Catania. Agatha died in prison, and a year after her martyrdom Mount Etna erupted; the inhabitants of Catania brought her veil to the volcano, and it miraculously stopped the flow of molten lava and saved the city. Breasts

are Agatha's attribute, and in paintings she is often shown carrying them on a plate. Because of their shape, she was adopted as the patron saint of bell foundry.

#### AGES OF MAN

*See panel, above.*

#### Ages of the World

In mythology, the four Ages of the World were known as the Ages of Gold, Silver, Copper or Bronze and

Ages of the World: *see*  
AGES OF MAN; NUDE  
<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Met I*: 89–150



## Agnes, Saint

Agnes, Saint: *see*  
Brothels; Martyrs

<sup>1</sup> *Golden Legend, St Agnes*

Agrippina:

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* II: 71–72  
and III: 1

Iron.<sup>1</sup> The Golden Age was free of fear and conflict, in a season of everlasting spring; its rivers flowed with milk and nectar, and the animals lived in harmony. Jupiter introduced the four seasons in the Age of Silver, forcing men to seek shelter. In the Age of Bronze men became fiercer and inclined to conflict, but they were still free from wickedness. The Age of Iron introduced treachery, deceit, violence, greed and war. Pietro da Cortona likened the Four Ages of the World to the Ages of Man in frescoes in the Sala della Stufa (Pitti Palace, Florence). Gold represents youth and bounty, and Silver the agrarian life; Bronze reaps the rewards of middle age; Iron brings violence and death.

### Agnes, Saint

St Agnes<sup>1</sup> can often be identified in paintings by her attribute, a lamb, which she probably acquired because *agnus*, Latin for lamb, sounds like her name. She is generally represented as a young girl with long hair. Agnes was an early Christian martyr who lived in Rome. The son of a Roman prefect fell in love with her but she scorned his promise of wealth, declaring that she had become a bride of Christ. When she refused to worship the pagan goddess Vesta, the prefect had her stripped and taken nude to a brothel, but miraculously her hair grew and covered her nakedness. An angel appeared in the brothel and provided her with a cloak of heavenly light which converted everyone inside and frightened away those who came to harm her. Her suitor was struck dead by a demon when he tried to ravish her, and her executioners were burned by the flames they intended for her. A knife was finally plunged



*A detail of St Agnes with a lamb, after a painting by Andrea del Sarto (Cathedral of St Agnes, Pisa).*

into her throat in AD304 and she died aged thirteen.

She appears as an elegant figure holding her lamb, for example in Duccio's *Maestà*. Emerantiana, her half-sister, was stoned to death and sometimes appears with her in paintings, often with a pile of stones in her lap.

### Agrippina

The story of the noble Agrippina, granddaughter of Emperor Augustus, is one of fidelity in marriage. She dearly loved her husband, the wise and popular Roman general, Germanicus, named after his successful conquests in Germany. He was poisoned by his political enemies in Syria, and Agrippina, grieving, brought his ashes back to Italy. Her intimate friends, several officers and many who had served under Germanicus went to Brindisi to meet