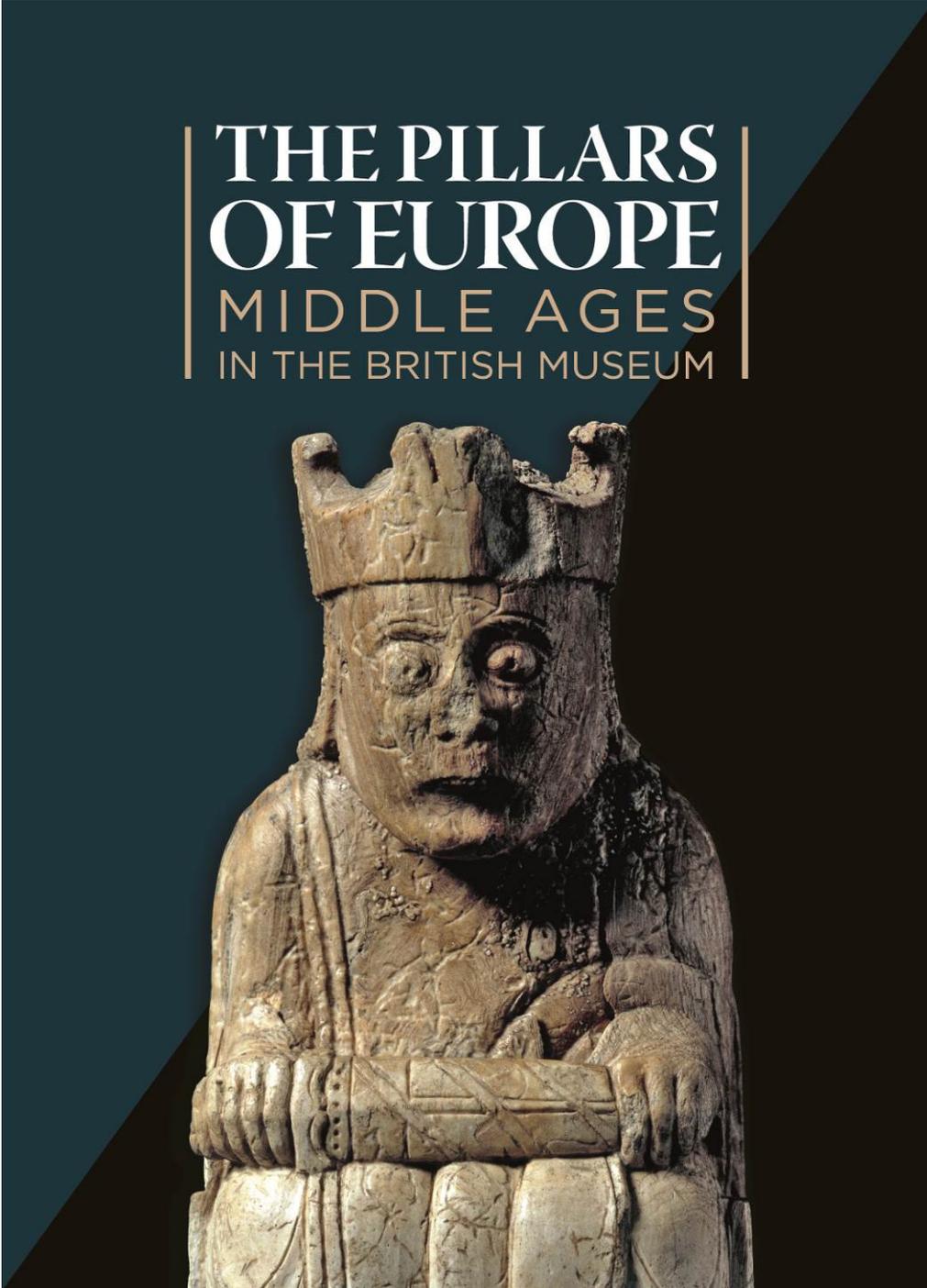




Obra Social "la Caixa"

The British
Museum

THE PILLARS
OF EUROPE
MIDDLE AGES
IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM



Press release

CaixaForum Zaragoza

From the 13th of July to the 29th of October of 2017



The exhibition, the first produced as part of the new partnership with the British Museum, explores a period when many of the states and the foundations for today's Europe were established

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In the past, historians have typified the Middle Ages as an uncivilized bridge between the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome and the Italian Renaissance and Protestant Reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, the truth is that this period, spanning more than a thousand years, was a time of enormous political, economic and cultural changes and from which emerged outstanding artistic talents and intellectual advances. *The Pillars of Europe. The Middle Ages at the British Museum* —the first show produced as a result of an agreement signed between "la Caixa" Foundation and the British Museum in 2015— explores the period from the years circa 400 to 1500 AD. Its purpose is to open a window onto the medieval world through the treasures and material culture that belonged to both to the dominant elites and other groups of society. Featuring an innovative design, the exhibition will include over 260 outstanding objects from the collections of the British Museum, many of them exhibited for the first time. The exhibition discourse is completed by loans of exceptional works from the National Archaeological Museum (Madrid), the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC, Barcelona) and the Frederic Marès Museum (Barcelona). These treasures will illustrate key events, highlight famous figures and enable visitors to learn about different aspects of the medieval world, such as life at court, war and conquest, and the personal devotion.

The Pillars of Europe. The Middle Ages at the British Museum. **Dates:** From the 13th of July to the 29th of October of 2017. **Place:** CaixaForum Zaragoza (Calle de José Anselmo Clavé, 4). **Concept and production:** "la Caixa" Foundation, in cooperation with the British Museum. **Curators:** Michael Lewis and Naomi Speakman.

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Zaragoza, July 12, 2017. The deputy director of the British Museum, Jonathan Williams; the director of Exhibitions of the Culture Department of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, Isabel Salgado; the director of CaixaForum Zaragoza, Ricardo Alfós and the curators of the exhibition Naomi Speakman and Michael Lewis presented this morning *The Pillars of Europe. The Middle Ages at the British Museum*, an exhibition that examines the Middle Ages from a broad European perspective and seeks to find the roots of a common identity.

In its cultural programme, "la Caixa" Foundation pays particular attention to the great cultures of the past. Accordingly, the institution presents exhibitions aimed at enabling audiences to discover the different ways in which men and women from different places and times have sought to answer the great universal questions, and to broaden our understanding of the world through knowledge of the most recent historical and archaeological research.

The Pillars of Europe. The Middle Ages at the British Museum is highly representative in this sense, as the show's approach goes beyond the history of individual realms, cultural traditions and national identities to place the accent on the formation of modern Europe.

Moreover, in contrast to preconceived ideas about the Middle Ages as a dark period of struggle and superstition, fear and ignorance, the show explores a view of the Middle Ages as a time of great artistic talent and cultural development, of profound political, religious and economic changes. These objects from the British Museum testify to the rich material culture of both the ruling elites and other medieval communities, offering a glimpse of shared themes from across medieval Europe, such as the splendour of the royal courts, the central role that the Church played in everyday life, the formation of states and the expansion of urban centres.

More than a thousand years full of political, economic, cultural and intellectual changes

Although historians employ the terms "medieval" and "Middle Ages" with a certain degree of flexibility, generally speaking these terms are used to designate the period in the history of Europe from the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth.

Over the course of this period, major changes affected all levels of society. The Europe of the sixteenth century was very different from the world of the fifth. All over the continent, splendid cathedrals and castles were built, many of them still standing even today, and urban expansion transformed the landscape. As the



power and status of rulers increased, so borders and cultures became more firmly established, laying the foundations for the modern European nation-states. The Church dominated everyday life and attitudes, while the expansion of trade routes, both within Europe and beyond, led to an increase in contacts between cultures. Skilled artisans created ornate works, rich in extraordinary detail, generating a world of light and colour. However, despite all this splendour and evident wealth, the majority of people lived in poverty.

Nowadays, the word "medieval" continues to be used to describe something barbarous or antiquated. However, this historic period, spanning more than one thousand years, witnessed many far-reaching political, economic and cultural changes, as well as the emergence of great artistic talents and intellectual advances. Just as conditions varied greatly from the western coasts of Portugal to crofts in northern Scotland and the palaces of the Italian city-states, so life in Europe in the year 400 was vastly different from that of 1500.

Even today, we find many fragments from our medieval past. Great stone churches and castles dominate the landscape, and artworks and objects made by skilful artisans have survived, as have certain words and place-names that reflect life in the villages of the Middle Ages.

A unique selection of works from the British Museum, combined with outstanding pieces borrowed from other collections

In addition to this original approach to the medieval period, the exhibition also stands out thanks to the design created by "la Caixa" Foundation. The innovative architecture highlights the spectacular nature of the works on show, which are divided into five sections focusing on the formation of Europe, royal power, ecclesiastical power, life at court and urban life. A final, closing section, featuring an audiovisual, is devoted to exploring the legacy of the Middle Ages down to our own time.

The Pillars of Europe includes a total of 262 works, of which 243 are from the collections of the British Museum. The show is completed by 19 pieces from the National Museum of Archaeology, the National Art Museum of Catalonia and the Frederic Marès Museum. These additional objects serve as a counterpoint to the exhibition discourse, enriching it by including the perspective of realms in southern Europe.



Within the exhibition there are a number of highlight objects, due to their historical and artistic significance and the exceptional opportunity of seeing them outside their permanent display at the British Museum. They include:

- » *King from the Lewis Chessmen* (1150-1200, possibly from Norway, found in Scotland). The Lewis chess pieces testify to the strong cultural and political connections between Britain and Scandinavia in the Middle Ages, and to the growing popularity within Europe of the game of chess, the origins of which lie in ancient India. Of the 93 pieces known to us today, 82 are in the British Museum. The chess pieces consist of elaborately worked walrus ivory and whales' teeth. The king, with his moustache and thick beard, symbolises masculine strength and represents the ideal medieval leader. His throne, crown and tunic denote his wealth and status.
- » *Disc brooch* (575-625) from England, silver-gilt plated with cloisonné garnet, filigree, glass cross and shell bosses. This type of brooch was very popular in the sixth and early-seventh centuries in Kent, an Anglo-Saxon realm in what is now southeast England. Kent established flourishing trade links and diplomatic ties with the Franks, whose kingdom occupied what is now France and parts of Germany. The brooch testifies to the wealth and growing status of this kingdom in southern England.
- » Stained-glass roundels (1480-1500, Germany). Stained glass, painted in bright colours, brought radiant life into the interior of medieval buildings. Stained-glass high windows featured ambitious decorative designs or elaborate stories. These roundels, or medallions, feature some of the most frequently found images: the Crucifixion, St Christopher carrying Christ, and St Catherine. Religious imagery was used in very different contexts, from churches to jewellery. This stained-glass roundel probably comes from the home of a wealthy family.
- » *Stone figure of a knight wearing full armour* (1375-1425, England). This statuette, which may represent St George, personifies the medieval knight. The upper body is protected by a breastplate, with a mail shirt covering the exposed parts of the neck and stomach. Clearly well-armed, he wears a sword and shield and holds what is probably a lance. The wealthier soldiers were the best armed and protected.



The exhibition is accompanied by a publication, produced by "la Caixa" Foundation and British Museum with the participation of the curators, Michael Lewis and Naomi Speakman. Moreover, a programme of parallel activities for all audiences will be organised, including a lecture exploring the history of the British Museum's medieval collection by the curator Naomi Speakman and visits especially designed for different groups – senior citizens, families and schools.

***The Pillars of Europe* marks the start of a new partnership with the British Museum**

The partnership established between "Caixa" Foundation and the British Museum results from the interest of both institutions in promoting knowledge by jointly organising major exhibitions based on the collections conserved by the latter.

This ambitious agreement forms part a line of action pursued by "la Caixa" Foundation in recent years to establish strategic alliances with leading cultural institutions around the world with a view to intensifying the organisation's cultural activities and generating synergies with different international centres of the highest standing.

In September 2015, the Chairman of the Trustees of the British Museum, Sir Richard Lambert, and the assistant general manager of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, Elisa Durán, signed a cooperation agreement between the two institutions for the coming years. The agreement serves to intensify a relationship based on a long-standing understanding between the two institutions, which have worked together regularly for decades.

The British Museum has always been a key source of loans of works for the exhibitions that "la Caixa" organises about the great cultures of the world. Particularly notable was the British Museum's cooperation in organising the show devoted to Ancient Persia in 2006. The project for *The Pillars of Europe* is the first fruit of this new stage in cooperation between the two institutions. After opening at CaixaForum Madrid, and its pass through CaixaForum Barcelona the exhibition now arrives to CaixaForum Zaragoza.

This first exhibition will be followed by three more projects, which will go on show at the cultural centres run by "la Caixa" Foundation. These exhibitions will enable visitors to discover the veritable masterpieces conserved by the British Museum, illustrating some of the great civilisations in the history of humanity represented in its collections.



ACTIVITIES

TALK RUN BY THE CURATOR

Thursday 13 July | 7 pm

Run by Michael Lewis, curator of the exhibition

Price: €4. Limited places

ACTIVITIES FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

GUIDED TOURS

Thursdays and Saturdays | 6 pm

Sundays | 12 noon

Price per person: €3

VISITS ARRANGED FOR GROUPS

Times to be arranged

Bookings: 976 768 201

Price per group: €60

Languages: Spanish, English and French

Visit with arts discussion group

For groups: day and time to be arranged

Price per group: €60

Bookings: 976 768 201

Languages: Spanish, English and French

Individually

Tuesdays | 4.30 pm

Price per person: €4

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

FAMILY TOURS

Sundays | 11 am

Price per person: €2

Education space (5+)

A space devoted to families, with activities around the exhibition.

Free access with entry to the exhibition

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

GUIDED AND THEATRICAL TOURS

A guided tour through the exhibition that approaches the contents by observing the works of art, talking to the participants and a series of practical activities.

Levels: Primary, Secondary, Baccalaureate and Vocational Training

Duration of the theatrical tour: 1 1/2 hours

Duration of the guided tour: 1 hour

Price: €25 per group (no more than 30 students per group)

Bookings: 976 768 201



GUIDED TOURS-WORKSHOP ON THE EXHIBITION FOR SUMMER CAMPS

"In the time of castles"

Recommended age group: from 4 to 7 years old.

Duration: 1 hour

"The pillars of Europe"

Recommended age group: from 8 to 18 years old.

Duration: 1 1/2 hours

Price: €18 per group (no more than 30 children per group)

Bookings: 976 768 201



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CaixaForum Zaragoza

Calle de José Anselmo Clavé, 4,
50004 Zaragoza
Tel. 976 76 82 00

Times:

Open every day
From Monday to Sunday, from 10 am to
8 pm

"la Caixa" Foundation Information

Service:

Tel. 902 223 040
Monday to Sunday, from 9 am to 8 pm

Prices:

Admission free for "la Caixa"
customers.
Visitors other than "la Caixa"
customers: €4 (includes admission to
all exhibitions)
Admission free for minors under 16
years

Ticket sales

CaixaForum.com/agenda
Tickets are also available at
CaixaForum during public opening
times

"la Caixa" Foundation Communication Department

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