

PRESS RELEASE

Temporary exhibition
29 May 2025 – 4 January 2026

Gaulish but Roman!
Masterpieces from the National Archaeological Museum



Statuette of a wild sow, Bronze, Cahors (Lot)
© MAN / Valorie Gö

In spring 2025, the Musée de la Romanité in Nîmes invites the public to immerse themselves in the fascinating history of Roman Gaul with the exhibition "Gaulish, but Roman!". Through an exceptional partnership with the National Archaeological Museum, the exhibition explores how Gaulish and Roman cultures intertwined to shape a new, rich and complex identity. This dialogue between two civilisations reveals a world undergoing transformation, where local traditions and Roman influences are combined to forge a society that historians describe as Gallo-Roman. It is a historical immersion that offers a captivating new perspective on Roman Gaul.

"Gaulish, but Roman!" traces the history of Gaul conquered by Rome and illustrates the way in which the Gauls not only integrated but also reinterpreted Roman culture. It therefore deconstructs traditional stereotypes around the hairy, barbarian Gaul to reveal **an organised territory and society, with a developed culture and traditions**. The exhibition thus aims to reveal the material traces of a true Gallo-Roman "art of living", combining Gaulish and Roman influences, in a territory that extends beyond Narbonne, to the provinces of Aquitaine, Lyonnaise and Belgic Gaul. The chronological framework extends from the defeat of Alesia, in 52 BCE, to the 3rd century, a period during which the multiple facets of this "Gallo-Romanness" were fully expressed.

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Reclining nymph, Carrara marble, Septeuil (Yvelines) © MAN / Loïc Hamon

It also offers an opportunity to return to the origins of the National Archaeological Museum, founded by Napoleon III as a "Gallo-Roman museum", and which helped shape certain stereotypes about Gaul. Drawing on the wealth of its collections, and designed as a complement to the permanent collections of the Musée de la Romanité, the exhibition gives visitors the keys to understanding them better.

The exhibition tour opens with **the emblematic figure of the wild boar, symbol of "Hairy Gaul"** in popular culture, and which embodies the duality between Gaulish and Roman identities. **A totemic animal for the Gauls and noble game for the Romans**, the wild boar occupies a central place in both societies, fuelling the imagination of a sylvan Gaul. The exhibition is then structured around three major sequences: the development of Gallo-Roman society; the exploration of religious practices and the Gallo-Roman pantheon; and finally, a reflection on the birth of Gallo-Roman archaeology in the era of Napoleon III.

The first sequence immerses visitors in the daily life of inhabitants of Gaul after the Roman conquest. Through a selection of archaeological objects, we discover how the Gauls had to integrate the Roman model while preserving some of their traditions. This first sequence seeks to show who the inhabitants of Roman Gaul were and how their society was organised. Depending on the different social groups, this sequence focuses on citizens and elites, the Roman army in Gaul, craftspeople and their trades, but also slaves and freedmen. It is illustrated by funerary stelae, honorary instructions and everyday objects. Through the **3D restoration of the Villa de la Millière**, which it will be possible to walk through, the public discovers how the Gallo-Romans lived "in the Roman way" in the countryside of northern Gaul. The vault of the Villa, decorated with the personifications of the four seasons, **will be presented to the public for the first time since its acquisition and recent restoration by the Soissons Centre for Study and Restoration of Wall Paintings.**

Dedicated to the domain of the gods, the second sequence highlights the richness and complexity of the Gallo-Roman pantheon, the result of a syncretism between Celtic and Roman beliefs. The Gaulish gods immediately coexisted with the Roman divinities, creating a hybrid religious system where local and imperial cults were intertwined. This section presents sculptures and divine representations from both peoples, such as the **statuette of the God of Bouray**, which illustrates the presence of Celtic divinities alongside the Greco-Roman pantheon. The worship of divinities, whether public or domestic, is explored in this sequence through votive objects found in sanctuaries such as the masks of Lacroix-Saint-Ouen, which illustrate the role of ex-votos in religious rituals.

The importance of offerings is highlighted through pieces such as the ex-voto offered to Apollo Moritasgus, found in Alise-Sainte-Reine. Descriptions of animal offerings and sacrifices reveal the rituals practiced to obtain the protection of the gods, whether for healing or for successful harvests.



Canthare, gilded silver, Alise-Sainte-Reine (Côte d'Or) © MAN / Valorie Gô

Finally, the third part of the exhibition looks back at the history and evolution of archaeology in France, from its first discoveries to the institutionalisation of the discipline. This section shows how archaeology helped to rediscover Roman Gaul and to forge a new "national identity" according to the political and ideological wishes of Napoleon III. Passionate about Roman history, he played a crucial role in the rediscovery of this Gallo-Roman past, particularly through his support for the excavations at Alesia, which contributed to the opening of the National Archaeological Museum in 1867. The 19th century had a strong influence on education, popular culture and the construction of a national imagination around the Gauls, which is still very present today. Formerly considered "an auxiliary science of history", during the 20th century archaeology acquired the status of a science capable of understanding Mankind in its entirety. For a long time, this discipline was effectively reduced to the discovery of treasures and beautiful objects. Thus, the archaeology of Roman Gaul, long limited to necropolises and the exploration of towns and villas, is now interested in simple farms, ancient plots, agricultural practices and the evidence they leave behind.

Through a fun and educational approach, the exhibition integrates **digital devices** that invite visitors to dive into the history of Roman Gaul, to explore archaeological discoveries in detail with **3D models of the works on display**, and even to project themselves into a **classroom of the Third Republic**.

General Curatorship

Nicolas de Larquier, Chief Curator of the Musée de la Romanité

Scientific Curatorship

Thierry Dechezleprêtre, Chief Heritage Curator, Scientific Manager of the Roman Gaul collections, National Archaeological Museum and National Estate of the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye

Executive Curatorship

Claire Champetier, Assistant Curator, Musée de la Romanité

Scientific and Educational Advisors

Cécile Carrier, Study Manager, Musée de la Romanité

Lucile Novellini, Head of Public Services, Musée de la Romanité

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