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### Le Château de Vincennes: The Outlying Society

The ivory panel, known simply as “Hunting Scenes,” is a narrative 5 x 12 x 3 panel, the only remaining side from a complete ivory casket with a hinged lid housed in the Metropolitan Museum Cloister Collection.<sup>1</sup> The deeply carved ivory depicts a stag hunt scene commencing with the release of the hounds to the final capture of the stag. From the left, the hunt begins with two women donned with circlets overseeing the departure of the hunters and hounds through a large stone gate. The two riders at the gate signal with horns the “*laisser courre*,” or the release of the hounds. This means the stag

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Barnet and Nancy Y. Wu, *The Cloisters: Medieval Art and Architecture*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005); Barnet, Peter. *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*. (Detroit, Michigan: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1997); Sarah M. Guérin, "Ivory Carving in the Gothic Era, 13th–15th Centuries," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/goiv/hd\\_goiv.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/goiv/hd_goiv.htm); and “Recent Acquisitions: A Selection 1996-1997,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Series*, 55/ 2, (1997): 20-23.

has been located and has fled.<sup>2</sup> In the second section, two women partake in falconry and one hunter has wounded the stag with an arrow, the hounds positioned below.

Additionally, a second hunter has engaged the stag directly with his sword in an act of hamstringing. Finally, in the last panel, a hunter has delivered the “*coup de grace*” as the stag attempts to take to a river. This is a ruse used by stags called “foiling down.” Not pictured on this panel, however, is either the locating of the stag or the presentation of the stag to the court. (fig.1) This panel was part of the back of a much larger casket, the other pieces now lost, this being the only remaining segment. As noted by the Cloister’s collection manager, another part of this casket is known by way of an eighteenth-century engraving where the stag’s head is presented to other courtly figures.

Scholars of the Cloister collection have suggested that this secular casket offers an allegorical look at secular prose. This examination of the piece as a courtly love allegory, where the stag hunt represents the hunt for love, serves, however, as just one explanation of what is occurring on the panel. Remaining to be explored is the fact that the ivory carving has several oddities in what are typically very standard tales. Based on a close examination of the clothing worn, which identifies the gender of the hunters as female, and with recourse to the particular actions of each figure in relation to the documented rules dictating the behavior of the participants of a hunt, I will argue that not only are the rules of the hunt being broken, but that the gender of the participants is counter to that expected for society in France at this time. In this light, the ivory casket piece can be said to depict a truth that illuminates not only an outlying space that bends the hierarchal structure of the hunt, but importantly offers insight into the societal norms of the day.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, (Stoud: Sutton, 2003).

Questioning these discrepancies, I suggest that the hunting scene depicted on this ivory panel existed not in the open rural hunting forests outside of Paris, as commonly assumed, but rather within the sequestered private forest within the King's second palace, the Château de Vincennes, where the rules governing the royal's activities could be suspended. Comparing the visual evidence found in the imagery on the fourteenth-century ivory casket with what we know of the original architecture at the Château de Vincennes, most specifically the Tour du Bois entrance, re-contextualizes not only our understanding of the roles royal women could have played behind royal walls, but also of those they were expected to play as educators of young male heirs.

Crucial for this thesis is the fact that hunting has been documented as an important, consistent factor in many countries and religions over almost all periods of time. Many gods are revered as important to 'the hunt,' such as those from Roman, Greek, and pagan traditions; similarly vital are the lives of the saints associated with Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The emergence of hunting as a popular trend in medieval France stemmed from a change from the constant aggression and warfare between small landowners to the peaceful cohabitation of Christians under the protection of the church and nobility during the emerging Peace-of-God movement in the eleventh century.<sup>4</sup> Beginning with Charlemagne, passionate hunters were known to favor the forests around Paris, with

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<sup>3</sup> David Kravitz, *Who's Who in Greek and Roman Mythology*. (New York: C.N. Potter, 1976); David Petts, *Pagan and Christian: Religious Change in Early Medieval Europe*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); Michael Stapleton, *The Illustrated Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York: P. Bedrick Books, 1986); David Alan Purvis, *The Noble Sport: the Stag Hunt as a Reflection of the Mores of the Medieval English Nobility*, (Savanna, Georgia: Armstrong Atlantic State University, 2006); Amanda Richardson, "'Riding like Alexander, Hunting like Diana': Gendered Aspects of the Medieval Hunt and Its Landscape Settings in England and France," *Gender & History*. 2 (2012): 253-266; and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: the Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Head, "The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine (970-1005)," *Speculum* 74/3 (1999): 656-686.

hunting typically practiced by kings and nobles as a completely male-dominated practice.<sup>5</sup>

There were strict rules and instructional texts on conducting the hunt, on who qualified to hunt, and on correct mannerism.<sup>6</sup> Like the hierarchal classes of noble society, the varied hunts signified levels of importance of the hunter or knight. In Gaston Phoebus' *Le Livre de la chasse*, the most complete account of medieval stag hunting, the stag hunt had very specific stages and specific roles, as did the hunters.<sup>7</sup> For example, it is the master of the hunt who partakes in slaying the hart, as seen on the third section of the ivory.

When these strict rules are broken, however, many problems and questions arise. One of these sets of hunting rules was specific to gender; notably, when women were involved in hunts they could only accompany the male hunters, or if they had a high enough status, were limited to falconry. The gender of the participants in the ivory casket is therefore important to understanding the events taking place. The Cloisters collection states that the women in the panel are indeed only involved in falconry, thus following the standard hunting rules. Similarly, the archery and sword use is limited to "hunters," implying masculine participants.<sup>8</sup> Still, looking closely at the clothing and headdresses, or lack thereof, of the two hunters in question renders this assumption questionable. The figure stabbing the hart on the middle section of the panel does not match the

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<sup>5</sup> Purvis, *The Noble Sport*, 1-262.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Schlag, *The Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus* (London: Brepols Publishers, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Richardson, "Riding like Alexander," 255; Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2003); Richard Almond, *Daughters of Artemis: the Huntress in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009); and Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, (London: Methuen, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Barnet and Wu, *The Cloisters*, 97; and Robert Schlinder. *The Cloisters Annunciation by the Master of Charles of France*. *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47/ 1 (2012): 85-100.

representations of the other men shown on this panel, as they have no head garments, while the documented “male” hunter on the left is wearing a head garment. This is in direct contrast to the other women’s headwear carved in the ivory; the two women on the gate are both wearing a circlet or coronet, while one on the farthest left also has a chin band.<sup>9</sup> Chin bands, or barbettes, were made popular by Eleanor of Aquitaine, and were typically donned only by women of the highest class.<sup>10</sup> Just one woman in the hunting party is wearing just a circlet, perhaps due to her age or marital status. The rest of the women have donned a wimple or chin guard with a veil covering their braids. Moreover, the hunter in question to the left has braided hair, as do the other women. This is only visible on the right side of her face. Her headdress appears to be a full wimple with a full veil, covering her entire throat and forehead.

Corroborating the female gendered headdress is the figure’s dress. Near her feet we see folds of flowing fabric that could be identified as a dress, similar to that being worn by the other female riders, and distinctly different from that of the three male riders, who appear to be wearing pants or a simple robe. All of these items of clothing conclusively demonstrate this character to be a woman. For that reason, the action she is performing is very odd indeed (fig. 2). The already injured stag, as wounded by the male archer, would be very desperate, and it has been suggested that this animal would be using his antlers as means of self-defense. Not only was it typically the master of the hunt who was able to stab the hart directly because of rank, it was also because of his great skill that he could even take down the wild, now-angered animal. According to standard

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<sup>9</sup> Dion Clayton Calthrop, *English Costume: I. Early English*, (London, 1906).

<sup>10</sup> “Jewels, Hair, and Accessories of the Middle Ages,” Website: <https://sites.tufts.edu/putajeweloni/2011/09/21/glossary-of-english-hairstyles-headdress> ; and Richard Almond, “The Way Ladies Ride.” *History Today*, Feb. 2012: 36-39.

protocol, a woman's performing this task would be quite unusual. The question then arises, under what circumstances could this ivory have been crafted to show such an unusual event?

I would argue that these very specific rules could have been adapted to specific locations, and that what we are seeing in this casket does not fully belong to the generalized setting of Paris, where strict social strata and rules dominated society, but rather to the secluded realm of the King's second palace—beyond the city, in Vincennes.<sup>11</sup>

During the late medieval ages, the kings of France developed a second royal complex in the forest southeast of Paris, in the vicinity of Vincennes (fig.3). Its sole purpose was for escape and respite from these very restrictions. The Chateau de Vincennes functioned originally as a place for hunting, for King Louis VII around 1150.<sup>12</sup> It existed as a quiet, residential area away from the bustling and hectic air of Paris, and was reserved for not only the king, but for the visiting nobles. Many kings after Louis VII used this complex, including Philippe Augustus in 1180, Louis IX in 1239, John the Good in 1356, and Charles V in 1364. Louis IX departed from le Chateau de Vincennes twice to participate in the crusades, while Charles V was born in the Chateau de Vincennes in 1338. Importantly, it was during the time of Charles V, that the Chateau was expanded to the architectural layout it is today.<sup>13</sup> As the Chateau de Vincennes grew, so did its importance, but its main purpose as a hunting park never swayed. In 1183,

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<sup>11</sup> John W. Baldwin, *Paris, 1200*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Philippe Velay, *From Lutetia to Paris: The Island and the Two Banks*. Translated by Miriam L. Kochan. (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> There were several sovereign residences at le Chateau de Vincennes in the eleventh century. For a listing of these, see Jean Chapelot, *Le Chateau de Vincennes: Une residence royale au Moyen Age*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Chapelot, *Le Chateau*, 122.

Philippe Augustus built a wall around the forest, which was soon filled with deer and other wild animals as a gift from King Henry II, and was considered the first constructed park. The hunts at this residual hunting park remained the exclusive domain of the king and his most trusted nobility.

At the beginning of its construction, the Chateau de Vincennes was a cluster of residential buildings for the king's royal officers, known as hotels, housing for the king himself, and housing for the staff, as well as guests such as the Duke of Burgundy, Duke of Normandy, and the Emperor Charles IV.<sup>14</sup> Charles V, in 1367, was the first king to use the palace as his official residence. However, when the 100 Years War officially resumed in 1369, Charles V soon realized that his second palace should have protection and fortification during the military campaigns.<sup>15</sup> After building the donjon and the protective walls, or *enceinte*, Charles moved to enclose the entirety of the Chateau buildings in 1372. These walls now protected the Saint-Martin Chapel, the new donjon, and *chatelete*. They were composed of nine connecting residential towers that were also used for military defense. Three of these towers, the Tour du Village of the north, the Tour des Salves of the east, and the Tour du Bois of the south, had gates for exit and entry.<sup>16</sup> When exiting through the Tour du Bois, which translates as "tower of the woods—or forest," a party would be put directly into the deeply forested woods. If a hunting party should want to leave the Vincennes, this Tour du Bois would serve as the best direct route into the forest, but also as a bridge for hunting parties between daily life and the leisure of the

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<sup>14</sup> Chapelot, *Le Chateau*, 121.

<sup>15</sup> Research Team on the Château of Vincennes and East Suburbs (Jean Chapelot, Daniel Arroyo-Bishop), City of Vincennes, Municipal Information and Public Relations Office, S.H.A.T., S.H.M., S.H.A.A. website: <http://en.chateau-vincennes.fr/index.php>.

<sup>16</sup> The Tour du Village is now the only entrance and exit being used in contemporary times.

hunt. Thus, while the Chateau de Vincennes did exist as an outlying separation, created for the noble class' leisure and escape, this particular exit into the wilderness represented a true entry into a zone of separation from all social and political norms.

Examining the ivory casket panel in relation to this particular architectural location, we see that the exit of the hunting party on the ivory is similarly through an arched building that leads directly onto a forest setting. With regard to similarity, the ivory carving and the actual architectural structure have nearly identical characteristics, suggesting, at least metaphorically, that the depicted arch may visually represent the Tour du Bois arch. Although the Vincennes' gates were renovated in the eighteenth century, the basic shape, small windows, and matching flat planes with turrets are shared with the ivory casket (figs. 4, 5).

The relevance of this shared imagery resides in the way the casket may depict, beyond a generalized hunting location, the more specific sequestered domain of Vincennes. Knowing that this particular location existed so that the king and his royal entourage could act outside of conventional social rules allows for a reconsideration of the actions taking place within the specified space depicted on the ivory casket—most specifically the curious scene where both women and men are shown participating in the hunt. If we assume that the casket imagery represents rarified space within the walls of Vincennes' forest, the rules dictating gender-specific activities of the hunt could well have been overlooked, thus allowing both men and women to participate in the spaces' intended purpose.<sup>17</sup> If we conclude that this enclosed, functioning, well-stocked hunting park was open to these highest-ranking women, that phenomenon suggests a suspension

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<sup>17</sup> Chapelot, *Le Chateau*, 16.



of the standard rules and a promotion of an alternative, outlying lifestyle, where women are allowed to accompany the men and participate in the hunt.<sup>18</sup>

I would argue that one of the reasons for this suspension of rules pertains to the role royal women played in the education of their sons. In the fourteenth century, the push for education became important to the noble class. Furthering this educational initiative, Charles V increased his library in the Chateau de Vincennes to house over a thousand manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Within this world it was the women who were responsible for educating and schooling of the youngest children in reading, writing, and mathematical practices.<sup>20</sup> The best documented example of a noble and royal women teaching is that of Queen Blanche of Castille, Louis VII's mother. Beyond the way she taught traditional skills, Richard Almond points to several manuscripts, such as *The Boke of St Albans*, that include imagery of women riding and accompanying men in the hunt.<sup>21</sup> Examining these illustrations suggests that medieval women were indeed educated in the rules of the hunt and likely physically engaged in the hunting process. Because women were the documented educators, and since the hunt had such a complex structure and rules, women, within the sequestered confines of royal life, were likely in charge of teaching their young sons and daughters the practices and rules of the hunt.<sup>22</sup> It follows that because the Chateau du Vincennes was inhabited only by nobles, the women teaching these ideals would have been allowed to participate in the hunts, thus allowing them to

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<sup>18</sup> Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*. Edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1997): 13-47.

<sup>19</sup> Research Team on the Château of Vincennes: website: <http://en.chateau-vincennes.fr/index.php>.

<sup>20</sup> Almond, *Daughters of Artemis*, 152.

<sup>21</sup> Almond, *Daughters of Artemis*, 120; and Buettner, Brigitte. "Profane Illuminations, Secular Illusions: Manuscripts in Late Medieval Courtly Society." *The Art Bulletin*, 74/1 (1992): 75-90.

<sup>22</sup> Tracy Chapman Hamilton, "Sur la route... Topographic Patronage and the Genealogy of Location in late Capetian France." *Peregrinations* 2, 3/4 (2009): 77-116.

pass down traditions and personal stories of their own hunts and expeditions, perhaps even using the panel with hunting scenes to illustrate their teachings.

Because the ivory casket was a personal object, the owner would have been able to understand its secular, literal meaning of hunting, as well as the many layers of allegorical or metaphorical understanding implied in the imagery. As taught by the medieval poet Baudri de Bourgueil, visual images of any sort could be used as teaching devices. In personal tapestries of his creation, Adela of Blois wrote the poem *Adelae Comitissae*,<sup>23</sup> composed to teach various stories with layers of meaning and interpretations, with the intention that Adela could use these stories and the imagery to teach her children.<sup>24</sup>

The tapestries lead me to speculate that the ivory casket may have been used to educate, both literally and exegetically. The hunting panel was part of a larger casket that would have belonged to a personal family that may have resided in the Chateau de Vincennes. The fact that the panel is carved ivory narrows this scope of ownership to higher-class nobility. The panel features a hunting scene of “*par force*” stag hunting, illustrating many aspects of the hunt. The inclusion of the bow and arrow, the dogs, the stag (a proper ten-point hart), renders the hunting-scene depiction particularly appropriate as a pedagogical instrument. Moreover, the accuracy of the forms, and the social class of the household to which the panel belonged, would specify a teaching moment between mother and son. As such, the panel may illustrate a perfect educational example of what

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<sup>23</sup> Baudri de Bourgueil, “Adelae Comitissae,” In *Baldricus Burgulianus, Carmina*, edited by Karlheinz Hilbert, Editiones Heidelbergenses 19 (Heidelberg, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Monica Otter, “Baudri of Bourgueil, ‘To Countess Adela’,” *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 11 (2001): 61-142.

occurred in the Chateau and its forest hunting grounds, where gender, as I have suggested, inhibited neither hunting nor leisure activities.

Despite the arguments against these illustrations representing an actual reality, the use of the images and their visual associations is important to our understanding of particular places and social activities. Overall, the placing the Panel with Hunting Scenes within a particular place substantiates what we know from other sources to have occurred behind the military walls of the Chateau de Vincennes. Having the appearance of a militant fortress, the Chateau was nonetheless created for leisure and relaxation for the higher nobles and the king and his family. The ivory casket's imagery allows us to suggest that, rather than being passive participants in this noble realm, the women of the Chateau were actively engaged in both hunting and education, thus influencing both their present and future experiences through the actions of their children.

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Images



Figure 1: *Panel with Hunting Scenes*

Paris, ca. 1350

11 X 30.8 cm

The Cloisters Collection, 2003

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/475488>





Figure 2: *Panel with Hunting Scenes (mid-panel detail)*

Paris, ca. 1350

11 X 30.8 cm

The Cloisters Collection, 2003

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/475488>

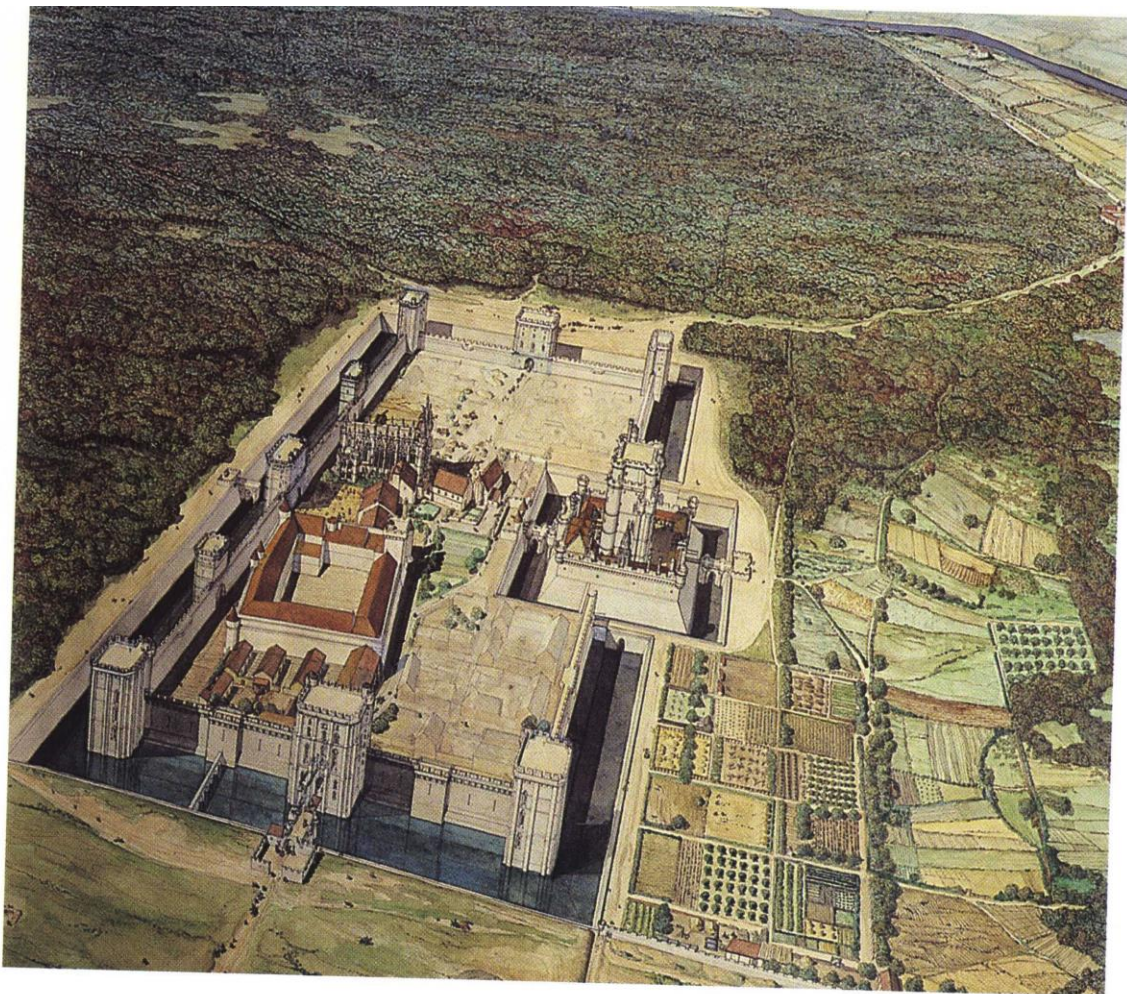


Figure 3: Jean-Claude Golvin

*Vue cavalière du château de Vincennes*

From: Phillippe Lorentz & Dany Sandron, *Atlas de Paris au Moyen Âge: Espace Urbain,*

*Habitat, Société, Religion, Lieux de Pouvoir,* (Paris: Parigramme, 2006), 93.



Figure 4: *Panel with Hunting Scenes (left side panel detail)*

Paris, ca. 1350

11 X 30.8 cm

The Cloisters Collection, 2003

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/475488>





Figure 5: Louis Le Vauxx

**Chateau de Vincennes** (Central gatehouse, Porte du Bois)

1660, France

The Hartill Archive of Architecture and Allied Arts

Artstor: <http://library.artstor.org/library/iv2.html?parent=true>