

Chapter 4

LÉOPOLD DELISLE, HENRI OMONT, AND THE PRICE OF NATIONAL COLLECTING

THE MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPT ACQUISITIONS OF THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE ca. 1900–1910

HANNAH MORCOS

THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE was one of the most important national libraries active in the manuscript trade in the early twentieth century. In addition to receiving a steady flow of donations, its curators consistently sought out new medieval manuscripts to enrich the already world-leading collection. The librarians operated within a value system distinct from other consumers in the market, spending not their own resources, but those allocated by the state to buy objects of cultural and national significance important to the nation's heritage and the institution's global reputation.¹ Between 1874 and 1905, the library was directed by the formidable Léopold Delisle, a world-renowned scholar and public figure, who had previously held the role of curator of manuscripts.² His reign marked a particularly fruitful era for the library's manuscript holdings and his forced retirement in March 1905 inevitably had an impact on future acquisitions.³ Following his promotion in 1874, Delisle maintained his involvement in the activities of the department of manuscripts and worked closely with its curators. Henri Omont was promoted to curator of manuscripts in December 1899 and held this position until his retirement in 1933.⁴ Whilst he shared Delisle's commitment to the library's manuscript holdings, Omont did not have his mentor's political influence. He did, however, possess a keen interest in the trade and shrewdly employed the department's budget to buy manuscripts at what he deemed the fairest price.⁵

Delisle's career coincided with an era in which the market for medieval manuscripts was both relatively abundant and affordable. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the emerging participation of affluent American buyers in the European market drove up prices, especially those of illuminated books.⁶ Delisle had managed to secure for the

1 See, for example, the considerations of Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français*, 1:lxxxv.

2 On Delisle, see Vieillard and Gosset, *Léopold Delisle*.

3 On his contributions to the library, see Blasselle, "Les années Delisle." On the comparable influence of Sir Frederic Madden, see de Hamel, *Posthumous Papers*, 295–337.

4 See Brunel, "Henry Omont."

5 Brunel, "Henry Omont," 375; and "Extrait," 69.

6 On the transatlantic trade, see Magnusson and Cleaver, *Trade in Rare Books and Manuscripts*. On the impact of American buyers in Italy, see Botana, "Acquisitions."

Bibliothèque nationale a number of “manuscris à peintures” in the previous decades (despite already “excessive” prices), but by the end of the nineteenth century the library was largely excluded from competing for such volumes.⁷ The library did, however, manage to obtain more modest manuscripts in large numbers, focusing in particular on items made in the region of modern France, written in the French language, or of French provenance. Omont’s first decade as curator was the most prolific of the twentieth century, benefitting from the initial support of Delisle and the dispersals of large collections formed in the previous century.⁸ The Bibliothèque nationale’s purchases of pre-modern manuscripts in “European” languages—the bulk of acquisitions during this important transitional decade—are the focus of this case study.⁹

The Département des manuscrits had an annual budget for acquisitions, which covered the procurement of catalogues and recent scholarly works, in addition to manuscripts, and a separate allowance for bindings. In 1906, the department had an allocation of 31,500 francs for acquisitions and 4,000 francs for bindings.¹⁰ However, these figures were not fixed: the budgets could be repartitioned between departments depending on negotiations in progress or important auction sales.¹¹ Furthermore, the budget for bindings could be re-allocated for acquisitions (see Table 4.1). In exceptional cases, the curators could apply to the government for additional funding, such as the special grant of 100,000 francs in December 1899 to acquire a collection of over 700 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, formed by the French scholar and diplomat Charles Schefer (1820–1898).¹² In the period under investigation, however, the librarians were largely restricted to their designated budget, which they publicly condemned as barely sufficient.¹³

7 See Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français*, 1:xliviii.

8 For example, significant numbers of manuscripts of interest to France were being sold at the auctions of the Philipps and Ashburnham collections in London (see below). In France, the manuscripts owned by Ambroise Firmin-Didot (1790–1876) were also re-entering the market, having been dispersed at six auctions between 1878 and 1884, and the unsold manuscripts reappeared at a sale in 1910.

9 The majority of the purchased manuscripts were written in French and Latin, but this study also takes into account items in Greek and a range of European vernacular languages. The acquisition of manuscripts in additional languages require further investigation and additional expertise that extend beyond the capacity of the current survey. For an overview of both purchased and donated manuscripts, see Omont, *Nouvelles acquisitions...1891–1910*.

10 Marcel et al., *Bibliothèque nationale*, 31. The budget for acquisitions remained at 31,500 FRF in January 1912, in a report comparing the budgets of the Bibliothèque nationale and British Museum. See Paris, BnF, Département des manuscrits, Archives Modernes, 105.

11 Marcel et al., *Bibliothèque nationale*, 31

12 Blochet, *Catalogue*. Alongside this remarkable acquisition, the library acquired increasing numbers of manuscripts produced outside Europe, including China, Ethiopia, Japan, Mexico, and Tibet, among others, at generally modest prices. See Blasselle, “Les années Delisle,” 306.

13 Omont frequently highlighted the “modicité des ressources,” *Nouvelles acquisitions...1891–1910*, xiv.

Table 4.1. Overview of the expenditure on pre-modern manuscripts in European languages purchased by the Bibliothèque nationale (1900–1910), including the amount allocated for bindings.

Year	Total spent (FRF)	Allocation for bindings ¹⁴ (FRF)	Number of priced articles ¹⁵	Average price (FRF)	Highest price (FRF)	Lowest price (FRF)
1900/01	26,119.00	3,000	36	725.53	10,000	15.00
1901/02	36,523.80	2,000	75	486.99	8,389	5.00
1902/03	10,040.85	2,000	27	371.88	1,500	10.50
1903/04	20,108.75	3,000	64	314.20	2,500	10.00
1904/05	12,031.20	4,000	41	293.44	3,000	7.00
1905/06	9,078.60	3,000	36	252.18	1,500	8.00
1906/07	5,473.68	2,000	40	136.84	800	5.00
1907/08	5,582.95	3,000	23	242.74	1,000	30.00
1908/09	45,305.30	2,000	150	302.04	2,000	8.00
1909/10	13,146.45	3,000	33	398.38	3,500	4.15
Total	183,411		525			

The registers containing each “Autorisation d’achat” (“authorization of purchase,” hereafter *Ada*), held in the archive of the Département des manuscrits, preserve data on the prices paid for manuscripts and the contexts of their acquisition.¹⁶ The *Ada*’s record the details of the item acquired, the name and address of the seller, and the price. They bear the original date of the request and when it was approved by the “Administrateur general,” the post held by Delisle until he was succeeded by Henry Marcel in 1905.¹⁷ They also include the name of Omont, the employee making the request. The origins of certain manuscripts are obscured by the use of local agents to process purchases.¹⁸ In these cases, the correspondence on acquisitions fills in some gaps, revealing negotiations over

¹⁴ Based on the figures in “Autorisations de dépenses pour acquisitions et reliures,” Paris, BnF, Département des manuscrits, Archives Modernes 517 (1889–1903: nos. 1166–1462) and 518 (1904–1921: nos. 1463–1777).

¹⁵ The priced articles include bundles of charters and individual documents in addition to bound codices and multi-volume collections; they therefore do not correspond to the number of new shelfmarks.

¹⁶ Archives Modernes 517 and 518.

¹⁷ The date of the authorization of payment, however, did not always equate to the date when the manuscript entered the library. In years of heavy expenditure, the librarians postponed the payment for certain purchases to deduct them from the subsequent year’s budget.

¹⁸ The principal *librairies* who processed the payments during this decade were Émile Paul et fils et Guillemin, Ernest Leroux, and Klincksieck.

price as well as the librarians' assessments of the manuscripts' worth. Moreover, the Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts offers further information about the manuscripts' trajectories prior to their arrival at the Bibliothèque nationale.

To examine the different factors influencing the new acquisitions in the first decade of the twentieth century, this case study centres on the three principal sources of purchased items: private individuals, auction sales, and professional book dealers. By combining the *Ada's* and complementary archival evidence, it is possible to ascertain the ways in which the contexts of acquisition affected the prices paid, the influence of the buyer–seller relationship, and the impact of the changes in personnel. Analysis of this previously untapped dataset offers new insights into the position of the Bibliothèque nationale within the manuscript trade and the roles of the individuals who shaped the national collection.

Private Individuals

The national and international status of the Bibliothèque nationale encouraged frequent propositions from private individuals of manuscripts that had entered their possession by chance or inheritance. In many cases, those proposing the items had little knowledge of their commercial value and would ask the curator to suggest a price, which resulted in generally lower figures being paid. Two of the most expensive manuscripts acquired between 1900 and 1910 came via this route and would likely have been unobtainable on the open market. In April 1900, the library spent 10,000 francs on a sixth-century illuminated Greek manuscript in gold ink on 43 folios of purple parchment (Supplément grec 1286), featuring parts of the Gospel of Matthew (*Ada* no. 1392) (Fig. 4.1).¹⁹ This manuscript came from a French naval officer who had acquired it in Asia Minor during his journey home.²⁰ The figure of 10,000 francs (approx. £398) was remarkable for the Département des manuscrits (see Graphs 4.1 and 4.2), but constituted a bargain when compared with the prices of other early manuscripts in this period.²¹ This extraordinary purchase was immediately followed in May 1900 by the acquisition of a six-metre long illuminated Exultet roll (NAL 710), produced in Southern Italy, ca. 1100, for 8,175 francs (*Ada* no. 1393).²² The source of the latter was identified as “Flury Hérard, 372, rue St. Honoré,” which was the address of the banker Paul Luce Hippolyte Flury-Hérard (1836–1913). He was not a known collector and may have proposed the manuscript to the library after acquiring it from a client.²³ It is no coincidence that these two stand out

¹⁹ Omont, “Peintures.”

²⁰ Omont, “Peintures,” 175–76.

²¹ For example, the American collector Theodore Irwin spent £2,300 in 1890 on the tenth-century Golden Gospels of Henry VIII (New York, Morgan Library, M.23; 144 fols.), also written in gold ink on purple parchment. See Morris, “Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America,” 194–95. J. P. Morgan paid £10,000 for the ninth-century Lindau Gospels (New York, Morgan Library, M.1) in 1901.

²² Lowe, *Beneventan Script*, 69, 356. See also Avril and Zaluska, *Manuscrits enluminés de la Bibliothèque nationale*, no. 33 (p. 18).

²³ See Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Archives nationales, “Minutes et répertoires du notaire André

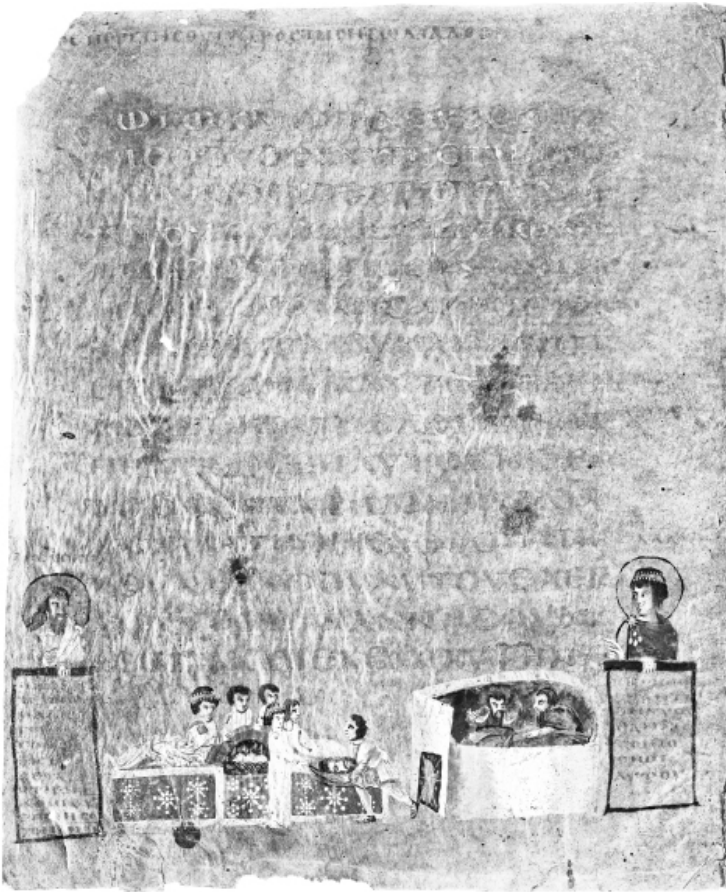
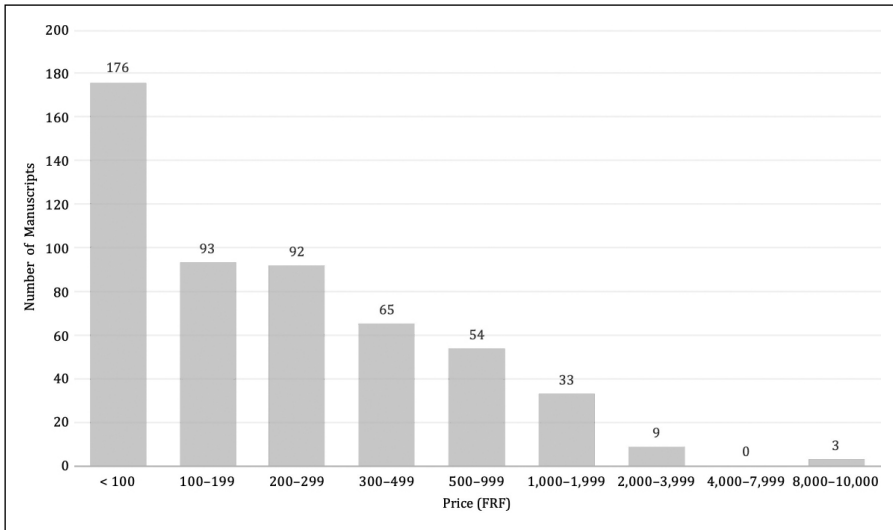


Figure 4.1. Sinope Gospels, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément grec 1286, fol. 10v. Reproduced with permission

purchases both occurred during Delisle's reign, when the average prices were generally higher (see Graph 4.2). Not only did the status of the Bibliothèque nationale attract such acquisitions, Delisle's individual influence as a global authority on medieval manuscripts and as the director responsible for authorizing the purchases helped to ensure their place in the national collection.

The largest acquisition of the decade, in terms of the number of manuscripts and total price, followed direct negotiations with Thomas FitzRoy Fenwick, the heir of the great nineteenth-century English collector Sir Thomas Phillipps. Unlike the preceding

FOURCHY, 17 février 1898–15 janvier 1902 (étude LIX),” 4th digital edition, www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/rechercheconsultation/consultation/ir/pdfIR.action?irId=FRAN_IR_042380. Paul Flury-Hérard was the son of the banker Prosper Flury-Hérard (1804–1873) who received the art collection of Charles-Joseph-Barthélemi Giraud (1802–1882) in lieu of his debts. See L.1015 in Frits Lugt, *Les Marques de collections de dessins & d'estampes*, online edition by the Fondation Custodia, www.marquesdecollections.fr.



Graph 4.1. Distribution of the prices paid by the Bibliothèque nationale de France for pre-modern manuscripts in European languages (1900–1910)

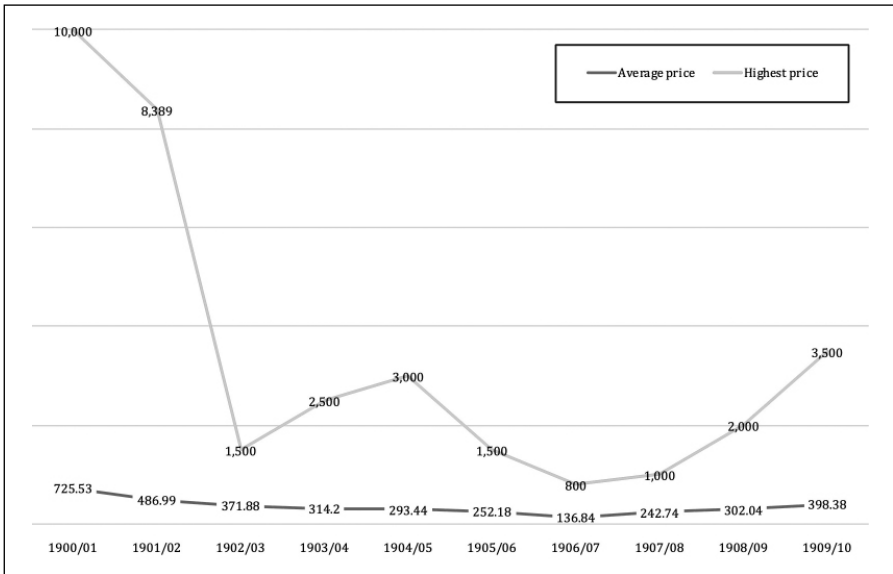
examples, Fenwick was deeply engaged in the commercial value of the manuscripts in his grandfather's collection and took a highly calculated approach to their dispersal.²⁴ The negotiations over the Phillipps manuscripts—which began in January 1904 and did not conclude until spring 1908—were stalled by disputes over payment and the selection of items, as well as the departure of Delisle in 1905. Given the library's budgetary constraints, Omont had hoped to buy the manuscripts in a series of yearly instalments, making use of the annual budget for acquisitions, but Fenwick refused and insisted on a single payment. Eventually, Omont secured 272 volumes for the Bibliothèque nationale for the total sum of £4,125.²⁵ The library's contribution amounted to £1,805 (45,125 francs; *Ada* no. 1555), the largest expenditure of the decade.²⁶ Donations covered the remainder (£2,320) which was more than half of the total, including substantial sums from Baroness James de Rothschild (née Laura-Thérèse von Rothschild), Baron Edmond de Rothschild, and Maurice Fenaille.²⁷ Their funds contributed towards the most expensive twenty items, including a number of important medieval cartularies.

²⁴ Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*.

²⁵ Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 32–36. See Oxford, Bodleian Library, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716. On the manuscripts acquired, see Omont, *Catalogue des manuscrits latins et français de la Collection Phillipps*.

²⁶ Medieval manuscripts constituted the vast majority of the items acquired (41,975 FRF for 137 priced items). The anticipation of this significance acquisition is suggested by the drop in annual expenditure between 1906 and 1907, whilst the negotiations were still in progress (see Table 4.1).

²⁷ Avril, "Dons," 1:82–85.



Graph 4.2. The average and highest prices paid by the Bibliothèque nationale de France for pre-modern manuscripts in European languages (1900–1910)

This is not the only instance of donors acquiring manuscripts beyond the reach of the library's limited budget. In 1902, Baroness James de Rothschild paid 5,000 francs for a tenth-century manuscript (NAL 1835) from the collection of the German scholar Joseph van Görres (1776–1848).²⁸ The historian Karl Hauck had written to the library on behalf of his descendants in Munich to offer manuscripts from the collection, which included important early items once held at Saint Maximin's Abbey in Trier. Hauck described the Bibliothèque nationale as "the worthiest place to house such important manuscripts" and asked the librarians to let him know their valuation if they considered his prices too high.²⁹ In the end, they paid 5,500 francs from their own budget for five further items in two instalments (*Ada* nos. 1427 and 1430).³⁰ Delisle thus ensured this significant acquisition and established a precedent for the future support of the baroness.³¹

²⁸ [Karl Hauck ed.], *Catalogus librorum manu scriptorum e Bibliotheca G.....iana* (Munich, 1902), no. 19. For Emile Picot's letter to Delisle, dated March 15, 1902, regarding the Baroness's offer of 5,000 FRF, see BnF, Fonds Mortreuil, 2005/028/184.

²⁹ "la place la plus digne pour conserver des manuscrits de telle importance," Fonds Mortreuil, 2005/028/184 (letters dated April 23 and 24, 1902). The Bavarian state had attempted to buy the manuscripts *en bloc*, but could not source funding. All translations of French are my own unless otherwise stated.

³⁰ BnF, NAL 759, 760, 762, 763, and 1836. On the manuscripts, see Omont, "Notice."

³¹ Delisle identifies the Baroness in a list of bibliophiles (and "friends") who supported his activities over the years, see Delisle, "Heures de Blanche de France," 490.

Auctions

Omont identified auctions, both in France and abroad, as a source of “important” acquisitions between 1891 and 1910, but not as many as they would have liked because of “the ever-increasing rise in the price of manuscripts.”³² For the majority of the French auctions, the *commissaire-priseur* in charge of the sale was identified on the *Ada* as the source of the manuscript.³³ Important sales of medieval manuscripts in the first decade of the twentieth century included the libraries of Charles Lormier (1825–1900) (*Ada* nos. 1429 and 1470) and the Château de Troussures (*Ada* no. 1584).³⁴ The prices of the thirty medieval manuscripts acquired from a *commissaire-priseur* up to the end of 1909 ranged from 7.7 to 1,562 francs (including fees), with an average of 223 francs, and the two most expensive purchases from a *commissaire-priseur* notably both occurred in 1901, before Delisle retired.³⁵ The figures for this decade also include six medieval manuscripts bought at the auction of Hippolyte Crosse (1826–1898) in November 1899 for 1,070 francs.³⁶ In this instance, the payment to Émile Paul et fils et Guillemain (hereafter Paul et fils)—the “Librairie de la Bibliothèque nationale” and owner of the Maison Silvestre, the auction house where the sale took place—was not made until December 1900 (*Ada* no. 1400). This arrangement suggests the close relationship with Paul et fils, who processed the majority of acquisitions from foreign dealers and private individuals during this period.

The Bibliothèque nationale’s largest expenditure on medieval manuscripts at auction in this decade, however, took place in London, at Sotheby’s in June 1901.³⁷ For the sale of the Ashburnham-Barrois collection—formed by the French collector Joseph Barrois (1874–1855) and bought *en bloc* by the fourth Earl of Ashburnham (1797–1878)

32 Omont, *Nouvelles acquisitions...1891–1910*, xiv. This marks a shift from Delisle’s report in 1891, in which he stated that public sales had provided “excellent opportunities” to buy manuscripts of “modest appearance” which appealed less to rich bibliophiles. Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français*, 1:iii.

33 On the profession and its history, see Rouge-Ducos, *Le crieur et le marteau*.

34 See Omont, *Nouvelles acquisitions...1891–1910*, xv.

35 BnF, NAF 10128, a thirteenth-century collection of saints lives in French, for 1,562 FRF (*Ada* no. 1419) and NAL 1828, a fifteenth-century cartulary from Bayeux, for 1,540 francs (*Ada* no. 1413). The prices cited include the sales fees, which ranged from 6.5 to 10 per cent in this period. These figures do not take into account the two manuscripts bought via Bernard Alfred Quaritch at the Troussures sale in 1909 (see below).

36 *Catalogue de la bibliothèque et des collections de feu Crosse, directeur du Journal de conchyliologie, dont la vente aux enchères publiques aura lieu à Paris, Maison Sylvestre, 28 Rue des Bons-Enfants, à huit heures précises du soir, du 20 au 30 Novembre 1899* (Paris: Les fils d’Émile Deyrolle, 1899), lots 24, 25, 33, 36, 32, and 31. The manuscripts (NAF 6881–6882, 6883; NAL 705, 706, and 1800) appear at the end of the published list of acquisitions in 1898–1899, see Henri Omont, *Nouvelles acquisitions...1898–1899*.

37 *The Ashburnham Library. Catalogue of the portion of the famous Collection of Manuscripts, the property of the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Ashburnham, known as The Barrois Collection. Which will be sold by auction by Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge...on Monday, the 10th day of June, 1901, and four following days* (London: Sotheby, 1901).

in 1849—Delisle successfully petitioned the *Ministre de l'Instruction publique* to allow the department to spend up to 50,000 francs from the current and subsequent year's budget.³⁸ In his letter, Delisle expressed his concerns to the minister about the potential competition for the manuscripts of importance to France's medieval literary heritage.³⁹ In his view, the requested amount would not be enough to compete for the illuminated volumes, but should enable them to acquire items from the exceptional range of medieval French literary works.⁴⁰ Indeed, the highest-value items broke previous auction records.⁴¹ The average price of the medieval lots acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale (586.79 francs) was more than twice that of the French auctions and higher than the average prices paid throughout the first decade of the twentieth century (see Table 4.1).

The French librarians commissioned the London-based dealer Bernard Quaritch to act on their behalf in the auction room.⁴² On the *Ada*, Paul et fils is recorded as the source and the prices integrate the commission paid to Quaritch. Quaritch's commission book provides supplementary data revealing all the items pursued for the Bibliothèque nationale and the limits set.⁴³ These figures indicate that the librarians were willing to exceed the limit in seven cases, including for a collection of charters (lot 102; NAF 20025–20032) bought for £35 over the maximum bid at £305 (or 8,389.95 francs including commission; *Ada* no. 1411), one of the three most expensive purchases of the decade. The commission book also reveals competition with the British Museum over seven lots and the generally higher limits set by the latter for fewer items.⁴⁴ Omont attended the sale and was seemingly involved in the negotiations over the final selection. In the end, the library obtained a significant hoard, which, despite being relatively expensive, did not exhaust the full allowance earmarked for the sale: the total spent was 28,846.20 francs including postage (*Ada* nos. 1410–1412).⁴⁵

Two years later the Bibliothèque nationale placed another significant commission with Quaritch for an auction of part of the Phillipps collection at Sotheby's in May.⁴⁶ The sale featured a diverse range of primarily historical material, in contrast to the literary

38 For Delisle's draft letter and the positive response from the *Ministre de l'Instruction publique*, see BnF, Fonds Mortreuil, 2005/028/172.

39 On Barrois's particular interest in collecting medieval French literature, see Collingham, "Joseph Barrois."

40 BnF, Fonds Mortreuil, 2005/028/172.

41 The highest priced lot was a three-volume illuminated copy of the *Prose Lancelot* (lot 537) bought for £1,800 (now New York, Morgan Library, M.805–807).

42 The commission with Quaritch also included items for the Musée Condé at Chantilly, Archives nationales, Archives du Pas-de-Calais, and municipal libraries of Lille and Tours.

43 London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd. Archives, Commission Book 6 (1899–1903), 207–9. On the manuscripts prioritized for the Bibliothèque nationale, see Morcos, "Mission littéraire," 166–95.

44 Quaritch Ltd., Commission Book 6, 205.

45 See Omont, "Catalogue des manuscrits Ashburnham-Barrois;" and Omont "Catalogue des manuscrits Ashburnham Barrois...(fin)."

46 Quaritch Ltd., Commission Book 6, 392–93, 399–400. This was their largest commission for any of Phillipps sales. On the Phillipps auctions, see Munby, *Dispersion of the Phillipps Library*, 55–64.

and illuminated treasures on offer at the Ashburnham-Barrois auction. The twenty-six pre-modern manuscripts bought for the Bibliothèque nationale had an average price of 297.21 francs (*Ada* no. 1450), which is closer to the average spent at the French auctions.⁴⁷ The most expensive item cost £39 (or 1,081.50 francs including commission) and comprised seventeen volumes of autographs dating from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries (lot 78; NAF 20238–20254). The three medieval French literary works bought at this sale included an early fourteenth-century English copy of the *Livre de Sidrac*, a popular prose encyclopaedic work, acquired for £5 5s or 146.55 francs including commission (lot 1043; NAF 10231).⁴⁸ A late thirteenth-century copy of the same work had been bought at the Ashburnham-Barrois sale for £20 or 554.40 francs including commission (lot 545; NAF 10063).⁴⁹ Both manuscripts have minimal decoration and the same number of folios (141 fols.), but the Ashburnham-Barrois codex has larger dimensions (280 × 200 mm as opposed to 192 × 138 mm) and a marginally earlier date. Nonetheless, these factors do not seem enough to justify a price almost four times higher than the Phillipps manuscript. For both lots, the librarians set the same limit of £13, which almost equates to the average price paid for the books at the two sales.⁵⁰ The context of the sale thus appears to have influenced the final price of two very similar manuscripts bought two years apart for the same library at the same auction house.

Dealers

Omont attentively followed the trajectories of the manuscripts dispersed at the Ashburnham and Phillipps auctions during the 1890s and 1900s, tracing their appearances at subsequent sales and in booksellers' catalogues.⁵¹ Both local and foreign dealers quickly picked up on this interest. The Paris-based, Irish-born dealer Langford Jeremiah Symes cultivated a relationship with Omont following Delisle's departure and sold seventeen medieval manuscripts to the Bibliothèque nationale in the first decade of the twentieth century, several of which came from London auction rooms and book-

⁴⁷ They counted for two thirds (7,727.45 FRF) of the amount spent on forty-nine lots in total (10,414.15 FRF). Delivery, packing, and an annotated copy of the auction catalogue cost an additional 72.35 FRF. See Omont, "Manuscrits de la bibliothèque de sir Thomas Phillipps."

⁴⁸ On the Phillipps manuscript, see Avril and Stirnemann, *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine insulaire*, no. 163 (p. 122). On the extant Sidrac manuscripts, see JONAS <http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/6217>.

⁴⁹ See Careri et al., *Album*, 163–65.

⁵⁰ For the Phillipps *Sidrac*, see Quaritch Ltd., Commission Book 6, 400. The Ashburnham-Barrois copy was one of the seven manuscripts that exceeded the original maximum bid at sale.

⁵¹ In December 1902, the library bought two Ashburnham-Barrois manuscripts (NAL 770; NAL 769) advertised in the catalogues of the London dealer James Tregaskis after the 1901 sale for 100 FRF and 50 FRF respectively (*Ada* no. 1436). See *The "Caxton Head" Catalogue of Books, Comprising Selections from the Library of Edward James Stanley, Esq., M.P., and the Barrois-Ashburnham Collection of Manuscripts*, No. 494, London, July 29, 1901, nos. 1157 and 1160.

sellers.⁵² The first manuscript offered by Symes to Omont in May 1905, a fourteenth-century astronomical collection (NAL 1893; *Ada* no. 1489), came from the Ashburnham-Barrois collection. In January 1908, Symes sold a second manuscript of Ashburnham-Barrois provenance to the library: a twelfth-century copy of Macrobius's *Commentarius in Ciceronis somnium Scipionis* (NAL 923; *Ada* no. 1549). In both cases, the figure paid was lower than the price of the lots in 1901, offering another example of the auction's inflated prices.⁵³ Despite their reduced value, these manuscripts constituted two of the most expensive items sold by Symes to the library.⁵⁴ Only four of the seventeen medieval manuscripts bought from him during this decade cost more than 110 francs and their average price was only 92.66 francs, which is less than half the average price paid to other dealers based in France in the same period (200.37 francs).

The *Ada*'s are particularly important for establishing the relationships with local dealers as their interactions left behind minimal correspondence, having predominantly taken place in person. Like Symes, Lucien Gougy frequented dealers in London, but his stock comprised luxury items that attracted wealthier international collectors such as Henry Yates Thompson.⁵⁵ Gougy bought a Phillipps manuscript featuring a medieval French translation of Lucian for £5 17s from J. & J. Leighton in 1904, which he then sold to the Bibliothèque nationale for 300 francs (approx. £12) that same year (NAF 10371, Phillipps 853; *Ada* no. 1554) making a considerable profit. In total, he sold ten manuscripts to the library in the first decade of the twentieth century, costing between 50 and 3,000 francs, with an average price (479.50 francs) that was more than double the average paid to other French dealers. In general, dealers like Gougy, whose stock attracted an affluent and international clientele, played a minimal role in the library's acquisitions.⁵⁶ More prominent are figures such as Anatole Claudin, a graduate of the *École des chartes* (like Delisle and Omont) and a specialist in the history of printing.⁵⁷ Between 1900 and 1906, Claudin supplied twenty medieval manuscripts to the library with an average price of 179.25 francs, ranging from 10 to 2,000 francs for an important eleventh-century musical-liturgical manuscript with large decorated initials (NAL 1871;

52 Clegg, *International Directory*, 226. In October 1906, Symes sold to the Bibliothèque nationale two manuscripts that the English dealer Bertram Dobell (1842–1914) purchased at the Sneyd sale in 1903: NAL 905 and Italien 2164, which the library bought for 15 FRF and 30 FRF respectively (*Ada* no. 1522).

53 Lot 27 (NAL 1893) fetched £20 at auction in 1901, but was bought for 200 FRF in 1905 (approx. £8) (*Ada* no. 1489); lot 372 (NAL 923) raised £13 10s in 1901, but cost 250 FRF (approx. £10) in 1908 (*Ada* no. 1549).

54 Two others close to this price were: NAF 10662 (*Statuts des rois d'Angleterre*, 15th c., 256 fols.) bought for 210 FRF (*Ada* no. 1549); and NAL 924 (*Consuetudines Ordinis Cartusiensis*, 15th c., 133 fols.) for 190 FRF (*Ada* no. 1554).

55 In May 1906, Yates Thompson bought from Gougy a late fourteenth-century illuminated copy of Matfre Ermengaud's *Breviari d'amor* (now British Library, Yates Thompson MS 31) for £1,986 according to his bookplate.

56 For example, Édouard Rahir sold only three manuscripts to the library during this decade (NAL 718, NAF 10015 and 10553; *Ada* nos. 1399, 1403 and 1514). On Rahir see chap. 3 in this volume.

57 Fontaine, "Anatole Claudin."

Ada no. 1447). The differences in the prices paid to these *libraires* on the *Ada*'s hint at the varied circles of French dealers active in the early twentieth century.

The manuscripts sold to the library by foreign dealers are obfuscated by the use of local agents on the *Ada*'s, but their correspondence offers insights into negotiations over price. In May 1905, Leo S. Olschki offered Omont a copy of Robert Macquériau's *Histoire générale de l'Europe* for 500 francs.⁵⁸ In a second letter, Olschki mistakenly claimed that it cost £14 18s (approximately 375 francs) at the Ashburnham-Barrois auction and reduced the price to 450 francs, the amount he had paid the dealer who acquired it at the sale (Leighton).⁵⁹ Omont, however, knew that the manuscript fetched only £4 18s in 1901. Four months later, Olschki responded to Omont's challenge by arguing that the figure in 1901 had nothing to do with his price, noting that he regularly bought back his own books at prices several times higher than the amount he had sold them for even one or two years ago!⁶⁰ In the end Omont paid Olschki 452 francs for the manuscript (*Ada* no. 1497). A few years later, Olschki was more generous with his discount, allowing Omont to negotiate him down from 1,000 to 500 francs for three charters from Messina, dated between 1146 and 1200, and a papal bull dated 1250.⁶¹ In this instance, Olschki claimed to have paid 750 lire for the group—which he considered a reasonable figure—but reduced his price because the Bibliothèque nationale already held a collection of charters from Messina and he was seemingly keen for Omont to write an article about them for his journal *La Bibliofilia*.⁶²

Maintaining good relationships with national libraries was a clear incentive for professional dealers, as they represented a potentially reliable customer, one less distracted by fickle “whims,” but whose priorities (and negotiating styles) could shift as different librarians took the lead. The Munich-based dealer Jacques Rosenthal had an established relationship with Delisle following years spent in Paris.⁶³ This is reflected in the prices paid to him prior to Delisle's retirement, which were generally higher. The most expensive purchase from Rosenthal during the first decade of the twentieth century was a Phillipps manuscript (NAL 1811, Phillipps 3523; *Ada* no. 1389), sold to the library in March 1900 for 533 francs (approx. £21), at a considerable profit to Rosenthal.⁶⁴ His letters exchanged with Omont, however, reveal a more challenging situation for the dealer, not only because of the younger curator's tough negotiating style but also due to the sup-

58 Letter dated May 18, 1905, Archives Modernes 527. Barrois produced an edition of the text in this manuscript, see Macquériau, *Histoire*.

59 Letter dated May 25, 1905, Archives Modernes 527.

60 Letter dated September 16, 1905, Archives Modernes 527; see also chap. 2 in this volume.

61 Letter dated April 1, 1909, Archives Modernes 527.

62 The Bibliothèque nationale acquired a significant group of Messina charters (Latin; Sup. grec. 1315; NAL 2581–2584) from Marino Massa for 1,607.50 FRF in May 1904 (*Ada* no. 1471), and 752 FRF in March 1904 (*Ada* no. 1469). See also Archives Modernes 526 B.

63 Delisle names Jacques Rosenthal as one of the bookdealers with whom he maintained an “excellent relationship,” see Delisle, “Heures de Blanche de France,” 490.

64 He bought the manuscript for £2 2s via a commission with Leighton at the 1899 Phillipps sale.

posed lack of “bon manuscrits” available.⁶⁵ In December 1906, Omont negotiated him down from 2,000 to 1,400 francs for seven manuscripts (*Ada* no. 1528), which Rosenthal finally accepted “to be congenial.”⁶⁶ In this same period, he donated a manuscript to the library, a gesture that was replicated by his brother Ludwig Rosenthal, also a dealer, keen to court the curator’s favour.⁶⁷ By 1907, Rosenthal had sold over three times more manuscripts to the Bibliothèque nationale than to the Royal Library in Berlin, making the French national library his best institutional client.⁶⁸ But this did not last, and in subsequent years his sales to the French national library dwindled, while those to Berlin increased, suggesting the gradual cooling of the rapport following Delisle’s departure.

Coda

The manuscripts obtained from the library of the Château de Troussures offer a particularly compelling example of Omont’s resourceful and diverse strategies to ensure that the Bibliothèque nationale continued to acquire important medieval patrimonial artefacts after Delisle’s retirement. Manuscripts from this library entered the Bibliothèque nationale via almost all the routes so far described, yet to various extents the exact means were shrouded. Owned by Marie-Louis Le Caron de Troussures (1829–1914) and founded by his grandfather Louis-Lucien Le Caron de Troussures (1751–1821), the collection comprised manuscripts once held in the medieval library of the cathedral chapter of Beauvais, acquired in potentially dubious circumstances during the upheaval of the Revolution.⁶⁹ Prior to the Troussures auction in 1909, the Bibliothèque nationale received an anonymous letter stating that the library should claim ownership of the collection as it had been acquired illegitimately.⁷⁰ This controversy impacted the auction organized by the *libraire* Henri Leclerc, at which almost two thirds of the manuscripts failed to reach their estimated value.⁷¹ In addition to two manuscripts bought from the *commissaire-priseur* André Desvougues (lots 7 and 11; NAL 1983 and 1984; *Ada* no. 1584), Omont commissioned Quaritch to buy two further lots at the sale, which

65 Letter dated December 24, 1906, Archives Modernes, 527.

66 “pour vous être agréable.” Card dated December 28, 1906, Archives Modernes, 527. Omont had initially offered only 1,200 FRF. By contrast, Rosenthal sold six manuscripts to the library for 2,007.50 FRF in May 1898 (*Ada* no. 1350).

67 Jacques donated an invoice from Jean Bourdichon regarding the illumination of a Book of Hours for Anne of Brittany (NAF 21192) and Ludwig donated a seventeenth-century manuscript of Honoré d’Urfé (NAF 10709). See Omont, “Nouvelles acquisitions... 1907–1908,” (45 and 52).

68 I thank Angéline Rais for this observation and for sharing information on Jacques Rosenthal’s sales to these libraries.

69 Omont, *Recherches*, 16.

70 *Manuscrits du VIIe au XVe siècle, provenant de la bibliothèque du château de Troussures: Première partie, dont la vente aura lieu le vendredi 9 juillet 1909* (Paris: Henri Leclerc, 1909). The letter is enclosed in the copy of the Troussures catalogue held by the Département des manuscrits, Impr. 4° 396. See Damongeot-Bourdat, “Les vicissitudes,” 139.

71 Damongeot-Bourdat, “Les vicissitudes,” 140–43.

were processed by Ernest Leroux (*Ada* nos. 1583 and 1584).⁷² There was no limit set for these lots in Quaritch's commission book, but the purchases were intended for the Bibliothèque nationale, as indicated in a brief letter from Quaritch regarding the "account for the books which I bought for you at the Troussures sale."⁷³ Omont's letters reveal that in 1907 he had already negotiated the purchase of three manuscripts for 1,600 francs from Le Caron via the Parisian *libraire* Théophile Belin and his wife.⁷⁴ Two of the manuscripts bought for the Bibliothèque nationale were not recorded as entering the library until 1913 (NAL 1064 and 1065), and the third was integrated into the Fonds Rothschild, bequeathed to the library by Henri de Rothschild in 1947 (Rothschild 3240).⁷⁵ Marie Damongeot-Bourdat established that Henri's mother, the Baroness James de Rothschild, and Maurice Fenaille both contributed towards the purchase of Troussures manuscripts, but the exact timing and receipt of their donations remains unclear.⁷⁶ Fenaille is also understood to have assisted with the purchase of two early medieval manuscripts, which Leclerc unsuccessfully sent back to auction with other unsold items in June 1912.⁷⁷ Rather than being recorded in the register of donations, the two manuscripts are noted as purchases from Leclerc in May 1913, costing 7,500 francs each (NAL 1063 and 2061; *Ada* no. 1682). Whilst questions remain over the Troussures acquisitions, the discrepancies nonetheless convey Omont's determination and creative bureaucracy in the service of the national collection.⁷⁸

In conclusion, when the individual authorizing the purchases was deeply invested in the library's manuscripts, the Bibliothèque nationale made larger and more valuable acquisitions. In Delisle's absence, Omont astutely managed the funds available and carefully maintained the established relationships with donors for the times of greatest need. The younger curator stands out for his more ruthless approach to transactions and acute knowledge of the trade. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth cen-

72 Quaritch bought a fifteenth-century Latin compilation, including works by Lactantius and Petrarch (lot 25; NAL 1985), for 1,120 FRF (acquired for 1,263 FRF including commission), and a ninth-century copy of the acts of the Third Council of Constantinople (680–681) (lot 4; NAL 1982) for 3,000 FRF (acquired for 3,500 FRF including commission). See London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd. Archives, Commission Book 7 (1903–1909), 421.

73 Letter dated July 14, 1909, Archives Modernes 527.

74 Damongeot-Bourdat identified this transaction in Omont's correspondence and notes (NAF 13028, fols. 208–11). See "Les vicissitudes," 134–38. In the same year, Belle da Costa Greene bought six early illuminated manuscripts from the Troussures collection for J. P. Morgan.

75 Damongeot-Bourdat, "Les vicissitudes," 135 and 144.

76 Damongeot-Bourdat, "Les vicissitudes," 142–44. See NAF 13028, fol. 214.

77 *Catalogue de livres anciens – manuscrits du VIIe au XVe siècle – Livres illustrés...Autographes provenant d'une grande bibliothèque. Ouvrages relatifs aux provinces, histoire de France, ouvrages relatifs à la noblesse et sur le blason, etc.*, June 20–21, 1912, *commissaire-priseur*, André Desvougues, assisted by Henri Leclerc and Noël Charavay. See Damongeot-Bourdat, "Les vicissitudes," 140.

78 Furthermore, in 1914, Omont bought eleven additional Troussures manuscripts for the library from Leclerc in several instalments. See Damongeot-Bourdat, "Les vicissitudes," 143–44. It is not insignificant that their sale was agreed after the law of December 31, 1913, to protect historical monuments.

ture, the sources of the Bibliothèque nationale's acquisitions appear to have influenced prices, but not always consistently, and part of this related to the librarians' relationships to the seller, as well as the commercial expertise and motivations of those proposing the manuscripts to them. Purchases originating from foreign sources, whether a private individual, auction room, or dealer, tended to be more expensive than those made in France and further investigations are required to understand the extent to which these prices relate to the local market. Nonetheless, the data on the *Ada's* reveal new information about the wide network of professional book dealers active in France in the early twentieth century. When combined with other available archival resources, a more nuanced picture emerges of the cross-European trade and the unique status of the French national library within it.

Bibliography

- Avril, François. "Dons de la baronne James Édouard et du baron Edmond James de Rothschild au Département des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale 1902–1908." In *Les Rothschild, une dynastie de mécènes en France*, edited by Pauline Prévost-Marcilhacy, 3 vols., 1:82–85. Paris: Somogy, 2016.
- Avril, François and Patricia Danz Stirnemann. *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine insulaire, VIIIe–XXe siècle*. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1987.
- Avril, François and Yolanta Zaluska. *Manuscrits enluminés de la Bibliothèque nationale: Manuscrits d'origine italienne. I. VIe–XIIe siècles*. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1980.
- Blasselle, Bruno. "Les années Delisle ou l'institution en majesté, 1871–1914." In *Histoire de la Bibliothèque nationale de France*, edited by Bruno Blasselle and Gennaro Toscano, 294–317. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2021.
- Blochet, E., *Catalogue de la collection de manuscrits orientaux, arabes, persans et turcs, formée par M. Charles Schefer et acquise par l'État*. Paris: Leroux, 1900.
- Botana, Federico. "The Acquisitions of Florentine Public Libraries 1900–1935." In *The Pre-modern Manuscript Trade and its Consequences, ca. 1890–1945*, edited by Laura Cleaver, Danielle Magnuson, Hannah Morcos, and Angéline Rais (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, forthcoming).
- Brunel, Clovis. "Extrait des procès-verbaux de 1941." *Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* (1941): 63–76.
- Brunel, Clovis. "Henry Omont." *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 102 (1941): 371–78.
- Careri, Maria et al. *Album de manuscrits français du XIIIe siècle: Mise en page et mise en texte*. Rome: Viella, 2001.
- Clegg, James. *The International Directory of Booksellers and Bibliophile's Manual*. Rochdale: Aldine Press, 1906.
- Collingham, Hugh. "Joseph Barrois: Portrait of a Bibliophile," *The Book Collector* 33 (1984): 431–48.
- Damongeot-Bourdat, Marie-Françoise. "Les vicissitudes d'une collection de manuscrits: de la cathédrale de Beauvais à la collection Le Caron de Troussures et à sa dispersion au début du XXe siècle," *Bulletin du bibliophile* (2010): 131–52.
- de Hamel, Christopher. *The Posthumous Papers of the Manuscripts Club*. London: Allen Lane, 2022.
- Delisle, Léopold. "Les Heures de Blanche de France, duchesse d'Orléans." *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 66 (1905): 489–539.

- Delisle, Léopold. *Manuscrits latins et français ajoutés aux fonds des nouvelles acquisitions pendant les années 1875–1891*, 2 vols. Paris: Champion, 1891.
- Fontaine, Jean-Paul. "Anatole Claudin (1833–1906)." In *Les gardiens de bibliopolis*, 3 vols. 1:169–71. Paris: L'Hexadère, 2015.
- Lowe, Elias A. *The Beneventan Script: A History of South Italian Minuscule*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914.
- Macquériau, Robert. *Histoire générale de l'Europe, durant les années 1527, 1528, 1529*, edited by Joseph Barrois. Paris: Techener, 1841.
- Magnusson, Danielle, and Laura Cleaver, *The Trade in Rare Books and Manuscripts in Britain and America c. 1890–1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Marcel, Henry et al., *La Bibliothèque nationale*. Paris: H. Laurens, 1907.
- McKitterick, David. "Second-hand and Old Books." In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, edited by David McKitterick, 6 vols., 6:635–73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Morcos, Hannah. "Mission littéraire en Angleterre: Paul Meyer and the Quest for Medieval French Manuscripts at the Ashburnham-Barrois Sale (1901)." *Romania* 141 (2023): 166–95.
- Morris, Leslie A. "Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America." *The Book Collector*, special number for the 150th anniversary of Bernard Quaritch (1997): 180–97.
- Omont, Henri. "Catalogue des manuscrits Ashburnham-Barrois récemment acquis par la Bibliothèque nationale," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 62 (1901): 555–610.
- Omont, Henri. "Catalogue des manuscrits Asburnham Barrois récemment acquis par la Bibliothèque nationale (fin)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 63 (1902): 10–68.
- Omont, Henri. *Catalogue des manuscrits latins et français de la Collection Phillipps acquis en 1908 pour la Bibliothèque nationale*. Paris: Leroux, 1909.
- Omont, Henri. "Manuscrits de la bibliothèque de sir Thomas Phillipps récemment acquis pour la Bibliothèque nationale," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 64 (1903): 490–553.
- Omont, Henri. "Notice du ms. nouv. acq. lat. 763 de la Bibliothèque nationale, contenant plusieurs anciens glossaires grec et latins, et de quelques autres manuscrits provenant de Saint-Maximin de Trèves." *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 38 (1903): 341–96.
- Omont, Henri. "Nouvelles acquisitions du département des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale pendant les années 1907–1908." *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 70 (1909): 5–72.
- Omont, Henri. *Nouvelles acquisitions du département des manuscrits pendant les années 1891–1910: Répertoire alphabétique des manuscrits latins et français*. Paris: Leroux, 1912.
- Omont, Henri. *Nouvelles acquisitions du Département des manuscrits pendant les années 1898–1899, inventaire sommaire*. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900.
- Omont, Henri. "Peintures du manuscrit grec de l'Évangile de saint Matthieu, copié en onciales d'or sur parchemin pourpré, et récemment acquis pour la Bibliothèque Nationale," *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* 7 (1900): 175–86.
- Omont, Henri. *Recherches sur la Bibliothèque de l'église cathédrale de Beauvais*, Mémoires de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres 40. Paris: Klincksieck, 1914.
- Rouge-Ducos, Isabelle. *Le crieur et le marteau: histoire des commissaires-priseurs de Paris (1801–1945)*. Paris: Belin, 2013.
- Vieillard, Françoise, and Gilles Désiré dit Gosset eds., *Léopold Delisle: Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle (8–10 octobre 2004)*. Saint-Lô: Archives départementales de la Manche, 2007.