



MUSÉE DE CLUNY
le monde médiéval

**PRESS
RELEASE**

THE ART OF GAMES AND GAMES IN ART, FROM BABYLON TO WESTERN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

28 November 2012 – 4 March 2013

Games of chance and strategy were central to the daily lives of people during Ancient Times and the Middle Ages. From very early on, they were intrinsically linked to universal themes such as power, love, divination and fate.

A total of 250 pieces are exhibited in the frigidarium of the Gallo-Roman Baths of Lutetia, taking visitors on an artistic journey through several millennia, as they discover the diversity and legacy of playing practices.

Welcome Aboard!

The musée de Cluny has brought together an exceptional array of pieces from a number of prestigious international collections. Ancient boardgames such as *Mehen*, The Palm Tree game, *Senet*, *Tric-Trac*, Chess, as well as *Tarot*, games of dice are featured alongside representations of people playing on archeological material and manuscripts. The exhibition adopts both a chronological and thematic layout to show visitors the evolution of gaming techniques. Games were both a medium for artistic expression (with some of the pieces being true masterpieces) and a source of iconographic inspiration.

Alea jacta est!

Also thrust into the spotlight are dice and knucklebones, two key elements of board games. Favouring games of skill and chance, the Greeks and Romans developed the role of the dice beyond that of merely recreational, becoming a means of practising divination. Dice were discredited and forbidden by the Church on a number of occasions and yet were met with great success in 12th century Western Medieval Europe. Based on simple calculus rules, the game was enjoyed at all levels of society.

From Ancient Babylon...

Playing board games is one of mankind's oldest pastimes.. These games were especially popular in the Near East and numerous variations of them existed. Visitors will have the chance to discover some spectacular works of art, that bear witness to the greatness

6 place Paul Painlevé
75005 Paris
T: 01 53 73 78 00
F: 01 46 34 51 75

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of past civilisations, such as the *Mehen* game, only about fifteen of which survive today. Other pieces are sure to make an impression with their aesthetic excellence and wonderful creativity. Among these noteworthy items is the extraordinary 58 Holes game otherwise known as the '*Palm Tree*' game, a unique set with its pegs topped with dog and jackal heads, currently on loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art collections in New York.

...to Western Medieval Europe »

Many games dating from Antiquity were passed down and evolved during the Middle Ages. Examples include *Merels* or '*Tric Trac*', a variation of the Roman '*Game of Twelve Lines*', a precursor to *Backgammon*. Similarly, the Indian game of *Chess* was embraced and adapted. It saw its rules formalised and the Pawn becoming a symbol of social order. The Elephants found in oriental chess evolved into Bishops and eventually french jesters. The ivory-made walrus chess pieces from Lewis Island (British Museum) are true miniature sculptures. A number of items on display such as the chessboard known as '*Saint Louis*' chessboard (Musée du Louvre), come from Royal collections and shed light on the intellectual and material dimension of the game.

Playing cards finally appeared in the West in the late Middle Ages, ushering in the appearance of Kings, Queens, Knights and Knaves as well as the numbers, colours and suits that we know today.

Now it's your turn to play!

Visitors will also be able to try their hand at a giant chessboard installed in the museum's 'cour d'honneur'.

This exhibition is organised by the Musée de Cluny, together with the Réunion des Musées Nationaux-Grand Palais.

The exhibition was organised in partnership with the Louvre and the exceptional contribution of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

Exhibition curators

Isabelle Bardiès-Fronty, Curator in chief at the musée de Cluny, Paris.

Anne-Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi, Hagop Kevorkian Research Associate, Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Informations pratiques

Musée de Cluny

Musée national du Moyen Âge
6, place Paul Painlevé
75005 Paris
Tel: 01 53 73 78 16
www.musee-moyenage.fr

Open every day except Tuesday

from 9.15 to 17.45.
Last Admission 17.15.
Exhibition closed on 25 December and
1st January

Bookshop/shop:

9.15 – 18.00, free access
Tel. 01 53 73 78 22

Getting there:

Metro Cluny-La-Sorbonne / Saint-Michel / Odéon
Bus n°21-27-38-63-85-86-87
RER: B and C line, stop at Saint-Michel – Notre-Dame station

Admission:

8, 50 €, concession 6, 50 €, includes entrance to the permanent collections.
Free entrance for people under 26 years (from or residing in the EU) and for all on the first Sunday of each month

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Press Contacts at Musée de Cluny

Pauline Boyer
Press Officer
pauline.boyer@culture.gouv.fr
Tel: 01 53 73 78 25

Natacha Provensal
Communications Officer, in charge of
Sponsorship
natacha.provensal@culture.gouv.fr