

Marriage in the Late Middle Ages: Museum Objects from Spain and France (1300-1450)

This comprehensive catalog presents 42 objects from Spanish and French museums that illuminate marriage practices, ceremonies, and cultural contexts in the late Middle Ages. The collection spans religious and secular art, decorative objects, jewelry, and textiles from the Gothic period.

Spanish Museums

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), Barcelona

The MNAC holds one of the world's finest collections of Catalan Gothic art, [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#)[↗] with exceptional representation of marriage themes in religious and decorative contexts.

Religious Art: Altarpieces with Marriage Scenes

1. Altarpiece of the Virgin

- **Artist:** Jaume Serra
- **Date:** c. 1367-1381
- **Type:** Altarpiece with twelve scenes from the Life of the Virgin
- **Dimensions:** 346.3 x 321 x 26 cm
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/altarpiece-virgin/jaume-serra/015916-cjt>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts the Seven Joys of Mary including the Marriage of the Virgin (Esponsales). [museunacional](#)[↗] From the monastery of Santa Maria de Sigena, commissioned after 1363. [Wikipedia](#)[↗] Includes scenes from Annunciation (mystical marriage to God) through Coronation.

2. Virgin of the Angels

- **Artist:** Pere Serra
- **Date:** c. 1385
- **Type:** Panel painting
- **Dimensions:** 195.8 x 131 x 11 cm
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/virgin-angels/pere-serra/003950-000>
- **Marriage Connection:** Shows the Virgin as Queen of Heaven with divine spouse (Christ Child), representing mystical marriage. Musical angels surround the pair. Painted for Tortosa cathedral, reflects medieval concept of spiritual marriage.

3. Annunciation and Three Kings of the Epiphany

- **Artist:** Circle of Ferrer Bassa and Arnau Bassa
- **Date:** Second quarter of 14th century
- **Type:** Altarpiece panel
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/annunciation-and-three-kings-epiphany/ferrer-i-arnau-bassa/015855-000>
- **Marriage Connection:** The Annunciation represents the Virgin Mary's mystical marriage to God through the Holy Spirit. Shows Tuscan painting influences, particularly Florentine and Siennese styles. [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#)[↗]

4. Triptych of the Crucifixion and the Annunciation

- **Artist:** Bicci di Lorenzo
- **Date:** c. 1430
- **Type:** Triptych, tempera and gold leaf on wood
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/triptych-crucifixion-and-annunciation/bicci-di-lorenzo/212804-cjt>
- **Marriage Connection:** Features the Annunciation scene representing the Virgin Mary's mystical marriage. [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ Italian work demonstrating importance of this marriage theme in Gothic devotional art.

5. Annunciation, Nativity, Dormition and Coronation of the Virgin

- **Artist:** Anonymous (Castile)
- **Date:** 14th-15th century
- **Type:** Panel ensemble from funeral setting
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/annunciation-nativity-dormition-and-coronation-virgin/anonim-castella/004375-000>
- **Marriage Connection:** Includes Annunciation (mystical marriage) and Coronation (enthronement as Queen of Heaven, bride of Christ). [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ Eight panels including weepers in mourning.

6. Predella with Annunciation

- **Artist:** Francesc Comes
- **Date:** c. 1400
- **Type:** Predella, tempera, stucco reliefs and gold leaf on wood
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/saint-john-baptist-annunciation-crucifixion-saint-catherine-alexandria/francesc-comes/064991-000>
- **Marriage Connection:** Features Annunciation alongside Saint Catherine of Alexandria, who refused earthly marriage for mystical marriage to Christ. Demonstrates pairing of earthly and spiritual marriage themes.

7. Coronation of the Virgin

- **Artist:** Bernat Martorell
- **Date:** c. 1445-1452
- **Type:** Predella compartment
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/coronation-virgin/bernat-martorell/251548-000>
- **Marriage Connection:** Represents culmination of Virgin's mystical marriage to Christ, showing her enthroned as Queen of Heaven. Part of altarpiece with Annunciation at Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montreal. [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗

Saints with Marriage Themes

8. Saint Catherine of Alexandria

- **Artist:** Bernat Martorell
- **Date:** c. 1442-1445
- **Type:** Altarpiece compartment
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/saint-michael-martyrdom-saint-eulalia-and-saint-catherine/bernat-martorell/064042-000>
- **Marriage Connection:** Saint Catherine refused to marry the Roman emperor, claiming mystical marriage to Christ. [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ Shows importance of Catherine's marriage narrative in Gothic altarpiece programs.

9. Altarpiece of Saint Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins

- **Artist:** Joan Reixach
- **Date:** 1468 (slightly outside range but important for understanding tradition)
- **Type:** Altarpiece

- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/altarpiece-saint-ursula-and-eleven-thousand-virgins/joan-reixach/015927-cjt>
- **Marriage Connection:** Saint Ursula was requested in marriage by a pagan prince. She agreed only if he would be baptized and accompany her on pilgrimage to Rome. [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ Depicts betrothal, marriage conditions, and pre-nuptial agreements common in aristocratic marriages.

10. Altarpiece of Saint Barbara

- **Artist:** Gonçal Peris Sarrià
- **Date:** c. 1410-1425
- **Type:** Altarpiece
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/es/colleccio/retablo-de-santa-barbara/goncal-peris/035672-cjt>
- **Marriage Connection:** Saint Barbara was imprisoned by her father in a tower to prevent conversion and control her marriage prospects. [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ Represents parental control over daughters' marriages, central theme in late medieval marriage practices.

Decorative Arts and Liturgical Objects

11. Bridal Chest with the Annunciation

- **Artist:** Circle of Pere Nunyes and Enrique Fernández
- **Date:** Second quarter of 16th century (represents continuation of 15th-century tradition)
- **Type:** Walnut or poplar bride's chest (cofre de núvia)
- **URL:** <https://blog.museunacional.cat/en/a-luxurious-16th-century-brides-chest-in-the-museu-nacional/>
- **Marriage Connection:** Marriage chests were essential dowry furnishings holding the trousseau—clothing, jewelry, linens, precious objects—that brides brought to marriage.

12. Italian Cofanetti (Marriage Chests)

- **Origin:** Italy
- **Date:** 15th century
- **Type:** Small chests with gesso pastiglia decoration
- **URL:** <https://xarxa.museunacional.cat/en/tresors-de-terres-remotes/>
- **Marriage Connection:** Used to keep prized possessions gifted at engagement or marriage, such as brooches, jewelry, precious stones. Decorated with Roman history themes emphasizing virtues like honor, purity, chastity—all associated with marriage. [Museunacional](#) ↗

13. Saint George Sculpture

- **Artist:** Parisian workshop
- **Date:** c. 1420-1450
- **Type:** Cast, forged and engraved silver, gilded and polychromed
- **Dimensions:** 54 x 24 x 24 cm
- **URL:** <https://xarxa.museunacional.cat/en/tresors-de-terres-remotes/>
- **Marriage Connection:** Purchased by the Generalitat in 1536 for Palau de la Generalitat. [Museunacional](#) ↗ [irBarcelona](#) ↗ Saint George was patron of knighthood and chivalry, central to aristocratic marriage alliances and courtly love traditions. Present during state ceremonies including marriage negotiations.

14. The Dove (Colom Eucarístic)

- **Date:** Medieval period
- **Type:** Liturgical vessel (Eucharistic dove)
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/ca/el-colom>
- **Marriage Connection:** According to the museum, "The dove is honest because it remains faithful to its partner even after death. For this reason it symbolizes fidelity and marriage." [Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya](#) ↗ Used in liturgical contexts including marriage ceremonies where fidelity was central.

15. Multiple Late Medieval Reliquary Busts

- **Date:** Various, 14th-15th century
- **Type:** Gothic silverwork and reliquaries
- **URL:** <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/collections/medieval-gothic-art>
- **Marriage Connection:** Part of Gothic church treasury collections used in marriage ceremonies and celebrations where relics blessed unions.

French Museums

Musée du Louvre, Paris

The Louvre's medieval collections include exceptional examples of marriage chests, ivory objects with courtly love themes, and jewelry from the Gothic period.

Marriage Chests and Coffrets

16. Marriage Coffret: Moorish Dance and Scenes of Gaming and Hunting

- **Title (French):** Coffret de mariage : danse mauresque et scènes de jeu et de chasse
- **Date:** 1435-1470
- **Type:** Marriage coffer, carved ivory/bone on wood core
- **Department:** Objets d'art du Moyen Age
- **Inventory:** MRR 82
- **Dimensions:** H: 7.9 cm, L: 16.4 cm, D: 13 cm
- **Origin:** Flanders or Netherlands
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010109268>
- **Marriage Connection:** Explicitly identified as marriage coffer. Features courtly love scenes including couples with falcons, hunting, fruit gathering, Moorish dance. Symbolically evokes "Echecs amoureux" romance (1370-1380). Themes relate to courtly power and power of love—typical marriage iconography. [Louvre Collections](#)[↗]

17. Hexagonal Marriage Coffret: Story of Paris

- **Title (French):** Coffret hexagonal : histoire de Pâris
- **Date:** circa 1400
- **Type:** Marriage coffer, bone and wood with marquetry (alla certosina)
- **Inventory:** OA 125
- **Origin:** Venice, Italy (Embriachi workshop)
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010106692>
- **Marriage Connection:** Explicitly described as marriage coffer. Lid features winged genii holding shields where couple's coats of arms were painted. Depicts Story of Paris including Judgment of Paris, popular marriage chest theme. [Louvre Collections](#)[↗] Embriachi workshop specialized in marriage coffers. [louvre](#)[↗] [Wordpress](#)[↗]

Ivory Objects with Courtly Love Themes

18. Hair-Parting Tool: Couple of Lovers

- **Title (French):** Gravoir : scène profane (couple d'amoureux)
- **Date:** 1300-1315
- **Type:** Ivory gravoir (hair-parting tool)
- **Inventory:** RFML.OA.2018.5.1
- **Dimensions:** H: 20 cm, W: 2.8 cm, T: 1.3 cm
- **Origin:** Paris, France
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010430563>

- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts couple of lovers—woman holds falcon (courtship symbol) while kneeling lover embraces her. Characteristic of Parisian ivory carvers early 14th century. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗ Shows courtship/betrothal themes common in marriage gifts. [louvre](#) ↗

19. Knife Handle: Couple of Lovers

- **Title (French):** Manche de couteau : couple d'amants
- **Date:** circa 1300
- **Type:** Ivory knife handle or gravoir handle
- **Inventory:** OA 6269
- **Dimensions:** H: 8.2 cm, W: 3.5 cm, T: 1 cm
- **Origin:** Paris, France
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010099200>
- **Marriage Connection:** Young couple in embrace, man offers woman a flower—classic courtship/betrothal gesture. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗ Flower offering traditional symbol of marriage proposals in medieval art. [louvre](#) ↗

20. Presentation Knife Handle: Courtly Scenes

- **Title (French):** Manche de couteau présentoir : scènes courtoises
- **Date:** Mid to late 14th century (1350-1400)
- **Type:** Ivory presentation knife handle
- **Inventory:** OA 10963
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010098864>
- **Marriage Connection:** Features "Offrande du coeur" (Offering of the Heart)—young man kneeling presents his heart to lady, classic betrothal/marriage allegory. Also shows woman weaving flower chapel (wreath) associated with marriage ceremonies. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗

21. Coffre: Saints and Story of Perceval

- **Title (French):** Coffret : saints ; histoire de Perceval le Gallois
- **Date:** First decades of 14th century (1300-1330)
- **Type:** Ivory coffer
- **Inventory:** OA 120
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010104045>
- **Marriage Connection:** Features courtly romance scenes from Arthurian legend (Perceval), popular subject for marriage chests. Narrative style characteristic of early 14th century ivory work for wedding gifts. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗

22. Panel from Composite Coffre: Courtly Episodes

- **Title (French):** Panneau d'un coffret composite : épisodes courtois
- **Date:** 1330-1350
- **Type:** Ivory panel from coffer
- **Inventory:** OA 10957-10960
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010104924>
- **Marriage Connection:** Multiple panels showing courtly love scenes including couples hunting with falcons (symbols of nobility and courtship), women rescued by knights, courtly pursuits. Composite coffers often given as marriage gifts. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗ [Louvre Collections](#) ↗

Paintings with Marriage Themes

23. The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine with Nine Angels

- **Title (French):** Le Mariage mystique de sainte Catherine, avec neuf anges
- **Date:** 1365-1370
- **Type:** Painting on wood with gold background (poplar)

- **Inventory:** MI 413, Campana 75
- **Dimensions:** H: 1.15 m, W: 0.53 m
- **Origin:** Italian School (attributed to Jacopo di Cione or circle)
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010053631>
- **Marriage Connection:** Christ places ring on Saint Catherine's finger, symbolizing spiritual marriage. Extremely popular in late medieval art, often commissioned for actual marriage celebrations representing ideal of sacred marriage. Frequently chosen for marriage dowry paintings and wedding gifts.

24. Triptych: The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine

- **Title (French):** Triptyque : Le Mariage mystique de sainte Catherine
- **Date:** 14th century (1300-1400)
- **Type:** Triptych painting on wood with gold
- **Inventory:** MI 360, Campana 82
- **Origin:** Siena, 14th century
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010053630>
- **Marriage Connection:** Central panel shows Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine surrounded by saints, Annunciation on side panels. Popular subject for wedding celebrations and dowry art.

25. The Triumph of Venus Venerated by Six Legendary Lovers

- **Title (French):** Le Triomphe de Vénus vénérée par six amoureux légendaires
- **Date:** 14th century (1300-1400)
- **Type:** Desco da parto (childbirth tray), tempera on poplar wood
- **Inventory:** RF 2089
- **Dimensions:** Diameter: 0.51 m
- **Origin:** Florence, Italy (Master of Charles of Durazzo)
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010063699>
- **Marriage Connection:** Birth tray given to new mothers but commissioned at marriage. Featured in Metropolitan Museum's 2008-2009 "Love and Marriage in Renaissance Italy" exhibition. Shows Venus being venerated by six legendary lovers (Achilles, Tristan, Lancelot, Samson, Paris, Troilus), celebrating love and marriage. Traditional marriage/birth gifts in 14th-15th century Italy. [louvre](#) ↗

Rings and Jewelry

26. Signet Ring Called "of Saint Louis"

- **Title (French):** Anneau sigillaire dit "de saint Louis"
- **Date:** 1300-1400 (14th century)
- **Type:** Gold signet ring with enameled fleur-de-lis decoration and sapphire intaglio
- **Inventory:** MR 92
- **Origin:** France
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010096530>
- **Marriage Connection:** Signet rings sealed marriage contracts and legal documents. Gold band with enameled fleur-de-lis decoration dates to 14th century, comparable to Sainte-Chapelle Apocalypse binding style. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗ Exchanged during betrothal ceremonies among nobility. [Louvre Collections](#) ↗

27. Ring

- **Title (French):** Bague
- **Date:** 1385-1415
- **Type:** Gold or gilded silver ring with sapphire
- **Inventory:** MRR 232
- **Origin:** France
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010104794>

- **Marriage Connection:** Ring with rectangular setting containing stone (likely sapphire of Auvergne) mounted in claws, hollow band decorated with interlaced foliage. Rings were essential marriage tokens exchanged during betrothal and wedding ceremonies. [Blogger ↗](#) [Recreación Historia ↗](#) Elaborate decoration suggests high-status betrothal or wedding ring for nobility. [Louvre Collections ↗](#)

28. Ring Decorated with Dragon Heads

- **Title (French):** Bague ornée de têtes de dragons
- **Date:** Probably first decades of 15th century (c. 1400-1430)
- **Type:** Gold ring with sapphire and dragon head decoration
- **Inventory:** OA 3052
- **Origin:** Venice, Italy
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010097257>
- **Marriage Connection:** Venetian gold ring with elevated oval setting containing sapphire held by four claws, decorated with dragon heads in openwork. Elaborate design and precious materials indicate likely betrothal or wedding ring. Dragons were protective symbols appropriate for marriage jewelry. [Louvre Collections ↗](#)

29. Signet Ring (Called "of the Black Prince")

- **Title (French):** Bague sigillaire (Anneau sigillaire dit "du Prince noir")
- **Date:** 1350-1400 (2nd half of 14th century)
- **Type:** Gold signet ring with ruby intaglio
- **Inventory:** OA 9597
- **Origin:** England
- **URL:** <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010100447>
- **Marriage Connection:** Signet rings with personal seals authenticated marriage contracts and legal documents related to marriage alliances. Elaborate ring with inscriptions and royal associations used to seal important documents including marriage agreements among nobility. [Louvre Collections ↗](#)

Musée de Cluny (Musée national du Moyen Âge), Paris

France's national museum of the Middle Ages holds exceptional collections of marriage-related objects including the famous Jewish marriage ring from the Colmar Treasure. [Wikipedia ↗](#)

Jewelry and Personal Objects

30. Jewish Marriage Ring from the Colmar Treasure

- **Title (French):** Bague de mariage du trésor de Colmar
- **Date:** First quarter - second quarter of 14th century (c. 1300)
- **Type:** Gold ring with enamel and filigree decoration
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/bague-mariage-tresor-de-colmar.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Jewish marriage ring used during wedding ceremonies. Groom offered bride a ring, typically gold, worn only on wedding day. Gift of ring was key moment in nuptial ritual sealing matrimonial bond. Features small edifice symbolizing couple's new home and destroyed Temple of Jerusalem. Bears Hebrew words "mazel tov" (good omen/good luck). [musee-moyenage ↗](#)

31. Ivory Casket: Attack on the Castle of Love

- **Title (French):** Coffret : Assaut du château d'amour
- **Date:** Around 1310
- **Type:** Ivory casket with elephant ivory plaques and copper fittings
- **Inventory:** Cl. 23840
- **Dimensions:** H: 9.7 cm, W: 25.7 cm, D: 16.7 cm
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/coffret-assaut-chateau-amour.html>

- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts courtly love and chivalric romance. Used by social elites to store jewelry, letters, precious objects. Lid shows allegorical assault of castle of love, with ladies defending castle shooting flowers at assailants. Side panels depict Tristan and Iseult, Lancelot, other courtly romances. [Musée de Cluny](#).[↗] [Musée de Cluny](#)[↗] Typically given as betrothal or wedding gifts.

Ivory Mirror Cases with Courtly Love Themes

32. Mirror Case: The God of Love with Four Couples

- **Title (French):** Valve de boîte à miroir : le dieu d'amour dardant ses traits sur quatre couples d'amoureux
- **Date:** First quarter - second quarter of 14th century (c. 1320-1340)
- **Type:** Carved elephant ivory mirror case valve
- **Inventory:** Cl. 23949
- **Dimensions:** H: 12 cm, W: 11.8 cm, D: 0.9 cm
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/valve-de-boite-a-miroir-dieu.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts god of love (Cupid) shooting arrows at four couples arranged in verdant chambers. [musee-moyenage](#)[↗] [Musée de Cluny](#)[↗] Mirror cases with courtly love themes were popular among aristocracy, often given as betrothal or marriage gifts.

33. Mirror Case: Tristan and Iseult

- **Title (French):** Valve de boîte à miroir : Tristan et Yseult
- **Date:** Late 13th - early 14th century
- **Type:** Carved elephant ivory mirror case valve
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/valve-miroir-tristan-yseult.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts famous lovers Tristan and Iseult from medieval romance literature. [Musée de Cluny](#).[↗] Mirror cases were luxury items associated with courtship and marriage, depicting idealized romantic love. Part of courtly love objects exchanged between couples.

34. Mirror Valve Called "The Assembly"

- **Title (French):** Valve de miroir dite "de l'assemblée"
- **Date:** Late 13th - early 14th century (4th quarter 13th century - 1st quarter 14th century)
- **Type:** Circular carved ivory mirror valve
- **Inventory:** Cl. 404
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/valve-de-miroir-assemblee.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts royal assembly scene with king, queen, and attendants, possibly representing marriage or family gathering. Some scholars interpret this as Philippe le Bel and his family. Shows formal court proceedings that may relate to matrimonial ceremonies or dynastic matters.

Religious Art with Marriage Themes

35. Marble Sculpture: Presentation at the Temple

- **Title (French):** Présentation au Temple
- **Date:** Late 14th century
- **Type:** Marble sculpture, high relief
- **Inventory:** Cl. 2045
- **Origin:** Burgundy
- **Attribution:** André Beauneveu (attributed)
- **URL:** Referenced in POP database
- **Marriage Connection:** Presentation at Temple includes marriage of Mary and Joseph, key biblical scene depicting matrimonial themes. Religious sculpture used in church context to illustrate sacred marriage.

36. Scenes from the Life of the Virgin

- **Title (French):** Scènes de la vie de la Vierge
- **Date:** 1330-1340
- **Type:** Antependium (altar frontal), painted wood panel
- **Origin:** England, made for Dominicans of Thetford
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/devant-autel-vie-vierge.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts episodes from Virgin Mary's life, likely including Marriage of the Virgin (Annunciation, Nativity, Death of Virgin, Adoration of Magi, Education of Virgin). [Musée de Cluny](#) ↗ Marriage of Virgin common iconographic theme representing sacred matrimony. Made for Dominican order promoting Marian devotion.

Secular Art and Decorative Objects

37. Stained Glass Panel: Chess Players

- **Title (French):** Joueurs d'échecs
- **Date:** Second quarter of 15th century (around 1435-1450)
- **Type:** Civil stained glass with grisaille and silver yellow on white glass
- **Inventory:** Cl. 23422
- **Dimensions:** H: 54.2 cm, W: 54 cm
- **Origin:** Hôtel de la Bessée, Villefranche-sur-Saône
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/en/collection/chess-players.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depicts man and woman playing chess, metaphor for courtship and romantic sparring in medieval period. Lady feigns surprise at distracted suitor. Chess commonly used as allegory for "game" of courtship and marriage negotiations. Rare example of civil stained glass depicting courtly love themes. [Paris Unlocked](#) ↗ [Musée de Cluny](#) ↗

38. Painting: The Jouvenel des Ursins Family

- **Title (French):** La famille Jouvenel des Ursins
- **Date:** Between 1445 and 1449
- **Type:** Painting on wood panel with gold brocade relief background
- **Origin:** Family chapel in Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/la-famille-jouvenel-des-ursins.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Family portrait depicts Jean Jouvenel (1360-1431), wife Michelle de Vitry, and eleven children. Includes "two married women recognizable by their horned headdresses" (coiffe à cornes), distinctive married women's fashion of mid-15th century France. [Musée de Cluny](#) ↗ [Lavièb-aile](#) ↗ Provides visual evidence of marriage status indicators in late medieval French society.

39. Engraving Tool with Lady and Dog

- **Title (French):** Gravoir dont le sommet représente une dame portant un petit chien
- **Date:** Mid-14th century
- **Type:** Carved elephant ivory grooming tool (gravoir/hair parter)
- **Inventory:** Cl. 23931
- **Dimensions:** H: 10.7 cm
- **Origin:** France (Paris?), found in Seine near former Tour de Nesle
- **URL:** Referenced in recent acquisitions
- **Marriage Connection:** Ivory combs and hair-parting tools (gravours) were symbols of eroticism in courtly literature, often depicted in courtly love scenes. In medieval romance (like Chrétien de Troyes' Lancelot), grooming implements had amorous significance. Luxury toiletry items given as courtship or wedding gifts. [Apollo](#) ↗

Textiles and Later Objects

40. Lock and Key with Heart-Shaped Key

- **Title (French):** Serrure et sa clé
- **Date:** Late 15th century (c. 1480-1500)
- **Type:** Germanic lock with secret mechanism and key with heart-shaped shaft
- **Inventory:** Cl. 13222 a and b
- **Dimensions:** Lock - H: 36 cm, W: 45 cm; Key - H: 10.8 cm, W: 4.6 cm
- **URL:** <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/collection/oeuvre/serrure-et-cle.html>
- **Marriage Connection:** Key has refined forged shaft in shape of heart. Museum notes "it evokes the nuptial context in which such chests could be encountered." [Musée de Cluny](#) ↗ Marriage chests (cassoni) with elaborate locks were traditional wedding gifts containing bride's dowry or trousseau.

41. The Lady and the Unicorn Tapestries

- **Title (French):** La Dame à la licorne
- **Date:** Around 1500 (c. 1500-1510)
- **Type:** Six wool and silk tapestries (millefleurs style)
- **Inventory:** Cl. 10831-10836
- **Dimensions:** Vary, approximately 3-4 meters in height and width
- **Commissioner:** Le Viste family; possibly Antoine II Le Viste for engagement to Jacqueline Raguier
- **URL:** Referenced at Musée de Cluny
- **Marriage Connection:** World-famous tapestries may have been commissioned as marriage celebration. Sixth tapestry bears motto "À mon seul désir" (To my only desire) with letters A and I, interpreted as bride and groom initials. Represent five senses plus sixth sense of love/understanding, themes associated with courtly love and possibly marriage. [The Art Newspaper](#) ↗ [Ivar Hagendoorn](#) ↗ Some scholars suggest wedding present.

42. Tapestries: History of Lérian and Lauréolle

- **Title (French):** L'Histoire de Lérian et Lauréolle
- **Date:** Late 15th - early 16th century
- **Type:** Tapestry series (3 pieces in collection)
- **Inventory:** Cl. 23249, Cl. 22742, Cl. 23445
- **Source:** Based on "Cárcel de Amor" by Diego de San Pedro
- **URL:** <https://pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/joconde/50030028860>
- **Marriage Connection:** Depict courtly romance scenes including lovers, interventions by royalty, and courtship narratives. Represents literature of love and courtship surrounding marriage in aristocratic circles.

Summary Analysis

This collection of 42 objects from Spanish and French museums demonstrates the multifaceted nature of marriage in the late Middle Ages across religious, legal, social, and artistic dimensions.

Geographic Distribution:

- Spain: 15 objects (all from MNAC Barcelona)
- France: 27 objects (14 from Louvre, 13 from Musée de Cluny)

Object Types:

- Religious art (altarpieces, paintings, sculptures): 14 objects
- Marriage chests and coffers: 6 objects
- Ivory carvings (mirror cases, tool handles, caskets): 12 objects
- Rings and jewelry: 5 objects
- Textiles and tapestries: 3 objects
- Other decorative arts: 2 objects

Key Marriage Themes Represented:

1. **Mystical Marriage:** Religious imagery of Virgin Mary's Annunciation and Coronation; Saint Catherine's spiritual union with Christ
2. **Courtly Love:** Secular art depicting courtship rituals, romantic pursuits, troubadour themes
3. **Betrothal and Ceremony:** Rings exchanged, flower offerings, heart presentations
4. **Dowries and Trousseau:** Marriage chests containing bride's possessions
5. **Legal and Social Status:** Signet rings for contracts, distinctive dress for married women
6. **Religious Blessing:** Liturgical objects used in marriage ceremonies
7. **Parental Control:** Saints' narratives reflecting family authority over marriage alliances

Cultural Insights: The objects reveal marriage as simultaneously a religious sacrament, legal contract, economic transaction, and romantic ideal. French collections show strong Parisian ivory carving traditions with courtly love themes, while Spanish holdings emphasize religious marriage iconography in Gothic altarpieces. Both traditions valued elaborate material culture—from golden rings to painted chests—that celebrated and legitimized matrimonial unions across social classes.