



CANADIAN
MUSEUM
OF HISTORY
-
MUSÉE
CANADIEN
DE L'HISTOIRE

MEDIEVAL EUROPE

POWER & SPLENDOUR



This exhibition brings together over 200 exquisite artifacts from the world-renowned British Museum to transport visitors into a legendary era.



King from the Lewis Chessmen

1150–1200, possibly Norway, found in Scotland
© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Found as part of a hoard on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, this chess king represents the ideal medieval leader. He is a symbol of masculine strength, with a thick beard and moustache. The sword, placed over the king's lap and gripped by both hands, suggests a ruler who is ready to draw his blade and fight. The throne, crown and decorated clothes all indicate his wealth and status.



The Wingham Brooch

575–625, England
© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

This intricate brooch is of a type popular during the 500s and early 600s in Kent, an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in present-day South East England. Kent forged healthy trade and diplomatic contacts with Frankia (centring on modern-day France and parts of Germany). This brooch is a testament to the kingdom's increasing wealth and status.

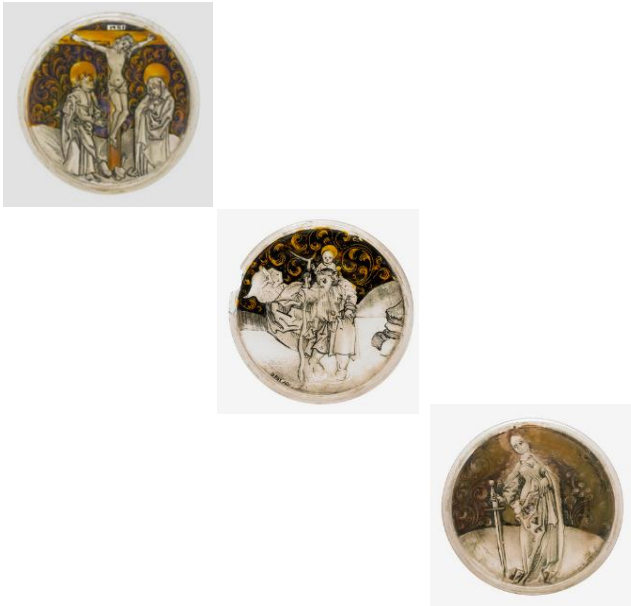


Processional cross

1330–1350, Spain

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

This cross would have been mounted on a staff, so that it could be carried in church ceremonies before the clergy. It depicts the Crucifixion, flanked by the Virgin Mary. At the base, Adam rises from his tomb and, at the top, an angel swings a censer. On the back, elaborate engravings depict Christ seated in majesty with symbols of the four evangelists: Matthew (man), Mark (lion), Luke (ox) and John (eagle). Such embellishment ensured that the cross would be the focal point of worship.



Stained-Glass Roundels

1480–1500, Germany

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Brightly painted windows of stained glass brought colourful light into medieval buildings. Such windows formed large-scale decorative schemes or elaborate stories. These roundels show some of the most widely used images: the Crucifixion, St. Christopher carrying the Infant Christ, and St. Catherine. Religious imagery was used in many different contexts, from churches to jewellery.



Figurine of a Knight

1375–1425, England

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Perhaps representing St. George, this figurine epitomizes the medieval knight. His body is protected with a suit of plate armour, with chain-mail covering the exposed areas of his neck and lower body. Clearly well-armed, he has a sword and shield, and is possibly holding a lance. The richest soldiers were the best armed and protected.



Casket of the Châtelaine de Vergi

1320–1340, France

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

A tragic story of doomed romance, the tale of the Châtelaine de Vergi, is depicted on this casket. The lid shows the courtship between the Châtelaine — wife of a lord — and a knight. The sides of the casket show the couple's betrayal by the Duchess of Burgundy, and the death of the protagonists. Contemporary wealthy society is represented, such as the ladies dancing on the left side.



Arrowheads from the Battle of Barnet

Around 1471, England

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

These arrowheads were found on the outskirts of London, where a pivotal battle took place during the Wars of the Roses (1455–1485) — a series of battles fought between two rival branches of the English royal family: the House of Lancaster and the House of York.



Finger Ring of the Earl of Warwick

1449–1471, England

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

This engraved ring shows the emblem of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, sometimes known as “Kingmaker” because of his crucial role in the Wars of the Roses. He was instrumental in the rise of both Henry VI and Edward IV — at the expense of one another. He was killed in the Battle of Barnet, securing Edward his throne.



Pilgrim Badge of St. Thomas Becket

1300–1400, England

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

One of the most important saints of the Middle Ages was St. Thomas of Canterbury, shown on this badge from London. Thomas Becket was Chancellor of England, becoming good friends with Henry II of England, who had him elected Archbishop of Canterbury. However, the two men fell out over matters of Church and State, leading to Thomas' murder in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170.



Tiles Showing Tristan as a Pilgrim

1200–1300, England

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Medieval courtiers were entertained by performed stories. The tragic romance of Tristan and Isolde was popular, and spread widely across Europe from the 1100s. This Chertsey tile is part of a much larger pavement that tells the whole story. This is from an abbey, suggesting the story was well known outside of court circles as well.



Mirror Case

1370–1400, France

© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Carved onto this mirror case is the Assault on the Castle of Love, which was first acted out in Italian courts for entertainment, showing the central role knights played in popular ideals of romance. Here, knights besiege a castle, with the one on the right drawing a bow with a floral arrow. Women throw down flowers, an ineffective defence, and succumb to the powers of the men.



The Battle of Roncevaux

1475–1500, probably Tournai, France
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.95-1962

Created as part of a series devoted to the life of Charlemagne, this tapestry was inspired by the epic poem, *The Song of Roland*. It depicts Charlemagne's nephew, Roland, armed with his sword Durendal, fighting King Marsile during the Battle of Roncevaux. This celebrated battle occurred in 778 at the Roncevaux Pass in the Pyrénées, between France and Spain.

For high resolution images, please contact Stéphanie Verner at
819-776-7169 or stephanie.verner@historymuseum.ca.