

## THE NATIONAL COLLECTION THAT NEVER WAS

### THE “FAILURE” OF HENRY YATES THOMPSON’S EXPERIMENTAL NATIONAL GALLERY EXHIBITION

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“HENRY YATES THOMPSON, the opinionated, mean, prejudiced, and secretive collector of fine manuscripts.”<sup>1</sup> This is the negative description of Yates Thompson, generally regarded as the leading manuscript collector of his time, in the introduction to the dictionary of *Nineteenth-Century British Book Collectors and Bibliographers*. Yates Thompson is (in)famous for his commerciality, evident in his constant weeding and selling of his books and his pedantic recording of prices paid. That earned him the title of the ‘first modern bibliophile’ in the classic account of his collecting: Christopher de Hamel’s “Was Henry Yates Thompson a Gentleman?”<sup>2</sup> This essay considers Yates Thompson’s *non-commercial* motives as a collector, by turning away from the saleroom to reconstruct an exhibition he organized at the National Gallery which was previously unknown to scholarship. In doing so, it sheds new light on the more public-minded aspects of his collecting, particularly his decision not to give his manuscripts to the nation.

Yates Thompson became a particularly unusual collector for his time with his controversial decision to sell many of his books towards the end of his life, rather than

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1 William Baker and Kenneth Womack, eds., *Nineteenth-Century British Book Collectors and Bibliographers* (London: Gale Research, 1997), xvi.

2 Christopher de Hamel, “Was Henry Yates Thompson a Gentleman?” in *Property of a Gentleman: The Formation, Organisation and Disposal of the Private Library 1620–1920*, ed. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1991), 77–89. This built on Josiah Q. Bennett, “Portman Square to New Bond Street, or, How to Make Money though Rich,” *The Book Collector* 16 (1967): 323–39. De Hamel’s findings were developed by William Stoneman, “Henry Yates Thompson, Gentleman: ‘an unusual collector with commercial motives just a shade larger than was common,” in *The Medieval Book: Glosses from Friends and Colleagues of Christopher de Hamel*, ed. James H. Marrow, Richard A. Linenthal, and William Noel (’t Goy-Houten: Hes & De Graaf, 2010), 344–54.

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to give them to an institution. After receiving letters of protest from Sydney Cockerell and M. R. James, who had catalogued many of his manuscripts for him, Yates Thompson sent a lengthy reply to the latter, giving his reasons for selling. This correspondence was partly published in an article which noted that Yates Thompson mentioned lending manuscripts to an exhibition, the outcome of which made him unhappy.<sup>3</sup> An examination of the original letter provides Yates Thompson's full remark: "At one time I had a notion of giving them to the National Gallery for the instruction of the public in the history of painting from the IXth to the XVIth Century." Yates Thompson went on to say that he trialed this by loaning "a dozen of them for exhibition there for a couple of years."<sup>4</sup>

This exhibition has not been treated in any accounts of Yates Thompson. In order to learn more about it, we must begin in the archives of the National Gallery.<sup>5</sup> Preserved there is the letter in which Yates Thompson made the offer of this exhibition.<sup>6</sup> Writing on August 2, 1909, he began:

The suggestion which I venture to make to the Trustees of the National Gallery is that it is worthy of consideration whether it would not be well to exhibit in conjunction with the pictures on the walls of the Gallery specimens of the paintings in books which preceded & led up to the oil paintings of the XIV:th and later centuries. Of these a consecutive series might be displayed beginning with the Irish and Byzantine products of the VIII:th to the XII:th centuries and passing in seriation to the XVI:th century when Book Illumination was finally merged in the art of the Renaissance period.

I have prepared from my own collection a show-case in which are displayed four M.S. Volumes and two picture pages which give a fair idea of the best French work from the year 1300 a.d. to about 1520, and I am willing, if desired to lend case and contents for exhibition in the gallery for twelve months on the following conditions viz:-

1. That the volumes should not be taken out or disturbed except in my presence.
2. That I should be permitted to turn over a fresh page once in each month.  
[This to prevent too long exposure to the light of any one page.]

Yates Thompson went on to list his proposed volumes for display (see Appendix, with my identifications of where these manuscripts are today).

The Minutes of the Gallery's Board of Trustees show that this offer was met with some uncertainty. At their meeting on August 10, they resolved that:

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, "Portman Square to New Bond Street," 325–26.

<sup>4</sup> Draft letter from Yates Thompson to M. R. James, September 1918, Bloomington Indiana, Lilly Library, Thompson, H. Y. MSS item 3, pp. 2–3.

<sup>5</sup> My thanks to Marco Keiller of the National Gallery Archive for his assistance in identifying documents.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Yates Thompson to Sir Charles Holroyd, August 2, 1909, London, National Gallery Archive NG7/367/9.

in the absence of a quorum, and in view of the fact that acceptance of works of this description would be a new departure, Mr Yates Thompson be thanked for his offer, and requested to allow it to remain open until the next meeting of the Board before which date it was hoped that the Trustees would be able to examine the works in question.<sup>7</sup>

By their next meeting, in November, the trustees had come around to a more favourable view. The minutes recorded that the offer be accepted “on the understanding that the exhibits should be previously approved by the Director.”<sup>8</sup> The minute book later marked the arrival of the case and its contents on December 1, 1909.<sup>9</sup> In his diary, Cockerell mentioned a visit to see the case with Yates Thompson on December 20.<sup>10</sup> The annual report for 1909 recorded that Yates Thompson had lent:

a case of illuminated manuscripts admirably illustrating the application of painting to this purpose. The works exhibited are examples of early French and Italian Masters and show the growth of the art of picture-making and its development from small pictures in books to the larger paintings of the same schools on the walls of the Gallery.<sup>11</sup>

One small detail in this account stands out as odd—Yates Thompson’s offer had been of an emphatically *French* set of books, not French *and* Italian. Manuscript codices were entirely outside the usual remit of the National Gallery, and so the loans register recorded only “Illustrated M.S.S. 1 case,” rather than an itemized list.<sup>12</sup> With no detailed information on the items in the Gallery’s archives, we must turn to contemporaneous periodicals for more information. Fortunately, an account of the exhibition was published in the *Athenæum*.<sup>13</sup> It was written by Maurice Walter Brockwell, an art writer and lecturer who published numerous art books and catalogues, including several of the National Gallery collections.<sup>14</sup> His article contains sufficiently detailed descriptions of each manuscript for them to be identified and mentions the room in which they were displayed: the Octagon Hall. There is even enough information to identify the pages at which the manuscripts had been opened by Yates Thompson for the display’s early visi-

**7** Minutes of the Board of Trustees, dated August 10, 1909, London, National Gallery Archive, NG1/7, 397–98.

**8** Minutes of the Board of Trustees, August 10, 1909, 402.

**9** Minutes of the Board of Trustees, August 10, 1909, 405.

**10** “Breakfasted again with the Yates Thompsons & went with Henry Yates Thompson to see his case of MSS at the National Gallery,” December 20, 1909, BL, Add. MS 52646. With thanks to Bill Stoneman for this information.

**11** Report of the Director of the National Gallery for 1909, April 6, 1910, London, National Gallery Archive, NG17/6, 233.

**12** Register of loans to the National Gallery, London, National Gallery Archive, NG19/1, 17.

**13** [Maurice Brockwell], “The National Gallery,” *The Athenæum*, January 1, 1910, 21.

**14** While the article was published anonymously, Brockwell can be identified as the author because an extract from it was quoted under his name in Maurice Brockwell and W. H. James Wheale, *The Van Eycks and their Art* (London: Lane, 1912), 92.

tors. The items are listed in the Appendix (Table 28.2), with the folios at which they were open.<sup>15</sup> The list shows that the exhibition was indeed a mix of French and Italian books, rather than the solely French items initially proposed by Yates Thompson.

Further articles document some visitors' responses to the exhibition. Charles Lewis Hind informed readers of the *Art Journal* that they "need not go all the way to Chantilly to see a perfect missal painting. There is one in the National Gallery, lent by Mr. Yates Thompson."<sup>16</sup> He was referring to one of the Fouquet pages, which he compared to the "magnificent, horrible, drunken Silenus" by Rubens, "facing it, a few feet across the gallery" and concluded "Ugh! Would that I had been born in the fifteenth century." Another article in the *Athenæum* in March alerted readers that the pages of the manuscripts had recently been turned and new openings could be viewed.<sup>17</sup> The exhibition was also mentioned in several books, including two based on earlier articles, and another which reproduced paintings in the Louvre.<sup>18</sup> Coverage even extended internationally, with an account published in February in the *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde*, the publication of the Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen, Germany's oldest bibliophilic organization.<sup>19</sup> It described the exhibition's contents as part of Yates Thompson's "erstklassigen Sammlung von Miniatur werken" (first-class collection of miniature works).<sup>20</sup>

The letter from Yates Thompson to James quoted above described the loan of manuscripts to the Gallery as lasting for a *couple* of years, not just one. Further investigation in the Gallery's archive reveals that Yates Thompson wrote to the Gallery on January 4, 1911, offering to swap the French and Italian manuscripts with "English miniatures of the XIIIth: XIVth, & XV centuries for exhibition on loan during the present year."<sup>21</sup> His offer was "gratefully accepted" by the Board at their meeting on February 14.<sup>22</sup> This generated even less of an archival paper trail than the first phase of the loan, with no record in the correspondence, loans register, minute book or annual report of exactly which manuscripts were exhibited. Once again, we are fortunate in being able to unearth this information from a periodical. An article in *The Antiquary* described each of the books on display at enough length to identify them.<sup>23</sup> It concluded with the remark that the

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**15** The manuscripts are now all digitized (apart from the one in a private collection), so it is possible to recreate the exhibition digitally, as I did for my conference presentation.

**16** C. Lewis Hind, "The Consolations of an Injured Critic, II," *The Art Journal* (1910): 108–9. Later republished in C. Lewis Hind, *The Consolations of a Critic* (London: Black, 1911), 22–23.

**17** "The National Gallery," *The Athenæum*, March 19, 1910, 350.

**18** See Brockwell and Wheale, *Van Eycks*; Hind, *Consolations of a Critic*; Maurice Brockwell and Paul G. Konody, *The Louvre: Fifty Plates in Colour* (London: Jack, 1910), 55.

**19** Otto von Schleinitz, "Beiblatt," *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde* N. F., 1.2 (1909/10): 112.

**20** von Schleinitz, "Beiblatt," 112.

**21** Letter from Henry Yates Thompson to Sir Charles Holroyd, dated January 4, 1911, London, National Gallery Archive, NG7/387/3.

**22** Minutes of the Board of Trustees, dated February 14, 1911, London, National Gallery Archive, NG1/8, 44.

**23** "At the Sign of the Owl," *The Antiquary* 47.3 (1911): 110.



Figure 28.1. The Taymouth Hours, London, British Library, Yates Thompson MS 13, fol. 68v. With permission of the British Library.

Taymouth Hours was open at a page showing “a willowy huntress shooting at a rabbit, who sits up calmly looking at the coming bolt, as if aware that women cannot aim straight.” This comment reveals that the page on display at the time must have been fol. 68v (Figure 28.1).

These were not the first exhibition loans made by Yates Thompson. In 1876, he had lent nine manuscripts to an exhibition of illuminated manuscripts at the Art Club in his native Liverpool.<sup>24</sup> In 1904, he had loaned nine manuscripts to the “Exposition des Primitifs français,” an exhibition of early French illustrated manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale. These were placed in a separate display case, marked “XX.”<sup>25</sup> He was one of only five individual owners to lend to this major exhibition, and with his nine manuscripts outstripped the other four, who only contributed one or two items each. Yates Thompson’s involvement can be attributed to his friendship with Léopold Delisle, head of the Bibliothèque nationale and one of the exhibition’s organizers. Finally, in 1908, Yates Thompson had been on the organizing committee and one of the most generous contributors to the landmark Burlington Fine Arts Club illuminated manuscripts exhibition, loaning seventeen items.<sup>26</sup>

The 1904 “Primitifs français” exhibition had a lasting impression on Yates Thompson. In his second set of Sandars lectures, in 1905, he used his opening address to express “the

<sup>24</sup> *Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts Exhibited at the Club Rooms, Myrtle Street, October 1876* (Liverpool: Liverpool Art Club, 1876), items 80–88.

<sup>25</sup> Henri Bouchot et al., *Exposition des primitifs français au Palais du Louvre et à la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Palais du Louvre et Bibliothèque nationale, 1904), 2–4.

<sup>26</sup> [Sydney Cockerell], *Burlington Fine Arts Club: Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1908).

hope that some day our authorities in London may be disposed to imitate in this respect the French example."<sup>27</sup> He envisaged a bringing together of British and Irish manuscripts from the British Museum, Cambridge, Dublin, Durham, Lambeth, Oxford, and private collections. However, by 1909 he had taken matters into his own hands. His National Gallery exhibition was unlike the "Primitifs français" and other exhibitions listed above in almost every respect. Firstly, it was comprised solely of items from one individual's collection, rather than from the collections of numerous individuals and sometimes institutional owners. Its second unusual feature was its long duration. The "Primitifs français" exhibition ran for three months from April 12 to July 14, 1904. By contrast, Yates Thompson's first set of manuscripts arrived in the National Gallery on December 1, 1909, and the second set was returned to him on January 18, 1912: a total length of just over two years.<sup>28</sup>

The third unusual feature was the venue. In 1905, Yates Thompson had imagined the British Museum as the obvious venue and organizer of such an exhibition.<sup>29</sup> This did not come to pass, and instead he eventually approached the National Gallery. The choice of a national cultural institution is indicative of his vision for the exhibition to be an English version of the "Exposition des Primitifs français," itself a response to the 1902 "Exposition des primitifs flamands" in Bruges. The National Gallery also displayed the sort of early European paintings with which he wanted his manuscripts to be in dialogue as an illustration of the history of painting. That this was seen by them as an innovative and somewhat radical plan is evident in the Trustees' remark that "acceptance of works of this description would be a new departure."<sup>30</sup> Yates Thompson's vision represented an evolution from the exhibition design of the "Primitifs français," where the manuscripts were exhibited in a separate venue to the paintings.

Why, then, was Yates Thompson's unusual proposal accepted by the Gallery Trustees? The Board minutes show that they rejected numerous other proposals not felt to suit the Gallery, but Yates Thompson may simply have been too alluring a potential supporter to risk offending. He had already made a significant gift to the Gallery in 1894 of a very large porphyry bust now known as the "Dying Alexander."<sup>31</sup> This was considered such an important donation that it merited a press release in *The Times* and was placed as the Gallery entrance's centrepiece.<sup>32</sup> More recently, Yates Thompson had been a generous donor to the Dulwich Picture Gallery, initiating and funding a major expansion which saw the wall space doubled, the pictures rehung and catalogued, and the display lighting improved.<sup>33</sup> He had made the initial proposals for this in late 1908 and the new

**27** Henry Yates Thompson, "Two Lectures on Illuminated Manuscripts," 1905, BL, Add. MS 37338, 1-3.

**28** Register of loans to National Gallery, NG19/1, 17.

**29** Thompson, "Two Lectures," 1-2.

**30** Minutes of the Board of Trustees, August 10, 1909.

**31** Letters from Yates Thompson to Sir Edward Poynter, dated May 7 and 10, 1894, London, National Gallery Archive, NG3/2141/1-2.

**32** "National Gallery," *The Times*, June 7, 1894, 6; "National Gallery," *The Times*, July 3, 1894, 11.

**33** Giles Waterfield, *Soane and After: The Architecture of the Dulwich Picture Gallery* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1987), 40-48.

additions were begun in 1909–1910. This was exactly the period when he approached the National Gallery about the exhibition, so they must have been acutely aware of his attractiveness as a potential donor. The exhibition also did not pose too much of an imposition in practical terms: it was effectively “ready-made,” with Yates Thompson providing an exhibition case as well as its contents, and selecting pages for display.

Despite the Gallery’s accommodativeness and the apparent success of the exhibition—at least among those visitors whose reactions are preserved in publications—Yates Thompson’s trial loan did not become a permanent one: he never offered his manuscripts to the Gallery, or indeed to any other national institution. This brings us to the question of what went wrong. The wording of Yates Thompson’s letter to James, quoted above, suggests that he contemplated giving many of his manuscripts to the Gallery, not just those which featured in his exhibition. But he went on to profess a deep unhappiness about the outcome of his plan. In the letter, he explained why the loan was unsuccessful: “I assure you that it gave me more pain than pleasure to see them there: each exposing one or two pages to the ‘regard bête du passant indifférent’” (ignorant stare of the indifferent passer-by). He concluded that he judged the trial loan a “failure.”<sup>34</sup>

The rather patronizing remark in French about the exhibition’s visitors is an unattributed quotation. Yates Thompson also included a French quotation in his 1918 announcement to the world that he was going to sell his manuscripts. He wrote that “these precious manuscripts...shall go, in the language of Edmond de Goncourt’s will, ‘aux héritiers de mes goûts’” (to the inheritors of my tastes).<sup>35</sup> The quotation in his letter to James is also from this source. Goncourt was a well-known, idiosyncratic French collector who had died in 1896. It is possible that Yates Thompson had met him; many of his early purchases were made in Paris before Goncourt’s death. Seven sales of the various collections of Edmond and his brother Jules took place in 1897. At the top of each sale catalogue was printed a facsimile of Edmond’s handwritten wish for his possessions to be sold after his death, from which Yates Thompson was quoting.<sup>36</sup> The fact that he did not attribute the words to Goncourt in his letter to James suggests that Yates Thompson expected him to be familiar with them. Indeed, Goncourt’s last wish did seem to be known among English artistic circles. It was included in a report on the forthcoming Goncourt sales in *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* in 1897.<sup>37</sup> It may have been popularized in England by the print historian Alfred Whitman, who first included it in an 1899 article in *Country Life Illustrated* on “How to Choose Old Prints,” and subsequently in his 1901 *Print-Collector’s Handbook*.<sup>38</sup>

**34** Draft letter, p. 3.

**35** Henry Yates Thompson, *Illustrations from One Hundred Manuscripts in the Library of Henry Yates Thompson*, 7 vols. (London: privately printed, 1907–1918), 7:inserted Post Scriptum page.

**36** For example, *Bibliothèque des Goncourt...dont la vente aura lieu Hotel Drouot*, March 29, 1897 (Paris: Motteroz, 1897), vii.

**37** “The Editor’s Room,” *The Studio* 10 (1897): II.

**38** Alfred Whitman, “How to Choose Old Prints,” *Country Life Illustrated*, December 9, 1899, 738; Alfred Whitman, *The Print-Collector’s Handbook* (London: Bell & Sons, 1901), 104.

Yates Thompson's repeated quotations show the effect Goncourt's words had had on him. It is worth including them in full here in order to understand the context of Yates Thompson's extracts:

Ma volonté est que mes dessins, mes estampes, mes bibelots, mes livres, enfin les choses d'art qui ont fait le bonheur de ma vie, n'aient pas la froide tombe d'un musée, et le regard bête du passant indifférent, et je demande qu'elles soient toutes éparpillées sous les coups de marteau d'un commissaire-priseur et que la jouissance que m'a procurée l'acquisition de chacune d'elles, soit redonnée, pour chacune d'elles, à un héritier de mes goûts.<sup>39</sup>

My wish is that my drawings, my prints, my trinkets, my books—in short the works of art which have made my life happy—should not receive the cold tomb of a museum and the ignorant stare of the indifferent passer-by, and I ask that they all be scattered under an auctioneer's hammer-blows and that the joy which the acquisition of each of them brought me be passed on, for each of them, to an inheritor of my tastes.

Yates Thompson went on in his letter to James to say that “My real wish is that they shall go into private hands. Personally I have greatly enjoyed their possession because they were mine and because I could handle them & look at them whenever I wanted.”<sup>40</sup> He concluded by saying “In short I think that these art treasures are by the nature of the case more suitable for private than for public collections.” His language drew a distinction between the collector's intimate, tactile relationship with their “treasures,” and the general public who ignorantly glanced at a page through the glass of an exhibition case. Understanding the influence of Goncourt on Yates Thompson, which has not been previously considered in accounts of his collecting, helps to explain this attitude. Goncourt was famous not only for his collections themselves, but also for his writing on collecting, literature, and art. He expressed these ideas in his book *La Maison d'un Artiste*, a systematic description of the house he shared with his brother, in which they kept and displayed their art collections. It included an account of his collection of eighteenth-century printed books, manuscripts, and ephemera, kept in a *cabinet de travail* filled with “volumes a la portée de la main, et qu'un doigt peut atteindre” (volumes within hand's reach, touchable by a fingertip).<sup>41</sup> Goncourt had a vehemently anti-institutional view on the display of collections, abhorring what he described as the “cold tomb of a museum.”<sup>42</sup> He emphasized the value of having one's collections in one's own house, describing how living with his objects constantly created new ways of viewing and appreciating them.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Bibliothèque des Goncourt*. (English translation my own).

<sup>40</sup> Draft letter, pp. 4–5. The word “real” has been struck through.

<sup>41</sup> Edmond de Goncourt, *La maison d'un artiste* (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), 238–39. Goncourt's “modern books” were kept in a separate space on the floor above.

<sup>42</sup> *Bibliothèque des Goncourt*.

<sup>43</sup> Dominique Pety, “La collection au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: l'art chosifié,” in *La production de l'immatériel*:

Yates Thompson's repeated quotations from Goncourt suggest that these ideas influenced his eventual view that his manuscripts were "art treasures" that should remain in private collections.

Yet this did not mean that Yates Thompson believed that his collections should be unknown or unknowable to the public. His letter to James goes on to say that he has also enjoyed owning them because "with the help of more capable friends [he] could give the fullest possible account of them and reproduce samples of their art excellence as a safeguard against future accidents."<sup>44</sup> He referred here to his publication of catalogues and facsimiles of his manuscripts, which made his books "without question the best-known private collection in the world."<sup>45</sup> It was the final volume of his facsimile series that bore the public announcement of his intention to sell, inserted as a small "Post Scriptum" page at the front. He wrote that he had decided to sell them by auction, "Now that I have done all I can by way of description and reproduction of these fascinating works of art."<sup>46</sup>

The facsimile volumes and catalogues did of course increase the fame and consequent monetary value of his manuscripts, but they were not merely marketing strategies. Close examination of them reveals multiple motivations behind publication, from promoting international cooperation, particularly in reuniting fragments with parent volumes, to encouraging and documenting the development of reprographic techniques, and preserving a likeness of the manuscripts should they be destroyed during the First World War or other disasters such as fire or flood.<sup>47</sup> The altruistic nature of these motivations is further demonstrated by his commissioning of facsimiles of manuscripts he did not own.<sup>48</sup> Even more tellingly, as early as 1868 he had been a founder and Vice-President of the Holbein Society, which aimed to produce facsimiles of illustrated early printed works, accompanied by alternative language texts for people who could not read Latin.<sup>49</sup>

Yates Thompson also sought to share his manuscripts through lectures. In 1901, he gave "A Lecture on Some English Illuminated Manuscripts" at the University of Cambridge, where he had been made Sanders Reader. He described himself as "showman of some dozen volumes," which he used to illustrate his talk together with lantern slides.<sup>50</sup> In 1906, he addressed the Royal Society of Arts on "Some Illuminated Manu-

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*Théories, représentations et pratiques de la culture au XIXe siècle*, ed. Jean-Yves Mollier, Philippe Régnier and Alain Vaillant (Saint-Etienne: l'université de Saint-Etienne, 2008), 144–45.

**44** Draft letter, p. 5.

**45** De Hamel, "Was Henry Yates Thompson a Gentleman?," 86.

**46** Yates Thompson, *Illustrations*, 7:inserted Post Scriptum page.

**47** Henry Yates Thompson, *Facsimiles of two "Histoires" by Jean Fouquet* (London: privately printed, 1903), 10; Thompson, *Illustrations*, 6:iii.

**48** For example, Henry Yates Thompson and Dom P. Blanchard, *Les Heures de Savoie* (London: Chiswick Press, 1910).

**49** "The Holbein Society," *The Reliquary* 9 (1868): 124–25.

**50** Henry Yates Thompson, *A Lecture on Some English Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: privately printed, 1902), 9.

scripts of Continental Europe,” telling his audience that his aim was “not to instruct, so much as to exhibit.”<sup>51</sup> He used only lantern slides, rather than bringing books with him, and explained that the structure of his talk was influenced by George Warner’s recent rearrangement of the British Museum’s exhibited manuscripts by country. His National Gallery exhibition was, then, the culmination of these earlier exhibitions, publications, and lectures. The lists of exhibited manuscripts (see Appendix) note whether the items had been included in these previous events, showing that while there were some lesser-known items, Yates Thompson generally drew on a small group of “star” items for public engagement. However, these would have been unknown to many of the National Gallery exhibition’s visitors: Yates Thompson was reaching out to a far broader audience than earlier exhibitions such as those at the Burlington Fine Arts Club.<sup>52</sup>

It is clear, then, that Yates Thompson’s two-year exhibition at the National Gallery was a pivotal moment in the history of his collection. Had he found this a positive experience, he might have given at least some of his manuscripts to the nation. This would have considerably altered the collections of the institution(s) receiving them, but also those—particularly in America—that would not have been able to acquire them in his later sales. It also would have changed the trajectories of the manuscripts, some of which have since undergone physical alteration or are now untraceable. Yates Thompson was not opposed to institutional donations in principle—indeed he gave generously to a huge range of institutions—but as to the fate of his manuscripts, the jewels of his collection, he was clearly influenced by Goncourt and his own understanding of his role as a collector, as “only a Collector of art bijoux,” to use his words.<sup>53</sup> The National Gallery exhibition shows that he saw the manuscripts as art objects, key components of a continuous artistic tradition not confined solely to codices. In publishing extensive catalogues and facsimiles of his manuscripts, which he sent to many public libraries, he made them permanently publicly accessible as art historical resources. Simultaneously, by then selling many of them, he was able to recoup some of his costs and to pass the manuscripts on to be prized by other collectors. Reconstructing this previously unknown exhibition therefore changes our understanding of Yates Thompson as a collector, and the fact that these manuscripts spent a year each on display in the National Gallery is an important addition to their object biographies. In conclusion, *loaning* his manuscripts to the nation discouraged Yates Thompson from *giving* his manuscripts to the nation, but despite this he was far from “secretive” or “mean,” as he was portrayed in the opening quotation of this essay. He wanted the public to have access to his collection, but only on his terms.

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51 “Proceedings of the Society,” *Journal of the Society of Arts* 54 (1905–1906): 461.

52 See Stacey J. Pierson, *Private Collecting, Exhibitions, and the Shaping of Art History in London: The Burlington Fine Arts Club* (London: Routledge, 2017).

53 Draft letter, p. 2.

## APPENDIX

Table 28.1: Yates Thompson's proposed French MSS exhibition, August 1909. BFAC = Burlington Fine Arts Club 1908 exhibition, PF = *Exposition des primitifs français* 1904 exhibition, SA = Society of the Arts 1906 lecture, SL = Sandars Lecture, 1901. The numbers refer to exhibition catalogue entries.

1.	"A page of an antiphonary date about 1300." Beaupré Antiphonary, now Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS W.759 BFAC 61-62; SA
2.	"A Pontifical made for Reginald de Bar Bishop of Metz—about 1300." Metz Pontifical, now Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 298 PF in facsimile (not yet owned by Yates Thompson) <sup>54</sup>
3.	"a M.S. Volume date about 1300 of the Romance of Lancelot." Lancelot du Lac, now PML, M.805 BFAC 144
4.	"a book of Hours (about 1440 a. d.) with paintings by Francois Foucquet." Dunois Hours, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 3 PF 115; SA
5.	"a page from the 'Faits des Romains jusqu'à César' with a painting by Jean Foucquet of Tours." Faits des Romains (Jean Fouquet leaf), now Louvre, RF 29493 BFAC 119
6.	"a book of Hours (date about 1520 being a specimen of French art influenced by Italian." [ <i>sic.</i> ] Tilliot Hours, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 5

<sup>54</sup> Yates Thompson included the facsimile volume of it beside the Verdun Breviary in his *Primitifs français* exhibition case. The Pontifical's owner, Sir Thomas Brooke, would later bequeath it to him. *Exposition des primitifs français*, 10.

Table 28.2: French and Italian MSS exhibition, December 1909–February 1911.

1.	“A series of drawings made probably in or near Siena, about 1325 ...” Vita Christi, <sup>55</sup> now PML, M.643
2.	“The Horae of Bonaparte Ghislieri of Bologna...” fol. 132v Hours of Bonaparte Ghislieri, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 29
3.	“A Florentine prayer-book of about 1490...” fol. 104v <sup>56</sup> Yates Thompson MS 93, now private collection <sup>57</sup>
4.	“A prayerbook...written and illuminated in 1502, on the occasion of the marriage of Laudomia de’ Medici...” fol. 117v Hours of Laudomia de’ Medici, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 30 BFAC 257
5.	“The Book of Hours of Jean Dunois...” fol. 162r Dunois Hours, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 3 PF 115; SA
6.	“The Metz Pontifical...” fol. 23v Metz Pontifical, now Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 298 PF in facsimile <sup>58</sup>
7.	“Book of Hours, which was written and illuminated probably at Paris about 1444...” fol. 141r Coëtivy Hours, now Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, W 082 PF 112
8.	“A page from a manuscript of the ‘Faits des Romains’...” Faits des Romains (Jean Fouquet leaf), now Louvre, RF 29493 BFAC 119

**55** This is the only item not described in sufficient detail to identify the opening. Yates Thompson had facsimiled eleven pages from this book in 1908, so we can assume he selected one of these for display. Yates Thompson, *Illustrations*, 2:5–6.

**56** While the manuscript is now inaccessible, the folio can be identified because Yates Thompson later facsimiled it. Thompson, *Illustrations*, 6:pl. LXXV.

**57** With thanks to Christopher de Hamel and Mitch Fraas for confirming this.

**58** *Exposition des primitifs français*. See n. 54.

Table 28.3: English MSS exhibition, February 1911–January 1912

1.	<p>“The Venerable Bede’s <i>Life and Miracles of St Cuthbert...</i>”          Bede, Prose Life of Cuthbert, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 26          BFAC 17</p>
2.	<p>“A Psalter made for the Carehowe Nunnery...”          Carrow Psalter, now Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS W.34          SL</p>
3.	<p>“Apocalypse for St. Augustine’s Monastery at Canterbury...”          Apocalypse, now Lisbon, MCG, Inv. LA139          SL</p>
4.	<p>“The famous Psalter which was begun about 1325 for a member          of the St. Omer family...”          St. Omer Psalter, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 14          BFAC 68; SL</p>
5.	<p>“Taymouth Horae...”          Taymouth Hours, now BL, Yates Thompson MS 13          BFAC 66; SL</p>
6.	<p>“Book of Hours of ‘Elysabeth ye Quene’...”          Hours of Elizabeth the Queen, now BL, Add. MS 50001          BFAC 153; SL</p>
7.	<p>“Book of Hours and Psalter of Lady Neville...”          Wingfield Psalter, now New York Public Library, Spencer Collection MS 3          SL</p>

