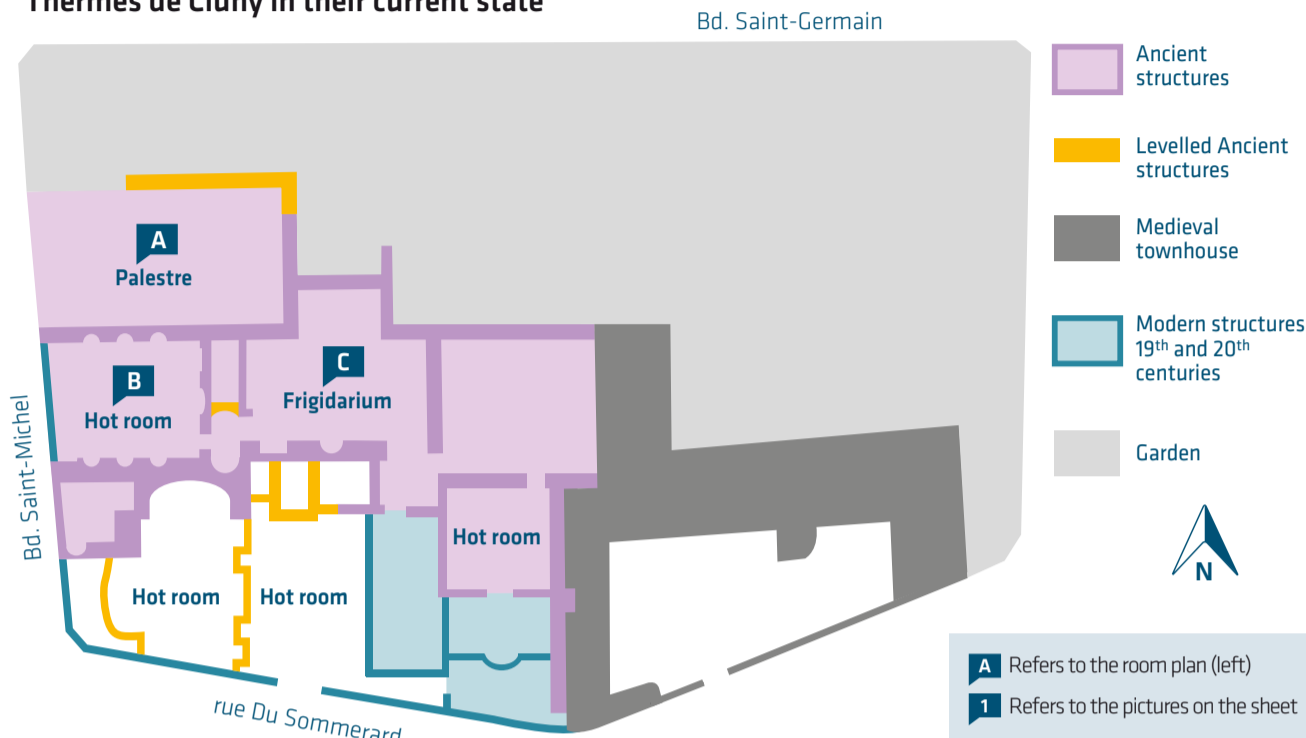


Although they can be viewed from the outside of the museum, the remains of the GalloRoman «thermes» (public baths or thermae) of Cluny, also called the 'Northern Baths', look even more impressive once inside the building and are amongst the most prominent baths preserved outside of the Mediterranean region. The frigidarium, the cold room of the thermal baths, is in an especially good shape, boasting an intact 14 meter high vault, making it the most spectacular room of the whole building.

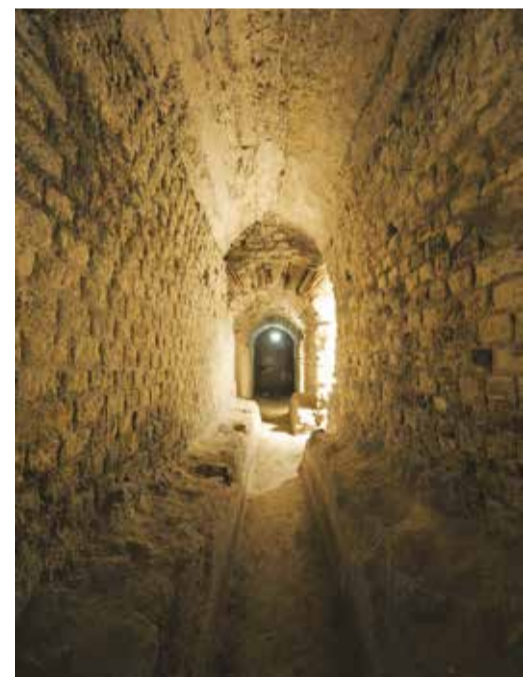
## Thermes de Cluny in their current state



1 Wall of the palaestra



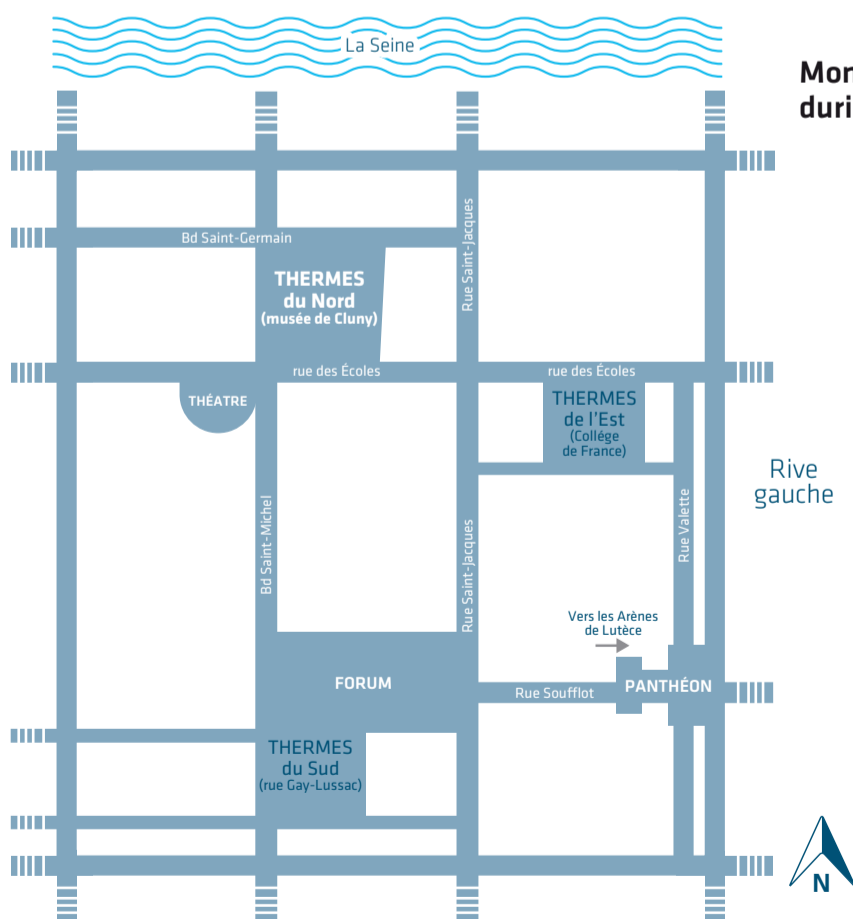
2 Hot room - Caldarium - east view from the boulevard Saint-Michel



3 Utility rooms : culvert

## The Thermes de Cluny : a prime example of Roman civil architecture

The structures preserved on the museum site only account for a small portion of a once much bigger ensemble which occupied an entire block of the ancient urban layout. The latter would form a rectangle of about 111,5 meters in length and 90 meters in width in between the boulevard Saint-Germain in the north, the rue des Écoles in the south, the boulevard Saint-Michel in the west and the rue Saint-Jacques in the east. Several significant elements from this thermal complex were preserved, among which the western palaestra\* (gymnasium) **A** with its wall lined with arcades, **1** the caldarium (hot room) **B**, another room also equipped with two furnaces **2** and the frigidarium (cold room) **C**, located at the heart of the building. The subterranean structures **3** situated in the northern part of the baths were equally as important as they housed the 'technical' spaces. This part of the building can be visited with a museum lecturer. These remains give an idea of how public baths functioned, of the construction and heating techniques in use at the time, but also of the monumental aspect of such buildings dedicated to leisure, which along with other public edifices such as theatres and amphitheatres were the trademarks of Roman architecture throughout the Imperial era.



## Monumental centre of Lutetia during the Early Roman Empire

## The monumentality of Ancient Paris

Built on the edge of the Seine River, in the north of the urban center of Lutetia, the Thermes de Cluny bear witness to the architectural monumentality of Paris during the gallo-roman era which started in the second half of the 1st century BC. The ancient city mainly developed on the left bank of the Seine, on the hill of Sainte-Geneviève, where the major public buildings were settled ; There were also constructions on the Île de la Cité whereas only one small faubourg (residential agglomeration) could be found on the right bank of the river. The forum, a large square of the gallo-roman city, was for the most part situated under the current rue Soufflot nearby the Pantheon. The area also boasted two venues dedicated to entertainment, the theatre and amphitheatre, known as the Arènes de Lutèce, as well as two other ancient public baths, the «forum baths» now under rue Gay-Lussac and the «eastern baths» under the Collège de France.

5851 BC

Conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar

Late 1st century early 2nd century AD

Building of the Lutetia Northern Baths ?

Middle of the 2nd century AD

Peak of Roman Lutetia

Early 4th century AD

Instability in Gaul  
Decline of the Roman Empire

Late 3rd century Early 4th century AD

Lutetia retreats on the Île de la Cité  
The Northern Baths stop being used



## Roman building techniques

Nowadays the *frigidarium*\* looks bare, with the wall and vault decorations almost completely removed with the notable exception of the two sculpted corbels **4** still visible on the northern wall. It is believed that the wall adornments could have been made of a panel of marble plaques, of stucco (a material made of marble dust and lime used for ornamental sculpture) or of paintings, faint traces of which can be observed on the vault.

The stripped structures allow the observation of the building technique which was used : the walls show courses (rows) of limestone intersected by levelling courses (bands) of horizontal bricks forming a construction named *opus vittatum mixtum* **5**, as a reference to the layering techniques and to the mixing of different materials.

In some places the builders used bricks exclusively, as for the arch marking the opening of the *natatio*\* (cold water pool). The vault of the *frigidarium* is also made of bricks. It was covered by successive plasters, which benefited from a largescale restoration campaign conducted in 2009.

A few blueshaded pigments were spotted on one of the ribs of the vault, the only indication that the room was originally painted. The floor from the Ancient period was also partly preserved : it is made of «Roman concrete» (*opus caementicium*), a mix of stones and of lime mortar, which was probably covered in stone slabs or mosaics, such as the fragment representing a little Eros riding on a dolphin found in the *thermae* in 1856.

## Dating and posterity of the building

The building is not exactly dated, but it was established that the baths were built on a location previously occupied by GalloRoman houses, making it therefore impossible to date them back to the very early stages of the urban development of Lutetia. They may have been built around the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD or the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and remained in use until the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century or the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. The buildings are in a relatively wellpreserved state, particularly the *frigidarium* with its surviving vault. This can be explained by the fact that the place was probably inhabited again in the early Medieval era, despite the baths being abandoned and the building materials reused at the end of the Ancient period. They were continuously occupied from then on, which ensured that the walls were somehow kept in a decent state. The monks of the Monastery of Saint Mathurin settled in the baths area, followed by the Abbots of Cluny in the 14<sup>th</sup> century who chose the place to become their Parisian main residence before building a *hôtel* (townhouse) there based on the Roman foundations of the buildings. After the

French Revolution, they were rented by the Charenton lunatic asylum. They were later used by the City of Paris as a stone storage **6** (accommodating various architectural designs and sculptures found during the archaeological excavations which took place in the city) before the parcel of land was sold to the State ; the latter acquired the collection of Alexandre du Sommerard in 1843 and the *Hôtel de Cluny*, a remarkable architectural ensemble, to house a museum. The listing of the *Thermae de Cluny* as a Historical Monument in 1862 granted further state protection to these architectural vestiges of the history of the city.

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### An important restoration

A largescale restoration campaign which goal was to clean the claddings (external surfaces) of the *frigidarium* walls and to restore the plasters of the vault was finalised in 2009. The restorers first conducted a series of interventions with conservation purposes including indepth dusting, treatment of the loss of cohesion and adherence with lime injections, treatment of the surfaces by microsandblasting allowing the removal of saline deposits, complete with the diffusion of a product used to consolidate the weakest spots. In addition, the vault was subjected to several operations such as the fixing of some plastered surfaces and the replacement of corroded fixations dating from the previous restoration campaign. The patinas applied in the 1940's were removed and when new ones were needed to harmonise the look on the surface of the vault, they were produced using materials similar to ancient plasters. It is possible to tell them from the previous layers so that the particular contribution of this recent campaign remains visible.

### The *thermae*: the spaces and their functions

- Caldarium** : room dedicated to hot bathing.
- Destrictarium** : room in the caldarium where athletes would scrape their skin with a strigil.
- Frigidarium** : cold room.
- Laconicum** : hot dry room heated with a brasero.
- Natatio** : place equivalent to a swimming pool in Roman baths.
- Palestra** : space dedicated to wrestling and physical exercise.
- Sudatorium** : sweating room.
- Tepidarium** : warm room.
- Cloakroom (ou apodyterium)** : a room where athletes would leave their personal belongings.



**4** Console adorned with the prow of a ship



**5** Superimposition of plaster layers



**6** *Thermae* and lapidary collection, circa 1845

#### Photos credits :

**1** et **5** musée de cluny / DR, **2** RMN-GP / Daniel Armaude,  
**3** RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda, **4** et **6** RMN-GP / Gérard Blot

Middle AgesMiddle of the 19th century

Continuous occupation of the *thermae*

1485-1500

Building of the *hôtel* (townhouse) of the Abbots of Cluny

1843

The State purchases the du Sommerard Collection and the *hôtel de Cluny*

1862

The *thermae* are declared a Historical Monument

2009

End of the restoration campaign of the *Frigidarium* vault