

LATE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

1350-1525

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GASTON PHOEBUS, *Livre de la chasse*; and LIVRE DE L'ORDRE DE CHEVALERIE

25

fms
Typ
130

Belgium, Ghent, dated 1485, written, signed and dated by Jan van Kriekenborch

Vellum, 124 leaves, 39.4 x 29 cm. 1 large and 85 small miniatures, in tempera, by the Master of the Flemish Boethius; 1 foliate border with device and motto of Louis of Bruges and arms of Louis XII; numerous illuminated initials.

Gaston III (1331-91) Count of Foix-Béarn, nicknamed Phoebus because of his beautiful blond hair, wrote this famous book on hunting that would become the most popular medieval text on the chase and a model of such handbooks for centuries to come. This handsome copy of Gaston's text, and its companion volume described in the next entry (fms Typ 129, No. 26), were commissioned by the famous bibliophile Louis of Bruges, Seigneur de la Gruthuyse and Governor of Holland. (See J. B. B. van Praet, *Recherches sur Louis de Bruges*, Paris, 1831.) His device of a firing mortar and his motto, "Plus est en vous," may be found in the foliate border on folio 101^v. Our manuscript was written by Jan van Kriekenborch, the well known scribe from whom Louis of Bruges ordered a number of luxurious volumes. In this manuscript, Kriekenborch proudly signs and dates his work on the striking table of contents (f.1^v), executed in calligraphic flourishes of silver and gold as well as red, blue and black inks, and at the end of each of the book's two texts (ff.100 and 124).

The large frontispiece for the *Livre de l'ordre de chevalerie* (that for the *Livre de la chasse* is unfortunately missing) and the numerous small miniatures of our manuscript may be attributed to an artist called the Master of the Flemish Boethius. (Our painter was once thought to be Alexander Bening, the enigmatic artist without an oeuvre who is now tentatively identified with the Master of the Older Prayerbook of Maximilian I; see MS Richardson 9, No. 27). The manuscript of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* in Flemish (Paris, B.N., MS néerl. 1), which gave our artist his name, dates to about 1491; it too was written by Kriekenborch and was a commission of Louis of Bruges.

Certain details that appear both in our miniatures and in those of another manuscript of the *Livre de la chasse* in Paris (B.N., MS fr. 616), one of the earliest and most beautifully illustrated of the manuscripts of Gaston's text, indicate that our artist used that manuscript - or another with quite similar miniatures - as a model. (The gilt diaper patterns filling the backgrounds of a few of our miniatures, long out of fashion by 1485, also point to a much older model.) In its turn, MS fr. 616, painted in a style associated with the Bedford Master and dating to about 1410, appears to be a copy of another manuscript of about ten years earlier, bearing the Foix family arms (Paris, B.N., MS fr. 619). The latter, while not the copy owned by Gaston himself, probably reproduces the miniatures from his copy. Thus the miniatures in our manuscript are a possible reflection, although distant and a few times removed, of the original illustrations for Gaston's own copy of his text. (continued on p. 123)

MINIATURES: *Livre de la chasse*: f.5: Stag; f.8: Reindeer; f.8^v: Deer; f.9^v: Mountain goat; f.11^v: Roe deer; f.13: Hares; f.15: Rabbits; f.15^v: Bears; f.17^v: Boars; f.19^v: Wolves; f.22^v: Foxes; f.23^v: Badgers; f.24: Wildcats; f.24^v: Otters; f.25: Hunting dogs; f.28: Care of sick dogs; f.33^v: Hunting dogs; f.34^v: Greyhounds; (continued on p. 123)

BINDING: Unbound

PROVENANCE: Made for Louis of Bruges; King Louis XII of France; Gontaut-Saint-Blanchard family, 1873; bought by Philip Hofer from H. P. Kraus in 1950 and presented in 1982.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: P. Hofer, "A Newly Discovered Manuscript of Frederick Hohenstaufen's 'Art of Falconry,'" *Harvard Library Bulletin*, VII, 1953, 24; Harvard College Library, *Illuminated & Calligraphic Manuscripts*, 28, no. 96, pls. 58 & 59; Bond and Faye, *Supplement*, 262; G. Tilander, *Gaston Phébus, Livre de chasse*, Karlshamn, 1971, 26, "o"; Kraus, *In Retrospect*, 208-209, no. 83, illus; Bruges, *Gruuthusemuseum, Vlaamse Kunst op Perkament*, Bruges, 1981, 265, 270.

