

## On the trail of the middle ages

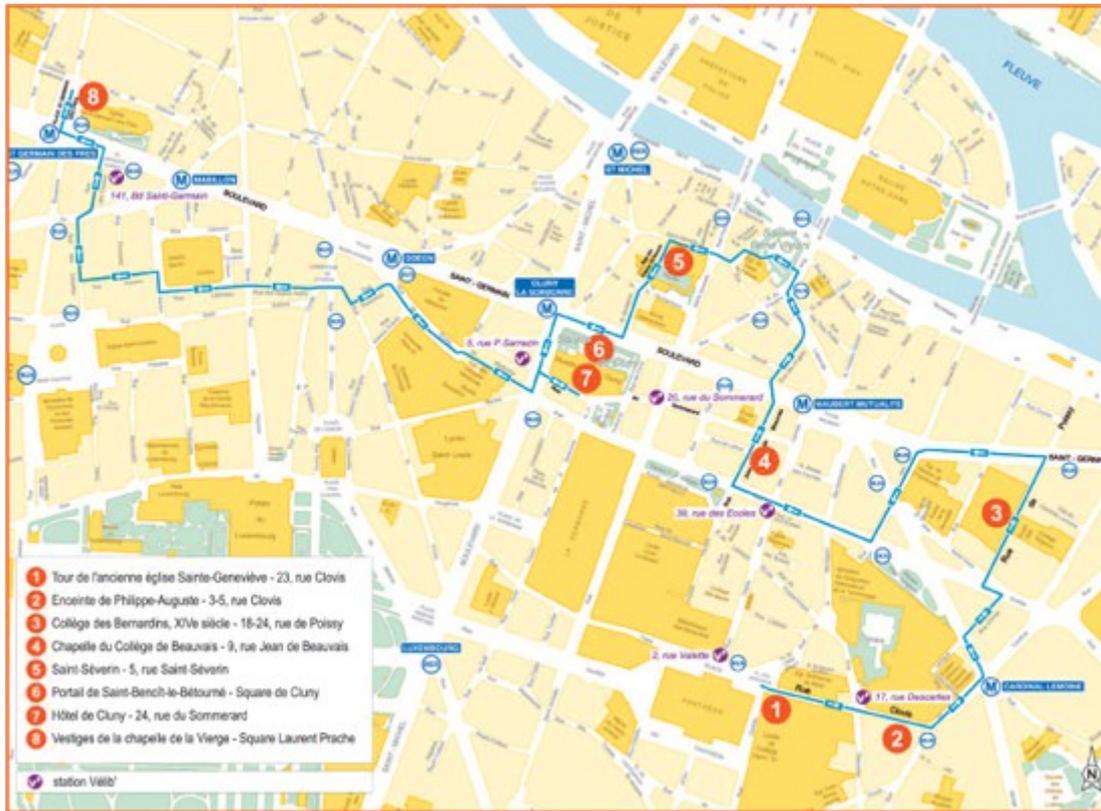
### FROM ST. GENEVIEVE MOUNTAIN TO SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS

In the 11th and 12th centuries, while most of the population of Paris was concentrated on the right bank, the left bank was more or less deserted, and was mainly devoted to farming. The plots of land were divided into large enclosed fields. In 1108, Guillaume de Champeaux established a school near to the Sainte-Geneviève Abbey, which enabled him to break away from the canonical school of Notre-Dame and escape from the jurisdiction of the bishop and his taxes. In 1200, Philip Augustus recognised the University and the Pope granted statutes to it in 1215. To protect this up-and-coming district, the King built a wall between 1200 and 1215, whereas a wall had been built for the right bank ten years previously.

Many French and foreign students settled nearby, the most well-off staying with their families or in boarding houses, and the less well-off in charitable establishments called colleges. There were up to 65 colleges between the 12th and 16th century. The district was also occupied by trades relating to intellectual life, such as parchment-makers and booksellers.

The old churches which were devastated by the Norman invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries and then restored during the Romanesque era were gradually renovated or rebuilt. In turn, grand prelates settled in the district. To the west, the buildings of Saint-Germain-des-Près Abbey, located outside of the wall, began to expand. All these Gothic-style buildings are examples of the architectural refinement of the time, reminders of which still exist in spite of the revolutionary destruction and major works by Haussmann.

**enlarge and download the plan in pdf format (346,6 Ko)**



(1st) 23, rue Clovis

### 11th-14th century Tower of the former Sainte-Geneviève Church

This is the old bell tower of Sainte-Geneviève Abbey Church, which adjoined Saint-Etienne-du-Mont Church and occupied this level at the site of the current Rue Clovis. Sainte-Geneviève Abbey, founded by Clovis and then protected after his death by Queen Clotilda, contained the relics of St. Genevieve as well as the tombs of the Frankish sovereigns. It was later redeveloped in the 12th and 13th centuries.

When it became old it was replaced under Louis XV by the new Sainte-Geneviève Church, which is now the Pantheon. The old church was finally destroyed after the Revolution in 1807, and the convent buildings became the Lycée Napoléon secondary school (now the Secondary School Henri IV). The bell tower, called the Clovis Tower, is the last relic of the abbey church. The lower half of the Tower dates from the 11th century and the top

half dates from the 15th century. The tall spire that used to crown the building was knocked down in 1764.



(1st) 3-5, rue Clovis

### 13th century Wall of Philip Augustus

In order to defend Paris against an invasion by the English who had settled in Normandy, Philip Augustus built an imposing wall around the city between 1190 and 1215, encompassing agricultural land so he could meet the needs of the population in the event of a siege. This fortified wall, which surrounds a space of 272 hectares, thus defined the new city limits. The impressive section of Rue Clovis shows the construction technique, which consists of two facings of large stone blocks retaining a core made of breeze blocks and bricks amalgamated by resistant mortar.

The wall stood 6 to 8 metres tall and was topped by a wall-walk two metres wide, with room for two armoured men to pass.



(1st) 18-24, rue de Poissy

### 14th century College of the Bernardins

The Collège des Bernardins belonged to the Cistercian order of Clairvaux Abbey, and then was given to Cîteaux Abbey in 1320. From its modest beginnings, the Parisian establishment became the leading college of this order in the 14th century. Thanks to the support of Pope Benedict XII, the buildings were reconstructed following a grandiose plan. The immense church, which was never completed, was meant to be 95 metres long and 30 metres wide. On 19, rue de Pontoise you can still see the remains of the church's south wall on the left-hand side of the pool. The collegiate house known as the refectory still stands on Rue de Poissy, and on the right you can see the sacristy that adjoined the church. The long building features 17 rows and a number of buttresses. Inside, thirty or so columns, some of them marble, support two rows of rib vaults. The dormitories were located upstairs. Used as a fire station since the 19th century, the building was recently bought by the Archdiocese of Paris and is under renovation. During the restoration the impressive cellar was cleared of the mud that had entered it when the Seine flooded in the 18th century. In late 2008, the building became the new home of the Cathedral School, which contains a cultural centre and the Notre-Dame Faculty of Theology.



(1st) 9, rue Jean de Beauvais

### 14th century Beauvais College Chapel

This is the last college chapel that still exists in Paris. Beauvais College was founded in 1370 by Jean de Dormans, Bishop of Beauvais. The chapel was built in 1375 under the direction of Raymond du Temple, who collaborated on the construction of the Louvre and Vincennes castles under Charles V. Students at the college included Cyrano de Bergerac and Charles Perrault. Saved from destruction in the 19th century, the chapel was restored in 1855. The octagonal spire is the only Gothic spire of this type still remaining in Paris. The façade was extensively redeveloped but inside the building, you can see the original framework. Some of the stained glass windows (the first high bay windows in the nave) were taken to Saint-Séverin. Since 1889 the chapel has been a Romanian Orthodox church.



(1st) 5, rue Saint-Séverin

### 15th century Saint-Séverin

#### Door of Saint-Pierre-aux-Boeufs

During the expansion of the street under Louis-Philippe, Saint-Séverin, which had never had a main door, received the door from Saint-Pierre-aux-Boeufs Church, which was being demolished and was located on the Ile de la Cité. This church dated from the 13th century and was named after the sculpted animals (boeufs being French for "bulls") which used to feature on either side of the door but have since been removed.

**Charnel houses - late 14th century**

These are the last charnel houses that remain from ancient Paris. Three vaulted galleries lining the cemetery were designed to contain the bones that were extracted from the pits when they were full. The bones were kept in aired garrets located above the galleries, to allow them to dry out. During the construction of the presbytery, under Louis XVIII, the west gallery was destroyed. Then at the turn of the 20th century, the architect Jean-Camille Formigé cleared the buildings of the earlier constructions that were on top of them, and elevated the neo-Gothic gables above the arcades.

### **Palm tree - late 15th century**

The choir of Saint-Séverin was built in the late 15th century. The apse with five bays, a double ambulatory and double radiating chapel provides a setting for the finest set of pillars in Parisian Flamboyant architecture. The axis pillar is particularly remarkable. It forms a palm tree with a trunk decorated with rods wrapped around the shaft, while a cluster of ribs escapes from the magnificent ring formed of soufflets and mouchettes. This pillar was celebrated by Huysmans as “one of the most astonishing umbels ever created by the craftsmen of yesteryear”.



**(1st) Square de Cluny**

### **14th century Door of Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné**

Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné Church stood on the corner of Rue Saint-Jacques and Rue des Écoles. Its name comes from the fact that it originally faced west and not east (bétourné means “turned the wrong way”).

Demolished in 1854 by Haussmann, part of its door was taken to the Hôtel de Cluny (Cluny Mansion). The door was topped with a cabbage leaf gable which is no longer there. Likewise, the two statues placed under particularly finely wrought daises are not the original ones, which depicted Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica. At the centre, the pier contained a Virgin and Child.



**(1st) 24, rue du Sommerard**

### **Late 15th-early 16th century Hôtel de Cluny (Cluny Mansion)**

This mansion was built for Cardinal Jacques d'Amboise in the late 15th century. This is one of the last mansions dating from the medieval period still remaining in Paris, along with the Hôtel de Sens (Sens Mansion), located in the Marais. From the courtyard you would access the inside of the house via the big staircase tower. The chapel that can be seen from the garden possesses some very fine Flamboyant vaults. In 1843, the Hôtel de Cluny (Cluny Mansion) was bought by the State to house the collection of Medieval and Renaissance art objects bequeathed by Alexandre Du Sommerard, who had previously lived in the mansion. It is home to the National Museum of the Middle Ages – Cluny Thermal Baths.



**(1st) Square Laurent Prache**

### **1245-1255 Remains of the Chapel of the Virgin**

On the site of the square stood part of the cloister of the Chapelle de la Vierge in Saint-Germain-des-Près Abbey.

The latter was a masterpiece by the architect Pierre de Montreuil and displayed similarities with the Sainte-Chapelle. In 1791, the building was sold in two separate lots, and the separation would eventually lead to its destruction.

One of the two buyers set aside certain elements which he moved to the façade of a house at 6, rue de l'Abbaye.

At the turn of the 20th century this house was destroyed and the stones were brought back to their original site. The door of the Chapel of the Virgin is conserved at the National Museum of the Middle Ages, at the Hôtel de Cluny (Cluny Mansion), and is an example of the refinement of sculpture circa 1245.

Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné



Saint-Séverin  
Palm tree



Hôtel de Cluny (Cluny  
Mansion)



Saint-Séverin  
Charnel houses



Due to the provisions of the Concordat signed in 1801 between France and the Holy See, which ratified the Revolutionary seizures of the clergy's possessions and transferred the property of the parish churches and their offices to the communes, the City of Paris currently owns around one hundred religious buildings, including a large number of Catholic churches.

The Concordat regime, which remained in force until the 1905 law separating Church and State, proved to be advantageous for religious buildings belonging to the commune. Making the works of art confiscated during the Revolution available to the clergy, combined with an active policy of commissioning decors and constructing new buildings, made the churches of Paris an artistic series of buildings of exceptional wealth covering the major periods of French art, from the Classical era to the modern period.

The Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Paris is currently responsible for conserving this considerable heritage. It is in charge of its inventory, maintenance and promotion as well as the restoration work necessary to conserve the buildings which house it.