

Chapter 7

FROM DRAWING ROOM TO SALE-ROOM

ALBUMS OF MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPT CUTTINGS IN THE 1920s

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THE VICTORIAN PERIOD was the height of the fashionable craze for collecting anything that might be mounted on paper leaves and bound into albums and scrapbooks: subjects included prints, drawings, watercolours, engravings, silhouettes, photographs, autographs, bookplates, postage stamps, calling cards, playing cards, Christmas cards, valentines, pressed flowers, and even banknotes. Albums of leaves and cuttings from medieval manuscripts had begun to emerge before 1800 but the heyday for making such volumes was undoubtedly the nineteenth century.¹ The personal energies invested in their assemblage resulted in objects that were highly regarded by their original creators but not necessarily by others; this lack of transferrable esteem is apparent from the way that James Dennistoun's family disparaged his album of illuminated manuscript cuttings, apparently referring to them as "Uncle Denny's scraps."² On the other hand, the intrinsic value of individual cuttings was widely recognized by both collectors and sellers. When albums were consigned to the sale-room their most frequent fate was disassembly, either prior to their trip to market or shortly afterwards in the hands of dealers; consequently, few such volumes remain intact today. In a recent preliminary study I documented twenty-two albums of medieval cuttings that preserve their original format, or where all the constituent elements of a disbound volume have been retained together; I also listed a further eighteen dismantled or currently untraced examples.³ Scholarly attention has tended to focus on a very few famous albums such as those owned by Dennistoun and Daniel Burkhardt-Wildt, giving the impression that such collections

¹ See Sandra Hindman, Michael Camille, Nina Rowe, and Rowan Watson, *Manuscript Illumination in the Modern Age: Recovery and Reconstruction* (Evanston: Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, 2001), 80–91; for a general overview of albums see Samantha Matthews, *Album Verses and Romantic Literary Culture: Poetry, Manuscript, Print, 1780–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

² Hindman, Camille, Rowe, and Watson, *Manuscript Illumination*, 87.

³ Margaret Connolly, "The Album and the Scrapbook," *Florilegium* 35 (2018): 31–51.

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were the preserve of the serious collector, and that all were of substantial size and grandeur (Burkhardt-Wildt's contained approximately 475 items).⁴ Yet the Victorian predilection for the activity of album-making suggests that there must have been many more examples of rather less splendid albums of cuttings than have survived to the present day. The aim of the present essay is to uncover evidence of the trade in albums of medieval leaves and cuttings in the early twentieth century, and thereby to extend knowledge of this type of "medieval" book. It will identify specific examples, most of which can no longer be traced, and will generally increase information about the contents and format of such volumes, and about the kind of people who owned, bought, and sold them.

This essay focuses on the 1920s, a decade notable for fashionable change, and a period when death and inheritance would naturally have brought many Victorian collections to the market.⁵ Auction was not the only way to acquire manuscripts, and there were many sale-rooms, including outside London, but a study of this length must necessarily be selective and the investigation has been restricted to sales at Sotheby's between 1920–1929 (a total of at least 340 sales). I have consulted approximately 75 percent of the catalogues for this decade, mostly via the hard-copy run at St Andrews University Library and in a few instances online.⁶ Although the St Andrews holdings are not complete and coverage of the years 1923–1925 is especially thin, nevertheless this corpus is sufficiently extensive to provide a representative view of sales at auction during the 1920s.⁷

The study was further delimited by the book-like format of the album. It does not include portfolios of leaves, or cut-out miniatures and initials kept loose in solander cases, or a combination of such items offered as "a parcel," even though these indicate a similar interest in curating fragmentary medieval manuscript materials. Typical of such collections was the "parcel" of leaves from manuscripts ("many with musical notation, some with initials in colours") and early printed books, which had belonged to David Secretan Jones, vicar of Oystermouth, Swansea.⁸ A similarly mixed "parcel" (a manuscript leaf; a cut-out illuminated initial K; manuscript leaves with ornamental initials; leaves from More's *Dialogue against Tyndal*, and leaves and facsimiles from early Bibles) was the property of Mrs. Elizabeth Green, widow of the Quaker historian Joseph Joshua Green.⁹ Also not included in this survey are numerous lots offering single leaves or indi-

⁴ *Catalogue of Single Leaves and Miniatures from Western Illuminated Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...25th April, 1983* (London: Sotheby, 1983).

⁵ Arguably the following decade, after the financial crash of 1929, might have yielded more evidence of the simple monetarization of collections.

⁶ For comparison Cambridge University Library holds 341 catalogues for this decade, see www.lib.cam.ac.uk/files/sothebys.pdf, accessed May 12, 2023; just eleven are digitally accessible, see: www.arlima.net/libraries/sotheby/, accessed May 12, 2023. St Andrews holds 247 catalogues for this period.

⁷ I am pleased to acknowledge the research assistance of Emma Gatrell and Zachary Vincent in assembling and checking this data for me during 2021–2022.

⁸ *Catalogue of Printed Books and a Few Manuscript...Which will be Sold by Auction...May 29, 1922* (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1922), lot 1031, p. 96.

⁹ *Catalogue of Printed Books and a Few Manuscripts, also of Autograph Letters & Historical*

vidual cut-out illuminated initials, framed or loose, unless there is some clear indication that the items were formerly housed together in an album. Accordingly, the “superb illuminations” that had belonged to John Rushout, second Lord Northwick, and which arrived on the market in two portions in 1925 and 1928, do not feature here. I have not had access to the 1925 catalogue, but the fourteen lots of the 1928 catalogue were all presented individually on sunk mounts, and some had recently been exhibited as separate items.¹⁰ On the other hand, the “magnificent series of illuminations on vellum” that had been owned by Robert Holford and then by his son, George Lindsay Holford, which was presented for sale in 1927 as a series of framed individual miniatures and groups of initials, is included because of the clear evidence that these cuttings had formerly been kept in a scrapbook at Dorchester House.¹¹

Previously Holford’s was the only album, albeit disassembled, that I knew had been sold during the 1920s: from this survey of Sotheby’s sale catalogues for the decade I can now identify several more. Sales at auction usually cover a number of days, and make clear which lots were to be offered on each day, but in this essay references to sale catalogues will refer to the first day of the sale only. Catalogues of this period did not publish estimates of prices, and they only provide evidence that an item was *entered* for sale, not whether it was actually sold. Information about the outcome of a sale (prices attained by different lots; the identities of buyers), may sometimes be retrievable from annotated catalogues; for Sotheby’s the annotated auctioneer’s copies of the printed sale catalogues up to 1970 are held at the British Library.¹² However, even unannotated sale catalogues contain valuable data. Their lot descriptions can provide information about an item’s contents, format, appearance, and condition, and although individual entries vary in the level of detail provided about an album, cumulatively they extend knowledge of the genre, sometimes also yielding information about ownership and provenance.

Documents...Which will be Sold by Auction...31st of July, 1922 (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1922), lot 343, p. 27. See the anonymous “Obituary, Joseph Joshua Green,” *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 19.1 (1922): 32.

10 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Illuminated Manuscripts, Autograph Letters and Historical Documents...Which will be Sold by Auction...November 16th, 1925* (London: Sotheby, 1925); *Catalogue of Superb Illuminations from the Collection of the late John, Lord Northwick (The Second and Final Portion)...Which will be Sold by Auction ...21st of May, 1928* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1928).

11 *The Holford Library Part 1: Catalogue of the Magnificent Series of Illuminations on Vellum...Which will be Sold by Auction...12th of July, 1927* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1927), lots 1–48, comprising more than 120 individual items (leaves, cuttings, initials, miniatures, composite borders). The discovery of the scrapbook is referenced in Robert Benson, ed., *The Holford Collection Dorchester House with 200 Illustrations from the Twelfth to the end of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 1:xvii. On Holford see Peter Kidd, “The Holford Album,” *Medieval Manuscripts Provenance* (blog), June 20, 2020, <https://mssprovenance.blogspot.com/2020/06/the-holford-album.html>, accessed May 12, 2023.

12 BL, SC Sotheby (1); I am very grateful to A. S. G. Edwards for checking details of recorded prices of items discussed in this essay. On the use of catalogues and annotated catalogues see his “Medieval Manuscripts, the Collector and the Trade,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval British Manuscripts*, ed. Orietta Da Rold and Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 284–94.

The Albums

Three albums offered only as “Other Properties” in 1920, 1926, and 1927, cannot be linked to individual owners but they nevertheless provide insight into the contents of such volumes. For convenience I will refer to these otherwise anonymous albums by the code names of their sales. Lot 190, offered on the first day in the sale of July 26, 1926 (Ganger), comprised sixty-seven miniatures, apparently all illuminated and on vellum, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, cut from Books of Hours and *ducali*, a particular category of Venetian state documents that had elaborate opening leaves.¹³ This was folio-sized, as was the album offered in the sale of June 27, 1927, lot 609 (Delphi) which had fewer but more varied contents from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century vellum manuscripts.¹⁴ As is often the case, the wording of the Delphi lot description admits some ambiguities: the materials, seemingly forty-nine in total, were “pasted in an album, unbound” and comprised a mixture of eight large painted initials from various manuscripts; eight fragments from Books of Hours and choir books; and thirty-three fragments of Flemish borders “decorated with flowers and insects in natural colours on a coloured ground.” More varied still was the “Illuminated MSS. Scrap-book” offered in the sale of December 13, 1920 (Stirrup).¹⁵ Its twenty manuscript items were a mixture of leaves and cuttings from different sources and periods:

six leaves from a French XVth Century Book of Hours, on vellum, each with a large arched miniature and full floreate borders, finely executed in gold and colours; three leaves from a similar Horae with small miniatures and three-quarter borders to the text; four very large historiated initial letters on vellum, containing miniatures (3 English, 1 Italian) of the XIVth Century; two leaves from a Flemish Horae, XVth Cent., with large arched miniatures and full borders (no text); two full-page miniatures (about 6 3/4 by 6 in.) [171 × 152mm] from a XVth Cent. French Service Book, representing the Infant Christ in the Temple and the Annunciation, both very finely executed (the latter slightly rubbed); three small square miniatures from a XIIIth Cent. English MS.

These were accompanied by “some photo reproductions of early woodcuts,” creating an eclectic combination of medieval and modern, original and reproduction, which may explain this volume’s description as a “scrap-book” rather than an album.

13 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Illuminated and Other Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...26th of July, 1926* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1926), lot 190, p. 27. On the collecting of *ducali*, see Helena Katalin Szépe, *Venice Illuminated: Power and Painting in Renaissance Manuscripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 259–87.

14 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Illuminated and Other Manuscripts, Autographs Letters and Historical Documents...Which will be Sold by Auction...27th of June, 1927* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1927), lot 609, p. 35.

15 *Catalogue of Valuable Illuminated and other Manuscripts and Printed Books...Which will be Sold by Auction...December 13th, 1920* (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1920), lot 418, p. 51.

Certain themes and organizational principles begin to emerge through the testimony of these and other lot descriptions. Many albums were collections of the religious miniatures typically found in Books of Hours (the Annunciation, Nativity, Flight to Egypt, and so on), or of illuminated initials that depicted individual saints. Sometimes an entire cycle of illustrations from the same source was preserved, so that the album essentially constitutes a highly condensed picture-book version of the original medieval manuscript. Especially tightly focussed was the album that belonged to G. C. Willoughby, Esq., of 4, Bedford Square, London. This was a collection of ten large miniatures depicting saints and biblical scenes, "cut from illuminated choir books," with all but the tenth taken from the same fifteenth-century Italian manuscript.¹⁶ Mrs. Simpson Rostron of South Warnborough Manor, Basingstoke, had a similar picture-book album that was made up of thirty-one full-page miniatures (that is, complete leaves rather than cuttings) from a fifteenth-century vellum Book of Hours.¹⁷ The two albums that had belonged to the journalist and scholar William Stebbing were also thematically coherent: their contents, images of saints and biblical scenes, derived entirely from fifteenth-century French Books of Hours.¹⁸ The eleven miniatures in the smaller volume (lot 673) presented a traditional sequence of illustrations from a manuscript Book of Hours; the forty-four miniatures in the larger volume (lot 674) offered a more expansive series depicting events from Christ's life, death, and resurrection, in this case taken from a *printed* Book of Hours, with gilt Renaissance frames painted around each image. The fifty-seven miniatures and initial letters in the album that Mme Etienne Mallet possessed were similarly religious but of Italian origin, taken from choir books. The description of the initials delineates three series, graded by size and splendour:

a fine series of large initials (about 170 mm × 170 mm.) painted in gold (or in colour with gold relief) on elaborate grounds of scriptural scenes painted in monochrome etc.; large ornamental initials in liquid gold on coloured grounds; a series of 22 large and elaborately designed initials apparently taken from the same manuscript to foliate and interlacing designs, with outlines and arabesque work in white.

However, the wording does not quite make clear whether all three series derived from the same source.¹⁹

16 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books and Illuminated Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...15th of April, 1929* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1929), lot 283, pp. 52–53. For the tenth miniature see Gary Vikan, ed., *Medieval & Renaissance Miniatures from the National Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1975), 22–25.

17 *Catalogue of Valuable Illuminated Manuscripts, Printed Books and Autograph Letters...Which will be Sold by Auction...June 19th, 1922* (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1922), lot 433, pp. 49–50; see further about this volume below.

18 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Illuminated and Other Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...21st of February, 1927* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1927), lots 673–74, p. 100. On Stebbing, see Martha S. Vogeler, "Stebbing, William (1831–1926), journalist and author," in *ODNB*.

19 *Catalogue of a Collection of Very Important Illuminated Manuscripts and Fine Printed Horae, with*

A collection that was clearly of more miscellaneous origins had belonged to Lewis Fry, lawyer and MP for Bristol, and member of the Quaker chocolate dynasty. His blue morocco gilt-edged album was folio-sized and contained thirty-two cuttings (eighteen miniatures, ten initials, and four borders) that derived from English, French, and German manuscripts. The borders and initials, which were large, came from fifteenth-century choir books, whilst the miniatures were from a fifteenth-century French Book of Hours and a thirteenth-century English manuscript of an unspecified kind. Though from disparate sources, Fry's album had a strong thematic concern with death. The English miniatures included one of a deer-hunt and another of an execution, and one of the French miniatures was of a burial service. The largest initial depicted the Last Judgment, and others the plague of murrain, and a monk with the figure of Death; another initial (a "D") offered: "a curious scene of a woman (?) in bed, at her side a man anointing her eyes from a vial, above the woman's head a bird is flying upwards, from outside a child is seen approaching carrying a fish and escorted behind by an angel."²⁰

Cuttings of initial letters were prized not just for their pictorial properties. The alphabet itself proved to be a tremendous attraction to the collector, and albums might be made up solely of cuttings of initials, sometimes also organized along alphabetical principles. Richard C. Fisher of Hill Top, Midhurst, West Sussex had a small quarto collection, bound in calf, of more than ninety illuminated capitals taken from fifteenth-century manuscripts and printed books, mostly on vellum. Many of these had been carefully extracted to preserve their "delicate spray terminals in gold and colours;" in the album they were arranged alphabetically "extending to the letter U."²¹ This description closely recalls the characteristics of the collection of "ornaments and letters" that was personally assembled by Esther Cory in the early nineteenth century; this survives as Glasgow University Library, MS Euing 26, and features several alphabetical sequences of single or multiple cut-out letters.²² Similarly, Miss Lavinia Halswell's collection of "initial letters, cut from printed books and manuscripts" was arranged alphabetically in a calf-bound album; and an album that had belonged to Mrs. Tuer was described as "Ornamental Alphabets" and consisted of an alphabetical arrangement of a mixed set of cuttings ("some woodcut, some engraved, some illuminated by hand").²³

a few Early Illustrated Books, formed...by Henri Auguste Brolemann...Which will be Sold by Auction... 4th of May, 1926 (London: Sotheby & Co., 1926), lot 159, p. 62.

20 The scene depicts events from the apocryphal book of *Tobit* (my thanks to Laura Cleaver for this identification). *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Illuminated and other Manuscripts and Autograph Letters...Which will be Sold by Auction...May 22nd, 1922* (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1922), lot 253, p. 32.

21 *Catalogue of Printed Books and a few Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...22nd of April, 1929* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1929), lot 630, p. 67.

22 Described by Neil R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–1992), 2:877; see also Connolly, "The Album and the Scrapbook," 35–38.

23 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, European & Oriental Miniatures & Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...27th of April, 1927* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1927), lot 404, p. 88; *Catalogue... 27th of June, 1927*, lot 174, p. 22.

Albums came in a mixture of shapes and sizes, but sometimes their dimensions can only be inferred from the category (folio, quarto etc.) of the sale in which they were offered. The anonymous Ganger and Delphi albums, and those owned by Willoughby, Fry, and Halswell were all folio-sized; the anonymous Stirrup album and those owned by Rostron, Mallet (lot 159), Fisher, and Tuer were quarto-sized; and Stebbing's two albums and Mallet lot 9 were octavo-sized. Their bindings, when specified, ranged from plain to handsome. The binding of the anonymous Ganger album was sheep, Fisher's was calf, and Halswell's "rough" calf; Tuer's was "vellum gilt." Morocco, in various colours, was the most typical covering, and these volumes were frequently gilt-edged. The anonymous Stirrup volume was half red morocco and Stebbing's second album was old red morocco gilt; Willoughby's album was "stamped in blue morocco," and Fry's was blue morocco gilt. Mrs. Rostron's was olive morocco gilt, fashioned by the London bookbinder Francis Bedford. The most splendid were the two albums offered for sale by Mme Mallet.²⁴ One (lot 159) was described as "bound in blind stamped brown morocco, inside dentelle border, silk linings, g[ilt] t[op] in a cloth case." The other (lot 9), was equally fine but reveals a different kind of binding technique. This extensive collection of cuttings, including ivy-leaf borders and grotesques, had been pasted onto thirty-four paper leaves and "inserted in a fine 18th century red morocco dentelle binding, probably by Douceur, from the first volume of the Italian translation of Lucretius, 1755 8vo;" in other words, a small (octavo) eighteenth-century printed book had been gutted so that its fine binding could be repurposed as the outer shell for this illuminated medieval manuscript material. These two finely bound albums also had a distinguished heritage, as is explained below.

The Inheritors

Sales of books were sometimes anonymous, with items offered under the capacious heading "Other Properties," or discreetly described as "The Property of a Gentleman" and (more rarely) "The Property of a Lady;" albums that appear under these headings offer few clues about the identities of their owners. On the other hand, albums included in the sales of named individuals may sometimes furnish multiple levels of information because their immediate sellers were often just their *last* owners who had acquired them through inheritance. The appearance of such albums for sale in the early twentieth century can thus provide retrospective views of the possession (and possibly even the creation) of such objects in the nineteenth century.

Sometimes the line of inheritance is very clear. The property of Miss A. B. Shoberl, offered in fifty-one lots in the sale of July 8, 1929, included many early nineteenth-century works published by Frederic Shoberl, such as the complete forty-three-volume set of *The World in Miniature* (lot 312).²⁵ Frederic Shoberl was a journalist and writer, and

²⁴ *Catalogue...4th of May, 1926*, lot 9, p. 4; lot 159, p. 62.

²⁵ *Catalogue of Printed Books and a few Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...8th of July, 1929* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1929), lots 287–337, pp. 33–37. See G. Boase and N. Banerji, "Shoberl [Shoberl], Frederic (1775–1853), journalist and writer," in *ODNB*.

Annie Bertha Shoberl was his great-granddaughter; the death of her father, Henry Collium Shoberl, of Kingston, Surrey, in February 1929 was presumably the impetus for the sale. No album of cuttings was included, but the raw materials for the making of such albums were all present. Lot 333 consisted of “a parcel” of loose leaves: two from a missal of ca. 1100, and two more from another missal of ca. 1150, along with fifteen other leaves or fragments that had been recovered from bindings, and two more vellum leaves that were blank. Lot 325 was a blank paper album of eighty leaves of “stout laid paper, mottled calf, back elaborately gilt and lettered ‘Gems’, an earlier lettering ‘German School’ having been erased”—evidently this folio-sized eighteenth-century album had already been repurposed more than once.²⁶ Should a bespoke construction be preferred, lots 326 and 327 offered substantial quantities of different kinds of blank paper, and lot 328 “five bindings from which the books had been removed,” of different sizes, in morocco or calf. This cache of materials demonstrates how albums might be put together, and is especially interesting given Frederic Shoberl’s influential contribution to nineteenth-century album culture. As the editor of *Forget-Me-Not*, the first literary annual in English, he was instrumental in promoting the concept of the album, especially amongst women.²⁷ The raw materials for album-making also featured in the sale of May 4, 1926. Scattered throughout this sale were three sets of leaves taken from illuminated manuscripts, now kept loose (lots 20, 26, and 27); two sets of illuminated initials and ornaments, about 160 in total, also loose (lots 142a and 143); and a set of four miniatures cut from a large early sixteenth-century service book (lot 160). In addition, there was a French Book of Hours that lacked its miniatures (lot 64) and another fragmentary Hours (lot 65). All these items were presented for sale “by Order of the present Owner,” Mme Mallet. When other married women consigned materials to the sale-room it was often because they were recently widowed and had to dispose of their husbands’ collections, but in this instance Mme Mallet had inherited in her own right. She was born Blanche Bontoux, the great-granddaughter of the French commercial broker Henri Auguste Brölemann, and it was his collection of “Very Important Illuminated Manuscripts and Fine Printed Horae,” formed a century before, that she was selling.

In other cases, ownership and lines of inheritance are slightly less clear. The album of “ornamental alphabets” sold by the executors of Mrs. Tuer in 1927 was part of what the sale catalogue headlined as “Books from the Collection of the late Andrew L. Tuer Esq.” (my emphasis).²⁸ Yet both the timing of this sale and its contents point to a connection with the Victorian stationer and publisher Andrew White Tuer.²⁹ The choicest part of his

²⁶ Its dimensions are given as 484 × 358 mm.

²⁷ See Katherine D. Harris, *Forget Me Not: The Rise of the British Literary Annual, 1823–1835* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

²⁸ *Catalogue of the Well-Known Collection of Children’s Books of the XVIIth, XVIIIth and XIXth centuries...Which will be Sold by Auction...17th of July, 1900* (London: Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge, 1900).

²⁹ See Lucy Peltz, “Andrew White Tuer (1838–1900),” in *ODNB*. I cannot account for the discrepancy in the middle initial except to note that apparently the orphaned Tuer changed his name to reflect that of his great-uncle Andrew White.

library had been sold shortly after his death and the items offered in 1927 must have constituted the rump of his collections that had been retained by his widow, Thomasine Louisa Tuer (née Louttit) who died in 1926. Peltz notes that Tuer had a reputation as “an ardent antiquarian and a voracious collector,” and this is reflected in the variety and number of albums that appear in this sale. There were albums of old banknotes (lot 19), bookplates (lot 31), Christmas cards (lot 44), fashion plates (lots 46–47), silhouettes (lot 189), and valentines (lot 216); in addition there were five albums of “scraps” (lot 188) and a scrapbook of old ballads (lot 18A). Also included were items of correspondence sent to Tuer at the Leadenhall Press (lots 10–18).

Death was generally the force which propelled albums onto the market, as is sometimes overtly stated in the sale catalogues (“Miss Lavinia Halswell (deceased), 26 Kensington Gate W.,” “the late R. C. Fisher Esq.”). On other occasions sellers were divesting themselves of property during their lifetimes. For example, Mrs. Simpson Rostron (born Christina Jane Riley) died in 1924 but had sold her album two years previously; she was the widow of a Surrey barrister and Justice of the Peace who had died in 1907, and the album may originally have been his. Sometimes the occasion behind the sale needs to be teased out. George de Grey, eighth Baron Walsingham, sold a considerable number of illuminated initials and miniatures in 1927.³⁰ He had succeeded to the title in March 1919 on the death of his father, and it is not immediately obvious what might have prompted the sale in 1927 except that his mother, Elizabeth Henrietta Grant, died that year, perhaps indicating that the collection had been hers. These initials and miniatures were sold individually, but they may have belonged in an album that had been dismantled for the sale.

After Sales

The album offered for sale at Sotheby's in December 1920 (Stirrup) was subsequently withdrawn.³¹ I know nothing about the fortunes of several others, but some may be traced a little further. Several were bought by dealers or booksellers. Lewis Fry's album was bought by James Tregaskis; the smaller Brölemann/Mallet album (lot 9, May 4, 1926) was purchased by Leo S. Olschki; the sheep-covered album sold anonymously in 1926 was bought by Charles Sawyer; and the oblong folio album sold in 1927 was bought by Ellis.³² The names recorded as the buyers of the two albums that had belonged to William Stebbing (Last (?) and Behrens) are not ones that I recognize. The range of prices achieved by these albums varied considerably. At the cheaper end, in 1927

³⁰ *Catalogue...27th of April, 1927*, lots 707–41, pp. 139–45 (comprising fifty-six individual items from Books of Hours and manuscript Bibles, some with musical notations, mostly Italian, thirteenth to fifteenth century in date).

³¹ *Catalogue...December 13th, 1920*, lot 418, p. 51.

³² Charles J. Sawyer's business was based in Grafton Street, London; on Ellis see George Smith and Frank Benger, *The Oldest London Bookshop* (London: Ellis, 1928), 65–68. See also David Pearson, *Provenance Research in Book History: A Handbook* (London: British Library, 1994), 159–60 (Ellis), 166 (Sawyer), and 168 (Tregaskis).

Stebbing's smaller album of eleven fifteenth-century manuscript miniatures (lot 673) fetched £5 5s and his larger collection of forty-four miniatures from an incunabulum (lot 674) raised £20; the previous year Sawyer had paid £33 for an album of sixty-seven miniatures (Ganger). These prices seem roughly aligned, suggesting that a reasonable price for a single cutting might have been about ten shillings. Quantity was not the only factor however; and another collection of initials and fragments ("at least 49"), sold in the sale of June 27, 1927 (lot 609, Delphi), raised only £6 5s. Prices must have been influenced by the nature and calibre of the contents of an album, as well as the quality of its binding. Fry's volume contained only thirty-two miniatures and yet Tregaskis paid £150 for it. Brolemann's smaller volume consisted of thirty-four leaves of paper and cannot have contained many more items than Fry's unless the individual cuttings were very small; the high price paid for it by Olschki (£200) doubtless reflected the volume's eighteenth-century binding.³³

These book dealers may have been buying with the intention of selling the albums on intact, but this outcome seems less likely than what Gabriel Wells termed "disseveration."³⁴ The sale catalogues for the 1920s are full of lots that offered single miniatures and illuminated initials and detached leaves, sometimes framed and glazed. Indeed, the lot description for Willoughby's album positively invited a purchaser to break up the volume, declaring that it was "an attractive collection of miniatures, most of which would be considerably enhanced in effect by being framed."³⁵ Aesthetics were far from the only consideration. It cannot have escaped anyone's notice that greater profits could be realized through piecemeal sales. Their greater potential yield is amply demonstrated through the sale of Holford's album in separate lots in 1927, for which some buyers and prices are recorded: Quaritch bought seven lots, paying a total of at least £438, and Wells bought three, paying £376.³⁶

In most instances therefore it seems probable that these albums were purchased with disassembly in mind, and that their appearances in the sale-room during the 1920s constituted their final outings as intact objects. Further research on individual fragments may establish the truth of this assumption, but there was at least one exception to this fate. The album of thirty-one leaves from a French Book of Hours that Mrs. Simpson Rostron sold in June 1922 remains intact. It became the property of the Lancashire industrialist, Robert Edward Hart, who was actively building his collection of rare books

33 For a brief history of Olschki see the firm's website: <https://en.olschki.it/la-casa-editrice/la-nostra-storia>, accessed May 12, 2023.

34 Quoted from the brochure that accompanied sales of individual leaves from the Gutenberg Bible, see www.mccunecollection.org/Incunabula%20Leaf%20Biblia%20Latina, accessed May 12, 2023.

35 *Catalogue...15th of April, 1929*, lot 283, pp. 52–53.

36 *Holford Library Part 1*. Specifically, Quaritch bought lots 29 (no price given), 30 (£140), 34 (£140), 36 (£60), 37 (£38), 38 (£30), and 39 (£30); Wells bought lots 31 (£180), 32 (£16), and 35 (£180); and two other purchasers were Jambert, who bought lot 33 (£90), and Drew (?) who bought lot 40 (£60). I thank A. S. G. Edwards for this and other information that has improved this essay.

and manuscripts, coins, and other artifacts during this period, buying directly at sales, from local booksellers, and from London firms such as Maggs.³⁷ It is not clear whether Hart bought the album directly from the sale or via an intermediary, but a bookseller's code on the front pastedown (meo/-/-) might yield some information about that or its earlier history.³⁸ The album is now Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery MS 20984, and remains undisturbed in its nineteenth-century Bedford binding.³⁹

The construction of albums of cuttings from medieval manuscripts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involved the plunder and destruction, directly or indirectly, of older, more valuable books. Western manuscripts were not the only victims of this treatment. Initials and miniatures from Indian, Persian, and Turkish sources were also displayed in albums, or kept loose, or framed. These materials, from disparate periods and cultures, were presented and preserved in identical ways to their medieval counterparts, and are testimony to the porous boundaries between the album of cuttings, artistic portfolio, and travel scrapbook. Yet whilst the Victorian album may have constituted a new environment for western medieval miniatures and initials, the same was not necessarily true for non-European materials. In the sale of November 15, 1926 a significant collection of Indian miniatures owned by Sir Malcolm MacGregor of MacGregor, was presented as separate items, through fifty-one lots, each with a detailed description.⁴⁰ If MacGregor had kept the miniatures in an album, that album had already been disassembled for the sale, but as the heading to this section of the catalogue makes clear, these items shared a collective origin: they had in fact *come from* albums, just not albums constructed by MacGregor himself, nor his ancestors. Their origins were the much older albums that had belonged to the library of Rājā Chait Singh in the fortress of Bijaigurh; in the violent late eighteenth-century conflicts in northern India they became spoils of war and thereby displaced from their proper historic and cultural contexts.

This is a renewed reminder that the album of cuttings was a transitory form of presentation. It was also one that was more common than the small number of surviving examples suggests. Albums did not just feature amongst the collections of famous bibliophiles: many of the individuals named in this essay were more ordinary and less wealthy book collectors whose libraries were of a smaller scale. As collections changed

37 On Hart and his collections see Cynthia Johnston, ed., *A British Book Collector: Rare Books and Manuscripts in the R. E. Hart Collection, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery* (London: University of London Press, 2021).

38 If Laura Cleaver is correct in relating this to Tregaskis's code "Mayflowers," the price would be £186 (e-mail correspondence April 28, 2023).

39 I am grateful to Anthea Purkis, Curator, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, for information about this manuscript, from a description by Ed Potten, e-mail correspondence November 10, 2022, and particularly to Catherine Yvard for sharing her unpublished research about this volume with me. See also Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts*, 2:101–2; for a facsimile of one leaf (fol. 11) see *Medieval and Early Renaissance Treasures in the North West* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1976), 32 and plate 15.

40 *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books & Manuscripts...Which will be Sold by Auction...15th of November, 1926* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1926), lots 473–546, pp. 75–81. Such collections appeared in great numbers throughout the sales of the 1920s.

hands through death and inheritance, albums moved down through family generations and into different, possibly humbler households. This descent also followed a trajectory from drawing room to sale-room. The appearance of albums at auction in the 1920s was a significant moment of transition. For many albums this may have been the objects' first encounter with the trade. Post-sale, most albums were probably broken up, and their individual components subsequently sold again at greater profit: this is demonstrable in some instances and assumed in others. Such breaking-up may also have happened pre-sale, and the thousands of individual cuttings and detached manuscript leaves that also feature throughout the 1920s Sotheby's catalogues are testimony to an unknown number of nineteenth-century albums that have vanished without trace.