

THE HIGHLIGHTS

1st FLOOR / ROOM 1

INTRODUCTION / GREEK SPORT: ATHLETIC EVENTS

For the Ancient Greeks, the significance of sport went far beyond competitions. It was an integral part of their culture and embedded in everyday life, playing a crucial role in the quest for both physical and spiritual excellence. The ideals of perfection, fair play and surpassing oneself championed during competitions in ancient times still inspire the values of modern sport to this day. The importance attached to the balance between body and mind, as well as the moral values are a reminder that sport goes beyond mere physical performance and can represent a path to personal and collective fulfilment.



The Discobolus by Myron

Mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his work *Natural History*, the *Discobolus* by Myron is an iconic Ancient Greek sculpture. This statue embodies the quintessence of artistic perfection and physical energy. Cast in the fifth century BC, it is the fruit of the ingenuity and artistic vision of Myron, an acclaimed Classical Greek sculptor.

Through the centuries, the *Discobolus* by Myron has continued to enthral and inspire artists, art historians and enthusiasts of aesthetics. Copies and adaptations of the work have been crafted down the ages, attesting to its enduring nature as a timeless artistic model.

Discobolus by Myron, Hellenistic copy, third century BC, bronze, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich (Germany) ©Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich

Other key works:

- **The Bow of Odysseus by Bernard Buffet** (Galerie Maurice Garnier, Paris)
- **Attic black-figured neck-amphora - Atalanta wrestling Peleus** (Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich, Germany)
- **Hercules the archer by Antoine Bourdelle** (Musée Bourdelle, Paris)
- **Fragment of gravestone with discobolus** (National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece)
- **Attic red-figured psykter** (Archäologische Sammlung der Universität, Zurich, Switzerland)
- **Attic red-figured kylix** (Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, Italy)

1st FLOOR / ROOM 2

GREEK SPORT: HORSE RACING ETRUSCAN SPORT, BETWEEN GREECE AND ROME

In Greece, equestrian competitions comprised three main events: the horse with rider race, when the rider sat astride the horse with no saddle; the *biga* race, which was contested in two-wheeled chariots drawn by two horses, and the *quadriga* race, with a chariot drawn by four horses.

The Etruscan civilisation flourished in central Italy in the last millennium BC. Their language and origins are still very much a mystery to us, partly because sources are lacking, but we know quite a bit more about their sports games. This is thanks to the various Etruscan frescoes that have come down to us, which once decorated hypogea, underground tombs. These funerary frescoes, particularly those from Tarquinia or Chiusi, have been conserved for the most part and give us a clear idea of their sporting practices.

Charioteer of Delphi (cast)

The Charioteer of Delphi is a masterpiece of Classical Greek sculpture. Dating back to the fifth century BC, the original is in the collections of the Archaeological Museum of Delphi and is one of the few original bronze sculptures to have survived. Large ancient bronze statues are very rare as most of them were melted down during and after Antiquity.

The Charioteer was discovered in Delphi by French archaeologists in 1896. This life-size sculpture represents a chariot driver with all the characteristics of a Greek coachman: a long tunic, riding crop and reins held in his hands.



Charioteer of Delphi (cast), Original from the fifth century BC, plaster copy, cast from the Musée du Louvre, Paris. Centre Camille Jullian, Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme, Aix-en-Provence (CNRS, Aix Marseille Université)

Other key works:

- **Statue of the Boxer at Rest (copy)** (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, Italy)
- **Attic black-figured stamnos depicting a chariot race** (Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität, Würzburg, Germany)
- **Attic psykter** (Antikensammlung, Basel, Switzerland)
- **Statuette of jumping athlete with arms raised** (Museo archeologico dell'Agro Falisco, Civita Castellana, Italy)
- **Candelabrum in form of shot-put figure** (Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, Italy)
- **Thymiaterion** (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon)

2ND FLOOR / ROOM 1 ROMAN HORSE RACING

The founding of the city of Rome in the eighth century BC heralded the Roman era which lasted for more than a millennium. Its height was reached in the first century when the Roman Empire covered the whole of the Mediterranean area. Having conquered the Greek and Etruscan worlds, Roman civilisation began to embrace their cultures. It thus set significant store by sports events, equestrian races in particular.

In Rome, the *Circus Maximus* stadium hosted chariot races. Built from the seventh century BC and redeveloped several times, it could accommodate around 150,000 spectators in Julius Caesar's day. Four factions (or teams) competed during these races, each distinguished by a different colour: blue, red, green or white.

Funerary relief from Ostia



This first-century white marble sculpture comes from Ostia, the Ancient Rome port. Today, it is in the safekeeping of the Vatican museums.

This relief would have been part of a funerary monument, probably honouring the two figures on the left. It showcases a race with four-horse chariots, driven by the *agitor* (the most accomplished of the charioteers). There are two figures on the right: the *hortator* (the rider who helped the charioteers to navigate) and the *sparsor* (who sprinkled water in front of the horses' nostrils). In the background, the man wearing a laurel wreath crown is a winning charioteer. Many details from the *Circus Maximus* have been sculpted: on the right of the sculpture feature *carceres*, the stalls where the horses waited before the start; in the centre, the starting gates with dolphins enabled the number of laps to be counted



Funerary relief from Ostia depicting a four-horse chariot race in the Circus Maximus, Ostia (Italy), first century, Italian white marble - Musei Vaticani, Città del Vaticano (Vatican City)

Other key works:

- **Bas-relief - Winged cupids riding a chariot** (Musée départemental Arles antique, Arles)
- **Bas-relief - Chariot race** (Lugdunum - Musée & théâtres romains, Lyon) 
- **Mosaics of Baccano** (Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome, Italy) 
- **Bust of a charioteer** (Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome, Italy)
- **Intaglio stone depicting a four-horse chariot race (Circus Maximus)** (Musée archéologique, Dijon)

2ND FLOOR / ROOM 2 ROMAN ATHLETICS

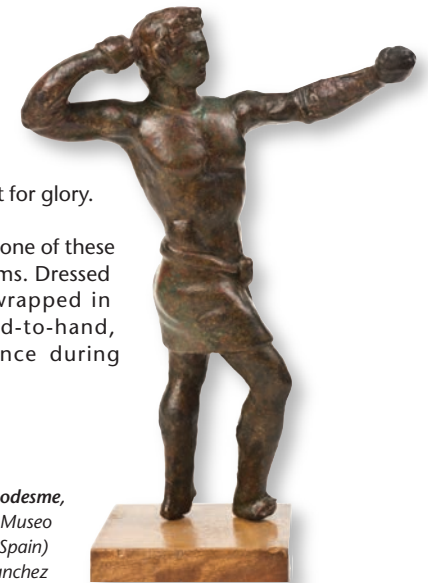
On the subject of sport, Roman and Greek practices have often been compared. Whereas for the Greeks, an Olympic crown was the ultimate glory, for Roman citizens, participating in a sports competition in public was a sign of dishonour. Their athletes were therefore professionals, often originally slaves.

Despite these two diametrically opposed visions, one similarity would emerge when the Romans turned sport into full-on entertainment for a public looking for thrills and excitement.

The boxer with kynodesme

Ever since Rome's beginnings, boxing was the Romans' favourite spectator sport. It was a display of bravery, strength and resilience that captivated the crowds. Ancient Roman boxing was a test of courage and determination, embodying the brutality of combat and the quest for glory.

The statuette from Mérida in Spain thus portrays one of these boxers who fought each other in ancient stadiums. Dressed simply in a kynodesme, with their hands wrapped in himantes, these athletes, who fought hand-to-hand, had to demonstrate courage and endurance during these often very violent matches.



The boxer with kynodesme, Mérida, second century, bronze, Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida (Spain) Archivo MNAR - José Luis Sanchez

Other key works:

- **Oil lamp with two boxers fighting** (Lugdunum - Musée & théâtres romains, Lyon)
- **Statuette of Faustkämpfer** (Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Basel, Switzerland)

2ND FLOOR / ROOMS 3 AND 4 KNIGHTS / THE ROUND TABLE

In the Middle Ages, the sports known from the Roman era endured for a time in Constantinople, but in the West, new practices were entering the scene at the same time as the heroic figure of the knight. This was a fighter on horseback, a warrior, who excelled on the battlefield. A whole literary canon emerged around the knight theme, not least the Arthurian legend. This described the ideal knight as demonstrating such values as courage, devotion, courteousness and honour.



Casket: mythological and battle scenes

This sumptuous casket decorated with ivory plaques attests to Byzantine artistic creation between the tenth and eleventh centuries. Crafted in Constantinople just before the first millennium, it is adorned with ivory plaques and illustrates the transition between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Indeed, the sculpted lid depicts a battle scene between chariots, symbols of Antiquity, on one side, while on the other side there is a mediaeval fortification.

Casket: mythological and battle scenes, Byzantium, tenth-eleventh centuries, sculpted ivory, Musée de Cluny - Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris. ©Paris, Musée de Cluny - Musée national du Moyen Âge

Greco-Roman mythological scenes grace either side of the casket, including the adventures of Hercules and the abduction of Ganymede, the cup-bearer of the gods. Decorating the whole are friezes of rosettes and diverse plant motifs. This casket was probably used in a domestic, secular setting

Other key works:

- **Statuette: Knight** (Musée du Louvre, Department of Decorative Arts, Paris)
- **Knight's head wearing chain mail** (Musée du Louvre, Sculptures Department, Paris)

Armorial of the Round Table

This manuscript, dating back to the late fifteenth century, is an armorial. It consists of 177 sheets presenting a physical description of the legendary Arthur and more than 150 knights of the Round Table, along with their coats-of-arms, of which heralds were specialists. Written in French, the knight's name can be read on the first line of the folio: "*Meraugis de Portlesguez*", son of Mark of Cornwall. His arms, described and drawn at the bottom of parchment, are said to be "argent a bordure gules" which means on a white background with a red outline.

Armorial of the Round Table, Late fifteenth century (1490 - 1500), parchment, BnF, bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris. ©Bibliothèque nationale de France

Other key works:

- **Sword** (Musée de l'Armée, Paris)

3RD FLOOR / ROOM 1 MEDIAEVAL JOUSTING AND TOURNAMENTS

In the historian Nithard's *On the Dissensions of the Sons of Louis the Pious*, written in the ninth century, equestrian battles simulating war are accurately described, without being called "tournaments" for all that. Regular records of the equestrian sport do not appear until the mid-eleventh century; but by the twelfth century this practice was widespread in Europe.

Whether fought on foot or horseback, these combats were used both to train for war and to counter idleness. Despite condemnation from the Church, this practice gained ground throughout the late Middle Ages until the tragic accident when King Henry II of France lost his life during a jousting tournament against the Count of Montgomery in 1159.

Le Jouvencel

Le Jouvencel is traditionally attributed to Jean de Bueil, a captain-general of Charles VII and companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc. This prose work, which was more likely written by several authors within Jean de Bueil's entourage, tells the life story of a character: the first section is dedicated to his youth and decision to join the war as a soldier; the second to his military career; and the third part relates his exploits and marriage to a King's daughter.

It is an enjoyable read, with nostalgic undertones and hints of humour. The fictional characters come to life within a realistic context, which no doubt explains the success of the work. Numerous copies of it were made and produced within a short time interval. The work on display here is one of sixteen manuscripts that have come down to us.

Different illuminations brighten up the work and its narrative. The one shown here is of a combat on foot between two knights both equipped with armour, a sword and a shield. The friendly battle is taking place before spectators gathered in front of two tents that are reminiscent of the organisation of tournaments. Other weapons are also portrayed: spears and double-headed axes, providing evidence of the knight's arsenal.



Le Jouvencel by Jean de Bueil, fifteenth century, manuscript in French, parchment, 136 pages, binding red Morocco leather, Manuscripts Department, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. ©Bibliothèque nationale de France

Other key works:

- **Jousting armour** (Musée de l'Armée, Paris)
- **The Dauphin, future Charles V in jousting attire** (Musée de l'Armée, Paris)
- **Recumbent effigy of a knight** (Musée des Augustins, Toulouse)
- **Chrétien de Troyes, Gaucher de Dourdan, Mennessier and Gerbert de Montreuil, Romance of Perceval the Welshman and continuations** (BnF, Manuscripts Department, Paris)
- **Diurnal intended for Arras** (Bibliothèque municipale, Draguignan)

3RD FLOOR / ROOM 2

TOURNAMENTS, JOUSTING AND COURTLY LOVE: CHIVALRIC CHALLENGES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Mediaeval tournaments, i.e. collective contests, made way for jousts - successive one-to-one fights. This change came in response to an array of cultural shifts, not least a new model of knight, more inclined to courteousness, in search of love, glory and a higher social standing, which could be achieved through public combats. Each knight, who fought for God, a lord or a young lady's affections, had to be easily recognisable on entering the arena. The champions put on a show.



Tapestry: Scenes from the Story of the Buzzard, circa 1480, tapestry: wool, linen, silk and silver thread, Musée du Louvre, Department of Decorative Arts from the Middle Ages, Renaissance and modern times, on loan to the Musée national du Moyen Âge - musée de Cluny, Paris. ©RMN-GP

Tapestry: Scenes from the Story of the Buzzard

This tapestry shows the final episode from a Germanic courtly poem, *the Story of the Buzzard*, which recounts the adventures of a royal couple from whom the eponymous bird (buzzard) steals a ring. Divided into two parts, the piece shows the tournament attended by the young couple, then the two of them leaving. In the centre, an archway and an unrolled scroll separate the story in two. The scene on the right shows the contest between two knights, in front of an attentive row of spectators. The couple are watching from beneath the archway. In the left-hand scene, the two young people are mounting

the same horse and leaving the gathering to the sounds of trumpets. This tapestry evokes the role that women played in mediaeval sports contests: they attended, inspired the participants but are seldom depicted taking part themselves.

Other key works:

- **The Romance of the Rose** (Bibliothèque municipale de Draguignan)
- **Armour, palatine's equestrian armour, military saddle, war sallet, spear tip and jousting helmet** (Musée de l'Armée, Paris / MBA de Rennes) [🔊](#)
- **The Moissac ball** (Regional Cultural Affairs Directorate/DRAC Occitania, Toulouse) [🔊](#)
- **The pas d'armes (tournament) of Sandricourt** (BnF, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris) [🔊](#)
- **The new Chronicles of France and England, written and compiled by Jehan Froissart** (BnF, Manuscripts Department, Paris)
- **Cartel (letter of challenge) sent by Edward III, King of England, to Philip VI of Valois** (Archives nationales, Paris) [🔊](#)
- **Lithograph by Eugène Delacroix, Duel between Faust and Valentine** (Musée du Louvre - Musée national Eugène-Delacroix, Paris)