

## Chapter 25

# MANUSCRIPTS AND MEANING

## THE BIOGRAPHY AND VALUE OF JOHN RUSKIN'S BLUE PSALTER, BRUSSELS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE ROYALE DE BELGIQUE (KBR), MS IV 1013

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WHAT'S IT WORTH? Oscar Wilde described a cynic as “a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing,” and a sentimentalist as “a man who sees an absurd value in everything.”<sup>1</sup> The value of a rare book or manuscript can be measured in a range of ways, by its content, its historic significance, or perhaps less objectively by its artistic merit. A price realized at auction might give a simplistic answer to its financial worth, but even this barely hints at the impetus behind the zeal of the winning bidder. Why was a wealthy collector (or museum curator) willing to pay a certain price to acquire a particular volume at a specific date? What was the inspiration that drove their fervour? Jealousy, greed, rivalry in the saleroom? Christopher de Hamel has described book collecting as, “a strange disease” in which a passion can easily turn into an obsession, “the chase and the joyful triumph of acquisition.”<sup>2</sup>

Provenance research can not only tell us who owned a manuscript or book at a particular time or place, but perhaps more interestingly may reveal a whole range of clues to the interface between the material object and its users.<sup>3</sup> Throughout a manuscript's life, owning it, seeing it, and touching it, will have impacted and enriched a succession of individuals' lives. Each user will have chosen different criteria through which to assess its value, not necessarily measurable or objective criteria, but often highly personal and subjective ones. As a case study, this chapter considers a thirteenth-century manuscript

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1 Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (London: Mathews and Lane, 1893), 95.

2 Christopher de Hamel, “Cockerell as Collector,” *The Book Collector* 55 (Autumn 2006): 339–66 at 354.

3 For a broader discussion of these themes, see David Pearson, *Provenance Research in Book History* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2019).

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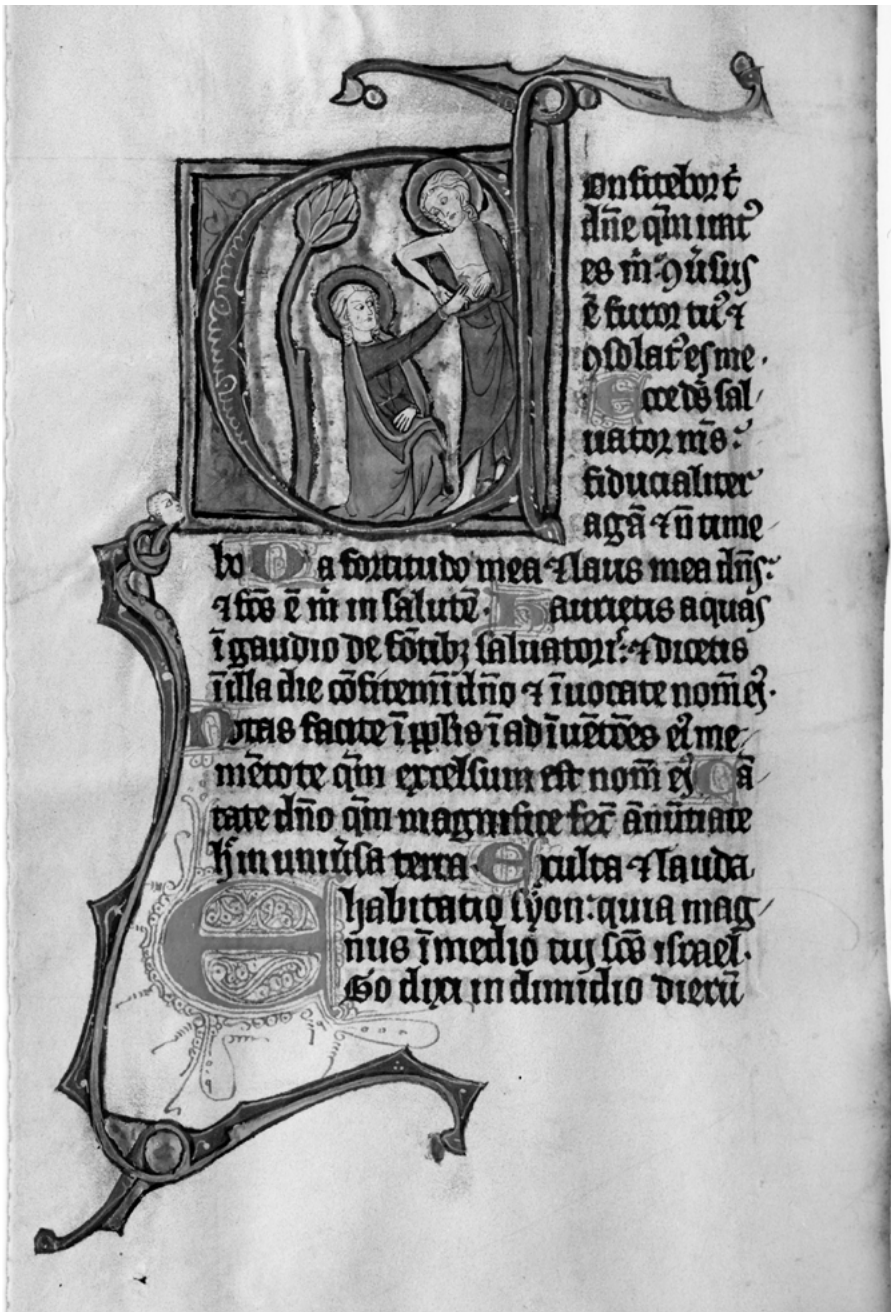


Figure 25.1. Christ and Mary Magdalene, The Blue Psalter; Liège, mid-thirteenth century. Ink and gold leaf on vellum, 14.8 × 9.8 cm. KBR, MS IV 1013, fol. 153v. Copyright KBR.

now held in the KBR (the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique in Brussels), which I will refer to as the Blue Psalter, a name given to it by John Ruskin when it was in his collection.<sup>4</sup>

The Blue Psalter is one of a group of around forty surviving manuscripts made in the Mosan region around Liège in modern-day Belgium between 1250 and 1330. More accurately it should be described as a Psalter-Hours, comprising a Calendar and Psalter, followed by six Old Testament canticles, prayers, the Hours of the Virgin, and Office of the Dead. It has 250 folios, measuring 14.8 × 9.8 cm, with twenty-four miniatures on the calendar pages, a full-page *Beatus* and twenty-one historiated initials. The borders are enriched with plump ivy leaves and distinctive spiky extensions from pinwheel terminals stretching out from the bodies of exotic creatures (Figure 25.1).

Judith Oliver has dated the manuscript to ca. 1280 and suggested it was probably made by an artist arriving in the region from Paris, adopting local iconographic styles, almost certainly for one of the beguinages in Liège.<sup>5</sup> It was probably a private commission, a gift from a wealthy or aristocratic family to a daughter or widow when she entered a beguinage. A clue is in the feminine forms used in some of the prayers, for example there is a petition for “*ton ancelle*” (your handmaiden) (fol. 8), and some of the women depicted in the imagery have the *falie*, the white veil and mantle characteristic of beguine dress. In the litany, the prayers between the Psalter and the Offices (fols. 162–67), there are two mentions of Lucia, perhaps a reference to the name of the original owner. The manuscript’s initial value, its meaning, its worth, was linked (in part at least) to its role as a liturgical resource. The criterion which it needed to meet to fulfil its purpose was that it had all the psalms and offices that a beguine would require for her daily prayer.

The original owner would have taken the manuscript into the beguinage and on her death, say in the early 1300s, the manuscript probably remained there. There is an addition to the calendar for August 29, 1349 (fol. 4v) which invites us to pray for another woman, Agnes, wife of Odonis de Soumagne, a town close to Liège. As far as we can tell, this is where the manuscript remained until the early nineteenth century when most of the beguinages closed and unwanted liturgical resources were sold off relatively cheaply to the new generation of collectors. At some point its value transitioned from being a personal prayer book to an asset kept in a treasury that could be sold off to the highest bidder, a spiritual value morphing into a financial value.

The manuscript emerges again in the collection of John Ruskin: artist, author, critic, but also collector. As James Dearden observed, “Ruskin had the means to allow his collecting instincts to run riot.”<sup>6</sup> He began collecting illuminated manuscripts around 1850, an excellent window of opportunity before the international trade really took off. Ruskin wrote to Sir Charles Newton on January 20, 1854, “If you come across any very interest-

<sup>4</sup> The Blue Psalter, KBR, MS IV 1013, Liège, ca. 1280; James S. Dearden, *The Library of John Ruskin* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2012), 266.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Oliver, *Gothic Manuscript Illumination in the Diocese of Liege (c.1250–c.1330)* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 248.

<sup>6</sup> James S. Dearden, “John Ruskin, the Collector, With a Catalogue of the Illuminated and Other Manuscripts formerly in his Collection,” *The Library* 21 (1966): 124–56 at 124.

ing MS.—interesting I mean in *art*, for I don't care about old texts—and can secure it for me, I will instantly reimburse you to the extent of fifty pounds; only I should expect a great deal for that price out of those old convent lumber-rooms.”<sup>7</sup> Ruskin has a contested reputation among bibliophiles due to the stories of his cutting up medieval manuscripts, for example, the well-known comment in his diary on January 3, 1854: “cut misal up in evening—hard work.”<sup>8</sup> De Hamel, however, has argued that such examples have been exaggerated: “Of almost a hundred illuminated manuscripts owned personally by Ruskin, he removed and gave away sample leaves—in fact—of only four, two of which had already been partially dismembered by Jarman.”<sup>9</sup> To Ruskin a medieval manuscript was “a means towards an end,” to be used as much as a teaching tool as a collector's item.<sup>10</sup> He was not planning to sell off manuscript fragments as would soon become the fashion. Instead, his actions were tied to his passion as an educator.<sup>11</sup> He framed individual pages, shared them, and used them for his lectures in Oxford. He took a pragmatic approach and yet, after he set up the Guild of St George Museum in Sheffield in 1877, he sent the curator, Henry Swan, a Bible saying, “This will baptise their eyes,” suggesting a performative, quasi-sacramental value.<sup>12</sup>

It is not clear when the Blue Psalter was purchased by Ruskin, but it was in his collection by 1862, because on January 3 that year he gave it away, to Rose La Touche, the young Irish girl with whom he was infatuated, on her fourteenth birthday. The Blue Psalter documents this through an inscription on the front flyleaf: “Posie with St C's love.” Posie was Ruskin's nickname for Rose; St C is an abbreviation for St Crumpet, her nickname for Ruskin.<sup>13</sup> Ruskin had first met Rose when she was only nine in 1858 and by the 1860s she featured regularly in his diaries and letters “not just as a favourite drawing pupil...but as a force for stability in his unsettled life, and almost as a spiritual guide.”<sup>14</sup> From our twenty-first century perspective, this immediately rings alarm bells of possible grooming behaviour, a middle-aged man, a celebrity, giving gifts to a young, impres-

**7** Letter from Ruskin to Sir Charles Newton, January 20, 1854, Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Dundas Ogilvy Wedderburn eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols (London: Allen, 1903–1912), 36:162.

**8** Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956–1959), 488.

**9** Christopher de Hamel, *Cutting up Manuscripts for Pleasure and Profit* (Charlottesville: Book Arts Press, 1996), 14. For the exploits of J. B. Jarman, see Janet Backhouse, “A Victorian Connoisseur and his Manuscripts: The Tale of Mr. Jarman and Mr. Wing,” *BMQ* 32.4 (1968): 76–92.

**10** Roger S. Wieck, “*Folio Fugitiva*: The Pursuit of the Illuminated Manuscript Leaf,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): 233–54 at 241.

**11** See also Stella Panayotova, “A Ruskinian Project with a Cockerellian Flavour,” *The Book Collector* 54 (2005): 357–74.

**12** Alice H. R. H. Beckwith, *Victorian Bibliomania* (Providence: Museum of Art, 1987), 12.

**13** The significance of nicknames is discussed in Linda M. Austin, “Ruskin and Rose at Play with Words,” *Criticism* 28 (1986): 409–425.

**14** John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby, *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 24.

sionable teenager.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the gift of a Book of Hours was not an uncommon practice in this period and later that year, Ruskin also gave a Book of Hours to Rose's sister Emily for her eighteenth birthday on March 15, 1862.<sup>16</sup> Anthropologists still debate gift theory and how best to understand material gifts which may be seen to represent a physical embodiment of love, but which tacitly announce an expectation of reciprocity.<sup>17</sup>

What possible value might a medieval manuscript have had to Rose? There is a prayer that begins *Ave Rose florie* (fol. 246) that may have appealed, and we know she had a strong religious faith. The fragment of her diary that has survived from 1867 when she was nineteen is more like a spiritual autobiography, littered with quotations from the gospels and the psalms.<sup>18</sup> Ruskin had numbered the folios of the Psalter and on a rear flyleaf highlighted the psalms that begin each section and the images that match the Offices. Perhaps he hoped that Rose might use it as a prayer book again. At Ruskin's suggestion she studied Greek from the age of thirteen so it is possible she may have been able to read the psalms in Latin.<sup>19</sup>

Ruskin proposed marriage to Rose on her eighteenth birthday in 1866. She turned him down and her parents refused him permission to see her when she visited London. She died, unmarried, aged twenty-seven on May 26, 1875. The Psalter is mentioned in Ruskin's diary again on July 8, 1875 so presumably had been returned to him by her parents.<sup>20</sup> The relationship between Rose's parents and Ruskin had deteriorated from 1868 onwards after they were in contact with his former wife, Effie (married to John Millais in 1855) and one can imagine that the manuscript had a contested or even negative value. Perhaps they wanted rid of it, something symbolic of part of their daughter's life they would rather not remember. However, if a gift has value to the recipient, it may also have ongoing significance to the giver. While it is hard to conjecture the importance of the Psalter to Rose, when it returned to Ruskin its sentimental, emotional value may have increased. He kept her letters and a lock of her hair in a rosewood box, a shrine to her memory.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the Psalter lived there too.

**15** For commentary on the relationship between Ruskin and La Touche, see Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 262–64.

**16** Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, 172.

**17** For gift theory, see John Sherry, "Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research* 10 (1983): 157–68.

**18** Van Akin Burd, ed., *John Ruskin and Rose La Touche: Her Unpublished Diaries of 1861 and 1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

**19** Burd ed., *John Ruskin and Rose La Touche*, 110. See also, Rayner Unwin ed., *Gulf of Years: Love letters from John Ruskin to Kathleen Olander* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953), 63.

**20** Ruskin Diary RF MS 20, pp. 18ff, 1875, cited in Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, 267. Emily's Book of Hours was not returned but was inherited by her daughter. In the 1940s both Rose's Psalter and Emily's Hours were reunited in J. R. Abbey's collection.

**21** Cook and Wedderburn, *The Works of John Ruskin*, 35:lxvii; Wilfrid Blunt, *Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, Friend of Ruskin and William Morris and Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (London: Hamilton, 1964), 41.

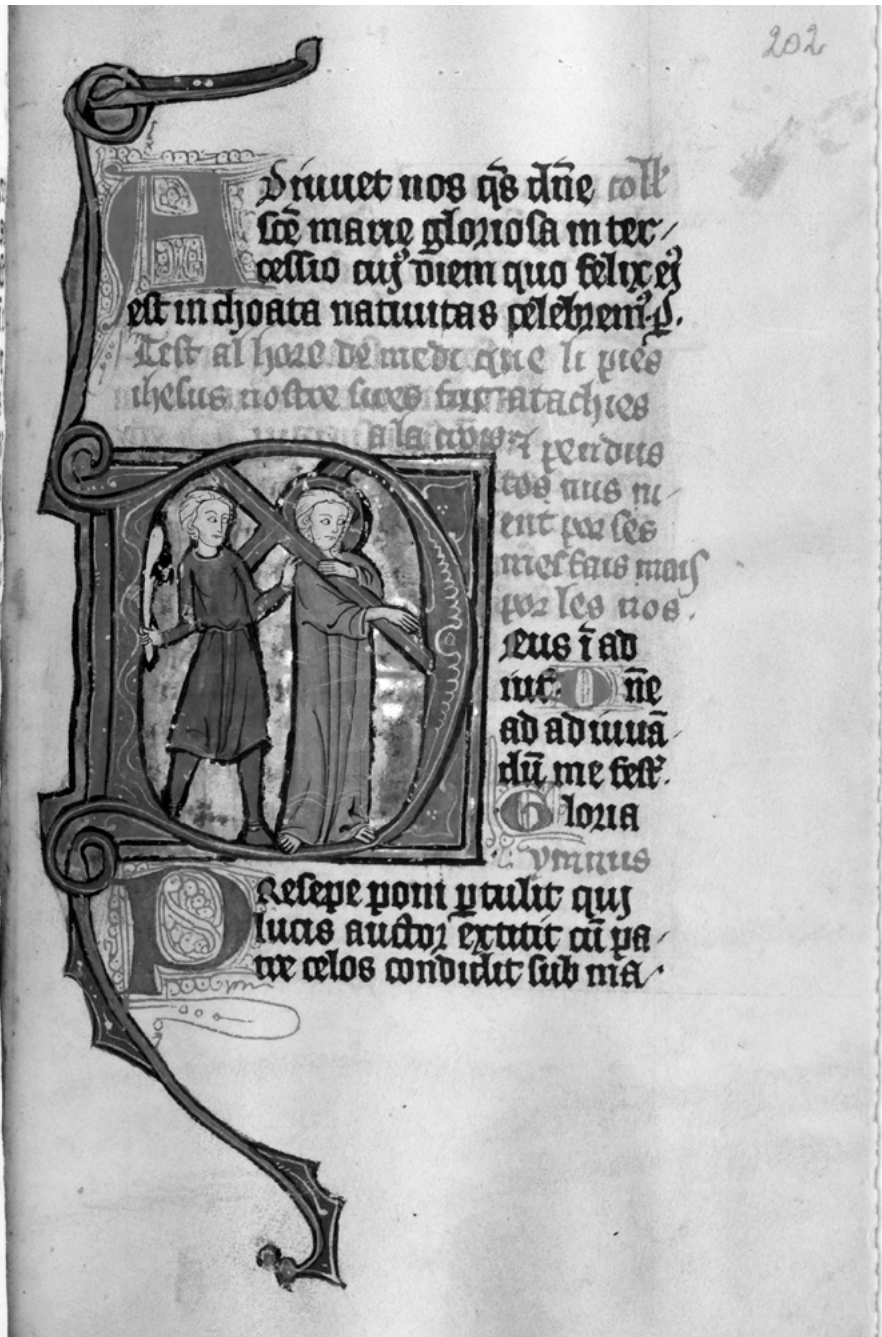


Figure 25.2. Christ carrying the cross, The Blue Psalter, Liège, mid-thirteenth century. Ink and gold leaf on vellum, 14.8 × 9.8 cm. KBR, MS IV 1013, fol. 202r. Copyright KBR.

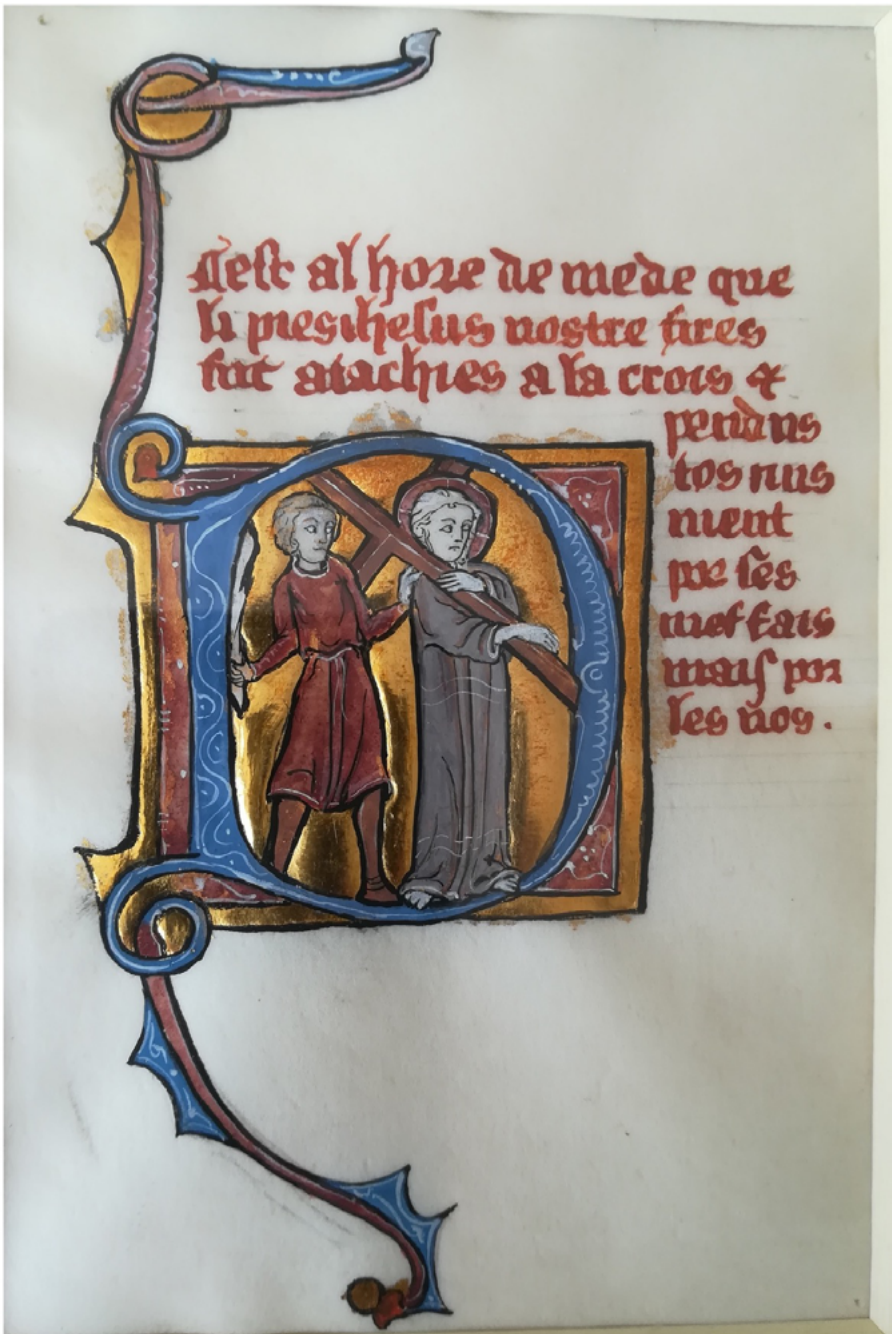


Figure 25.3. Christ carrying the cross copied by Phoebe Anna Traquair, ca. 1887.  
Ink, watercolour and gold leaf on vellum, 12.4 × 9.6 cm. Private collection.

More than twenty years later, in 1887, Ruskin sent the Blue Psalter to another young woman. This time it was Phoebe Anna Traquair, a young Irish artist living in Edinburgh whom he had never met. It seems that she had written to him asking for advice on illumination and he responded by saying that the best way to learn is from studying the medieval masters. He loaned her the thirteenth-century Brantwood Bible and then the Blue Psalter, "I send you another book, more interesting than anything I have yet asked you to examine. Keep it as long as you care to."<sup>22</sup>

Traquair made copies of the historiated initials in the Blue Psalter in inks and gold leaf on fine vellum, a formative process in her artistic development (Figures 25.2 and 25.3).<sup>23</sup> She would go on to become one of the leading Arts and Crafts artists in Scotland and made some of the finest illuminated books of the modern era, including her version of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Willowwood* sonnets (Figure 25.4).

The meaning and value of the Blue Psalter to Traquair was as an exemplar to be copied. This reflects what we see in the different acquisition policies at this period of the British Museum, which valued items for their historic importance, and the South Kensington Museum (later the V&A), whose collection was specifically intended to be a source of design history to inspire contemporary artists. The latter probably had the most impact in shaping popular views in Victorian medievalism.

In 1854 Ruskin wrote that he, "would infinitely rather own a finely illuminated book than a picture...a beloved thing, to be handed down from father to son, and from generation to generation."<sup>24</sup> This indeed is exactly what happened to Traquair's copy of the Blue Psalter which was passed down through her family. It was sold at auction in Edinburgh in July 2000 after which it was broken up and the individual pages framed and sold off.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps this is a good compromise, the original Psalter is preserved but the copy has been dispersed into private collections.

Traquair returned the manuscript and Ruskin referred to it for a final time in his diary in 1889.<sup>26</sup> He died in January 1900 and the Blue Psalter was sold in 1905 to another famous collector who added his bookplate to the inside cover, "FROM THE LIBRARY OF / C. H. St JOHN HORNBY / SHELLEY HOUSE, CHELSEA." What is the material evidence telling us here? A bookplate is much more than a sign of ownership, it is symbolic of power, possession, wealth, and pride. In a similar way, the binding history is intrinsic to the manuscript's story. The current binding is by Katherine Adams and at the bottom of the verso of the first fly leaf, she has written in red ink, "Rebound by K. Adams 1905." There is also a stamp on the bottom margin in the centre, "BOUND BY HAYDAY." James

**22** Letter from Ruskin to Traquair, June 23, 1887, now bound with *The Dream*, Victoria & Albert Museum, MSL/1936/1765. Earlier in 1887 Ruskin had loaned Traquair the Brantwood Bible (now BL, Yates Thompson MS 22) which he had bought from Quaritch in 1876.

**23** Alan Mitchell, "John Ruskin and Phoebe Anna Traquair: Medieval Manuscripts and the Scottish Arts and Crafts Tradition," *British Art Journal* 23.2 (2022): 66–72.

**24** Cook and Wedderburn, *Works of John Ruskin*, 12:484–85.

**25** *Shapes Auctioneers*, July 1, 2000 (Edinburgh: Shapes Auctioneers, 2000), lot 39.

**26** Ruskin Diary RF MS 10a, p. 152, 1889, cited in Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, 267.



Figure 25.4. D. G. Rossetti, "Willowwood III" by Phoebe Anna Traquair, 1890. Ink, watercolour and gold leaf on vellum, 19.3 × 15 cm. National Museums Scotland, K.2010.58.3. Image © National Museums Scotland.

Hayday was active in London in the 1840s and 50s. He was sometimes commissioned to do presentation bindings and in 1851 at the Great Exhibition he showed an example “in morocco in a style suitable for ecclesiastical books.”<sup>27</sup> Ruskin always referred to the manuscript as his Blue Psalter and Dearden suggested that perhaps the current midnight-blue morocco was Adams giving a nod to the previous binding (presumably by Hayday) that it had enjoyed when owned by Ruskin.<sup>28</sup> The 1905 date suggests it was rebound when Hornby acquired the manuscript although again we might query his motivation. It seems unlikely that the binding was falling apart. It had been passed around quite happily between Ruskin, La Touche in Ireland, and Traquair in Scotland in its previous state. However, a fine binding is much more than a protective covering; it is another symbol of ownership. Over one hundred bindings for Hornby by Adams are known and he used her as a binder for Ashendene Press books from 1902. To some collectors, a binding may even include a sensual element. Sydney Cockerell once wrote, “I think I must one day put all my beautiful Katie bindings in a row, & caress them in turn.”<sup>29</sup>

The value of a manuscript, and the reputation of a collector, can be enhanced when it is shown to other connoisseurs or put on display to the general public. In 1908 Hornby loaned the Blue Psalter to the spectacular exhibition of illuminated manuscripts held at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London.<sup>30</sup> Over two hundred manuscripts were gathered from all the major collectors of the period, seventeen from Henry Yates Thompson, eighteen from J. Pierpont Morgan, fifty from Charles Dyson Perrins, and just one from Hornby: the Blue Psalter.

Cockerell, so often the spider in the web pulling various threads that connect networks, was effectively the curator of the exhibition. He never owned the Blue Psalter, but he made his mark on it, literally, in a sequence of notes dated 1907 on the verso of the flyleaf which carries Ruskin’s inscription to Rose. Cockerell had first met Ruskin at Easter 1887, curiously the weekend that Traquair was in correspondence with Ruskin.<sup>31</sup> It is certainly conceivable that Cockerell would have had the opportunity to handle the Blue Psalter at this time. His biographer Wilfred Blunt records that in the following year, 1888, “Cockerell was even allowed to take his turn at holding the precious rosewood box.”<sup>32</sup>

The 1907 notes suggest that Cockerell had been doing serious research on Liège psalters, perhaps in preparation for the 1908 exhibition. In 1920 he added further notes to the manuscript in a different ink (presumably with Hornby’s permission) noting that

**27** Howard M. Nixon, *Five Centuries of English Bookbinding* (London: Scolar Press, 1978), 202.

**28** Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, 267.

**29** Letter from Cockerell to Adams, cited in Christopher de Hamel, “Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts from the Library of Sir Sydney Cockerell,” *British Library Journal* 13 (1987): 186–210 at 192.

**30** [Sydney Cockerell], *Burlington Fine Arts Club: Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1908), 57.

**31** Letter from Traquair to Ruskin April 12, 1887 (the Tuesday after Easter Sunday) in which she thanks him for the loan of the Brantwood Bible. Mack Collection L101, Ruskin Library, University of Lancaster.

**32** Blunt, *Sydney Carlyle Cockerell*, 41.

one of the Liège books with which he had earlier compared the Blue Psalter was now in the Fitzwilliam Museum where he was director from 1908 to 1937.<sup>33</sup> The value of the manuscript to Cockerell in this context was as a scholar and researcher identifying an important survivor of a particular school of illumination from the thirteenth century. Cockerell however was a complex personality, not only a curator, but also a collector, fixer, and go-between. The Psalter may also have had a commercial value to him. After Ruskin's death, Cockerell visited Brantwood again from April 4 to 11, 1902, and he advised Joan and Arthur Severn on how best to dispose of Ruskin's collection. He purchased two manuscripts for himself and negotiated the sale of items to Yates Thompson.<sup>34</sup> He almost certainly also played a part in the sale of the Blue Psalter to Hornby a few years later. Hornby bought it from the Severns for £150 in June 1905 and Cockerell's diary records a payment of £15 received from Hornby on 21 June which looks remarkably like a 10% commission on the sale.<sup>35</sup> In 1902 he had turned down the offer of a commission on the Yates Thompson's sales instead asking the Severns, "to be entrusted with the rebinding of all of the illuminated manuscripts then in fragments at Brantwood."<sup>36</sup> Cockerell may also have played a part in having the Blue Psalter rebound by Adams for Hornby.<sup>37</sup>

Hornby died on April 26, 1946, and on September 16, Major J. R. Abbey purchased twenty-nine manuscripts from his collection. Cockerell was given the responsibility of dispersing Hornby's library, and he offered Abbey first refusal to buy Hornby's medieval manuscripts *en bloc*, but demanded an answer within just twelve hours. Abbey took the bait and bought the complete collection, including the Blue Psalter, for the offer price of £40,000, an excellent example of an avaricious collector purchasing a complete library from a previous owner.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps he did not particularly want the Blue Psalter, but he did want the kudos of owning or preserving Hornby's collection.

Abbey added his bookplate and then he too loaned the manuscript out for exhibitions including the Arts Council exhibition, *Ruskin and his Circle* in 1964.<sup>39</sup> In the exhibition catalogue the Ruskin provenance is discussed in detail. By the 1960s, the manuscript's value to Abbey, and probably its financial value, was enhanced by its previous

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**33** Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 288, Liege, ca. 1280, no. 142 (page 68, plate 97) in the catalogue of the 1908 Burlington Exhibition. Cockerell's notebooks, including one on Psalters, are now at Senate House Library, MS 809/box 13/1.

**34** Christopher de Hamel, "Cockerell as Entrepreneur," *The Book Collector* 55 (2006): 49–72 at 61. Ruskin purchased a Bible (now BL, Add. MS 52778) and the Ruskin Hours (now Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig IX 3 (83.ML.99)); Yates Thompson purchased the Psalter of Isabelle of France (now Fitzwilliam MS 300) and the Brantwood Bible (now BL, Yates Thompson MS 22).

**35** Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, lxxxv; BL, Add. MS 52642, fol. 77v.

**36** Correspondence between Cockerell and Joan Severn, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 54-2002. See also Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, lxxxiii.

**37** Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, xxix.

**38** A. R. A. Hobson and A. N. L. Munby, "Contemporary Collectors XXVI John Roland Abbey," *The Book Collector* 10.1 (1961): 40–48 at 42.

**39** *Ruskin and his Circle* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1964), no. 174.

ownership, whereas in 1908 the Burlington catalogue omitted to mention that it was once owned by Ruskin. Perhaps in the 1900s the Ruskin name did not “add value” in the same way that it did by the 1960s and certainly does today. There is a prescient line in a letter of April 11, 1880, from Ruskin to Bernard Quaritch when he was offloading excess books from his collection:

My shelves are too short for my books—and my life for the reading of them... You will find here and there a good book among them—and a few signed as mine, which on that ground may perhaps be thought worth houseroom by foolish people, some day or other.<sup>40</sup>

Abbey went on to amass a collection of over 1,300 books and manuscripts. When he died in 1969 his library was sold, raising almost £1,000,000. The Blue Psalter was lot 2915 in a sale on June 4, 1974, where it was purchased by Maggs Brothers.<sup>41</sup> Finally, on November 9, 1974, it was acquired by the KBR for £19,800.<sup>42</sup> Had it been bought by a library in the United States it might be fully digitized by now and therefore accessible to scholars, but in Belgium it has a local meaning, a heritage value. It has returned nearer to Liège, its place of creation eight hundred years ago, and therefore can be interpreted in the context of research into the beguinages of the thirteenth century and contribute to debates on repatriation.

The Blue Psalter has been a prized possession of its various owners over the centuries, but they will have had very different reasons for valuing its importance. We could consider the value of a Book of Hours solely through the lens of its function as a prayer book, its original use. The manuscript quite clearly has been used; many thumbs have left their dirty marks on the bottom right-hand corner of each folio. Yet today its spiritual value as a prayer book is minimal. A prayer book in a library is rather like a silent violin in a museum display cabinet; it hints at the promise of something more precious than itself.

From its birth this was also more than just a prayer book. The ornamentation is not merely ornamental. The illuminations enhance the visual appeal but also draw attention to the owner’s status, wealth, and good taste. It has always had a financial value and must have been a costly project when it was first commissioned, though when the beguinage closed its resale value was probably low. Perhaps Ruskin got a bargain. Nevertheless, he was happy to give it away to La Touche for nothing. Its free loan to Traquair was inspirational. She may not have honed her skills and become the mature artist we know today if it had not been for Ruskin’s encouragement and affirmation.

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**40** Letter from Ruskin to Quaritch, April 11, 1880, Charlotte Quaritch Wrentmore ed., *Letters to Bernard Quaritch, 1867–88* (London: Quaritch Ltd, 1938), 24. Many of these books were sold at auction a few months later at Puttick & Simpson, *Catalogue of an Assemblage of Fine Books, Books of Prints & Manuscripts*, June 30–July 1, 1880 (London: Puttick & Simpson, 1880), with the heading, “Many of them having the autograph of John Ruskin.” See, Dearden, *Library of John Ruskin*, lxxix.

**41** *Catalogue of The Celebrated Library of the late Major J. R. Abbey: The Eighth Portion...4th June 1974* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1974), lot 2915. Sold to Maggs Brothers for £17,000.

**42** KBR accessions register, November 9, 1974.

Of course, the manuscript's survival has been of value to scholars. To the cultural historian, it is a tangible artefact that complements contemporary texts and imagery in other sources. Its public display in exhibitions will have helped to shape popular attitudes, informing both Victorian and twentieth-century medievalisms. While art historians tend to fetishize the original state of an artwork as it left its maker's studio, this methodology instead revels in a manuscript's successive incarnations across its timeline and through the hands of successive owners. The annotations, the binding history, the provenance, all add to the story and to the manuscript's value. The Blue Psalter's importance, and the criteria on which its meaning has been assessed, has ebbed and flowed as it has passed through the hands of different collectors, scholars, dealers, librarians, and curators, not forgetting the women, Lucia in the beguinage, Rosie the teenager, and Phoebe Anna the artist.

