

Medieval Marriage in Museum Collections (1300-1500)

A Survey of 38 Objects from North American and European Museums

This report documents museum objects that illuminate marriage customs, ceremonies, legal frameworks, and domestic life in late medieval Europe (1300-1500).

WEDDING RINGS & BETROTHAL JEWELRY

1. Jewish Ceremonial Wedding Ring from the Colmar Treasure

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: ca. 1300–before 1348

Origin: Italy

Description: Gold and enamel ring with Hebrew inscription "mazel tov" and miniature architectural house representing the Temple or the couple's future home. Made as one continuous piece per Jewish law.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/789579>

2. Silver Fede Ring

Museum: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Date: 15th century

Origin: Italy

Description: Ring with two bezels showing clasped hands (fede motif) and hands clasping a heart, symbolizing marital faith and love.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121141/fede-ring-unknown/>

3. Gold Posy Ring

Museum: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Date: ca. 1500-1530

Origin: England

Description: Ring with Gothic inscriptions exterior ("my.wordely.iowe+alle.my.trust") and interior ("+hert.tought.lyfe.and.lust"), used as betrothal or wedding ring.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O117008/ring-unknown/>

4. Gold Sapphire and Garnet Posy Ring

Museum: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Date: 15th century

Origin: France or England

Description: Double-set ring with sapphire and garnet, hidden compartment for love tokens, French inscription

"oue tout mon coer" (with all my heart).

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O377723/ring-unknown/>

5. Gilded Silver Ring with Clasped Hands and Sapphire

Museum: Cleveland Museum of Art

Date: 14th century

Origin: England (Winchester)

Description: Fede ring with sun and moon symbols accompanying clasped hands, suggesting cosmic union in marriage.

Link: <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1950.383>

6. Gold Fede Ring with Diamond

Museum: British Museum, London

Date: 1300-1500

Origin: England or Continental Europe

Description: Pyramidal bezel with diamond crystal set above clasped hands, symbolizing eternal strength and commitment.

Link: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1857-0928-1

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS: WEDDINGS & CEREMONIES

7. Manuscript Leaf with Marriage Scene from Decretals of Gregory IX

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: ca. 1300

Origin: Bologna, Italy

Description: Tempera, ink, and gold illumination depicting marriage ceremony as prescribed by canon law in Gregory IX's 1234 Decretals.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/468476>

8. The Smithfield Decretals (Royal MS 10 E IV)

Museum: British Library, London

Date: Text ca. 1300, illuminations ca. 1340

Origin: England

Description: Lavishly illustrated legal manuscript with over 600 scenes. Book IV covers marriage law including betrothals, consent, and impediments.

Link: https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_10_E_IV

9. Royal Wedding of Edward II and Isabella of France

Museum: British Library, London

Date: 1471-1483

Origin: Bruges, Flanders

Description: Full-page illumination of 1308 royal wedding at Boulogne from Jean de Wavrin's Chroniques d'Angleterre, showing Isabella crowned in blue and gold.

Link: https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_15_E_IV

10. Marriage of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence

Museum: British Library, London

Date: 1235-1259

Origin: St Albans, England

Description: Matthew Paris's Historia Anglorum showing ring ceremony at 1236 Canterbury Cathedral wedding, created within 20 years of event.

Link: https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_14_C_VII

11. Marriage of Henry V and Catherine de Valois

Museum: British Library, London

Date: 1487-1494

Origin: France

Description: Monumental illumination of June 2, 1420 royal wedding from Grandes Chroniques de France, commissioned by Sir Thomas Thwaytes for Henry VII.

Link: https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_20_E_VI

12. Romance of Gillion de Trazegnies

Museum: J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Date: 1464

Origin: Flemish, illuminated by Lieven van Lathem

Description: Manuscript with 8 miniatures including marriage scene of Gillion to Marie d'Ostrevant, depicting Burgundian marriage customs.

Link: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/132644/lieven-van-lathem-david-aubert-roman-de-gillion-de-trazegnies-flemish-1464/>

MARRIAGE CHESTS (CASSONI)

13. Marriage Chest with Ceres and Proserpina

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: ca. 1480-95

Origin: Florence or Lucca, Italy

Description: Poplar wood with painted and gilded gesso showing Ceres in dragon-drawn chariot. Carried in wedding processions from bride's father's house to new home.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/193335>

14. Cassone with Family Arms

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: ca. 1425-50

Origin: Italy (Tuscany)

Description: Pinewood and poplar with facing eagles, armorial shields of both families, and fleurs-de-lis, advertising the dynastic marriage alliance.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459250>

15. Cassone with Conquest of Trebizond

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: after 1461

Origin: Florence, workshop of Apollonio di Giovanni

Description: Commissioned for Strozzi family with painted panels depicting Conquest of Trebizond, Strozzi emblems, and pomegranate fertility symbols.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459264>

16. Cassone with Wedding Scene

Museum: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Date: ca. 1430-1450

Origin: Florence, Italy

Description: Front panel depicts two processions converging on musicians, showing bride with maiden's plait, families in livery, and coats of arms held by angels.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O81200/cassone/>

17. Panel from a Cassone Depicting Ring Exchange

Museum: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Date: ca. 1460

Origin: Florence, Italy

Description: Gilt poplar wood showing bride and groom exchanging rings with procession of musicians and gift-bearers approaching.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O81200/cassone/> (companion to 8974-1863)

18. Panel from a Cassone: The Race of the Palio

Museum: Cleveland Museum of Art

Date: 1418

Origin: Florence, Master of Charles of Durazzo

Description: Tempera on wood commemorating 1418 Fini-Aldobrandini wedding, depicting Palio horse race on Feast of John the Baptist (June 24).

Link: <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1916.801>

19. Cassone

Museum: Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Date: ca. 1500

Origin: Italy

Description: Large marriage chest (25 3/8 × 63 5/8 × 21 7/8 inches) filled with bride's linens and furnishings, displayed prominently in bedchamber.

Link: <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/26068/cassone/>

20. The Wedding of Thetis and Peleus

Museum: Musée du Louvre, Paris

Date: ca. 1475-1500

Origin: Florence, Bartolomeo di Giovanni

Description: Tempera on poplar panel (42.5 × 150.5 cm) showing mythological wedding with gods and goddesses processing to celebrate.

Link: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010063528>

21. The Procession of Thetis

Museum: Musée du Louvre, Paris

Date: ca. 1475-1500

Origin: Florence, Bartolomeo di Giovanni

Description: Companion panel to RF 1346 showing festive wedding celebration, part of same cassone decoration.

Link: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010063528> (RF 1347)

PORTRAITS OF MARRIED COUPLES

22. The Arnolfini Portrait

Museum: National Gallery, London

Date: 1434

Origin: Bruges, Jan van Eyck

Description: Oil on oak panel of Giovanni Arnolfini and wife with marriage symbolism: joined hands, single lit

candle, dog (fidelity), oranges (fertility).

Link: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-van-eyck-the-arnolfini-portrait>

23. Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: ca. 1440

Origin: Florence, Fra Filippo Lippi

Description: Earliest surviving Italian double portrait, likely Lorenzo Scolari and Angiola Sapiti. Woman's sleeve embroidered with "lealta" (loyalty).

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436896>

24. Diptych of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza (recto)

Museum: Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Date: 1472

Origin: Urbino, Piero della Francesca

Description: Duke of Urbino and wife in profile against continuous landscape. Battista's pale pallor alludes to her 1472 death (married 1464).

Link: <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/the-duke-and-duchess-of-urbino-federico-da-montefeltro-and-battista-sforza>

25. Diptych of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza (verso)

Museum: Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Date: 1472

Origin: Urbino, Piero della Francesca

Description: Reverse sides show triumphal processions with Christian virtues and Latin inscriptions connecting earthly marriage to spiritual triumph.

Link: <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/the-duke-and-duchess-of-urbino-federico-da-montefeltro-and-battista-sforza>

26. Giovanni II Bentivoglio

Museum: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Date: ca. 1474-1477

Origin: Bologna, Ercole de' Roberti

Description: Tempera on poplar profile portrait of ruler of Bologna (married Ginevra 1464), recalling Roman coins to emphasize dynastic authority.

Link: <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.360.html>

27. Ginevra Bentivoglio

Museum: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Date: ca. 1474-1477

Origin: Bologna, Ercole de' Roberti

Description: Companion portrait to Giovanni II showing wife in profile with pearls, emphasizing aristocratic rank. Displayed as matched pair.

Link: <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.361.html>

TEXTILES & HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

28. Decorated Girdle (Belt)

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: ca. 1350-1400

Origin: France or Italy

Description: Silk and silver-gilt thread with gilt metal buckle and basse-taille enamel. Exchange of belts was fixed part of medieval marriage rituals.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464760>

29. Millefleurs Tapestry with Unicorn

Museum: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Date: ca. 1500

Origin: Flanders

Description: Wool and silk tapestry. Unicorn symbolized bride's chastity and purity. Expensive wedding furnishings displayed in principal chambers.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O84543/tapestry-unknown/>

DEVOTIONAL BOOKS & LEGAL DOCUMENTS

30. Book of Hours Commemorating Wedding of Raoul II de Raineval and Isabelle de Coucy

Museum: Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Date: ca. 1380

Origin: Paris

Description: Created for 1380s wedding with combined family arms at canonical divisions, donor portrait of bride before Virgin, served couple's devotional life.

Link: <https://manuscripts.thewalters.org/viewer.php?id=W.89>

31. Book of Hours with Marriage Love Knot

Museum: Morgan Library & Museum, New York

Date: Last quarter 15th century

Origin: France (Orléans/Rouen)

Description: Features silver escutcheon with initials "M and D joined by love knot," recognized medieval marriage/betrothal symbol.

Link: <https://www.themorgan.org/manuscript/76804>

32. Decretals of Pope Gregory IX with the Glossa Ordinaria (Single Leaf)

Museum: Morgan Library & Museum, New York

Date: 1330-1335

Origin: Bologna, Italy

Description: Illuminated leaf from legal manuscript. Book IV covered marriage law: betrothals, consent, impediments, validity.

Link: <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/2/158742>

33. Book of Hours with Marriage of the Virgin

Museum: Morgan Library & Museum, New York

Date: 15th century

Origin: Burgundy

Description: Includes illuminations of Visitation and Marriage of the Virgin (folio 33v), providing sacred model for Christian marriage.

Link: <https://www.themorgan.org/manuscript/440261>

34. Marriage Contract Document

Museum: Various archives (see individual collections)

Date: Throughout 1300-1500

Origin: Various European locations

Description: Legal documents recording dowries, property arrangements, and terms of marriage alliances between families.

Note: Individual marriage contracts can be found in municipal archives and special collections across Europe.

ADDITIONAL NOTABLE OBJECTS

35. Betrothal Bowl

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: 15th century

Origin: Italy

Description: Maiolica bowls commissioned for betrothals, often painted with portraits of the bride or coats of arms of both families.

Link: Search MET collection for "betrothal bowl" or "wedding maiolica"

36. Marriage Medal

Museum: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Date: 15th century

Origin: Italy

Description: Bronze commemorative medals struck for aristocratic marriages, showing profiles of bride and groom.

Link: <https://www.nga.gov/collection-search-result.html?classification=Medals>

37. Wedding Garment Fragment

Museum: Various textile collections

Date: 14th-15th century

Origin: Italy, France, Flanders

Description: Silk brocade or velvet fragments from wedding garments, often with family heraldry woven into pattern.

Note: Check Victoria & Albert Museum, Metropolitan Museum costume collections

38. Spousal Gift: Ivory Mirror Case

Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Date: 14th century

Origin: Paris, France

Description: Carved ivory mirror cases depicting courtly love scenes, given as betrothal or wedding gifts. Scenes often show lovers exchanging rings.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search> (search "ivory mirror case medieval")

RESEARCH NOTES

Geographic Distribution:

- Italy (especially Florence): 15 objects
- France: 8 objects
- Flanders/Burgundy: 6 objects
- England: 5 objects
- Multi-regional: 4 objects

Object Types:

- Rings and jewelry: 6 objects
- Illuminated manuscripts: 6 objects
- Marriage chests (cassoni): 9 objects

- Portraits: 6 objects
- Textiles and household items: 2 objects
- Devotional books: 4 objects
- Additional ceremonial objects: 5 objects

Key Themes Represented:

1. **Legal frameworks** - Decretals manuscripts showing canon law
 2. **Religious ceremonies** - Illuminated wedding scenes in manuscripts
 3. **Economic transactions** - Cassoni with family arms showing dynastic alliances
 4. **Material culture** - Textiles, jewelry, household furnishings
 5. **Symbolic representation** - Rings, portraits, devotional imagery
 6. **Public display** - Cassoni in processions, heraldry, commemorative portraits
 7. **Private devotion** - Books of Hours for married couples
 8. **Social status** - Luxury materials demonstrating wealth and rank
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For Further Research:

- Metropolitan Museum Art of Marriage in Renaissance Italy: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ital/hd_ital.htm
- British Library Medieval Manuscripts Blog (Royal Weddings): <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/>
- Victoria & Albert Museum Medieval & Renaissance Galleries
- Getty Museum Illuminated Manuscripts Collection

Recommended Museum Collections:

1. Metropolitan Museum of Art - Robert Lehman Collection (Italian Renaissance)
2. British Library - Royal Manuscripts Collection
3. Victoria and Albert Museum - Medieval & Renaissance Galleries
4. National Gallery (London) - Northern Renaissance Paintings
5. Uffizi Gallery - Italian Renaissance Portraits
6. Musée du Louvre - Italian Cassoni Collection

7. Cleveland Museum of Art - Medieval Decorative Arts
 8. Walters Art Museum - Manuscripts and Rare Books
 9. Morgan Library & Museum - Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts
 10. J. Paul Getty Museum - Illuminated Manuscripts
 11. National Gallery of Art (Washington) - Italian Renaissance
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Report compiled November 2025 Date Range Covered: 1300-1500 (Late Middle Ages) Total Objects: 38 from 11 major institutions