

GRAND CURTIUS

FINALISATION OF THE WEAPONS COLLECTION TOUR

NEW SECTION
FOR BLADED WEAPONS
AND MILITARY
PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT



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CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
2. From the Weapons Museum to the Grand Curtius Weapons department	4
3. Finalisation of the permanent tour of the weapons department.....	5
• New bladed weapons section.....	6
• Military weapons	9
• Civilian weapons	10
• The cannons courtyard	11
• Outreach facility.....	11
4. Collaborations.....	12
5. Practical information	13
6. Publications	13
7. A festive weekend to celebrate the permanent weapons collection	14
8. Contacts	15

1. INTRODUCTION

The reorganisation of the weapons department, which began in 2018, will be completed in November 2023 with the inauguration of the section dedicated to bladed weapons and military protective equipment, which has been set up on the third floor of the Palais Curtius.

Let us salute the work carried out by the entire museum team, under the dynamic and energetic leadership of the current curator, who has breathed new life into this exhibition, which resolutely focuses on accessibility for the public.

The Councillor for Culture
and Interculturalism
for the City of Liège



Reinforcement for an "escoffia" jousting helmet, Augsburg, Holy Roman Empire, circa 1550. Bladed weapons and protective equipment section © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

2. FROM THE WEAPONS MUSEUM TO THE GRAND CURTIUS WEAPONS DEPARTMENT

The Weapons Museum is one of the oldest museums in Liège: it was created in 1885, at the behest of the municipal authorities and thanks to an initial donation from a local weapons manufacturer, Pierre-Joseph Lemille. In this way, the desire expressed by various bodies to provide the city of Liège with a permanent structure entirely dedicated to one of its most significant industries – armoury – took shape. At that time, as had already long been the case, Liège was indeed one of the world's leading cities in the production of small arms.

The Weapons Museum, which is still one of the world's leading museums of its kind, was housed in the former Hayme de Bomal mansion, once owned by Lemille, until it was incorporated into the Grand Curtius museum complex, which opened in 2009.

Consequently, the Grand Curtius weapons department is the heir to the Weapons Museum. It contains several thousand firearms and bladed weapons, not only from the major production centre of Liège but also from other parts of the world.

Its collections, spanning all periods of the history of weaponry, hold significant interest both technically and aesthetically, as they contain, among many exceptional pieces, some masterpieces of applied art (such as engraving, chiselling, inlaying, etc.).

Faced with this priceless heritage, in 2018 the Grand Curtius Weapons department began an in-depth overhaul of the weapons displays, which have gradually found their place in the splendid and monumental Palais Curtius built around 1600 by Jean Curtius (born in Liège in 1551, died in Leganez in 1628), whose name the museum now bears, a wealthy merchant who made his fortune in trading weapons and gunpowder and who was the official munitions dealer for the Spanish Army.

3. FINALISATION OF THE PERMANENT TOUR OF THE WEAPONS DEPARTMENT

Among the permanent collections at the Grand Curtius (Weaponry, Glassware, Decorative Arts, Religious and Mosan Art and Archaeology), the weapons department occupies a special place, entirely dedicated to one of Liège's most distinctive industries: armoury.

Though it was incorporated into the main exhibition with the other collections, this exceptional arsenal deserved to be given even greater prominence. The reorganisation of the weapons department that began in 2018 has now been finalised and is to be completed with the inauguration of the section devoted to bladed weapons and military protective equipment.

A permanent tour through four sections

The permanent tour of the weapons collection in the Palais Curtius now boasts four sections:

- Bladed weapons and military protective equipment (on the third floor of the Palais Curtius).
- Military weapons (on the second floor of the Palais Curtius).
- Civilian weapons – hunting and shooting (on the first floor of the Palais Curtius).
- The cannons courtyard (Palais Curtius courtyard).

The permanent collection includes firearms, bladed weapons, ammunition and accessories related to their use and the technology they use. They come from every continent and country, from prehistoric times to the present day. From the outset, it has served as a kind of conservatory of civilian and military weaponry arts and crafts.

The display design of each section is set out in a chronological and technical sequence.

To discover the entire collection of weapons in chronological order, it is recommended to

start the visit with the new section on bladed weapons and protective equipment, followed by the section on military weapons, before finishing with the section devoted to civilian weapons.

Today, over 1,300 weapons are displayed across three floors of the Palais Curtius. Consequently, in successive stages, in the wake of what it resembled when it was created, one of the jewels of Liège's heritage is undergoing a rebirth, poised to attract both Belgian and foreign audiences.

Management of the permanent weapons collection

The permanent collection of the weapons department is made up of purchases and donations, almost all of which belong to the City of Liège, which manages the collection, in collaboration with an administrative committee which, given the museum's origins as a private foundation, is also made up of representatives from the arms industry as well as individuals appointed for the expertise in the field. A non-profit-making association, called "Les Amis du Musée d'Armes de Liège" (the Friends of the Liège Weapons Museum), founded in 1964, initially worked with the City of Liège on a first modernisation of the building and presentation of its collections. Today, it supports the museum's cultural actions and contributes to its reputation.

The Grand Curtius weapons department ranks among the world's leading museums in its field due to the breadth and diversity of its collections.

THE NEW SECTION OF BLADED WEAPONS AND PROTECTIVE MILITARY EQUIPMENT

Since 24th November 2023, approximately 200 bladed weapons and various pieces of protective equipment from Liège or around the world have been on display on the 3rd floor of the Palais Curtius.

Unlike the military weapons and civilian weapons sections, most of the objects on display here do not originate from Liège, as the Principality of Liège did not specialise in weapons production until the 16th century. Until the end of the Middle Ages, the region's main weapons manufacturing centres were Brussels, Tournai and Bruges.

Spanning a period from the late Bronze Age (1,200 BCE) to the present day, the exhibits are grouped into 15 categories: swords, sabres, knives, bayonets, maces, battle axes, polearms, throwing weapons, pikes and spears, bows, crossbows, chest protections, helmets and armour. There is also a section displaying trade weapons, which heralded the end of bladed weapon usage as the primary weapons worldwide.



"Viking" sword, Europe, 8th to 9th century © Grand Curtius, City of Liège



Smallsword bearing the Spanish coat of arms, Toledo, 1893. © Grand Curtius, City of Liège



Halberd used by Prince-Elector August of Saxony's bodyguards (1553-1586). © Grand Curtius, City of Liège



Yataghan, Ottoman Empire, 19th century © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

INSTRUCTIONAL SCREENS

A selection of period documents and nine screens have been incorporated into the display design for the permanent tour of the new bladed weapons section. They aim to provide understanding of how the weapons were made and used. The following themes are addressed: use of swords, the anatomy and forging of a sword, the manufacture of a roundel dagger, the use of different types of bows and crossbows, armour crafting by an armourer, the use of pole weapons (spears and halberds), illustrations of trade weapons and ethnic weapons, as well as, lastly, the use of different bladed weapons and armoured combat.

A FOCUS ON SOME WEAPONS AND PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Pierre Paul Rubens' rapier



Pierre Paul Rubens' rapier, England, 17th century. Property of the King Baudouin Foundation © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

This rapier was given to Pierre Paul Rubens (1577-1640) in 1630 by King Charles I of England. That year, Rubens had employed his diplomatic skills in service of the peace negotiations aimed at putting an end to five years of conflict between the two countries. This complex situation must be seen in the context of the wars that shook Europe at the beginning of the 17th century and which incidentally led to the accumulation of the fortune of Jean Curtius.

The rapier is a type of sword with a long, thin blade that appeared at the end of the 16th century. Floral motifs and fourteen medallions decorate the gold pattern-welded handle. It is probably of Italian origin.

This exceptional weapon, which is listed as a Treasure of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and has been lent to the Grand Curtius complex, is the property of the King Baudouin Foundation.

It comes from the generous donation by the children of Count (Jean-Marie) van der Stegen de Schriek at the behest of Count (Joseph) van der Stegen de Schriek.

Edo period Samurai armour



Edo period Samurai armour, Japan, 1700-1710. © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

This magnificent Samurai armour dates back to the first decades of the 18th century (the Edo period) and belonged to one of the generals from the Oda clan, in the province of Echizen and later Owari province in Japan.

This complete and original Samurai armour boasts elements consistent with the era and the armourer that made it. The helmet is a rare iron zunari kabuto (a head-shaped helmet) with high-level kirigane (iron decorations). The lower part is decorated with a wavy band with karakusa patterns, while on the top there is an openwork rhombus from which a long ken descends towards the visor. The front plate is embossed in relief with well-defined eyebrows and wrinkles.

The four-plated shikoro (neck protection) is attached according to kebiki odoshi, as is the rest of the armour. Its style is okegawa-dō, with horizontal panels with a wavy profile, decorated with an unusual golden-grey pattern.

The sleeves (kote) are made of a high-quality mesh framework with iron protections. The armour is decorated with a maedate made up of small leaves replicating a half crown.

The case is the original one made of untreated wood. This is undoubtedly the highest rank armour typical of the generals of the Oda clan.

Cuirassier's helmet



Cuirassier's helmet, Belgian 1843 model, made by Fonson in Brussels, Belgium, 1843 © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

A cuirassier was a military cavalryman who was heavily equipped and armed with both bladed weapons and firearms.

The cuirassier, whose heyday was during the Napoleonic Wars, was protected by cuirass body armour, hence his name. This body armour was mainly made up of a breastplate and burnished backplate, fastened together by laces.

Originating from the heavy cavalry of the Ancien Régime and the battle cavalry of the French Revolution, the first cuirassier regiments in France were created in 1801 (under the reign of the Consulate). Far from being a mere military fashion, this new type of cavalry truly constituted the spearhead of Napoleon's tactics at that time.

As for the brand-new Belgian army, it created a cuirassier regiment in October 1830, whose equipment was very similar to their French counterparts, especially regarding the helmet.

MILITARY WEAPONS

Since October 2021, the 2nd floor of the Palais Curtius features a display of over 500 military firearms dating from the 15th to 21st century.

The military weapons section is split into three main areas, the first of which is made up of a corridor of educational displays based on a chronological sequence of weapons systems, the aim of which is to explain the tactical and strategic contributions of firearms from a historical and technical standpoint. The second area allows visitors to discover these weapons in an international and sequential context, particularly through the American Civil War and the World Wars. The third area is devoted more specifically to production from Liège and Belgium, with three rooms based on the Belgian army, exports and, finally, the 19th century in Liège, which is considered to be the golden age of the Liège weapons industry.



Claxton machine gun, 1868, military weapons section © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

CIVILIAN WEAPONS

Approximately 600 remarkable items from the history of the weapons industry from the 16th to 21st century are on display on the 1st floor of the Palais Curtius, in the civilian weapons section (hunting and shooting), inaugurated in September 2018. The items on display have been selected for their technical as well as aesthetic interest and especially the way they showcase high-precision craftsmanship (masterpieces of applied art, engraving, chiselling, inlaying, etc.), which reflects the desire to pay tribute to their manufacturers' work, with the ambition of providing one of the finest museum showcases in the world for the weapons industry.



View of a room in the civilian weapons section © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

A TREASURE NOT TO BE MISSED!!

LUXURY RIFLE FROM THE WORLD FAIR IN PARIS IN 1867

This remarkable weapon is listed as a Treasure of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. In technical terms, this is a side-by-side barrelled shotgun using the Lefauchaux system, after the name of the inventor of the cartridge used with this weapon. In production terms, it was made thanks to cooperation between three weapons manufacturers. The mechanical parts were made by Pierre-Joseph Lemille in Liège, the pattern-welded canon by Léopold Bernard in Paris and the chiselling and gold relief inlaying were carried out by Joseph Boussart in Liège. This rifle, made in 1865, was put on display at the World Fair in Paris in 1867. Pierre-Joseph Lemille donated it to the museum when it was founded in 1885. It is one of the weapons department's outstanding items.



Lefauchaux rifle - A Liège made rifle from the World Fair in Paris in 1867, Liège, 1865 © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

THE CANNONS COURTYARD

In the courtyard opposite the entrance to the emblematic Palais Curtius, 19th-century cannons from the Liège foundries take pride of place: two mortars dating from 1812 come from the Imperial Foundry in Liège, whilst the other cannons on display, dating back to 1818 and 1870, come from the Liège Royal Cannon Foundry.

An educational corner dedicated to poliorcetics (the art of conducting sieges, through the ages and types of equipment) will soon be incorporated into this area.

WEAPONS DEPARTMENT OUTREACH FACILITY – PALAIS CURTIUS GROUND FLOOR

In 2024, the Grand Curtius aims to create a mobile outreach facility dedicated to weapons. From its location on the ground floor, it will complement the tour of the weapons department's collections at the Grand Curtius with resources for outreach and interpreting the works presented on the three floors of the museum.

The activities available will be possible in independent, individual and collective format, in a fun way, aimed at all ages.

This essential outreach zone will take on the task of considering the stakes posed by the conflicts in our history; it will look at the various ways of transmitting this historical memory and the values associated with it, while remaining within a museum and historical framework.



The cannons courtyard, Palais Curtius © Grand Curtius, City of Liège

4. COLLABORATIONS

At the instigation of

Mr. Mehmet Aydogdu, Councillor for Culture and Interculturalism for the City of Liège

Mr. Pierre Paquet, Director of Museums for the City of Liège

Mrs. Pauline Bovy, Administrative Director of the Culture and Tourism Department for the City of Liège

Coordination and exhibition design

Mr. Loïc Servais, Curator of the Grand Curtius Weapons Department

Acknowledgements

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The King Baudouin Foundation.

The Friends of the Weapons Museum. Liège Museum ABSL.

All the personnel at the City of Liège's museums.

The donors of works.

The volunteers impassioned by weapons and history.

All the people who have taken part in finalising the redeployment of the Grand Curtius Weapons Department, through their knowledge and know-how.

THE KING BAUDOIN FOUNDATION

For over 30 years, the King Baudouin Foundation has been acting to preserve and protect our heritage. Its Heritage Fund acquires artworks and historical documents to promote them and make them accessible to all. Its collection is divided up between more than 90 public institutions that can be found throughout the country.

With the help of many patrons, as the years have passed, the Fund has been able to build up a rich collection.

Many patrons share the Foundation's concern to preserve heritage. They can contact the Foundation's Philanthropy Centre with their questions, to express their wishes or to obtain advice on carrying out their project. The various

possibilities and tools available are jointly examined. If philanthropists wish to involve the Foundation in their project, the Foundation will work with them to devise a tailor-made formula.

A wide variety of projects have been carried out as a result, including the preserving collections of works and documents, maintaining historic buildings and elements of our natural heritage, encouraging target groups to come into contact with our heritage, and restoring significant elements of our movable and built heritage.

The King Baudouin Foundation is a charitable foundation that supports projects or individuals working to build a better society. It seeks to make a lasting contribution to greater justice, democracy and respect for diversity. It is an independent and pluralistic foundation authorised to receive gifts, bequests and donations. It was created in 1976 to mark the 25th anniversary of the reign of King Baudouin.

www.kbs-frb.be/en

LE GRAND CURTIUS

The City of Liège's museums bring together the Grand Curtius, La Boverie, MULUM (the lighting museum), the Grétry Museum, the Ansembourg Museum (currently undergoing renovation) and the Heritage Funds.

The Grand Curtius is an art and history museum that boasts more than 5,000-m² of collections spread throughout five departments: archaeology, religious and Mosan art, weapons, glassware and decorative arts. During the entire duration of work on the tram system, the glassware department is being held in the reserve.

Within its walls, visitors can discover more than 7,000 years of history in Liège, in a remarkable architectural setting. The 17th-century Palais Curtius, the emblematic building that houses the museum, plays host to the weapons collection, which is internationally renowned thanks to the quantity of items on display as well as their quality.

The Grand Curtius is a societal museum which acts as a link between the past and the present, from prehistory to the most modern productions, as reflected by its programme of temporary exhibitions and its partnership policy.

It is supported by the City of Liège and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

5. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

GRAND CURTIUS

Access: Féronstrée, 136 – 4000 Liège and Quai de Maestricht, 13 – 4000 Liège

From Monday to Sunday:
10.00 > 18.00, closed on Tuesday
Closed on 1/01, 01/05, 1/11, 02/11, 11/11 and 25/12.

Admission (permanent collections)

Adults: 9 euros
Seniors, groups, unemployed: 5 euros Article 27 concession holders: 1.25 euros

Free admission:
- For under 26-year-olds.
- Holders of the MuseumPassMusée.
- On the 1st Sunday of the month.
- Accompanied school groups located within the territory of the City of Liège and for students of the Saint-Luc and Académie de Liège schools.
- Journalists on presentation of a press card.

Shop – Cafeteria with terraces

6. PUBLICATIONS

The exhibition is accompanied by two publications, namely the Weapons Department catalogue and a visitors' guide, the Essentials of the Weapons Department, available for free from the museum's reception desk.

CATALOGUE

Weapons Department, Liège, 2023, 235 pages.
ISBN: 0978-2-930968-02-5

This work was published to coincide with the finalisation of the redeployment of the weapons collections at the Palais Curtius, inaugurated on 23rd November 2023.



An initiative of the City of Liège:
Under the auspices of Mehmet Aydogdu, Councillor for Culture and Tourism for the City of Liège Pierre Paquet, Director of Museums for the City of Liège (and Jean-Marc Gay, the former Director of Museums for the City of Liège).
Pauline Bovy, Administrative Director of the Culture and Tourism department.
Coordinated by Loïc Servais, Curator of the Grand Curtius Weapons Department.
In collaboration with Glaude Gaier (+), Philippe Joris, Adrien Marnat, Arnaud Thiry and Loïc Servais, as well as with all the personnel of the museums.

This catalogue is available in French, English, Dutch and German, on sale from the Grand Curtius shop and at the bookshop / shop at the La Boverie museum for € 28.

VISITOR'S GUIDE

Make sure you get the most out of your visit by obtaining a copy of *The Essentials of the Weapons Department*, which is a guide that, as its name suggests, contains all the essential information on the permanent collection of weapons at the Grand Curtius.

This visitors' guide is free and available on simple request from the museum reception desk, in French, Dutch, German and English.

7. A FESTIVE WEEKEND TO CELEBRATE THE GRAND CURTIUS PERMANENT WEAPONS COLLECTION SATURDAY 25TH AND SUNDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2023

Free access to the permanent collections

As part of the inauguration of the bladed weapons and protective equipment section, as well as the finalisation of the permanent tour of the museum's weapons collection, access to the entire weapons department at the Grand Curtius will be free on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th November 2023.

For this occasion, a weekend of free activities is being organised.

PROGRAMME

SATURDAY 25TH NOVEMBER

From 11.30 to 13.00: a tour with Loïc Servais, Curator of the Weapons Department at the Grand Curtius.

Discover the entire weapons department (civilian weapons, military weapons and the new section on bladed weapons and protective equipment): a guided tour with the Curator who has striven to promote the section on military weapons and the new bladed weapons section.



Loïc Servais, Curator of the weapons department at the Grand Curtius. Copyright – City of Liège – Grand Curtius.

From 14.00 to 16.00: a fencing demonstration organised in cooperation with the "Escrime Uliège" club and the "Cercle Escrime Embourg" club.



Fencing lessons using a sabre with Escrime Uliège and the Cercle Escrime Embourg club. Copyright Escrime Uliège – Cercle Escrime Embourg

From 14.00 to 16.00: creative workshops, "Dress up a knight" and "Create your Coat of Arms" with the museums' activities departments.

These two small workshops are suitable for children aged 5 years and above accompanied by their parents.

"Dress up a knight": assemble and colour the armour on the silhouette of knight.

"Create your Coat of Arms": discover heraldry, create your Coat of Arms and your escutcheon.



Edith and Sébastien, activity leaders at the City of Liège museums' activities department. Copyright – City of Liège – Grand Curtius

From 15.00 to 16.00: tour / experience sharing by a 12th / 13th century Lignard soldier.

SUNDAY 26TH NOVEMBER

From 11.30 to 12.30: tour with Loïc Servais, Curator of the Weapons Department at the Grand Curtius.

Discover the entire weapons department (civilian weapons, military weapons and the new section on bladed weapons and protective equipment): a guided tour with the Curator who has striven to promote the section on military weapons and the new bladed weapons section.



Loïc Servais, Curator of the weapons department at the Grand Curtius. Copyright – City of Liège – Grand Curtius.

From 14.00 to 16.00: creative workshops, "Dress up your knight" and "Create your Coat of Arms" with the museums' activities departments.

These two small workshops are suitable for children aged 5 years and above accompanied by their parents.

"Dress up a knight": assemble and colour the armour on the silhouette of knight.

"Create your Coat of Arms": discover heraldry, create your Coat of Arms and your escutcheon.

From 15.00 to 16.00: tour / experience sharing by a 12th / 13th century Lignard soldier.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The events on the programme for this weekend are accessible without booking. However, access to activities is subject to availability.

The events and tours are aimed at all ages, focused on a friendly atmosphere and the pleasure of meeting and sharing ideas.

Access to the weapons department during the weekend of the 25th and 26th November 2023 is also free.

8. CONTACTS

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