

The « Ancient arms and armours » department



Equestrian armour of François 1st, realised between 153-1546. Inv. G117 © Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP.

The ground floor of the Army Museum west wing displays on a permanent basis one of the world's most important collection of ancient arms and armours, of both French and foreign origin. Under the supervision of the Ancient Department (13th – 17th centuries), this collection gathers thousands of objects on more than 2000 square meters (21500 square feet) of display space. With an entirely renewed museography, these rooms present a twofold course, one chronological, the other thematical.

The chronological course : the iron man

Starting with a didactic room and a brief reminder of war in Prehistory and Ancient times, the course recounts five hundred years of French military history. From Saint Louis to Louis the 13th, the pieces displayed enable to follow warfare's technical evolution from the 13th century up to the first half of the 17th century. Didactic material recalls the major conflicts which punctuate this period of time in Europe, and evokes the setting up of a permanent army by the king of France.

The medieval room

This part of the Museum illustrates the major role played by the knighthood in medieval warfare, in which shock power prevails. The collections displayed especially enable to understand the apparition and development of the armour. During the last centuries of the Middle-Ages, new weapons appear : the firearms, both artillery and portable firearms. The Hundred Years' War, won by France in 1453, highlights the role of both the infantry and the artillery on the battlefields.

At the end of this conflict, the king Charles the 7th creates the permanent, regular army.



The medieval room © Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP.



Cul-de-lampe of a culvrin of Charles V, ca. 1530 Inv. N 569 © Paris, musée de l'Armée / RMN-GP.

The Louis the 13th room

The 16th century is punctuated by European-size conflicts : Italian wars between 1494 and 1515, wars against the Empire between 1520 and 1559 – or by severe interior crisis such as the religious wars. The technical breakthroughs lead to tactical evolutions: cavalry gives up the first place, at the end of this period of time, to the infantry, whose firepower increases constantly as formations of arquebusiers and musketeers, along with the pikers, become more and more important.

A specific space is dedicated of the Ottoman Empire's military forces, a threat for Christian Europe, but a rear alliance for France in its struggle against the Habsburgs.

The Thirty Years war (1618-1648), which ends this section of the Museum, forms an important break in both French and European military history. The era of gang warfare, made up mostly of mercenaries living off important seizures among civil populations, comes to an end. The Thirty Years war is also the last conflict in which the integral iron armour is worn in Western Europe. From 1660 onwards, Louis the 14th, assisted by Louvois, sets up the modern army, that is to say professional troops abiding by rules.

The thematic course : arms and life

The chronological course is completed by several thematical spaces, which replace the objects according to their use as well as their social context. The artistic dimension of these pieces is enhanced by the major aesthetic interest of many of them.

The arsenal : the arsenal's gallery

This space puts back together the appearance of a late 16th century arsenal. It is a visible reserve as well, providing shelter for some 2 500 pieces dating from the 15th up to the 18th centuries. On fir-wood shells and racks, these collections are made up of defensive weapons (armours, body and head protections), offensive weapons (shafted weapons, knives, projectiles and firearms) as well as numerous pieces of harness (saddles, bits, spurs, stirrups).



The arsenal, a visible reserve of the museum
© Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP



Pulverin powder . Inv. M2109,
ca. 1670 © Paris, musée de
l'Armée / RMN -GP

Noble life : hunting, jousting, tournaments

A nourishing activity dating back to the origins of mankind, hunting in the Middle Ages is at the basis of noble education and way of life. It is one of the favourite occupations in aristocratic circles, where it stands for war-training as well. The Army Museum offers a comprehensive survey of the hunter's weaponry from the 16th century to the early 19th century (projectiles, knives, shafted weapons, firearms).

Hunting and jousting, along with hunting and warfare, are an essential expression of the noble way of life both in the Middle Ages and in modern times. Ancestors of the sports tournaments, these often magnificent shows glorify both the physical skills and the social prestige of aristocracy's members. Indeed, they are linked to the courtly ideal, a constituent element of the chivalry's spirit in the Middle Ages. The saddles in the Army Museum account for the great variety of these tournaments, well understood thanks to the illustrated collection of Emperor Maximilian 1st (1459-1519).



Suit of armour for Gestech (german
jousting), ca.1490-1500. Inv. G 164 ©
Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

Arms and armours of the world



Kabuto (japanese helmet). 17thc.
Inv. H471 © Paris, musée de
l'Armée /RMN-GP.

The oriental cabinet and the Japanese cabinet

The oriental arms and armours collections of the Army Museum are made up essentially of the remnants of the Crown's collection and of Napoleon 3rd's donations to the former Artillery Museum. The whole collection is therefore a various one, with armours, knives and firearms ranging from the 15th century down to the early 20th century. Four main war universe in particular are displayed: the ottoman empire, moghol India, imperial China and the samurai's Japan.

The European cabinet (16th-18th centuries)

The European cabinet is a specific space which displays knives and portable firearms generally designed for hunting for important individuals. Most of these arms, which are of great technical and aesthetical interest, are unique copies. Many firearms are quite ahead of their time, but conceptions and conditions of production at the time didn't allow for them to spread.



Equestrian armour of Otto Henri, 1533. Bayern, Inv. G 40 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

The European room

The former southwest dining hall is dedicated to the activity of the main European weaponry workshops in the 16th century. The collections on display gather saddles from the main weaponry centers of the time : Milan in northern Italy, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Landshut in southern Germany and Innsbruck in the Tyrol. In the 1540's, French weaponry production, which develops under the influence of the lombardic craftsman, is characterised by the emergence of an original style fed by the manierist contribution of Fontainebleau's school.



Breast plate in the roman style, Italian workshop, ca. 1550. Inv. : G298 © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

Arms and armours of the Crown : the royal room



Louis the 13th piece of armour for the neck. In the center, a portrait of his father, Henri the 4th. Inv. 2837 PO © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

Last but not least, displayed as a whole for the first time, the prestigious collections of arms and armours of the Crown are now shown in the former northwest dining hall, decorated by Joseph Parrocel in the 17th century and restored in 2005. The Crown collections come from the arms cabinets of the kings of France, and were increased by the Bourbons, Henry 4th and mainly Louis 13th , a great collector of arms. Organized into an inventory under Louis 14th 's reign, they are put together in the "Garde-Meuble", a stock open to the public one day a week from 1778 onwards. The French Revolution scatters some of the Crown's arms and armours. What's left of them becomes the core collection of the Artillery Museum founded in 1796, and transferred in the Invalides Hostel after the 1870-1871 war.



The royal room © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.



Child's armour of Louis the 13th, ca. 1610. Inv. G197. Height: 1,34 m. © Paris, musée de l'Armée/RMN-GP.

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