

BOOK REVIEW

IN THE MANNER OF THE FRANKS: HUNTING, KINGSHIP, AND MASCULINITY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

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Eric J. Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks: Hunting, Kingship, and Masculinity in Early Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. 384 pages.

Eric J. Goldberg's new book *In the Manner of the Franks: Hunting, Kingship, and Masculinity in Early Medieval Europe* investigates the cultural, political, and economic role of hunting in Frankish society. Articulating the coevolution of the Frankish political climate and the hunt, Goldberg incorporates existing scholarship to offer a comprehensive analysis exploring broad themes spanning the time from late antiquity to the last Carolingian king. The lack of extant hunting manuals has led to a belittled understanding of early medieval hunting which he spends the book dismantling.¹ He joins scholars in conversation about the social implications of Frankish hunting and its role as a contriver of noble camaraderie, building upon pre-existing arguments which explore the group bonding aspects of hunting in the time directly following that which the book explores.² Goldberg asserts that the role of

¹ Eric J. Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks: Hunting, Kingship, and Masculinity in Early Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 129.

² Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, 89.

hunting with respect to noble community building comes not solely from hunting parties bringing nobles together physically, but also through the shared identity of nobility and manliness found through the display of dominion over nature. This marriage of masculinity and nobility is integral to the specifically Frankish manner of hunting, and a large part of what distinguishes it from hunting practices that came before and after.

The book is divided into eight main chapters headed by cleverly alliterative titles. The first four chapters provide a historical walkthrough from Late Antique Roman hunting through the reign of Louis the Pious (813–840). The latter four chapters explore the logistics of hunting, from techniques and prey, to legal restrictions for peasants and clergy, to the dangers associated with the hunt.

“Emperors and Elites” introduces hunting as a performative act, not only literally in the context of amphitheaters’ staged hunts, but also as a display of aristocracy through the technical skill, financial means, and bravery required to hunt exotic and dangerous beasts like lions and bears. The chapter exhibits an impressive collection of art which displays the cultural significance of the hunt and draws connections to military prowess, for example through the inclusion of hunting imagery on the Arch of Constantine (315 CE).

In “Merovingians and Magnates,” Goldberg explains how perceptions of hunting as a “badge of elite status and manhood” is clearly present in the writings of the time; however, the connection between hunting proficiency and Frankishness had not yet emerged.³ The fact that wild animals could not be considered private property made hunting less restricted. Due to the lingering association of hunting with Roman identity, hunting could not yet be identified clearly with Frankishness.

“Charlemagne and the Chase” illustrates the shift towards the identification of hunting as a symbol of Frankishness, in large part due to the privatization of forests and Charlemagne’s declaration that wild animals belonged to the Kingship (“our game”).⁴ It is during this time when hunting *more Francorum* (in the manner of the Franks), as named by Einhard, emerged, distinguishing Charlemagne’s rule as a pivotal time for conceptualizing the unique nature of Frankish hunting.

“Louis the Pious and His Legacy” further demonstrates the association of hunting with Frankishness through its role as a generator of noble camaraderie. Through activities like banqueting and large hunting parties, rulers were able to foster camaraderie with and between elites, take notice of promising nobles, and prove their claim to the throne with feats of strength and skill. Hunting served as such an important political tool that Charles the Bald restricted it from his son so as to not allow him to build enough support to overthrow his father.

“Hounds and Hawks” explicates the diversity of Frankish hunting techniques, from falconry to hounding, and weaponry, from bows to spears. Goldberg emphasizes the high cost of keeping dogs

³ Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, 68.

⁴ Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, 74.

and falcons, and how these costs contribute to the strong associations of Frankish hunting with elite status.

“Peasants and Poachers” investigates the types of hunting practiced by non-nobles, which consisted most frequently of trapping and fishing. These activities were seen as more passive, less masculine forms of hunting. The high cost of dogs and falcons restricted the peasantry from hunting outside of these methods, further contributing to the exclusivity of hunting *more Francorum*. By providing opportunities for building healthier, safer, more wealthy communities, as well as opportunities for social mobility, hunting posed a threat to the elite status of the nobility, which likely explains Charlemagne’s stress on restricting it.

“Bishops and Boars” examines the alternative form of masculinity associated with clerics, one derived from chastity and man living in harmony with nature. Clerics were restricted from hunting with the exceptions of exterminating dangerous predators and fishing, mainly due to the Bible’s generally positive portrayal of fishermen and its generally negative portrayal of hunters, such as Nimrod and Esau.⁵

“Danger and Death” explains the implications of the mortal danger associated with the hunt. Whether it be through vulnerability to assassination, fatal equestrian mishaps, or encounters with teeth, tusks, and claws, hunting placed hunters in vulnerable positions. Political instability resulting from the decline in centralized Carolingian power made nobles more likely to be attacked while out hunting.

Goldberg’s writing appeals to a wide audience by providing thorough examinations of historical, archaeological, and artistic sources. While this book will be useful for scholars, its language and style remain accessible to the general public. Throughout the book, he notes the absence of women from hunting scenes, and at times their presence, but he does not spend much time investigating the implications of their place (or lack thereof) in the hunt. Goldberg explores the performance of masculinity through hunting, beginning with Roman *Venationes*, yet does not thoroughly explore that theme with regard to women observers accompanying the party.⁶

Hunting *more Francorum* differed from other medieval hunting, as it occupied a particularly unique role in society as a method of displaying political influence, a badge of manliness, and an opportunity to advance oneself through the demonstration of skill. While these elements are not restricted to those hunting in Frankish Europe, their combination, and the fact that hunting in the manner of the Franks warrants its own title, sheds light onto the notability and uniqueness of the Franks’ hunting style.

⁵ Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, 203.

⁶ Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, 29.