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**EXTRAORDINARY FIFTEENTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPT IS THE
CENTERPIECE OF A NEW EXHIBITION AT THE
MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM**

***LE LIVRE DE LA CHASSE* IS AMONG THE EARLIEST AND MOST FAMOUS TEXTS
DETAILING “THE SPORT OF KINGS”**

***Illuminating the Medieval Hunt*
April 18 through August 10, 2008**

**** Press Preview: Thursday, April 17, 2008, 10 a.m. until noon ****

New York, NY, February 28, 2008 — A new exhibition featuring nearly fifty miniatures from the Morgan’s celebrated hunting manuscript by Gaston Phoebus (1331–1391), *Le Livre de la chasse* (Paris, ca. 1407), is on view at The Morgan Library & Museum from April 18 through August 10, 2008. *Illuminating the Medieval Hunt* presents a unique opportunity for the public to see a large number of these miniatures displayed together because this manuscript has been disbound temporarily for conservation and the preparation of a facsimile. Visitors can leaf through a copy of the facsimile and compare these images with those in other original manuscripts and early printed editions that demonstrate how hunting themes made their way into a broader cultural context in religious literature as well as secular texts. About two dozen manuscripts and printed books, dating from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, are on display.



Hunting Party Pursuing Wild Boar, Gaston Phoebus, “Le Livre de la chasse,” France, Paris, ca. 1407. Bequest of Clara S. Peck, 1983. MS M.1044 (fol. 64).

Considered the sport of kings and noblemen, hunting was a popular aristocratic pastime during the medieval period. Numerous manuscripts were written on the subject, and these treatises, made for wealthy patrons, were often lavishly decorated. Among the most famous and earliest medieval texts on hunting, *Le Livre de la chasse* was written by Phoebus between 1387 and 1389 and dedicated to Philip the Bold (1342–1404), Duke of Burgundy. Although the dedication manuscript is lost, numerous copies were customarily commissioned by noblemen.

The Morgan's *Le Livre de la chasse* is thought to have been commissioned by Philip the Bold's son, John the Fearless (1371–1419), who presumably inherited his father's manuscript and had copies made. During the late fifteenth century, it was owned by King Ferdinand II of Aragón and Queen Isabella of Castile, who added to it their full-page coat of arms. Of the forty-six known surviving copies of the manuscript, the Morgan's is one of the two finest extant examples; the other, in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, was made at the same time and contains the same cycle of eighty-seven miniatures.

"Illuminated manuscripts are a cornerstone of the Morgan's permanent collections and this particular text is absolutely extraordinary" said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. "The scenes depicted are remarkable both in the vitality of the action presented and in the artistry of the illuminator. There is a passion evident in the manuscript that is very compelling."



"King James I at a hunting party," woodcut, George Gascoigne. *The Noble Art of Venerie or Hunting* (London: Printed by Thomas Purfoot, 1611). Bequest of Julia P. Wightman, 1994. PML 150046.

Le Livre de la chasse is divided into four books: on gentle and wild beasts; on the nature of dogs and their care; on hunting in general and hunting with dogs; and on hunting with traps, snares, and cross bow. Written in French, the work was enormously popular throughout Europe and England, where it was translated under the title, *Master of Game*.

The miniatures of the Morgan manuscript are shown in their proper sequence, revealing the characteristics and habits of the animals, the various devices and strategies involved in the hunt, and the costumes of both the aristocratic hunters and their servants. A large number of miniatures are devoted to the hound, which Phoebus called the "noblest and most reasonable beast that God ever created." Phoebus

bred hunting dogs and, according to the famous chronicler Jean Froissart, kept kennels for some 1,600 hounds.

The exhibition includes extremely rare first and second printed editions of *Le Livre de la chasse* (both issued in Paris around 1507) along with the first printed book on hunting (Chambéry, 1486), also based on a fourteenth-century text. Also on view are the first and second editions of the “Book of St. Albans,” the first English book on hunting, with additional sections on heraldry and falconry. The printed editions tapped a newly emerging middle class market with cheaper versions of a text originally intended for an aristocratic audience. Nonetheless, the noble origins of the sport are apparent in editions of George Gascoigne’s *The Noble Art of Venerie or Hunting* (London, 1575 and 1611), which contain portraits of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I in their capacity as heads of state and leaders of the chase.

The medieval hunt was often used as a metaphor in both profane and sacred texts. In a sixteenth-century Flemish miniature, the object of the falconer’s hunt is the young lady peering out of a window. In another Flemish miniature of about 1500, depicts the hunt of the unicorn annunciation. The archangel Gabriel’s hunting dogs chase the unicorn into the lap of the Virgin Mary.

The exhibition concludes with a few examples of Islamic and Indian paintings, demonstrating that the noble hunt was not limited to Europe. In an Indian manuscript of Nizami’s *Khamsa* of ca. 1618, King Bahrum Gur fells an onager with an arrow that pins its hoof to its ear, and a seventeenth-century album leaf shows a seated nobleman framed by various hunting scenes.

The exhibition is organized by William M. Voelke, curator and department head of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, The Morgan Library & Museum.

Illuminating the Medieval Hunt is made possible by a generous gift from Melvin R. Seiden and by the Janine Luke and Melvin R. Seiden Fund for Exhibitions and Publications.

Faksimile Verlag Luzern is the corporate sponsor.

Public Programs

A family day workshop, *Dogs, Deer, and a Dab of Gold*, complements the exhibition on Saturday, May 17, 2008, from 2 to 4 pm. The activities include a card game that will send participants exploring medieval forests and mountains in search of wild boars, wild cats, deer, bears, wolves, and mountain goats. Families will also make paint with ingredients and tools familiar to the artist in the exhibition, then use the paint and a little bit of genuine gold leaf to create illuminations as in *Le Livre de la chasse*.

For more information and other programs, please contact the Education Department at (212) 590-0333.

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. Nearly a century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Monday, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.