

## From Animal to Meat: Illuminating the Medieval Ritual of Unmaking

Rebekah L. Pratt  
Arizona State University

Adorned with gold leaf and brilliant pigments, the illuminations of medieval manuscripts dazzle the eyes of viewers past and present. Among the many bibles, books of hours and other devotional works of the Middle Ages, another genre emerges from the collections of medieval aristocrats. Hunting manuals reached their height of popularity during the fourteenth century. Gaston III, Count of Foix, Lord of Béarn and self-styled “Fébus” (1331-1391), perhaps the most famous and influential author of these treatises, began composition of *Le livre de la chasse* on May 1, 1387. Of the forty-six surviving works of his manual, several manuscripts display sumptuous, richly decorated illuminations of the medieval hunt.<sup>1</sup> Within the collections of the Morgan Library in New York and the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, picturesque scenes of vibrant stags fleeing from hunters decorate MS fr. 616 (fig. 1-3).<sup>2</sup> The vibrant, gilded images contradict the grisly events visualized in illuminations and described in the text—the pursuit, slaughter and dismemberment of animals. Through analysis of cultural context, iconography and applied critical theory, this essay will demonstrate how the images of *Le livre de la chasse* reveal the violence inherent to the transformation of an animal into food and the significance of this process for medieval aristocratic culture.

The miniatures depict the various methods and weaponry utilized by members of the medieval hunting party, which included noblemen, huntsmen ranging in rank and servants, to pursue, capture and kill prey, as well as the training of the dogs necessary for hunting par force, comprised of pursuing prey on horseback with a pack of hounds. Gaston himself appears in several images sharing his knowledge as an expert huntsman within the four sections of the manual: *On Gentle and Wild Beasts*, *On the Nature and Care of Dogs*, *On Instructions for Hunting with Dogs*, and *On Hunting with Traps, Snares, and Crossbow*. Once the hunters captured and killed a stag or boar, the creature was then dismembered in a specific ritual described and visualized in the manuals known as the unmaking or breaking of the animal. The breaking apart of the animal body stands out, seemingly out of place amidst the richly textured clothing, gold accents, and decorative patterns of other courtly scenes. Rendered in the same bright colors and style which characterizes late medieval art, unmaking representations become more than just another aesthetically pleasing hunting image. Upon closer examination, they depict humans splitting apart animal bodies down

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed biography of Gaston, see Vernier, Pailhès, and Tucoo-Chala. It is recommended readers explore the illuminations via the online exhibitions of the Morgan Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale, *Illuminating the Medieval Hunt* <http://www.themorgan.org/collections/swf/exhibOnline.asp?id=802> and *Le livre de chasse de Gaston Phebus* (<http://classes.bnf.fr/phebus/explo/index.htm>). The number of surviving manuscripts varies considerably between sources and can be attributed to the unknown location of at least six copies. Regardless, the majority of the works contain minimal illuminations. Notable exceptions include the images of MS. M 1044 of the Morgan Library and MS. fr. 616 and 619 of the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. For a detailed account of the surviving manuscripts, see Gaston 76-78.

<sup>2</sup> Gaston dedicated the work to Philip the Bold (1342-1407) Philip’s son, John the Fearless (1371-1419), commissioned MS. M 1044, dates to c. 1407, as a gift for Louis d’Orléans (1372-1407), thought to be copied from the original manuscript gifted to Philip (no longer extant). For additional provenance information, see Christie. Provenance for MS. fr. 616 (also c. 1407) identifies the work to be owned by the Poitiers family but the exact patron is currently unknown. See Gaston, et al. for further provenance.

the center, which provides the medieval audience with the memory of the act. Viewers might imagine the body still steaming from the heat of frantic running to escape the human predators. Dogs pant their desire for the raw organs and bleeding flesh. In some scenes, deer and other animals hang to bleed and to allow for removal of desired parts of their bodies. One can easily imagine the ripe smells of the sundered skin, the desire of the hounds, the sweat of tired horses and the fresh green scents of the forest against the odors of death emanating from the animal body. For many today, hunting is uncomfortable, considered bloody, grisly, and visceral. Most prefer animal flesh to be cold and bloodless, wrapped safely in plastic, no longer resembling the creature it once was. But that occurs after the moment depicted in these medieval images—the object in the supermarket, no longer animal, de-animalized through the separation of the body into pieces, becomes meat. Unmaking scenes represent this transformation, the change of the living animal body to what humans consume.

### **1. The Animal Pursued: The Medieval Hunt**

The hunt, one of the most common motifs in medieval art, appears in nearly all media throughout the Middle Ages, including stone, ivory, metal, leather, paint and wood, and within an assortment of places, such as sculpted lintels, carved misericords, and painted walls in both secular and religious spaces. The sheer volume of surviving images indicates the appeal of the theme during the period. The majority of these works display humans astride horses in pursuit of a range of prey. Among scenic illuminations of aristocrats indulging in the sport are images more akin to those found in twenty-first century horror films. Perhaps not grotesque by today's standards, our eyes accustomed to gory, bloody video games and films, these hunting images portray the dismemberment of animals and, in some instances, with startling displayed realistic details against an elegant background (fig. 2). Patrons chose to juxtapose visualizations of the unmaking of the animal body against scenes of other courtly activities, such as falconry, dance, ball games, hunters in pursuit, husbandry (in the calendar pages of personal devotional texts), lovers engaged in courtly love, and many other occupations of the nobility. Unmaking or the gutting/ dismembering of animals decorate medieval walls, such as at Runkelstein Castle in northern Italy but most frequently illuminates secular texts. The majority of these depictions date to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

To date, few publications analyze medieval hunting though the subject has gained scholarly interest in the last decade, particularly within the fields of history, literature, anthropology and zooarchaeology. The most recent comprehensive study of medieval hunting, Richard Almond's 2003 book, *Medieval Hunting*, expands upon *The Hound and the Hawk: the Art of Medieval Hunting*, a similar, earlier work by John Cummins from the 1980s. While Almond's study presents a thorough analysis of medieval hunting, Karl Steel's recent publication *How to Make a Human*, significantly expands Almond's examination through a critical, theoretical examination of medieval violence against animals and is not limited to only hunting. Additional scholars addressing the subject include Jacqueline Stuhmiller, Marcelle Thiébaux, David Dalby and An Smets. Art historians have largely ignored hunting, despite its evident popularity in medieval images, with the exception of technical analyses of manuscript illuminations in facsimile editions and catalogs. Currently, psychoanalytical studies of medieval hunting scenes do not exist though Aleksander Pluskowski and Richard Thomas discuss the need of such analysis in their respective essays within the largely zooarchaeological anthology *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages* and recent application of game theory to the ritual aspects of the medieval hunt by Susan Crane and Ryan Judkins indicate such study is on the

horizon. My own examination seeks to fill this absence in medieval hunting scholarship and utilizes the works of anthropologist Mary Douglas, particularly her studies of pollution and contamination, and French theorist Julia Kristeva, specifically her examination of abjection in *Powers of Horror*.

One of the most widely disseminated secular texts throughout Europe during the late Middle Ages, Gaston Fébus' *Le livre de la chasse* imparts the majority of available information regarding medieval hunting and follows the extensive tradition of hunting manuals during the period. Henri de Ferrières' *Le livre du Roy Modus et de la royne Ratio* (late fourteenth century) directly influenced Gaston's work.<sup>3</sup> Frederick II of Hohenstaufen composed the earliest of the medieval hunting manuals during the first half of the thirteenth century, *De arte venandi cum avibus* (a composition on falconry). Notable additional hunting manuals include Edward of Norwich's English translation of Gaston's *Le livre de la chasse*, *The Master of the Game* (early fifteenth century), *The Boke of St. Albans* (late fifteenth century) and Dame Juliana Berner's *The Angling Treatyse and its Mysteries* (sixteenth century).

My examination follows Richard Almond's definition of hunting as "...the pursuit and taking of wild quarry, whether animal or bird, using any method or technique." (Almond 3). The breaking apart of animals remained universal throughout Western Europe in the fourteenth century, regardless of where and how they were sought after. While all classes of society hunted, hunting manuals clearly articulated aristocratic practices to an upper-class audience. My study focuses on this section of society, though archaeological studies reveal particular butchery practices were employed regularly by other classes. Surviving textual sources indicate only the nobility ritualized animal dismemberment (Sykes 149-160; see also Yeoman and Seetah).

The absence of the unmaking ritual for the lower classes can be attributed to specific sociological needs of the nobility. All members of society constructed their identities, but the aristocracy required extensive codification of social performance. Nobility required participation in courtly activities, such as hunting, in order to display themselves as aristocracy to other members of medieval society. In order to become a knight, a man must hunt, an idea continuously emphasized by Gaston and other authors of hunting manuals. Chivalric works, such as the fourteenth-century treatise *Le livre de l'ordre de chevalerie*, also underscored the importance of hunting for the nobility as practice for combat and for pleasure (Gaston 14, see also Lulle). The activity also served a practical purpose as well, the provision of fresh meat (Almond 17). In addition to these rational motivations for the activity, the manuals also stress the particularly noble aspects of hunting as practice for battle and participation in the rituals associated with the sport. These reasons underscored hunting as an exclusive upper-class activity and separated the nobility from other classes of society, who certainly hunted but lacked the structured ritual and social importance associated with the event. Falconry, in particular, was the sole province of the upper class due to the cost of birds and the necessary equipment, in addition to the extensive time necessary to train falcons and hawks (Almond 20). Despite its exclusivity, Gaston does not describe or discuss falconry in his work. The omissions may be attributed to the role of falcons as intermediaries between human hunters and prey, as the birds both pursued prey and killed it. The prey of predator birds also was generally smaller quarry. *Le livre de la chasse* discusses smaller

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<sup>3</sup> Henri de Ferrières produced the first French hunting manual in c. 1370. Thirty-six editions survive of *Le livre du roi Modus et de la reine Ratio*. Gaston also borrowed from Gace de la Buigne's work *Déduits de la chasse* (between 1359 and 1373 and 1377).

quarry but emphasizes noble prey dismemberment rather than the lesser animals hunted. Prey of noble hunters included animals which varied in symbolic importance. Stags and wild boar ranked high in the minds of medieval aristocratic hunters. Gaston devotes an entire section to the unmaking of the hart (a male deer, usually over five years in age, also known as a stag) and chapter forty-three discusses the same process applied to the wild boar.<sup>4</sup> The stag, one of the most often represented animals, required hunters to acquire extensive skill and technical abilities, thus ideal for construction as a particularly noble activity, as the aristocracy possessed the financial means to devote the time necessary to become proficient at the sport. Though hunting manuals tended to downplay the dangerous aspects of medieval hunting, the boar was certainly much more threatening than the stag, despite the attribution of more prestige to the pursuit of stags and harts. The pursuit of wild boar required “great skill with a weapon to dispatch” (Almond 66). Considered a noble enemy, aristocratic hunters admired the fierce nature of the boar. Both animals appear in images of unmaking, though other animals noted for their ferocity, the wolf and bear, generally do not as a result of the lack of consumption of their flesh, though their pelts were highly prized for their fur (Almond 70-72). Thus, there would be no need to visualize their transformation into edible flesh for human consumption. The distinction between consumable and undesirable meat indicates a purposeful choice in the ritual itself and the resulting visual representation and its consequential function to display the change of the dead animal body to meat.

## 2. Unmaking the Animal Body

The popularity of hunting manuals indicates a general widespread knowledge of the unmaking ritual among the aristocracy. Archaeological evidence of cutting marks on bones reveals hunters mostly adhered to the ritual advocated by Gaston though with some variation, which scholars ascribe to the preference of certain cuts of meat in various locations, usually distinguishable by region (Thomas 127). The various surviving hunting manuals from the Middle Ages identify the process of taking apart the animal as *breaking*, *unmaking* or *undoing* the carcass. The activity comprised of three main parts: the animal was *undone* (split open), *fleaned* (flayed or skinned) and then *brittled* or cut up into pieces (Almond 77). Gaston describes the unmaking of the stag in detail and many of the manuscripts contain images of the event. Several versions of the manual visualize his description, though perhaps the most famous illumination is folio 85 of MS. fr. 616 (fig. 2), which depicts the *fleaning* of the animal. The earlier part of the ritual occurred after hounds chased and cornered the stag. Hunters then cut the hind leg to disable the animal and protect themselves from the sharp tines of the rack of antlers, which could cause serious injury or even death. They severed the spinal cord by piercing with an arrow between the horns and neck or plunging a sword between the shoulder blades into the heart (Thiébaux 35). Figure 2 portrays the scene after the killing stroke, the stag lying on his back with the antlers dug into the earth in the center of the composition in the middle ground of the picture plane. Contrary to the representation, Gaston describes the slicing of the right foot, which was then given to the highest ranking member on the hunt, male or female. After the completion of the undoing, the *fleaning* began. Gaston himself appears in the illumination (identified by his red and gold tunic and larger size than other figures), supervises the skinning of the deer. He holds the right hind hoof of the stag, presumably his as the highest ranking member of the enterprise. The clothing indicates differentiation in social status, with the head huntsmen in red tunics with green collars and their assistants in green tunics.

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<sup>4</sup> Folio 61 of MS. M1044 corresponds to chapter forty and folio 73v of MS. Fr. 616 at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris visualizes chapter forty-three.

The huntsman to the right of Gaston brandishes a knife in his left hand, poised to slice flesh. His right hand pulls the hairy skin downward off the animal's hind leg. At the other end of the stag, the killing appears to the left of the sharp antlers, a gaping bleeding hole almost parallel to the eye glazed open in death. Another huntsman grips the right foreleg as he cuts, exposing the interior of the animal. Behind the smaller figure, the larger head huntsman clutches a long spear or stick. Against the geometric blue, white, black and gold background, other servants speak to the left of Gaston while another figure blows an oliphant on the far right. Trees rise behind the stag and the horn blower, though small in comparison to the disproportionate figures of Gaston and his head hunter. In the foreground, other hunters wait on horseback, lead horses and mind the hounds. The dogs wait for their rewards, received during the second part of the unmaking ritual, the *cureé*. Some gaze at the stag or sniff at the ground. Once the huntsmen flayed the stag, the carcass was raised to reduce the amount of blood flowing onto the ground. As part of the *undoing*, the huntsman slit the mid-section and removed the entrails (Almond 75).

After completion of the *undoing* and *fleaving*, the next step, *brittling*, comprised the dividing up of the animal parts. Various internal organs were presented to important persons of the hunting party to be eaten at once or arranged for display. Humans were not the only recipients of the stag's body. During the second part of the ritual, the *curée*, the hunters presented rewards to the hunting hounds, which included the kidneys, lungs, paunch, wind pipe and blood. Richard Almond describes the details of the ceremony, "The paunch and small intestines were emptied, washed and chopped up, mixed with blood and bread and fed to the hounds" (Almond 78). Servants arranged the pieces for the hounds on the hide of the deer. The assistants held the hounds on leashes while they devoured the flesh, as part of the training process so that they associated the reward with obedience (Almond 78).

### 3. Human Dominance

As discussed previously, several scholars of medieval hunting acknowledge and analyze the ritual aspects of the hunt for medieval noble society. The very need to codify the practice through descriptive manuals which also functioned within the aristocracy as luxury objects in and of their own right reveals the significance of the hunt to the aristocracy. Hunting functioned as a means for food throughout history but during the Middle Ages became directly connected to the social performance of society and gained importance as a sport. A key aspect to most societies is the need for nourishment for survival, making the fear of starvation prominent and resulting in the abundance of food becoming a social marker of power (Marvin 7). During the medieval period, meat in particular became associated with status and the ability to bestow power and strength. The sustaining of appropriate prowess initially required the consumption of more meat than those who did not protect or fight but eventually came to represent a physical superiority over other classes and those having more food could share it with others deemed worthy. Ultimately not only was quality of food, such as meat specifically, important but quantity and capacity to distribute to one's companions. Within the particular context of the medieval hunt, the act of disseminating meat also included parceling of the animal based on status. In this instance, the carcass would be divided up into pieces. The skin would be given to the hunter which killed the animal with a bow, the huntsmen tasked with breaking up the creature provided with the chyne, and the right shoulder parceled to the parson. Lower level huntsmen received a quarter and the parker given the left shoulder (Almond 77). The huntsman offered the cartilage of the heart to a pregnant woman or to a lord for his child, the left shoulder given to the forester, and the liver to his assistant. The main visual trophy of the adventure, the stag's head, belonged to the master huntsman or the lord of the

hunt (Almond 75-76). The association of meat with power meant procurement of the desired flesh became codified and adapted to reflect the significance of the food but also functioned as a means for the aristocracy to assert their dominance through the expression of membership in an exclusive caste of society as consumers of meat in particular, and thus master to both other classes. The deliberate representation of nobility in gilded clothing and physically larger than the huntsmen and servants in the illuminations of *Le livre de la chasse* emphasizes the class distinctions even among members of the hunting party. The dominance play during the medieval hunt was not limited to the humans, however. Humans violently asserted their perceived superiority to the point of destruction.

Diane Bazell notes the “clearest physical expression of human mastery” is in the conversion of animals into meat, a violent act which ultimately extinguishes the life of another being (89). Many aspects of medieval aristocratic life incorporated violence and Gaston himself identifies hunting as necessary practice for combat. Richard Kaeuper reveals how “heroic violence was glorified by knights and how brutality in jousts and tournaments...was alloyed to displays of prowess...” (21). Hunting carried the same significance, with expert hunters attributed with status and skills appropriate for aristocracy, thus the production of *Le livre de la chasse* not only established Gaston as a participant but of such skill to be able to share that knowledge with others, as he dedicated it to another exalted peer, Philip the Bold of Burgundy after completion of the work in 1389. Similar to the social performance acted during tournaments, the medieval hunt established status through participation and recognition by an audience of peers. The so-called civilizing aspects of chivalry, such as emphasis on honor and codification of all violent courtly or noble activities demonstrated “how chivalry itself paradoxically begat violence in medieval Europe,” by encouraging violence as a necessary part of noble life (Kaeuper 21). The translation of hunting into more than for sustenance appropriately corresponded to other activities practiced within in aristocratic culture, only in pursuit of another foe—the ambiguous and often problematic non-human animal. As Susan Crane notes, the medieval hunt encompassed ritual through the “formal articulation of human unity” in the need for participants to work together, as a “recurrent celebration” in its status as a pleasurable pastime, and also as a spectacle of social performance for the activity which required legitimization by witnesses to “make and mark” a transformation (Crane 104, 106). Ultimately the pursuit and death of the animal perpetuated noble authority and as such, becomes merely an object in the service of the affirmation of aristocratic prowess within the ritual of the hunt which both celebrates and endorses the ideal attributes of noble status (Steel 17; Žižek 1; Dreyfus 220; see also Bourdieu ). Gaston describes this objective violence in his hunting manual and directs the aristocratic reader through the process to successfully pursue and kill a variety of animals. The role of the animal has yet to cease at this point in the hunt, however. The remaining body still suffers at the hands of the human, rendered into unrecognizable pieces during unmaking.

#### **4. Problematic Flesh: To Eat or Not to the Eat the Animal**

Human consumption of the flesh of other animals has been problematic throughout history and the Middle Ages were no exception. The medieval human-animal relationship was fraught with ambiguity and constant re-evaluation (Cohen 61-65; Salisbury 1-12). Animals are living creatures, just as humans but lack a central component of humanity—a language which could be understood, directly contributing to the perceived superiority of the human over the animal (Steel 21). Simultaneously, animals and humans share similarities despite the absence of language. The death of a living creature emphasizes the inherent fragility of all flesh, including human skin which

could also be rendered or ruptured unto the point of the death like that of the hunted prey. Fear of our demise, of the animal in all humans, contributed to the culmination of the medieval hunt. The ritual of unmaking was a particularly violent act, an attack on which was feared, satisfying a need to render the creature completely unrecognizable as animal and thus definitively unrecognizable as *living*. This act of domination required the further demarcation of boundaries between human and animal, through which "...humans mark one creature as merely animal-as something that should be eaten, tamed, or killed" (Steel 14). Steel also remarks the acts of "boundary-making subjugation" include not only eating, taming and killing but also categorizing, which is vividly represented in *Le livre de la chasse* (14).

The process of transforming the live animal into something humans eat began with the identification of the animals in Gaston's manual. Initially, the animal of *Le livre de la chasse* lives in the forest with others of its species and represented in both genders and in multiple ages. Gaston describes each animal with corresponding illuminations in a similar fashion to the encyclopedic bestiaries of the Middle Ages (fig. 3). The images depict first the most desirable and noble of prey, the stag, then reindeer, deer, ibex, roe buck, hare, wild rabbit, wild boar, the bear, wolf, fox, badger, wildcat, and otter. Gaston intentionally ordered the creatures by those eaten and those unacceptable for consumption and hunted for other reasons, such as for bones or skins. The ordering also emphasizes the human predators' ability to dominate animals which convey prowess onto the hunter, such as the boar. As Karl Steel notes in his study of medieval human-animal relationships, meaningful domination, occurs only when the animal is afforded worthy characteristics of the pursuers-thus the ultimate domination through death provided the hunter with the courage and strengths attributed to the animal in the manual (14).

The categorization of the prey in *Le livre de la chasse* clearly identifies the creatures as animals and definitively not human. Each chapter provides the means for the reader to identify each animal and to learn about their habits. The placement of animals into a hierarchy clearly demarcates creatures as *Other*. Gaston re-orders animals into his own hierarchy, making the animal kingdom "conform to his ideas," which required ritual to unite *all* hunters in order to be realized (Douglas 3). In *Le livre de la chasse*, Gaston's descriptions and corresponding images of how the hunt should occur, defines the role of the hunter and thus through dissemination, the manual provided the means to ritualize the entire experience and thus re-affirm the status of animals as prey for humans, for which the human can establish his human-ness against the animality of the creature and rendering it safe to consume (Douglas 3).

Ritual alleviated fears of being consumed by animals, particularly problematic when man is eaten by a creature which he or she consumes, such a boar. One desires what is rejected, what is expelled, for the ego understands this could be *us* as well. This however, places one at the point of a perceived cannibalism. If the animal is abject and we are abject in our wanting of the animal and we consume the animal, are we not consuming ourselves? This is the ultimate abjection and must be assuaged through purification. During the hunt, the animal becomes symbolic of this fear, thus abject and must be confronted and destroyed (Kristeva 13). The ritual dismembering served as a means to remove the animal's agency and perceived power. The primal fear of humans, focused as it was on this consumption, sought to transfer that onto the animal; the human was no longer the devourer but the devoured and through the purification process of the kill and dismemberment, the animal no longer threatened humans.

Ritualized unmaking of animals purified them for human consumption. The very nature of being animal-like in behavior meant that consuming the creature could taint the eater. The mostly whole body of the animal could continuously remind the consumer of the association between

animal and human as living beings, which induced fears of contamination and resulted in the need to define the animal as specifically not human while simultaneously asserting the animation of the human body (Kristeva 13-15). At the moment before consumption, the living animal body becomes a corpse, which like humans, was once alive and thus abject, visualized in the rupture of the borders of the animal body through the bloody killing wound. The connection as living beings, required the designation of the corpse as a specifically animal body, required the defining of a clear contrast to the human body, which could also die but unlike the stag in this illumination, was not an object to be consumed. The once alive status rendered the animal abject and as such, repulsive and capable of polluting if consumed by another animal, the human-animal. Put simply, all creatures are what they eat, literally. This means consumption of the abject animal would thus pollute the consumer and place the human in the process of becoming an Other, a specifically animal Other. Through dismemberment, the animal became pure and thus edible (Kristeva 53). Dismembering reduced the animal to parts of flesh, no longer identifiable as a specific animal and thoroughly unable to threaten humans. The mutilation of the animal body provides physical evidence of humans conquering fears of contamination caused by the destruction of the animal body. The internal organs of the animal, given to the most prominent members of the hunting party, emphasized the importance of the ritual. They represent the border between life and death and of the internal and external. The exposure of the abject insides purified them and emphasized the "clean" bodies of the humans--their borders intact, organs inside, skin undisturbed (Kristeva 53). The unmaking ritual solved the inherent dilemmas in consuming flesh by maintaining the borders between human and animal and reducing the animal to the status of object through dismemberment and rendering it safely edible by eliminating all traces of animation--the once living breathing creature is unrecognizable in pieces and thus all animality is erased.

An additional purifying aspect included how medieval hunters killed animals. Many early medieval taboos included the exclusion of carrion as acceptable for consumption, for it was deemed specifically unclean due to the nature of its death by another animal or disease (Bazell 79). The medieval hunt turned inedible flesh into edible through the acceptable death by human hand. Animal violence had to be waged by humanity, with the ultimate mastery of life and death conducted by humans to assert their perceived mastery over the vulnerability of the flesh. By erasing the animal, the power of the human over the fragility of flesh, moves the human fully into the present while the animal becomes absent through its death. The animality of the animal is eliminated in meat because it has been transformed into something else. Through death the animal becomes an absent referent because nothing remains to connect the final product to the creature it once was--the meat no longer represents the animal but rather something desired and necessary to perpetuate the life of the human (Adams 66-67). The destructive process resulting in meat as the end product of the medieval hunt perhaps is the ultimate violence in that humanity denies the very existence of the animal through this transformation.

### **5. Animal to Object to Memory**

*Le livre de la chasse* takes the animal through a series of transformations. First, it is living, breathing, clearly alive and fleeing from human predators. Then it becomes an animal corpse through death, conquered but still possesses the dangerous potential for polluting human bodies. The carcass transforms into a broken animal body, whatever life it may have had completely eliminated in the destruction of its body, reduced to contaminated flesh. Ritual unmaking renders the flesh safely edible but the violence against the animal continues. The medieval hunt existed in the lives of the aristocracy, its rituals cementing the perceived boundaries between classes and



species within the accepted brutality of aristocratic culture. Within the borders of each illumination, the natural world collapses into a controllable space and violently breaks with the reality of death awaiting all humans. The manual, with its parchment made of animal flesh, decorated with illuminations of carefully categorized and contained animals, asserts human dominance and visualizes the ritual which makes meat a signifier of not only superiority over other humans but over animals and becomes an act of symbolic violence. The animal flesh made page becomes the physical manifestation of the violence of image and language which repeats the domination against animals in perpetuity, another social performance through the cultural capital of books within aristocratic culture. In essence, not only does Gaston give Philip the Bold a sumptuous, luxurious manuscript, he reminds him of each hunter's past, present and future domination as part of their existence as not only nobility but as also humans.

## Figures



Fig. 1 *Le livre de chasse*, by Gaston Fébus.  
c. 1407  
MS.fr. 616, fol. 85v  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Fig. 2 *Le livre de chasse*, by Gaston Fébus.  
c. 1407  
MS.fr. 616, fol.85.  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

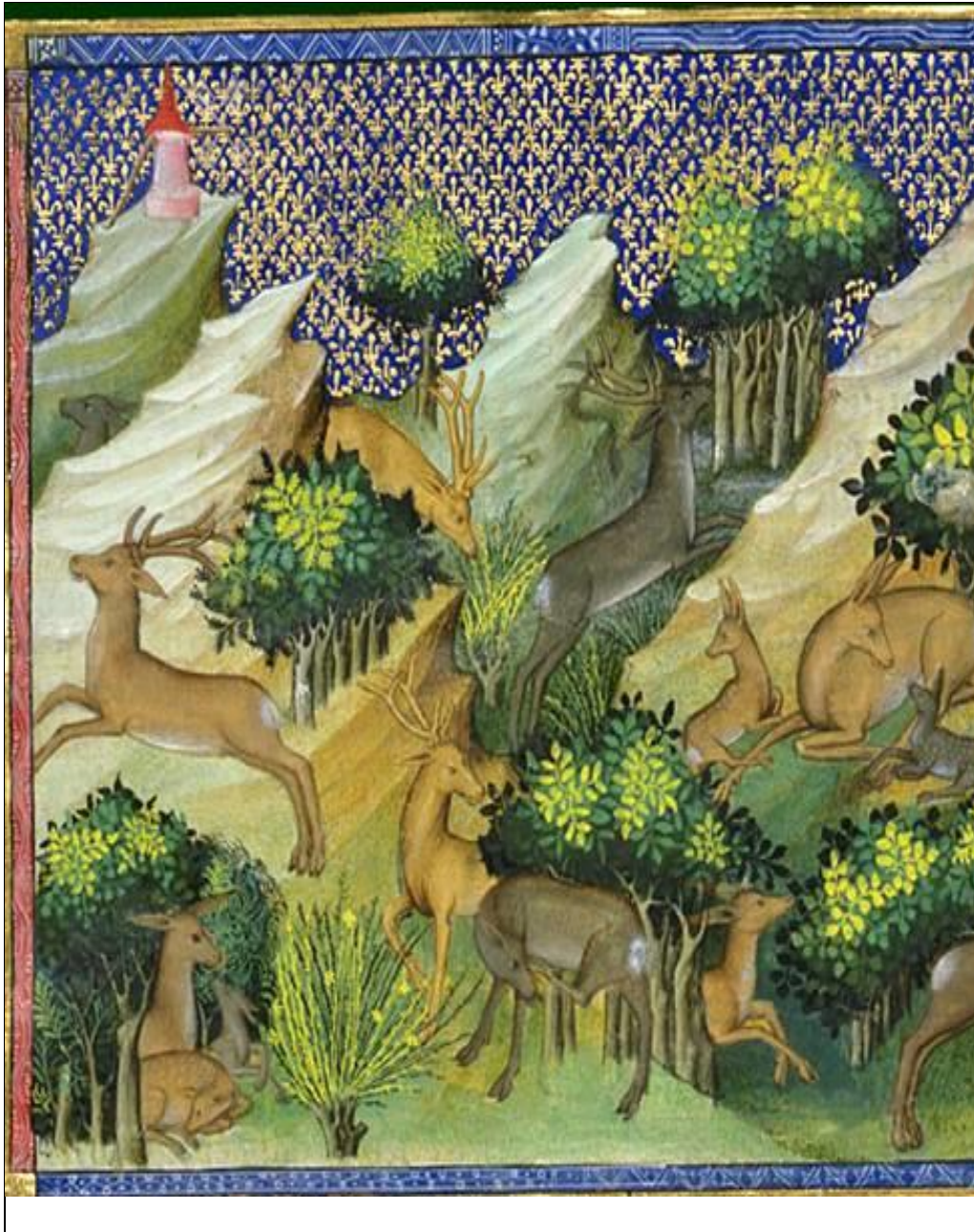


Fig. 3 *Le livre de la chasse*, by Gaston Fébus.  
c. 1407  
MS.fr. 616, fol. 23  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

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