

PRIVATE PURSES AND “NATIONAL” POSSESSIONS

THE FRENCH ACQUISITION FROM THE PHILLIPPS LIBRARY (1908)

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IN 1908, HENRI Omont, curator of manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, finalized the acquisition of 272 volumes from the immense library amassed by Sir Thomas Phillipps, following four years of negotiations with his grandson, Thomas Fitzroy Fenwick.¹ The history of the Bibliothèque nationale’s acquisition, however, dates back much further. On July 24, 1886, Léopold Delisle, manuscript scholar and director of the Bibliothèque nationale, wrote to inform the Ministre de l’Instruction publique that he had been indirectly approached about the sale of the Meerman manuscripts in the Phillipps collection, which once belonged to the Collège de Clermont in Paris.² Gerard Meerman had acquired the manuscripts in Paris around 1764, and his son Johan Meerman inherited and added to the collection, before Phillipps purchased over 650 manuscripts following the library’s dispersal in 1824.³ Delisle explained that the contents, as well as the origins of the manuscripts rendered them of prime interest to France.⁴ Yet, he declined to buy them in the knowledge that the Bibliothèque nationale would not be able to obtain funding for such a large purchase. Delisle was embroiled in

¹ From 244 Phillipps manuscripts, the Bibliothèque nationale acquired 233 new shelfmarks, which formed 272 volumes.

² BnF, Fonds Mortreuil, 2005/028/039, fol. 2. Delisle’s letter was composed three days before Fenwick’s letter to Theodor Mommsen about the potential sale of the Meerman collection to the Royal Library at Berlin. See A. N. L. Munby, *The Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, Phillipps Studies 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 22.

³ A. N. L. Munby, *The Formation of the Phillipps Library up to the Year 1840*, Phillipps Studies 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 25–28.

⁴ “Par leur contenu autant que par leurs origines, ils ont pour la France un intérêt de premier ordre.” Fonds Mortreuil, 2005/028/039, fol. 2r.

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trying to finance the return from England of the stolen Libri and Barrois manuscripts, unwittingly acquired by the fourth Earl of Ashburnham.⁵ A year later, the Meerman manuscripts went to Berlin for £14,000.⁶

By 1888, Delisle had successfully acquired the stolen Libri and Barrois manuscripts and his focus turned to the dispersal of the Philipps collection. The *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* published a brief update on recent acquisitions by the German, Belgian, and Dutch governments, paying special attention to the source of funding in each case.⁷ The report noted that the German purchase of the Meerman manuscripts was financed by a syndicate of bankers, whilst special grants funded the Belgian and Dutch acquisitions. The account concluded with the words of Samuel Muller, the archivist involved in the Dutch negotiations, who commented that the current generation was paying dearly to make amends for the “negligence” of past generations.⁸ His lament over their failures to safeguard the nation’s manuscripts seemingly resonated with the editors of the journal, which included Delisle. Three years later, Delisle echoed Muller’s comments, whilst highlighting the contemporary imperative to remedy past mistakes in a publication on the recent acquisitions of the Bibliothèque nationale. Following a public call for greater investment in the library, Delisle asked if France would remain a mere “spectator” of the dispersal of large English private collections formed from “our spoils.”⁹ In his view, by not buying the “French part” of the Philipps collection, France would commit a further act of negligence. The reparation of past losses and the recuperation of the “glorious monuments of our history and our literature” offered an opportunity to rejuvenate an institution considered from abroad as the greatest expression of France’s “intellectual grandeur.”¹⁰ His public challenge to act on behalf of the national interest and for the global reputation of the Bibliothèque nationale betrays the curators’ ongoing battles and foreshadows future struggles with the French government to secure funding to reinstitute such “losses.”

In the same year, a group of French scholars visited the Philipps library to catalogue the manuscripts deemed relevant to France. Following the trip, Omont published

5 Léopold Delisle, *Catalogue des manuscrits des fonds Libri et Barrois* (Paris: Champion, 1888).

6 Munby, *Dispersal of the Philipps Library*, 26.

7 Anonymous, “Les manuscrits de Cheltenham,” *BEC* 49 (1888): 694–703.

8 “Les manuscrits de Cheltenham,” 703.

9 “La France restera-t-elle simplement spectatrice de la dislocation des grandes collections de manuscrits que de riches amateurs avaient formées en Angleterre depuis un siècle et dont nos dépouilles leur avaient fourni les principaux éléments?” Léopold Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français ajoutés aux fonds des nouvelles acquisitions pendant les années 1875–1891*, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1891), 1:lxv. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

10 “En négligeant d’acheter la partie française des collections de sir Thomas Philipps, laisserons-nous échapper la merveilleuse occasion qui nous est offerte de réparer des pertes douloureuses, de sauver de glorieux monuments de notre histoire et de notre littérature, d’activer plusieurs genres de travaux d’érudition et de relever l’éclat d’une institution que tous nos gouvernements ont entourée de leur sollicitude, et qui, surtout aux yeux de l’étranger, est un des plus éloquents témoignages de la grandeur intellectuelle de la France?” Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français ajoutés*, 1:lxv–lxxvi.

an overview of the items of historical interest, and Count Paul Durrieu, art historian and curator at the Louvre, produced an assessment of Philipps's illuminated manuscripts, two thirds of which he identified as originating in France (encompassing Flanders and other regions under Burgundian rule).¹¹ Their reports were complemented by various articles on the medieval literary manuscripts in French by Paul Meyer, romance philologist and director of the *École des chartes*.¹² The Philipps library was particularly rich in Anglo-Norman literature, on which Meyer had published several articles.¹³ Together their publications formed an inventory of the items of interest to the Bibliothèque nationale and simultaneously claimed the manuscripts as belonging to the medieval heritage of modern France.

Despite the attention paid to the Philipps library, it took almost two decades before Delisle and his colleagues made any significant acquisition for the Bibliothèque nationale. The Philipps auctions offered the curators opportunities to recuperate some materials of interest. The largest purchase occurred in 1903, when the London-based dealer Bernard Quaritch bought over fifty lots on commission for the Bibliothèque nationale, amounting to 144 new shelfmarks.¹⁴ Omont used this sale as a starting point for opening the negotiations with Fenwick for an *en bloc* purchase in January 1904.¹⁵ After numerous setbacks, including the retirement of the formidable Delisle in February 1905, Omont finally settled the transaction in spring 1908.¹⁶ This essay examines both the manuscripts desired and those eventually acquired for the Bibliothèque nationale to explore the economic dynamics and cultural claims underlying the purchase. The first section considers the historical manuscripts purchased in 1908 and the individuals involved in their export from and return to France. I then identify the attempts to

11 Henri Omont, "Manuscrits relatifs à l'histoire de France conservés dans la bibliothèque de sir Thomas Philipps à Cheltenham," *BEC* 50 (1889): 68–96; and "Manuscrits relatifs à l'histoire de France conservés dans la bibliothèque de sir Thomas Philipps à Cheltenham (suite et fin)," *BEC* 50 (1889): 180–217; see also Henri Omont, "Manuscrits relatifs à l'histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France conservés à Cheltenham," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France*, 16 (1889): 43–53; Paul Durrieu, "Les manuscrits à peintures de la bibliothèque de sir Thomas Philipps à Cheltenham," *BEC* 50 (1889): 381–432. He entitled the first section: "Manuscrits enluminés dans le royaume de France (y compris les provinces du Nord, telles que la Flandre, qui ont fait partie au XVe siècle des États de la Maison de Bourgogne)" (386).

12 Paul Meyer, "Notice sur quelques manuscrits français de la bibliothèque Philipps, à Cheltenham," *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 34.1 (1891): 149–258. For a summary of his previous publications on Philipps manuscripts, see 155n2.

13 For example, Paul Meyer, "Notice et extraits du MS. 8336 de la Bibliothèque de Sir Thomas Philipps à Cheltenham," *Romania* 13 (1884): 497–541.

14 Henri Omont, "Manuscrits de la bibliothèque de sir Thomas Philipps récemment acquis pour la Bibliothèque nationale," *BEC* 64 (1903): 490–553. The commission with Quaritch also included lots for the Archives de la Gironde and Musée Condé, Chantilly.

15 Letter from Omont to Fenwick, January 24, 1904, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Philipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 1–2.

16 Delisle, nonetheless, continued to play a role and, in November 1905, even attempted to get the Institut de France to fund the purchase on behalf of the Musée Condé. For a succinct overview of the "French negotiations," see Munby, *Dispersal of the Philipps Library*, 31–36 at 35.

buy manuscripts of literary importance in the early exchanges, and the book Durrieu considered the artistic “pearl” of the collection in the aftermath of the negotiations.¹⁷ In doing so, this study demonstrates how the librarians and scholars curating the national collection reconciled Fenwick’s prices with challenging financial circumstances, all the while attempting to rectify past mistakes. Indeed, the financial means and motivations of private individuals—in response to and against the contemporary national claims made about these manuscripts—played a central role in determining their fates.

The Phillipps manuscripts successfully acquired for the Bibliothèque nationale in 1908 comprised a range of historical documents of “French origin,” including cartularies, account books, and charters, dating from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ The cartularies constituted the most important block, both in terms of significance and price. Delisle had been purposefully buying cartularies for the Bibliothèque nationale throughout the previous decades and valued them as the most “solid” basis for accessing the medieval past.¹⁹ He claimed that a ministerial decision in 1798 called for cartularies to be reunited in the national collection and that since then its curators had been “zealously” battling against foreign establishments and collectors to fight for their acquisition.²⁰

Amans-Alexis Monteil was involved in both salvaging such manuscripts and selling them to Phillipps. His varied career combined the roles of archivist, collector, historian, and dealer of manuscripts, but not necessarily in that order.²¹ Monteil primarily acquired and sold historical documents and records dispersed by the Revolution, scavenged from parchment sales, or put on the market by unwitting archivists.²² He gave these previously overlooked artefacts new value and promoted innovative practices for their preservation, while simultaneously profiting from the importance he attributed to them through his scholarship and marketing practices.²³ Phillipps began acquiring Monteil’s manuscripts in the early 1820s via the Parisian *libraire* Jean-François Royez, who

¹⁷ Durrieu, “Les manuscrits à peintures,” 386.

¹⁸ See Henri Omont, *Catalogue des manuscrits latins et français de la Collection Phillipps acquis en 1908 pour la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Leroux, 1909), i.

¹⁹ “Les cartulaires sont une des bases les plus solides de tous les travaux auxquels peut donner lieu l’histoire du moyen âge.” Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français ajoutés*, 1:xxxv.

²⁰ Delisle, *Manuscrits latins et français ajoutés*, 1:xxxv–vi.

²¹ Monteil was the archivist at the library of the École militaire de Saint-Cyr between 1815 and 1819 and soon after started selling manuscripts. See Jean-Loup Lemaître, “Amans-Alexis Monteil (1769–1850) et les manuscrits,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* 164 (2006): 227–50 at 242; Chris Warne, “Amateurs and Collectors: Amans-Alexis Monteil and the Emergence of a Professional Archive Culture in Nineteenth-Century France,” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 33.1 (1996): 45–72.

²² Warne, “Amateurs and Collectors,” 48.

²³ Amans-Alexis Monteil, *Traité de matériaux manuscrits de divers genres d’histoire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Duverger, 1835). This *Traité* was essentially a priced sale catalogue, but its introduction outlined Monteil’s manifesto for the preservation of historical documents, such as binding rolls and loose leaves in codices. He expanded on this in a second edition, published the following year. See Lemaître, “Amans-Alexis Monteil”; and Warne, “Amateurs and Collectors,” 50–51.

was succeeded by his widow in 1823.²⁴ When Madame Royez announced her intended retirement to Philipps in 1827, she introduced him to Monteil as someone with whom he might develop a similar relationship.²⁵ Monteil swiftly allied himself with Philipps, initially sending him a copy of his *Histoire des français des divers états aux cinq derniers siècles*, which cited several manuscripts that had already entered Philipps's library.²⁶ In November 1828, Monteil wrote to Philipps, promising him first refusal of the manuscripts featured in the forthcoming volume of his *Histoire* and stating that he would not sell anything to the Bibliothèque du Roi before consulting Philipps.²⁷ In one letter, he requested transcriptions of two cartularies from Bordeaux on behalf of the Bibliothèque du Roi, admitting that he had sold them for financial reasons and that the French librarians regretted their loss.²⁸ Seven months later, Monteil repeated the request and confessed that he had recently sold a number of the aforementioned manuscripts to the Bibliothèque du Roi, because the librarians feared that they too would soon cross the Channel.²⁹ This is the last letter from Monteil in the Philipps-Robinson papers, but his manuscripts continued to enter Philipps's library.³⁰ Despite imploring the nation to appreciate its "written monuments," Monteil had been complicit in their export, while the French librarians were slow to acknowledge their value and Philipps's interest in them.³¹ In consequence, Monteil's manuscripts accounted for around one fifth of the documents bought from Fenwick for the Bibliothèque nationale, including obituaries and martyrologies, significant series of charters and accounts, and at least eight of the thirty medieval cartularies.³²

24 On Royez, see Luc Marco, "Le renouveau du marché des livres de commerce à Paris en 1802," *Philosophia Scientiæ* 22.1 (2018): 43–61.

25 See letters from Madame Royez to Philipps, July 26, 1827 and December 17, 1827, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Philipps-Robinson b. 122, fols. 214–15, 220–21.

26 Letter from Monteil to Philipps, November 29, 1827, Philipps-Robinson b. 122, fol. 216. See Amans-Alexis Monteil, *Histoire des français des divers états aux cinq derniers siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris: Janet et Cotelte, 1827–1828).

27 Letter from Monteil to Philipps, November 13, 1828, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Philipps-Robinson c. 424, fols. 232–33; letters from Monteil to Philipps, November 25 and 30, 1829, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Philipps-Robinson c. 426, fols. 89–90.

28 The manuscripts in question were the cartularies of Saint-Séverin and Saint-André (Philipps MSS 71 and 82).

29 Letter from Monteil to Philipps, June 21, 1830, Philipps-Robinson c. 429, fols. 105–6.

30 It is unclear whether Philipps bought manuscripts directly from Monteil after 1830. Some manuscripts acquired from Thorpe in 1836 (Philipps MSS 8539–10185, see [Thomas Philipps], *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum in bibliotheca D. Thomæ Philipps, Bart., A. D. 1837* ([Broadway: Middle Hill], 1837–), 137), belonged to Monteil's collection, such as Philipps MS 8872 (BnF, NAL 1947). On Monteil's sales, see Lemaître, "Amans-Alexis Monteil."

31 "Partout l'ignorance détruit également les monuments écrits." Amans-Alexis Monteil, *Traité de matériaux manuscrits de divers genres d'histoire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Duverger, 1836), 1:vii.

32 The cartularies from Monteil acquired in 1908 include: Philipps MSS 68 (BnF, NAL 1927), 1321 (NAL 938), 1322 (NAL 930), 1335 (NAL 931), 2970 (NAL 1935), 2971 (NAL 1936), 2973 (NAL 1934), 4372 (NAL 2413).

Omont secured for the Bibliothèque nationale all the cartularies identified in his article on the historical manuscripts in the Philipps library, apart from those that had been sold since its publication.³³ Alsace-Lorraine was under the control of the German Empire when the local archives acquired four cartularies from Metz (Philipps MSS 76, 1320, 2246 (and 13639), 10456 (and 13619)) and a number of other historical documents related to the region from Fenwick in 1890 and 1891.³⁴ The Conseil départemental de la Gironde funded their own purchase in 1894, including three cartularies from Bordeaux (Philipps MSS 69, 71, and 82).³⁵ In addition, the Belgian national archives acquired a thirteenth-century cartulary from Liessies Abbey (Philipps MS 8839) at the Philipps auction in June 1899 (lot 821).³⁶ The Bibliothèque nationale's curators had commissioned Quaritch to buy this lot and increased their limit from £150 to £210—the highest maximum bid set by the Bibliothèque nationale for any of the Philipps sales during this period.³⁷ However, this fell well below the final price of £307, deemed “excessive” by French scholars.³⁸ Despite Liessies being located within the borders of modern France, the Belgian Government ensured the acquisition of this manuscript from an abbey of importance to the history of Hainault.

Fenwick knew the importance of the cartularies to the Bibliothèque nationale and priced them accordingly. He valued the two earliest cartularies (Philipps MSS 67 and 70) at £500 each—the highest value given to any of the manuscripts of interest to the French—in a list compiled at the start of the negotiations in May 1904.³⁹ In subsequent lists, the eleventh-century cartulary, or “Livre noir” of the Abbey of Saint-Florent-lès-Saumur (Philipps MS 70; BnF, NAL 1930) retained this valuation.⁴⁰ The figure of £500 equated to over 12,500 francs in 1908, which was more than the Bibliothèque nationale had ever spent on a single manuscript using their allowance for acquisitions.⁴¹

33 Omont, “Manuscrits relatifs,” 70–71.

34 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Philipps-Robinson c. 712.

35 Omont introduced Jean-Auguste Brutails, a fellow *chartiste* and archivist at the Archives de la Gironde, to Fenwick in November 1889. See Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Philipps-Robinson c. 713, fols. 1–2. Most of the items acquired had been owned by Monteil. See Jean-Auguste Brutails, “Documents bordelais de la bibliothèque de Sir Thomas Philipps,” *BEC* 55 (1894): 227–29 at 228.

36 Brussels, Archives générales du Royaume, Archives ecclésiastiques 16706.

37 London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., Quaritch Archives: Commission Book 6 (1899–1903), 37.

38 See Amand d'Herbomez, “*Étude sur l'abbaye de Liessies (1095–1147)*,” par le P. M. Jacquin,” *BEC* 64 (1903): 624. The review considers a study produced for the Belgian Royal Historical Commission soon after the acquisition of this cartulary. See P. M. Jacquin, “*Étude sur l'abbaye de Liessies, 1095–1147*,” *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'histoire* 71 (1902): 283–400.

39 Philipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 340–46. Philipps bought these two manuscripts and Philipps MS 2861 from Royez between 1822 and 1823 for 2,400 francs (fol. 272).

40 Philipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 321, 353. Fenwick reduced the price of the twelfth-century Cartulary of Fontevault (Philipps MS 67; BnF, NAL 2414) to £400 in a list dated November 7, 1905 (fol. 331), and to £250 in another list (fol. 353).

41 In 1900, 10,000 francs (approximately £396) was spent on an illuminated sixth-century copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Greek on purple vellum (BnF, Sup. grec 1286). See Henri Omont, “*Peintures du manuscrit grec de l'Évangile de saint Matthieu, copié en onciales d'or sur parchemin pourpré, et*

Table 15.1: Philipps manuscripts bought for the Bibliothèque nationale by donors (1908).

Philipps MS no.	BnF shelfmark	Contents	Fenwick's valuations	Donor
7404	NAL 1921	Cartulary of the Abbey of Saint-Quentin, Beauvais (twelfth century)	£110–140	Thérèse de Rothschild
7410	NAL 1933	Cartulary of the Priory of Saint-Maurice, Senlis (fourteenth century)	£28–45	Thérèse de Rothschild
2973	NAL 1934	Cartulary of the Templars of Sommereux (thirteenth century)	£70–150	Thérèse de Rothschild
2841	NAF 10685	<i>Conseil de Pierre de Fontaines</i> (thirteenth century)	£30–35	Thérèse de Rothschild
77	NAL 929	Cartulary of the prebends of the Cathedral of Laon (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries)	£65–150	Edmond de Rothschild
876	NAL 936	Cartulary of the University of Paris (fourteenth century)	£100	Edmond de Rothschild
2863	NAL 937	Statutes and Privileges of the Faculty of Law, University of Paris (fifteenth century)	£35–50	Edmond de Rothschild
2275	NAL 939	Cartulary of the Church of Reims (thirteenth century)	£40–65	Maurice Fenaille
8076	NAL 1963	Martyrology of Ado of Vienne; Obituary of the Priory of Cassan, Beziers (twelfth century)	£60–100	Maurice Fenaille
811	NAF 10683	<i>Établissements de Saint Louis</i> (thirteenth century)	£25–35	Maurice Fenaille
810	NAF 10684	<i>Établissements de Saint Louis</i> (fifteenth century)	£10–16	Maurice Fenaille

Faced with budgetary restrictions, as well as Fenwick's inflated prices and insistence on a single payment as opposed to instalments, Omont had no other choice than to look beyond the state's purse.⁴²

The twenty most expensive manuscripts, including almost half of the cartularies, were bought with donations totalling £2,320. This amounted to over half the figure paid to Fenwick for the 1908 acquisition (£4,125).⁴³ The state paid the remaining £1,805 (45,125 francs) for the majority of the manuscripts.⁴⁴ Two of the major donors were members of the Rothschild family.⁴⁵ Thérèse de Rothschild, widow of Baron James Édouard de Rothschild (one of the founders of the Société des anciens textes français, alongside Paul Meyer), gifted four manuscripts to the library (see Table 15.1).⁴⁶ Baron Edmond de Rothschild funded the purchase of three manuscripts. In addition, the industrialist and collector, Maurice Fenaille paid for four.⁴⁷ The donations thus guaranteed the most important patrimonial artefacts for the Bibliothèque nationale, while state funding completed the less costly bulk of the purchase.⁴⁸ The French press lauded their generosity, publicly praising the role of these three donors in "this patriotic rescue mission."⁴⁹

In the introduction to the published catalogue of acquisitions from the Philipps library, Omont lamented the considerable body of manuscripts related to France that remained in Cheltenham, especially the witnesses of "our literature."⁵⁰ Omont had pursued a number of these manuscripts in May 1904, when he first visited Fenwick accompanied by Meyer. The list of manuscripts that they wished to consult featured a selection

récemment acquis pour la Bibliothèque Nationale," *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* 7.2 (1900): 175–86.

42 Omont had initially proposed spending £1,000 per year from the annual budget for acquisitions (approximately £1,252 in this period). See Henry Marcel et al., *La Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Laurens, 1907), 31.

43 Letter from Omont to Fenwick, March 22, 1908, Philipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 185–87.

44 BnF, Département des manuscrits, Archives modernes 518, no. 1555.

45 See François Avril, "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*, ed. Pauline Prévost-Marcilhacy, 3 vols. (Paris: Somogy, 2016), 1:82–85.

46 She had previously donated two manuscripts to the Bibliothèque nationale (BnF, NAL 1815 and 1835), and thirteen autograph volumes of Brantôme (NAF 20468–80). See Henri Omont, *Nouvelles acquisitions du Département des manuscrits pendant les années 1891–1910* (Paris: Leroux, 1912), XXXIII.

47 On their donations, see BnF, Inventaire 9, Registre des entrées du Département des manuscrits: dons, 1895–1948, fol. 77r. The inventory does not identify the source of the most expensive item in Fenwick's lists (Philipps MS 70; BnF, NAL 1930) and a handful of other manuscripts funded by donation.

48 Almost two thirds of the manuscripts bought using the Bibliothèque nationale's budget cost 100 francs or less.

49 "cette patriotique œuvre de sauvetage." See M. D., "Les nouvelles acquisitions de la Bibliothèque nationale," *Le Temps*, May 8, 1908, 2.

50 Omont, *Catalogue*, x.

of medieval works in French, including chronicles, and a handful of volumes preserving classical and medieval Latin texts, in addition to the historical documentation that they eventually acquired.⁵¹ Fenwick wrote that he was not prepared to sell every item that might be solicited and that he would explain more when they met.⁵² Whilst his explanation is absent from the correspondence, Fenwick's lists of manuscripts, as well as his general approach to the dispersal of the medieval literary manuscripts in French, suggest his decisive role in their fates.⁵³

Fenwick's first list of "French MSS" responded to Omont's by recording both the items that had already been "sold" and his valuations of the available manuscripts.⁵⁴ The Belgian Government had bought five manuscripts in 1900, including two fifteenth-century manuscripts of Jean Froissart's *Chroniques* probably produced in Paris (Phillipps MSS 131 and 24258; Brussels, KBR, MSS II 2551 and II 2552).⁵⁵ Fenwick had proposed these manuscripts to the Belgian curator Joseph van den Gheyn in 1899 as part of a "collection" judged to be "of Belgian origin or interest."⁵⁶ Fenwick's inclusion of the two Froissart manuscripts, whose Parisian origins he may not have known, offers another example of the conflicting ways these remnants of the medieval past could be claimed for modern nations. The medieval author's origins and patronage connected him to Hainault, but also to England following the marriage of Queen Philippa of Hainault to Edward III. The manuscripts of Froissart's *Chroniques* were predominantly produced within the region of modern France, but were also sold to English clients as was possibly the case with Phillipps MS 24258.⁵⁷ Meyer and Omont selected the copies of Froissart along with the other medieval manuscripts in French on the basis of their language and the value of the texts to scholars, as well as their potential affordability (they notably did not pursue any of the generally more expensive Arthurian romances).

51 Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 253–64. Omont included these "chronicles" in his overview of the historical manuscripts, see "Manuscrits relatifs," 74–75.

52 Draft letter from Fenwick to Omont, May 21, 1904, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 19–20.

53 Fenwick was highly calculated about the material available to purchase privately, holding back "the romances and the illuminated MSS" from negotiations with the British Museum, Bodleian, and Cambridge University libraries in 1890. See Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 46.

54 Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 340–46. Fenwick repeatedly told Omont that he preferred to work from a total figure rather than attribute individual values to manuscripts; yet in his own calculations, he priced manuscripts individually. Omont insisted that individual figures were needed both to obtain credit for the purchase and to determine their selection. Letter from Omont to Fenwick, May 18, 1904, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 17–18.

55 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Phillipps-Robinson c. 715, fols. 70–118. On the Belgian purchases, see Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 28–31. I thank Godfried Croenen for sharing information on the two Froissart manuscripts. See also Godfried Croenen, "The Reception of Froissart's Writings in England: The Evidence of the Manuscripts," in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), 409–19.

56 Draft letter from Fenwick to Joseph Van den Gheyn, October 30, 1899, Phillipps-Robinson c. 715, fols. 7–8. See also Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 31.

57 See Croenen, "Reception," 415–16.

Table 15.2: The most expensive medieval manuscripts crossed off the first list of “French MSS” (May 1904), in descending order of Fenwick’s valuations.⁵⁸

Phillipps MS no.	Contents	Fenwick’s valuation (1904)	Current location
10190	Capitularies of Charlemagne (ninth century)	£200	New Haven, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 413
8336	Trilingual miscellany, including the works of Nicole Bozon, Walter de Bibbesworth, etc. (fourteenth century)	£200	BL, Add. MS 46919
8345	<i>Waldef</i> (unique copy); <i>Gui de Warewic</i> ; <i>Otincl</i> (thirteenth/fourteenth century)	£180	Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 168
8193	Jean Cuvelier, <i>Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin</i> (fourteenth/fifteenth century)	£170	New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 990
3340	Noyon Sacramentary (tenth century)	£150	BL, Add. MS 82956
222	<i>Orson de Beauvais</i> (unique copy) (thirteenth century)	£150	BnF, NAF 16600
236	Christine de Pizan, etc., <i>Débat sur le Roman de la Rose</i> (fifteenth century)	£136	Berkeley, Bancroft Library, UCB 109
1277	Jean Froissart, <i>Chroniques</i> (fifteenth century)	£100	KBR, MS IV 1102
4760	Register of Letters of Pope Innocent VI (fourteenth century)	£80	Last recorded at Sotheby’s, November 28, 1967, lot 98
3713	Raoul de Houdenc, <i>Roman des Eles</i> ; <i>Donnei des Amants</i> (unique copy) (thirteenth century)	£60	Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 82

⁵⁸ Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 340–46.

The selection included books of insular origin, whose value Fenwick appraised from an English perspective as opposed to the continental view which posited them in relation to the French of France.⁵⁹ Two of the highest priced manuscripts crossed off the first list were important witnesses of Anglo-Norman literary culture (Phillipps MSS 8345 and 8336), claimed simply as "Poèmes français" by Omont, but valued by Fenwick at £180 and £200 respectively (see Table 15.2). In the same vein, Fenwick gave Phillipps MS 3713—a thirteenth-century manuscript of English origin containing the unique copy of the *Donnei des Amants*—the value of £60 despite it being formed of only twenty-four folios.

All the most expensive items crossed off the first list contain medieval literature in French (both continental and insular), with the exception of the Capitularies of Charlemagne (Phillipps MS 10190), the Noyon Sacramentary (3340), and the Register of Letters of Pope Innocent VI (4760).⁶⁰ Fenwick attributed £150 to the copy of *Orson de Beauvais* (222) from northeastern France, rendering it more expensive than any thirteenth-century manuscript of *chanson de geste* sold at the recent Ashburnham "Appendix" (1899) and Ashburnham-Barrois (1901) sales.⁶¹ It is not insignificant that this manuscript and several of the insular books preserved *unica*. Nonetheless, Fenwick's prices were relatively high for largely esoteric text manuscripts without significant illumination or adorned bindings, and did enough to deter Omont and Meyer from pursuing them.

Fenwick did not fix a value to every item on the first list, including five medieval manuscripts in French. There may have been existing expressions of interest, or the potential that their sale would have been refused by the Court of Chancery.⁶² In the case of the thirteenth-century insular copy of the *Chanson d'Aspremont* (Phillipps MS 26119; Cologny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 11), one of twenty-four extant witnesses of this *chanson de geste*, Fenwick may have avoided fixing a price because of the inflated figure that his grandfather paid. Meyer witnessed it achieve £100 at the Savile sale in London in 1861, alongside several other expensive purchases of "poésies françaises" made on behalf of Phillipps.⁶³ A second manuscript of the *Chanson*

59 In his study of Phillipps MS 8336, Meyer distinguished the continental texts from those of insular provenance, acknowledging the importance of Anglo-Norman authors such as Nicole Bozon, whose works he edited for the Société des anciens textes français. See Meyer, "Notice et extraits;" *Les Contes moralisés de Nicole Bozon frère mineur*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith and Paul Meyer (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1889).

60 Omont repeatedly attempted to acquire Phillipps MS 10190, but Fenwick would not capitulate and eventually sold the manuscript to Alfred Chester Beatty for £500 in 1923. See letter from Beatty to Fenwick, February 23, 1923, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Phillipps-Robinson c. 719, fols. 58–59.

61 See Hannah Morcos, "Mission littéraire en Angleterre: Paul Meyer and the Quest for Medieval French Manuscripts at the Ashburnham-Barrois sale (1901)," *Romania* 141 (2023): 166–95.

62 I thank Tony Edwards for highlighting the potential limitations placed on the material by the Court of Chancery.

63 Paul Meyer, "Vente des manuscrits de la famille Savile," *BEC* 22 (1861): 272–80. The high prices paid included £380 for the unique copy of the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* (Phillipps MS 25155; PML M.888), which Meyer subsequently edited, *L'histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, comte de Striguil et de Pembroke, régent d'Angleterre de 1216 à 1219, poème français publié pour la Société de l'histoire de France*, ed. Paul Meyer, 3 vols. (Paris: Renouard, 1891–1901).

Table 15.3: Trajectories of manuscripts containing medieval French works crossed off the first list of “French MSS” (May 1904), ordered by occasion of dispersal.⁶⁴

Phillipps MS no.	Contents	Fenwick's valuation (1904)	Occasion of dispersal
3950	Enguerrand de Monstrelet, <i>Chroniques</i>	£15	1911 (Sotheby's, April 24, lot 219)
8075	Adenet le roi, <i>Berte aus grans piés</i> , <i>Enfances Ogier</i> ; Herbert le Duc de Dammartin, <i>Foulque de Candie</i>	—	1946 (direct negotiation with Brussels)
24172	Jean de Vignay, <i>Jeu des échecs moralisé</i>	—	1946 (Sotheby's, July 1, lot 28)
8345	<i>Waldef</i> ; <i>Gui de Warewic</i> ; <i>Otinél</i>	£180	1948 (Robinson catalogue 77, no. 64)
8336	Trilingual miscellany, including the works of Nicole Bozon, Walter de Bibbesworth, etc.	£200	1949 (Robinson catalogue 79) ⁶⁵
6664	Collection of religious poems and saints' lives	£20	1950 (Robinson catalogue 81, no. 48)
3713	Raoul de Houdenc, <i>Roman des Eles</i> ; <i>Donnei des Amants</i>	£60	1953 (Robinson catalogue 83, pp. 1–3)
7078	Baudouin d'Avesnes, <i>Chroniques de Hainaut</i>	—	1957 (Kraus catalogue 85, no. 9)
236	Christine de Pizan, etc., <i>Débat sur le Roman de la Rose</i>	£136	1969 (Sotheby's, November 25, lot 462)
26119	<i>Chanson d'Aspremont</i>	—	1969 (Sotheby's, November 25, lot 452)
222	<i>Orson de Beauvais</i>	£150	1973 (Sotheby's, November 28, lot 585)
8193	Jean Cuvelier, <i>Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin</i>	£170	1973 (Sotheby's, November 28, lot 592)
1277	Jean Froissart, <i>Chroniques</i>	£100	1976 (Sotheby's, November 30, lot 871)
21910	<i>Voeux du faisan</i>	—	1976 (Sotheby's, November 30, lot 881)
833	Gautier de Metz, <i>Image du monde</i>	£50	1979 (Kraus catalogue 153, no. 64)

Price	Current Location
£12	Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Fr. 55
?	KBR, MS II 7451
£600	Unknown. Bought by Davis and Orioli in 1946.
£1,250	Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. 168
£8,500	BL, Add. MS 46919
£400	KBR, MS IV 1005 (since 1974)
£2,250	Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. 82
£3,500	New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 339
£5,800	Berkeley, Bancroft Library, UCB 109
£4,800	Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. 11
£3,600	BnF, NAF 16600
£2,800	New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 990
£2,400	KBR, MS IV 1102
£3,000	KBR, MS IV 1103
\$20,000	Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, MS 305

d'Aspremont (lot 26) also fetched £100 at the Savile sale, and reached the even higher price of £155 at Guiglielmo Libri's sale in 1862, before plummeting to £26 when it re-entered the market at the Ashburnham “Appendix” sale in 1899 (lot 150; BL, Add. MS 35289).⁶⁶ Fenwick clearly took into account what his grandfather paid, whilst following the market closely.⁶⁷

Fenwick withheld most of Phillipps's medieval literary manuscripts in French from the auction room, where they might have been more attainable for the Bibliothèque nationale during the early twentieth century.⁶⁸ Only Enguerrand de Monstrelet's *Chroniques* (Phillipps MS 3950) appeared at auction during Fenwick's lifetime; it fetched £12 at the 1911 sale (lot 219), which was £3 less than his valuation in 1904. The rest of the manuscripts containing medieval French works did not leave the Phillipps collection until after Fenwick's death and the purchase by W. H. Robinson Limited in 1946 (see Table 15.3).⁶⁹ The sole manuscript acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale was the unique copy of *Orson de Beauvais* (Phillipps MS 222; BnF NAF 16600), which raised £3,600 at auction in 1973.⁷⁰ The majority of the other medieval

⁶⁴ The data on the manuscripts have been compiled from the *Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts* (<https://sdbm.library.upenn.edu/>), *Biblissima* (<https://portail.biblissima.fr/>), and the IRHT's databases: *Bibale* (<https://bibale.irht.cnrs.fr/>) and *JONAS* (<https://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/>), all accessed May 29, 2023.

⁶⁵ *Phillipps Manuscript 8336 [Catalogue 79]* (London: Robinson, 1949).

⁶⁶ See Paul Meyer, “Chronique,” *Romania* 28 (1899): 474–75. On prices at the “Appendix” sale see Léopold Delisle, “Vente des manuscrits du comte d'Ashburnham. Second article,” *Journal des savants* (August 1899): 510.

⁶⁷ Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 54. For Fenwick's record of Phillipps's sources and purchase prices, see Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 272–77.

⁶⁸ According to Munby, he deliberately held back from auction the “greatest treasures.” Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 55.

⁶⁹ Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 94–112.

⁷⁰ *Bibliotheca Philippica: Medieval Manuscripts: New Series: Part VIII...28th November 1973* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1973), lot 585.

French literary manuscripts initially pursued for the Bibliothèque nationale remained in Europe, but not in France.

Even in the early stages of negotiations the French did not contemplate including any of the richly illuminated manuscripts identified by Durrieu.⁷¹ Yet, three months after the deal was finalized, Omont wrote to Fenwick to inquire about the manuscript described by Durrieu as the “pearl” of the collection.⁷² The Bibliothèque nationale already had two leaves from this thirteenth-century illuminated Bible (BnF, NAL 2294), and Omont attached photographs to his letter. Fenwick swiftly dismissed his interest, emphasizing that the manuscript was far beyond the library’s resources and that he already had several interested buyers.⁷³ Omont probed further in a second letter by asking Fenwick to specify the price, noting that they might rely on the current generosity of donors if the library’s budget were insufficient.⁷⁴ Fenwick replied with the huge price tag of £10,000, which Omont deemed a potentially “insurmountable obstacle” to its reunion with the leaves held in Paris.⁷⁵ He persisted, however, and asked Fenwick for photographs of the manuscript so that he might tempt a collector to return it to France, whether for their own collection or as a gift to the national library.⁷⁶ Yet, no further progress was made. In 1916, Belle da Costa Greene agreed to pay £10,000 for the manuscript on behalf of John Pierpont Morgan Jr., after it had been initially refused by his father six years earlier.⁷⁷ Thus the manuscript classified by Durrieu as one of the masterpieces of French gothic art became the Morgan Library’s “Crusader Bible” (now PML, M.638)⁷⁸

The French claims to the Phillipps manuscripts held little weight without financial backing. When the opportunity finally emerged to purchase the “French part” of the collection for the Bibliothèque nationale, Omont had to settle for what Fenwick made available and seek alternative means of funding to secure the cartularies deemed essential for constructing the nation’s medieval past. Many of these items had survived thanks to the efforts of Monteil, but he had also facilitated their exile in the Phillipps library, leaving the French librarians of the early twentieth century to call on private collectors to rectify their predecessors’ past “negligence.” Fenwick’s strategic approach to the disper-

71 The first list did, however, include the fifteenth-century Italian manuscript of St Cyprian (Phillipps MS 4361; Budapest, National Széchényi Library, Cod. Lat. 529), owned by Matthias Corvinus and later by Chrétien-Guillaume de Lamoignon. See Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fol. 256; Durrieu, “Les manuscrits à peintures,” 419.

72 Durrieu, “Les manuscrits à peintures,” 386. Letter from Omont to Fenwick, July 23, 1908, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 237–38.

73 Draft letter from Fenwick to Omont, August 5, 1908, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 239–40.

74 Letter from Omont to Fenwick, August 10, 1908, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fol. 241.

75 Letters exchanged between Omont and Fenwick, August 24 and 29, 1908, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 242–44.

76 Letter from Omont to Fenwick, October 1, 1908, Phillipps-Robinson c. 716, fols. 245–46.

77 Munby, *Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, 68–69. See also Christopher de Hamel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Manuscripts Club* (London: Allen Lane, 2022), 487–92.

78 Durrieu, “Les manuscrits à peintures,” 387.

sal of his grandfather's library resulted in most of the medieval literary manuscripts in French entering collections outside of France in the second half of the twentieth century. As for the most prized illuminated book, he indulged in American money, eschewing Omont and his supportive patrons.

