

# **DOCUMENTING THE MODERN MUSEUM**

**A SURVEY OF ANGLO-AMERICAN MUSEUM CATALOGUES  
FROM 1800 TO THE PRESENT**

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## *Introduction*

The practice of museum collection cataloguing in print achieved much of its current form during the early nineteenth-century. As Enlightenment preoccupations of universal classification spread among the cabinets of Europe, an increased desire for scholarship regarding objects in these cabinets took hold, manifesting in physical record. Eventually, as these cabinets developed into the modern museum, institutional catalogues evolved to fill two distinct but overlapping roles: the scholarly reference and the guidebook for casual museum visitors. These roles persevered for more than a century, as more or less stable expressions of the modern museum collection.

Today, cataloguing enters a new phase: the wholesale adoption of digital formats. At this juncture, as the printed museum catalogue begins to show its age, we have a unique opportunity to review an entire developmental trajectory with a reasonably distinct origin and endpoint. As digital collections become ubiquitous, perhaps eventually eclipsing the book form altogether, we may miss the lucid view the printed catalogue book purports to provide. Although postmodern critics may accurately complain that any such view must be a distortion, the contemporary scholar, if disallowed the overarching vision provided by the book catalogue, can no longer aspire to the comprehensive awareness the book form convincingly extolls, and to which earlier scholars subscribed. While the advantages of digital formats seem clear, and while I do not imply any reactionary regression to the doubtless abridged view provided by book catalogues alone, printed catalogues have much to tell us about institutions as entities within a social context: catalogues provide a lucid view into an institution's collecting habits, into the concerns of the institution more broadly, and clarify the role the institution plays among its constituents and peers. When considering museum catalogues, a scholar can at least *aspire* to comprehensive knowledge.

Regardless of format, catalogues illuminate the general development of collections, and have accompanied museums since their inception. Ideas inherent in museum collections follow the well-worn grooves carved by the Enlightenment: a desire to classify, to learn, and to expand. Catalogue form and function has closely paralleled museum development, and exemplifies these Enlightenment concerns; catalogues have enabled institutional aspirations toward universal collecting, while reinforcing and eventually superseding the accepted Western art historical narrative.

The general outline and function of the museum collection was firmly in place in the early nineteenth-century. During most of the nineteenth-century, the central, practical issues faced by museum collections remained fundamentally stable, allowing catalogues to develop into sophisticated, systematic, scholarly documents, able to accurately reflect institutional collections. As the general format of the institutional catalogue became standardized, it increasingly allowed lateral comparison of objects and institutions across geographic areas and national borders.

During the late nineteenth-century, catalogues adopted parallel strains found in libraries and other liberal Western institutions, that is, to serve and educate the widest audience possible. Catalogues thus began to occupy a unique space between two eminent modern edifices, the museum and the library, providing each with a vehicle to influence and inform one another. With increased museum visitation, demand for catalogues grew; this in turn encouraged institutions to produce more catalogues more frequently, all the while attempting to reflect institutional collections as accurately as possible. The multiplication of catalogue editions, as I will show in this paper, provides the potential for longitudinal comparison: with so many catalogues available, we can reconstruct the development of an institution over time through a formal analysis of its catalogues.

## *Methodology*

In this paper I endeavor to provide a survey of museum collection catalogue development, from its birth at the apex of the Enlightenment (c. 1800) to the present day. In order to highlight the characteristics of collection catalogues over time, I will present several case studies, that is, particular catalogues consulted as primary sources with attendant documentation. What can a catalogue's form tell us about its contemporary context? This use of primary sources as empirical primary sources results from the relative paucity of secondary scholarship available regarding nonbook collection catalogues and their social effects. Due to long library scholarship, a great body of literature surrounding the history of books exists (and, to a lesser extent, histories of bibliography); when appropriate, I have leaned on books as an analogue, but obviously books and artwork have major differences. Nevertheless, unlike what is available regarding exhibition or auction catalogues, no comprehensive bibliography of collection catalogues exists. Even long-established and endowed institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and London's National Gallery, two of the institutions I examine later in this paper via their catalogues, have not assembled systematic bibliographies of collection catalogues they themselves have produced.<sup>1</sup>

With some minor exceptions, I limit my research to art museum collection catalogues of the United Kingdom and the United States. I chose this somewhat arbitrary limitation because of the huge quantity of catalogues available: each major institutional collection perforce produced a series of catalogues, sometimes in rapid succession. Any comprehensive survey of available catalogues would necessarily extend beyond the scope of such a paper. Generally I attend to the collections of a few major museums, while considering a few extraordinary examples of minor catalogues I've discovered that shed light on particular concepts otherwise inexplicably appearing in subsequent major museum catalogues. According to Frits Keers, formerly curator of paintings and sculpture at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, some of the early developments in museum catalogue form occurred first in Europe, in particular in France, but the greater wealth of primary

catalogues contributed better to my method. Thus, I do not insist that any of the developments indicated in this paper occurred first in the examples provided. These examples do approximately date such phenomena, and at least indicate the particular developmental trajectories of the institutions in question.

### *Description of a collection catalogue*

The catalogue idea implies a systematic arrangement: a list expanded via methodization and attribution, independent of content. Catalogues are representations of collections for the purpose of consulting objects in their absence. Catalogues thus are not essentially about objects themselves, but are concerned instead with information inherent in objects; that is, they are tools for users to identify or interact with objects without direct consultation. Catalogues are abstractions: they represent a collection in a reduced, portable form, implying a scientific, classifying mindset, which since 1800 also implies an attempt to distill and digest phenomena along familiar lines of Enlightenment thought. They facilitate retrieval of objects from storage, as well as (in better cases) the comparison and cross-referencing of objects.

Museum catalogues can be considered a distinct subset of such collection catalogues. Keers provides this definition: “A catalogue of a museum offers a printed list of the objects in any systematic order, preferably with a description that at least enables the reader to identify the object.”<sup>2</sup> Keers goes on to qualify this statement, however, as museums are places where the public at large can congregate: they are not simply the private holdings of an individual. Although catalogues of *Kunstkammer* and *Wunderkammer* collections, owned by private persons, existed well before the nineteenth-century, most of these collections are no longer extant, and their catalogues are not true museum catalogues. The eighteenth-century holdings of the Kings of France, for example, the *Cabinets du Roi*, while available for public consumption, were held

privately; their documentation can be considered a precursor to the modern museum catalogue, but not necessarily an example of it.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, as the modern catalogue form developed directly from documents of the *Wunderkammer*, any such history must begin with them, however cursorily. By the eighteenth-century, town halls and academies across Europe had often accumulated stores of objects. Many of these collections developed into museums in their own right: the *Cabinets du Roi* eventually formed the nucleus of the Louvre.<sup>4</sup>

Such collections were not unique to Europe; by the early nineteenth-century they existed in the United States as well. A catalogue of an early American cabinet in New York, for example, consists principally of various lists of exotic fauna and other natural historical artifacts in the collection (fig. 1). While it does not include any artworks, or other fields important to art research (no titles separate from description, for example), nevertheless the volume broadly corresponds in form with later collection catalogues. Objects have catalogue numbers and scientific classification.

Evidently, due to their classificatory nature, such Cabinets were organized similarly to book collections of the time. By the nineteenth-century, bibliographic classification was finally becoming scientific. Dorothy May Norris, one of the few historians ever to deal specifically with printed catalogues, attributes this development to the French Cataloguing Code of 1791, which established professional guidelines for cataloguers; the code outlined the first card cataloguing system, as well as a practical guide toward describing works and guidelines for shelving and locating works in storage.<sup>5</sup> However, although catalogues created after the 1791 code were more technically advanced, according to Norris this was not necessarily a positive development: “eighteenth-century cataloguing has nothing of the variety of that of previous centuries; it is well on the way toward the general uniformity of method of modern cataloguing.”<sup>6</sup> The implication is that, for better or worse, cataloguing was becoming more standardized. (Curiously, the 1793

Louvre museum catalogue did not follow any alphabetical order or classification, but instead was organized by order of object display in the museum; apparently the Code did not apply to artworks.)<sup>7</sup> Because of the French Code and other general Enlightenment influences, the beginning of the nineteenth-century featured a transition to national and inter-collection norms for cataloguing, of both books and art.

### *Definition of a museum catalogue*

Keers outlines a few core elements common to museum catalogues, namely: a printed list of collection objects, a systematic order, and descriptions of objects which allow object identification by museum visitors.<sup>8</sup> For example, the early American cabinet catalogue introduced above (fig. 1), fails this test, due to a haphazard organization and lack of identifying characteristics.

I would add to Keers' definitions. First, museum catalogues must also separate items into broad classes. Most often, museum catalogue classification follows the common modern distinctions between high and low (e.g. "fine" art and "craft"), and by media (e.g. paintings and sculpture); classes are further divided into subclasses like nationality and period. Museum catalogues can be organized along other lines as well; in the nineteenth-century, catalogues were often organized by the location within the museum where pieces were displayed, that is, classified according to the architecture of the museum. Today this is less common outside of museum guidebooks.

Second, catalogues must be republished, and have further editions. The museum catalogue has near siblings, namely, exhibition catalogues and the auction catalogues produced by firms such as Sotheby's and Christie's. These catalogue forms do not qualify as museum catalogues because they are temporal: they document a single event. Further development, whether by addenda or new editions, is unlikely and rare.

Instead, a collection catalogue must change over time, to follow the evolving character of the institution it represents. According to an early catalogue of the Art Institute of Chicago, "A well classified catalogue is made impossible by the constant enlargement of the collections and of the building and by other causes."<sup>9</sup> To deal with such "impossibility," catalogues must grow; instead of a static document, a museum catalogue is better considered a template for the organizing of variable collections, often requiring addenda or further editions. It supersedes its medium: it is an abstract system of organization.

In addition, a particular museum collection catalogue, like the museum it accompanies, can be considered an instantiation of a particular narrative. This is very much analogous to the relationship between the idea of a universal narrative, the hypothetical universal collection, and their instantiation in a survey textbook (*fig. 2*). Any critiques of the Western art historical narrative, or upon Western museums, can equally be applied to their parallel catalogues. Both came into existence and developed concurrently, and much of the same theoretical framework applies to both.

As a museum catalogue is a representation of a collection and not a duplication of a collection, it possesses several advantages over the consultation of objects directly. Primarily, a catalogue allows avoidance of actual object handling, ostensibly keeping objects safe. A catalogue is also far more portable than an actual collection, so a collection can be perused in remote locations, even multiple remote locations. With reproduction, such portability allows the widespread consumption of a museum's collection, providing for the dissemination of information over wide spans of time and place. Of particular note for museums, catalogues encourage subscription (with potential attendant revenue), provide for posterity, and attract attention: they are perfect advertisements, allowing institutions the luxury of widespread self-promotion.

### *Types of museum catalogues*

In order to apply these generalizations to an actual example, I'll start with a very sophisticated, recent scholarly catalogue, published in 1997 by the Art Institute of Chicago, and compiled by Suzanne McCullagh, head of the Art Institute's Department of Prints and Drawings. This work is certainly not for idle browsing, but a complete scientific description as surrogate for the collection (*fig. 3*).

According to my observations, most modern museum catalogues share general characteristics. They are in codex form, with title page, lists of objects in an established order, usually with tables of contents and indices. By and large, they are of two sizes: *quarto*, a single printer's sheet of paper folded in half twice (approx. 12 x 9 in.), and *octavo*, the same sheet folded in half again (approx. 5.5 x 9 in.). These sizes correspond to the general purpose of each catalogue, in that the larger quarto catalogues tend to be used for desk use and study, while octavos are for carrying through a gallery for on-the-spot consultation. This size difference sometimes also indicates the intended audience of the catalogue, in that larger catalogues seem to contain more scholarly information, like attribution and provenance, while smaller catalogues more often contain information oriented toward the leisurely tourist, like identification and basic analysis.

The quarto size of the Art Institute catalogue is our first clue that this is a work of scholarship. For an earlier work, this observation might not hold, but by the late twentieth-century, except for "coffee-table" books intended for casual visual consumption, the larger size generally has been reserved specifically for catalogues with a scholarly audience.

The late date of the catalogue (1997) also corresponds to its specialization: the work does not indicate the entire collection of the Art Institute (such a work would hardly fit into its 456 pages), but rather only the *first* collection of *Old Italian drawings* in the *Prints & Drawings* department of the museum. Presumably the Prints & Drawings department could also produce further works in

the series detailing works of more recent vintage, as well as French, Japanese, or American, for example, and this would still only scratch the surface of pieces in the Prints & Drawings department, still less the general museum collection.

The work's scholarly intent becomes clear when the reader considers the elaborate descriptive and narrative elements shown on a typical catalogue page. For example, in a catalogue record detailing a Raphael, we have fields indicating: Artist Name, Catalogue Number, Title, Medium, Support, Watermark, Chain Lines (a characteristic of the paper), Condition, Inscription, Inscription Medium, Provenance Inscription, Provenance Inscription Medium, Provenance Inscription Location, Alternate Titles, as well as a full narrative description, notes regarding other related pieces around the world, catalogues raisonné, notes of intent, and a narrative of theme, context and iconography. It is a work of scholarship, that is, it pays extensive attention to attribution, observation, provenance and historical context. In total, the record covers four columns of text, as well as a full page color reproduction in addition to the illustration version in the text. Clearly this information is for scholars, and required enormous effort to create. It establishes a new level for subsequent catalogues of similar scope, a high standard of classification, description and erudition.

As a contrasting example, intended for a non-scholar, I include a museum guidebook by the Art Institute of Chicago from 2009, *The Essential Guide*, opened to the famous El Greco *Assumption* (fig. 4). This book constrains its representation to a single page, and although many of the fields available in the 1997 catalogue find evidence, the narrative description is more cursory: it provides detail about the artist's life and a cursory iconographic analysis, without the extreme detail of the 1997 catalogue. The volume is of octavo size, 9.5 x 6 inches, perfectly portable, and is only 336 pages, despite referring to the general Art Institute collection. Clearly the 1997 and 2009 catalogues have different audiences, and uses, in mind.

Finally, for the sake of completeness, we have the “coffee-table” book, *Treasures from the Art Institute of Chicago* (fig. 5). The book is of octavo size, initially indicating a book for scholars, but this is misleading: for each catalog item, we have neither narrative, or any data beyond what is necessary for raw identification, albeit accompanied by a lavish photograph of the artwork in question. It does not, therefore qualify as a catalogue, as it makes little attempt at classification.

### *Early catalogues*

Museum collection catalogues have their roots particularly in the categorization of books, a field possessing a rich history, reaching back to 16C incunabula and beyond; in her 1939 history of cataloguing, Norris details catalogues from the 11C, and evidence of catalogues from the Roman era.<sup>10</sup> Incunabula bibliographies were generally haphazard descriptions of books, developed to gain a handle upon the burgeoning explosion of information in the premodern era: at some point, when a collection possessed too many books to recall the location of any particular title, an inventory became necessary.<sup>11</sup> Although equivalent surveys of art collection catalogues don’t exist, such catalogues likely began in similar fashion.

As a bibliography is an attempt to organize books, an object catalogue attempts to gather and tame a growing collection of objects. But the need was not immediately recognized. Major museums in England and America did not attempt broad classification of their holdings until the late eighteenth-century; during most of the eighteenth-century, catalogues of artworks in the British Museum, for example, did not yet exist.<sup>12</sup> According to Edward Miller, the museum did not have the staff for such an undertaking, no exhibition space, and limited accommodation for storage.<sup>13</sup> Smaller institutions presumably were even less advanced. Only by the turn of the nineteenth-century did the British Museum begin to more rigorously catalogue its materials, as regulations were eased for the study of objects in the collection, necessitating the creation of catalogues for access.<sup>14</sup>

Useful and aesthetic catalogues, while uncommon, did exist during the early nineteenth-century. One eminent example, the catalogue of the Leicester collection of 1817-1825, documents one of the seed collections which constituted the early National Gallery of London (*fig. 6*). While not strictly a museum catalogue by Keers' definition, as it takes liberties with description and lacks systematic order, it can be considered a close precursor. It consists entirely of "Modern Artists," that is, English late eighteenth-century-early nineteenth-century painters, including Gainsborough, Turner and Fuseli, in the collection of Sir John Fleming Leicester. Each entry is accompanied by a small etching, as the work was compiled by a trained illustrator, John Young, engraver to the Crown.<sup>15</sup> The catalogue is remarkable because of the obvious expense involved, but also for its sophistication: each entry includes a catalogue number, title, consistent format, size data, and contextual information. The catalogue has a curious flavor, as value judgments permeate the descriptions: poetic asides and Bible verses adorn each entry, like this passage describing a Fuseli (translated from Boccacio):

He rais'd his head, and saw a beauteous maid  
With hair dishevell'd, issuing from the shade;  
Two mastiffs, gaunt and grim, her flight pursu'd,  
And oft their fasten'd fangs in blood imbru'd.<sup>16</sup>

Evidently, the objective tone today associated with scholarly catalogues had not yet been adopted in 1825. During this period, cataloguers chiefly consisted of skilled amateurs, and gallery owners were often artists themselves: the systematic discipline of creating catalogues was yet in its infancy.<sup>17</sup> Even as late as 1870, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art was established, museum professions were a new development, and the Met itself was run by connoisseurs without formal training, establishing their field as they went.<sup>18</sup> Adherence to classification schemes or established historical fact was relaxed, and cataloguers often took significant liberties, literary, biblical or otherwise, to describe entries. This was not an uncommon trait for the period: Norris

describes, among many examples, a book catalogue from 1821 with a decidedly non-utilitarian flair, which details its collection's contents via riddles.<sup>19</sup> It seems our contemporary prerequisite for catalogues as dispassionate objects may be a recent development.

Indeed, as late as the middle of the nineteenth-century, major collections were still organized and catalogued by amateurs. The preface to the New York Historical Society catalogue of 1866 contains this text by the author, H. Abbot:

It may be necessary to state that I do not profess to be a savan [*sic*]... but merely an amateur collector... of the ancient Egyptians, in whose country I have passed the last twenty years of my life. To occupy my leisure hours was necessary, and I found it an agreeable pastime to dive into the tombs of the ancients... I have endeavored, as far as the limits of such a work will allow, to give a sufficient... description of each article, and for more minute details must refer to the work of such savans...<sup>20</sup>

The introduction to the Egyptian section of this catalogue carries direct Biblical allusions, very much attempting to evoke a distant past, instead of providing rigid scientific classification:

We are made, as it were, contemporaries with Abraham, with the Israelites in Egypt, with Shishak, with Zerah, by witnessing specimens of rare arts made in their times.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, these early catalogues intended more than mere description and inventory. They hint rather at a more experiential, more phenomenological use, consistent with contemporary Romantic thought: a means to encourage enjoyment and edification instead of intellectual inquiry. More prosaically, it may also have been a result of the vastness of the collection: sufficient scholarship, whether attribution, classification or attribution, had simply not yet occurred..

### *Toward the comprehensive catalogue*

A catalogue which shows something of the ambitions and failures of the period might be the massive work describing the Sutherland Collection of prints, created for the Bodleian Library of

Oxford in 1837 upon the death of her husband, Alexander Sutherland, according to credit given in the addendum (*fig. 7*). This work was a massive undertaking for the author, evidently working alone, and discovering firsthand the pitfalls of cataloguing.

The first step in cataloguing a collection is to form an inventory. Where later works of cataloguing may attempt to understand a collection, initially a cataloguer must simply take an account, whether for purposes of appraisal, dissemination, or subsequent analysis. Any scholarship about a collection must first know what the collection contains. This initial inventory usually consists of a simple list of pieces, ordered merely by sequence of accession, repository, or display. Of course, such a list takes for granted that a thorough inventory of an evolving collection is even possible: as collections are never complete, their catalogues never can be, and any imposed order must constantly be modified.

To illustrate this, the Sutherland catalogue possesses extensive sections of Addenda and Miscellanea, attributable to the static intent of the collection, or perhaps lack of planning for growth or further understanding of the collection. Initial requirements evolved as the collection grew by almost a thousand prints, adding years to the project and several addenda. As the beleaguered author, Charlotte Sutherland, complains from the volume's pages:

...notwithstanding... the charges already incurred, (for which the sale of the entire edition of the Catalogue will scarcely be a reimbursement), [the author] is induced, by the desire of doing justice as well to the purchasers of it as to the Collection, to publish a few supplementary pages, (the expense of which will fall on herself only)... great as the pleasure has been of extending and improving [the Collection], yet greater is the satisfaction she has found in the resignation of it.<sup>22</sup>

Upon examination, it is difficult to discern the use of this catalogue, as artworks in the main collection are not given accession (or any other) numbers. Although objects are loosely organized by subject matter, the breadth of subjects examined, from people to places to battles, is neither comprehensive nor logical. The volume contains an index, but as it is organized by

subject as well, it is redundant and lacks extensive cross-referencing. The work thus has a loose resemblance to an encyclopedia but with no listing of subject headings: it is an inventory without a system:

...in the Indices to the Collection, the names, whether of persons or places, are entered in a general alphabetical order, without any separation between [various subjects]... though the Indices are complete in themselves, and perfectly adapted to the purpose for which they are intended... they present no system of classification, and are a somewhat intricate labyrinth, out of which to unravel a general and methodical catalogue of the whole Collection.[sic]<sup>23</sup>

The last clause of that passage indicates that a subsequent, more sophisticated catalogue was intended, with the Sutherland catalogue as a nucleus, perhaps for purposes of appraisal or dispersion throughout Oxford.

This catalogue seems to highlight problems reconciling accepted Enlightenment notions of rational completeness, a knowable universe, with the daunting task of cataloguing an extensive and growing object collection. Forty years before Dewey provided libraries with systematic means of organizing collections by subject, Charlotte Sutherland was faced with manually sorting, indexing, cross-indexing, and describing thousands of entries without an established framework: she operated in lieu of a modern system of universal organization. Ad-hoc techniques may be adequate for small collections like the Leicester, in which a predilection toward attribution, description and collective narrative may be well exercised, or which are small enough to mentally cross-reference. However, at some threshold of complexity, a more systematic approach becomes necessary.

A singular characteristic of the Sutherland catalogue is that entries are marked for page size, e.g. *Quarto* or *Half Sheet* or *Folio*. Evidently, this collection was thus marked for size and physical location: if all the *Folio* or *Quarto* sizes are kept together, by subject matter, then indeed they could at least be located. This is an old practice, and may have been a conditional requirement for

this particular catalogue. A catalogue of books, for example, can still adhere to bibliographic control whether or not it is organized by alphabet or classification, even if it does not match a written list. Premodern librarians, likely with collections rather smaller than the Sutherland, found that as long as books were organized by size or form, as maps are in many libraries, bibliographic control could be maintained.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately for Charlotte Sutherland, these earlier libraries usually contained far fewer items than the collection with which she was dealing.

### *Development of object cataloguing standards*

By the middle of the nineteenth-century, bibliographic standards were indeed becoming established, but similar standardization of cataloguing for non-book objects took longer to get off the ground. Book-equivalent bibliographic standards for nonbook items were not established before the 1950s: the Library of Congress only provided standard rules for cataloguing prints and photographs in 1959.<sup>25</sup> Museums were little more advanced; although they took extensive care to document their own works, little cooperation took place between various institutions.

Part of this lack might stem from a concurrent shortage of efficient means of visual documentation. Books often have large editions: sharing bibliographic data among institutions makes more sense when these institutions share similar (or identical) objects. However, just because two institutions share paintings by a particular artist, this does not mean the artworks are equivalent. Only after the patenting of George Eastman's roll film system in 1884 could libraries and archives have inexpensive, accurate slide collections for education and classification;<sup>26</sup> previous to this development, institutions had little accurate means of sharing and directly comparing content. Etchings and lithographs, while common and gaining in efficiency and speed, were still hardly efficient enough to keep up with a growing universal collection. They were also subject to the hand of the artist who created them: they could not claim scientific authority.

Instead, cataloguing practices for visual items had to rely solely on data in text form, and the vocabulary for such enterprises was not widely practiced. Categorization of visual media did not become widespread in libraries or archives until the twentieth-century, when photographic processes became common.<sup>27</sup> It seems instructive that effective, widespread visual cataloguing of materials broadly coincides with the widespread use of the camera: the first university slide library was formed at MIT in 1900 and the first in a museum was at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1904;<sup>28</sup> this is precisely when effective, standard cataloguing took hold. Visual cataloguing of objects is simply a modern phenomenon.

A more rigorously systematic catalogue than the Sutherland was the first catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, dating from 1871 (*fig. 8*). As is to be expected from a nascent museum eagerly seeking legitimacy in the broader (i.e. European) cultural arena, the main purpose of this catalogue seems geared toward convincing readers of the museum's right to exist, and the quality of its collection via conspicuous displays of connoisseurship. Descriptions of paintings aim for a universal ideal, thereby establishing the incontrovertible, objective core of a collection with ambitions to last indefinitely. Thus, a "Notice" precedes the catalogue entries, stating in no uncertain terms that the collection is highly regarded in Europe and has been authenticated by the highest authorities (the palpable insecurity seems to have lessened over the intervening century).<sup>29</sup> A salient preoccupation with attribution runs throughout the catalogue, the hallmark of the curator:

The pictures included in this Catalogue... were purchased in Europe, in the summer of the year 1870, and became the property of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in March, 1871... After an attentive examination of these one hundred pictures, and having satisfied ourselves as to their quality and their generally good state of preservation, we are agreed that it would be very difficult to find united an equally remarkable collection of the works of these different masters.<sup>30</sup>

I have not been able to discern an order to the catalogue, except a loose idea of order of acquisition. For example, a certain Van Dyck, Catalogue #5, has an accession number (from the Metropolitan website) of 71.41; therefore, either the catalogue is not in order, or the catalogue already does not contain every piece then in the collection. The Van Dyck numbered Catalogue #6 does not appear in the Metropolitan website. Either the website catalogue does not depict everything in the catalogue, or the painting no longer remains in the collection.

The Met catalogue of 1871 also includes a map of the premises (*fig. 9*). This is an important detail: although the catalogue is not organized by order of hanging, it is nevertheless cursorily tied to the architecture of the museum. A 1927 Metropolitan catalogue of very similar format is indeed organized by museum wing, floor, and room: a true visitor guide. The 1871 catalogue merely anticipates this development. It seems schizophrenic: small enough to carry around galleries, while nevertheless likely not intended for the casual visitor, as the information presented seems principally oriented toward experts interested in the attribution of pictures; either a substantial portion of museum patrons consisted of connoisseurs who could decipher such jargon, or the gulf between expert and amateur was not great. The book does not contain illustrations, except for facsimiles of artist signatures for each signed artwork, an attempt apparently for the authors of the catalogue to systematize attribution research for each artist. As no *a priori* signature system exists, however, every painting does not carry a signature, and thus the catalogue for these signatures is incomplete. It is also thus redundant; the very signatures in question would be equally illegible in reproduction as on the painting itself, and is necessarily less authoritative. This may explain why this practice is not emulated elsewhere.

### *The museum collection explosion*

After the French Revolution and during the industrial revolution, Britain and the United States experienced a boom in museum visitation, which picked up substantially during the

second half of the nineteenth-century. For example, in 1852, the first year of opening, visitors to the South Kensington Museum (today the Victoria and Albert Museum) exceeded 330,000 people. A decade later, in 1862, this increased to more than 1,200,000.<sup>31</sup> This reflects partly the newly enfranchised middle class, flush with industrial capital and free evenings. Partly, it also indicates a Victorian sensibility, that public institutions should be educational and that one's leisure hours should be spent in the betterment of the self. In contrast with preceding aristocratic art houses like the pre-revolution Louvre, museums like the South Kensington Museum devised programs that resonated across the English-speaking world: to detach art and culture from the ruling classes, and instead use it to encourage the populace toward self-education and regulation.<sup>32</sup>

As collections expanded and cataloguing techniques gained sophistication, catalogues developed to meet the new situation. Before this period, catalogue control evolved apropos the organizational inclinations of institutions, for libraries and eventually for museums, but by the late nineteenth-century museums were producing two different types of catalogues simultaneously. The museum guidebook, despite a superficial similarity to the extant collection catalogue, was a novel development: it was intended for the general public rather than for institutional management or the learned set.

Providing tools for casual visitors was not an uncommon phenomenon; for example, Keers considers a rare eighteenth-century pamphlet distributed to visitors of the town hall of Amsterdam, documenting objects inside, and general travel guidebooks of the nineteenth-century containing similar information.<sup>33</sup> But once photographic reproduction became widespread during the late nineteenth-century, suddenly it was far easier for institutions to create vivid, influential catalogues, and to market them as widely as possible. The museum guidebook is the confluence of these factors: a broad public market, an illustrated, collectible object, and a means to provide visitors with an educational experience.

Although the 1871 Metropolitan catalogue does not necessarily qualify as a guidebook due to lack of photography, it anticipates this role. A later catalogue from the Met, in 1927, makes this eventual trajectory crystal clear:

The following Guide has been prepared for the benefit of the casual visitor... who wishes first to be shown the easiest way of making the circuit of the building, and second to have his attention called to the most interesting or important objects in each gallery as he passes through. It is in no sense a catalogue of the contents of the Museum, nor is it intended to supplant the special handbooks of the various collections, which contain much more information about their subjects than can be compressed within the limits of a general guide. To them, therefore, the visitor who wishes to study seriously any of the collections in the Museum is referred.<sup>34</sup>

In its general plan the book has been modeled upon the descriptions of museums in Baedeker's guide books, which are the result of expert judgment and long experience. Following them, the system of stars has also been adopted, as an additional aid to the visitor who may not have the time to look at everything to which his attention is called. (*fig. 10*)

Such a perceived split between the “casual visitor” and the expert may have been artificial: it carries the assumption that such visitors possessed less sophistication than they necessarily did. A division of the museum-going public into two segments, low and high, may have thus reflected elitist notions of those running the institutions: if visitors were not connoisseurs, then the information presented for their consumption should be elementary. Other reasons may have been economic: it makes sense, for example, to provide a simpler catalogue for mass-consumption than for a specialist audience, as less effort spent on scholarship would allow a lower price point and more sales. Any lack of sophistication inherent in a casual museum guidebook then should be ascribed less to its audience than to a perceived socio-economic situation.

### *The catalogue in theory*

In a library, as scholars consult collection catalogues for research purposes, their use patterns differ fundamentally from how collection visitors would use guidebooks. While scholars could feasibly have encountered artworks in person, they can also use a collection catalogue in an altogether different capacity, as a collection of data, more or less unattached to material objects.

In his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin's auratic principle deals with a single artwork sacrificing its aura in reproduction; in reproduction the artwork loses the qualities which make it unique. A modern, illustrated scholarly catalogue often contains copious reproductions, but these are means to an end: they are effective means of description, e.g. for reasons of attribution or other research. Any related aura of the catalogue's content has been stripped clean, sacrificed in favor of representative information. A scholarly catalogue is not a collection of *reproductions*, but rather a collection of *representations*. The catalogue becomes an object in its own right, and becomes collectible. It is a tool, a data set: a collection of abstracted, commodified attributes.

Hence, because of this separation from actual objects, scholarly catalogues do not necessarily reflect the collection they represent. The catalogue may be equally interesting for what it leaves out as what it includes, very much like a photograph: it gives the illusion of being objective and scientific, while at heart is perhaps more dependent upon contemporary fashion, preoccupation and practice. As every detail about an object can never definitively be recorded in finite time and catalogue space, thus no object can be completely recorded, and a collection of records can never be considered definitive or complete.

A guidebook, on the other hand, is tied directly to a visit to a museum, to the architecture of a building and the organization of the artworks within. Guidebooks contain maps, firmly attaching the volume to an actual visit, to see an actual collection, in an actual building. All of the artworks in the guidebook exist in the collection, indeed are highlights of the collection, and can be seen in

person. Thus a guidebook is much closer to Benjaminian concepts of reproduction, in that it is a reproduction of a unique collection, or at least a deliberate subset. In a guidebook, the signifier is thus rather more closely attached to the signified than in a scholarly catalogue, in which the split between signifier and signified is palpable. It is a chief difference.

Guidebook connections to architecture in particular are not accidental. Museum architecture of the late nineteenth-century and guidebooks both extol liberal values toward enhancing city life for the middle class. Museum architecture in this period, especially the City Beautiful movement in the United States, was conceived and built as much for civic pride and liberal values as for art appreciation: they were for their cities, and for their cities' people.<sup>35</sup> Museums increasingly had a new public to serve, and the guidebook / scholarly catalogue split may have reflected this new need: retain a catalogue for the intellectual class, but take care to ensure the participation of the general populace.

### *The guidebook and its social effects*

Initially, much of the new museum vitality occurred within small museums, essentially private residences of collectors, opening their doors to the public. In Britain, at least, pedigreed institutions like the British Museum were famously resistant to providing for the common people; smaller initiatives instead led the way, on both sides of the Atlantic. In discussing a British collector named Sir John Soane, Barbara Black mentions that:

In his house-museum, Soane was engaged in the parallel tasks of self-construction and boosterism. Anxious about his lineage and uncertain about his posterity, this collector... used his collections to construct a new identity and a better future for himself. He was a self-made man in a society awakening to the dreams of self-help and social mobility.<sup>36</sup>

As an art collection historically carries trappings of the aristocracy, gathering an art collection may indicate a wish to enter the upper class; the leisure time, sophistication and money necessary

for the venture would at least indicate means. In such cases, publishing a museum guidebook would amplify its proprietor's self-conception as an arbiter of taste, or at least provide documentation and advertisement, for peers and future generations, of his existence. Presumably, Sir John Soane would welcome the greatest number of admirers possible, and a substantial guidebook print-run would be a valuable means to further this aim.

Residential museums like this were common in the United States. One small volume I discovered, published in 1896, matches this sort of institution: the collection of George Lininger of Omaha, Nebraska. It may certainly be considered as a guidebook to a small regional museum (*fig. 11*). The museum itself contains a substantial collection of Italianate painting and sculpture. A passage from the catalogue's preface serves to illustrate the growing traffic of souvenir-hunting tourists, even in regional centers like Omaha:

The Lininger Art Gallery was built and thrown open to the public, free, in November, 1888. Since that time many additions have been made and the collection as a whole has been materially improved. The attendance has also greatly increased, over fifteen thousand people having visited the Gallery during the past year. ...The catalogues are free. We have bound a number in heavy boards in hopes that the patrons will take better care of them. We have illustrated this edition at considerable expense, and if any visitors wish to keep a souvenir of the Gallery, they can do so by dropping twenty-five cents (the actual cost) in the box at the desk.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, this work seems mostly a means for tourists to digest the collection, or at least to take home and leave on a coffee table, to relive the experience and show to friends. This catalogue does contain one cutting edge detail, apart from extensive use of photography for artwork identification: paintings, while not hung with adjoining cards explaining them, are nevertheless labeled with a number, corresponding to their guidebook entry.<sup>38</sup> In this way, the catalogue gets firmly attached to the building it describes; it becomes a reproduction of architecture, in line with other guidebooks of the period. The numbers become memory aids, encouraging connections

among architecture, floor-plan and artwork, thereby reinforcing relationships between signifier and signified in visitors' minds. They also function as a checklist of elements "to be seen:" visitors might consider their visit complete if they personally view the source of any interesting photograph.

Small regional collections were not the only collections producing guidebooks during this period, however. A complete, well-funded guidebook in the modern vein might be the 1917 Art Institute of Chicago catalogue (*fig. 12*):

The General Catalogue is issued in its present abbreviated form to fill an immediate need. Its chief object is to provide the visitor with a handbook which he may use according to number, finding in the catalogue the number attached to the object under inspection.<sup>39</sup>

By this date, the Art Institute of Chicago held an extensive collection. For example, even a small part of the museum, the Department of Prints & Drawings, was suddenly flush with artworks. The 1887 Edward H. Stickney bequest, occurring five years after incorporation, provided the museum with a nucleus of 460 works on paper. In 1911, the Department of Prints & Drawings was established. In short order, several other trustees stepped forth before 1920 to build the department, including Clarence Buckingham and Robert Allerton. In 1922, another Chicagoan, William F. E. Gurley, donated almost 4,000 works to the department. During the rest of the 1920s, other trustees provided thousands more. All of this occurred before an acquisitions policy was drafted (in 1940).<sup>40</sup> Within the context of this rapid expansion of content, museums like the Art Institute had little choice besides producing specialized catalogues to cover the various parts of their collection: a single volume could not realistically indicate all of the works in the collection. The guidebook catalogue form was a natural result of this, as it provides a lateral, general view of the collection despite essential abridgment.

The Art Institute guidebook seems designed specifically for casual visitors, for their education and entertainment. Artwork notes presume to interpret and provide talking points ("...the key to

an understanding of Egyptian antiquities is found in certain characteristics of the Egyptian religion...")<sup>41</sup> seemingly presented for the non-expert, or at least non-scholar, looking for easy understanding of the works at hand. This democratic tone seems particularly well-suited for an American museum; nevertheless, the Institute clearly plans for serious scholarship elsewhere, as the catalogue alludes to planned further specialization: "A catalogue of the Egyptian Collection is now in preparation."<sup>42</sup> Evidently, if visitors were to outgrow the cursory remarks within the guidebook, they might broaden their education by consulting other related works.

The Art Institute catalogue is of octavo size, thus meant perhaps to be carried around the galleries. It includes a (by now, prerequisite) map inside depicting the room layout of the museum, broadly historically linear, starting with Babylonian and moving to modern, the standard art-historical narrative. The narrative does break down sometimes, though, as some rooms are merely marked "Miscellaneous." Thus, the different rooms in the floor plan seem reminiscent of the *Kunstkammer*, in that several rooms are dedicated to *objets d'art*: unclassified objects like Wedgwood Pottery, Musical Instruments and Architectural Casts, presumably with matching photographs for purchase in the gift shop.

### *Catalogue illustration*

In the middle of the nineteenth-century, catalogue illustration was limited to expensive, short-run volumes: until photo-lithographic processes became common in the early twentieth-century, illustration was a laborious and technical process, limited primarily to attributive information, in the form of signatures and the stamps of previous owners of objects. With the advent of widespread lithographic processes, illustrations could assume new roles, depicting the institutional architecture and setting, its benefactors, and of course, the artworks themselves. By the twentieth-century, guidebooks were being printed in the tens of thousands,<sup>43</sup> and illustrations were becoming increasingly common.

While consumer guidebooks did not hold any monopoly on illustration, as scholarly catalogues also contained illustrated individual artworks, illustrations supplied guidebooks with the facility to allow non-experts to benefit from catalogues without extensive expertise. Certainly artwork illustration provided a certain freedom from description in object metadata: it made description redundant, and forced any accompanying object text to work harder, perhaps to provide analysis to accompany any provenance or attribution data. At the same time, a growing number of visitors created a market for smaller, more portable, and easier to digest guides: publications were necessary to provide relatively easily digestible information regarding institutional collections. This, of course, forces catalogue producers to make a fundamental decision: whether to create catalogues with the casual visitor or the scholar in mind, or whether to adopt some hybrid form.

When a catalogue is illustrated, it changes in a subtle fashion; it becomes more than a mere inventory of objects, but instead a collectible object in its own right, standing in for the collection. For both scholar and casual visitor, presumably both of whom lack the economic wherewithal to collect objects directly, an illustrated catalogue provides a surrogate collection, a means of consuming visual objects in ways alien to mere text. This dovetails with late Victorian tendencies toward accumulation, in which visitors to museums were encouraged to form collections of their own. Barbara Black writes that "selling electrotypes, plaster casts, and photographs of everything from Wedgwood to silver to lace, Victorian museums from their inception encouraged the public to take part of the Museum home with them."<sup>44</sup> Owning a catalogue, especially a guidebook offering a basic education upon the objects held therein, could stand as a surrogate for the museum: illustrations provided the illusion of owning the objects in the museum themselves, and a vivid reminder of a remarkable cultural excursion.

For example, illustrations in the 1917 Chicago catalogue, except for the El Greco *Assumption* (which, due to its size, was photographed in-gallery) and various interior scenes, are presented

out of context, neutrally presented on the page, without frame or color, the white of the page acting as a frame. They are inscribed immediately below with the artist's name and the title, as well as the catalogue number and the page referenced for more detailed information. Through this complete commodification, the catalogue becomes a sort of exhibition in its own right, allowing perusal (however reduced in color and size) of a collection without reference directly to the collection. On some pages interiors of galleries are even depicted, as if standing in for a visit.

### *Scholarly catalogue extravagance*

During the first few decades of the twentieth-century, major museums finally caught up with the explosion of new acquisitions, and expanded the entries in their scholarly catalogues. Consider an entry for the Menes Earrings and Necklace, which exists both in the 1866 New York Historical Society catalogue (fig. 13) and a more specialized 1924 catalogue detailing only the collection's Egyptian portion. The Menes entry of 1866 contained only a cursory, value-laden description, approximately a paragraph in length. The corresponding Menes entry of 1924 merited five entire pages of rigorous scholarship (fig. 14). By 1924, descriptions have become scientific in their verbosity and taxonomy. Consider for example the introduction from the 1924 edition, written in an elaborate, detailed style which also permeates subsequent entries:

In construction, much of the Egyptian jewelry falls into two classes: hoop jewelry, that is, articles which consist essentially of a hoop of metal, whether or not elaborated by inlaid or appliquéd ornament, and bead jewelry. To the first class belong nearly all finger rings and circlets for the head, and many armlets, bracelets, and anklets; to the second class, necklaces, girdles, the large majority of wide collars, and also many armlets, bracelets and anklets.<sup>45</sup>

During the infancy of the universal collection in the early nineteenth-century, a catalogue entry contained the bare minimum of information, usually just a catalogue number and a basic description. It did, however, generally correspond to scientific classification, and this has

continued to the present: catalogue numbers adopted in the early nineteenth-century continue to apply to the same artworks. As the passage from the 1924 introduction demonstrates, this stability in numbering does not preclude extensive further classification, instead providing a framework for additional scholarship and metadata.

### *The digital conversion*

Despite such accumulation of information, structural development of the printed catalogue did not change fundamentally during the middle decades of the twentieth-century. With the exception of gradually improving printing techniques, in particular the advent of color lithography which allowed fantastic improvements in object reproduction, the formal structure of catalogues remained constant until the beginning of the digital conversion during the late 1970s.

Museum catalogues were formally well positioned to take advantage of this conversion when it did occur, however. As a museum catalogue is a scientific exercise in classification, with standardized fields and standardized forms of collecting data into these fields, the catalogue entry, at least in its scholarly form, seems a prime candidate for digital conversion. Such conversion removes some of the inherent problems of cataloguing: unlike printed catalogues, after an initial phase of conversion and data-entry, a catalogue need not be obsolescent upon publication. An organically developing collection can finally have an equally organic representation. In addition, internal use of catalogue records, within institutions, would benefit from the increased efficiency provided by collection databases to find records, or related records, thus making the jobs of registrar and curator easier. Whether or not bound catalogues were used previously for internal use, the same set of records could be used as the foundation both for internal organization and external consumption. Information in a database could be consulted in its native, digital format, or used to seed data for printed catalogues.

Such a conversion undermines the archaeological analysis I exercise in this paper, of course: a digital catalogue may gloss over the developments of a collection over time. Once irrevocably published, a printed catalogue indelibly reflects the state of a collection, or the cataloguing methodology, at the moment of its publication, while the more organic digital catalogue obviates any such temporal characteristics. For example, art-historical observations and interpretations particular to an era may be deemed obsolete or inaccurate by a later generation of scholars, and misguidedly “updated” to reflect more modern sensibilities. Or, historical developments and observations particular to a period may, in a digital format, mingle with those of other periods, creating an homogeneous mixture without periodic signposts. While careful structural design and disciplined use of a repository may limit such problems, a digital catalogue nevertheless is more indifferent to the past than its printed counterpart.

For myriad technical reasons, the form of digital catalogues proper lies outside the scope of this paper. A digital catalogue either fails or explodes every premise or definition supplied by Keers or myself for a printed catalogue: they are not printed, sequence is supplied upon request, classification can simultaneously adhere to multiple schemes, and republishing is constant. The use of a catalogue as an extension of architecture, with the advent of smart phones and global positioning, becomes literal. Essentially, despite any superficial similarity or relation to printed books, the digital catalogue is entirely new. Analysis of its formal effects can only be approximate, as the medium changes too rapidly, is composed of too many independent technologies, and has too many instances for any comprehensive assessment of form, at least in the manner I have used above to examine printed catalogues.

### *Economic effects*

The digital conversion does effect printed catalogue form, however. For example, although tangential to museum collection catalogues, the instantaneous digital catalogue offers supreme

advantages over print for temporal collections like exhibitions and auctions. In these realms, the digital catalogue will inevitably subsume its printed counterpart. For example, Thomas Campbell, director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, explains that while large Met exhibitions will have printed catalogues, many smaller exhibitions will have "scaled-back" versions.<sup>46</sup> According to a recent article in the *Art Newspaper*:

Exhibition catalogues rarely make sense economically. Production costs—paper, ink, printing, binding and so on—for 10,000 copies of a 250 to 300-page book typically range from \$150,000 to \$250,000. Add in the time spent by curators on research, writing and editing, the fees paid to outside authors, image reproduction rights, design costs and distribution and the actual cost per book can reach into three figures. Most are heavily subsidized by donors or are simply considered money-losers in the museum budget.<sup>47</sup>

A visit to a museum gift shop, however, demonstrates that sophisticated printed museum collection catalogues, like the 1997 McCullagh catalogue, are still being produced in quantity. According to Keers, late twentieth-century museums have realized the economic potential of the printed collection catalogue, and are printing them in ever greater numbers.<sup>48</sup> Evidently, economic characteristics differ between exhibition and collection catalogues, presumably as a result of an exhibition's temporary nature: catalogues printed about established collections simply have more time to recoup investment than those printed for an exhibition. Although printed exhibition and auction catalogues may perish under the digital onslaught, the future of the printed collection catalogue is less clear.

In an examination of the community-building capabilities of online museum resources, Peter Samis of the San Francisco Museum of Modern art discovered that "in terms of sheer numbers, traditional interpretive media such as wall texts and object labels are the foundation on which visitor experience is built."<sup>49</sup> In other words, a museum catalogue, whether in printed or digital form, does not replace the actual experience of visiting a collection, serving instead as

advertisement for the collection. According to the Smithsonian, surveys have shown that museum visitors value the “respite and retreat” that actually visiting museums provides: “perhaps museums are a place where they can actually escape screens and keyboards to find something real,” that the burden is on museums to await the day “the printed word may lose some of its primacy, and technology use will feel more natural.”<sup>50</sup> Until this occurs, websites and smart phones will not replace actual visits to a collection, and thus will not be primary producers of revenue. Instead, they have an ulterior motive: they advertise the experience of a visit. Too much information supplied via these advertisements has the potential to cannibalize revenue from ticket sales.

It is instructive, at this juncture, to consider the Art Institute of Chicago’s website, showing the El Greco considered earlier (*fig. 15*). All of the descriptive data from the guidebook is available, but none of the narrative elements, and scholarly information is largely absent. If collection information on the Art Institute’s website is kept deliberately paltry, in order to encourage visitation, demand for this information must be supplied via other means. The printed catalogue meets this demand while providing additional revenue.

### *Printed catalogues in a digital world*

A subtler role for the printed catalogue still exists, and one that will guarantee its continued existence in at least the near term. A digital catalogue is necessarily arbitrary, in that a visitor gets what he comes for, while a printed catalogue mandates links carefully considered by an author. In a sense, the printed catalogue is a curated “exhibition” analogous to its physical counterpart, the museum collection, with a linear path of consumption most digital collections do not attempt. Any lack of flexibility in the online medium is inherently frustrating, while this same inherent limitation in printed catalogues is taken for granted as an asset: it is a guide. An object in a printed catalogue is *selected*, while a digital entry is just one of an arbitrary, seemingly infinite

pool. Online record browsing, for all of its advances in recent years, still does not approach the usefulness of browsing in a book, with its clear delineation of classified chapters and headings. A digital catalogue hides its structure, while a printed catalogue proclaims it. Thus, printed catalogues can instruct in ways online catalogues yet cannot.

In the near term, therefore, the printed catalogue will retain some of its accepted roles, although perhaps in muted form. No longer can a printed catalogue compete with its digital counterpart for universality or data comprehensiveness, but the silver lining for the printed catalogue may be significant: it may be freed of the burden of the universal narrative, and allowed to fill smaller, alternative niches. A printed work, like the 1997 McCullagh catalogue, can thoroughly address a subset of a collection at a particular moment with a reasonable expectation of comprehensiveness: it is a specialty item, and can confidently relinquish more general depictions of a collection to a complementary digital catalogue. In this way, the printed catalogue can continue to aspire to Enlightenment notions of a rational, complete world: a role for which it has demonstrated a remarkable fitness.

Thus, even at the moment that society seems to hurtle wholesale toward digital technology, the printed collection catalogue maintains a place as a vehicle for scholarship, for advertisement and as a guide for casual museum visitors. The developments of the past two hundred years are not, therefore, mere historical curiosities. Printed catalogues and guidebooks have been a part of the institutions they reflect from their beginnings, and are perhaps inseparable from them. While these institutions continue to exist and have collections to organize, it seems likely that printed catalogues will continue to provide context and insight into the collections they represent.

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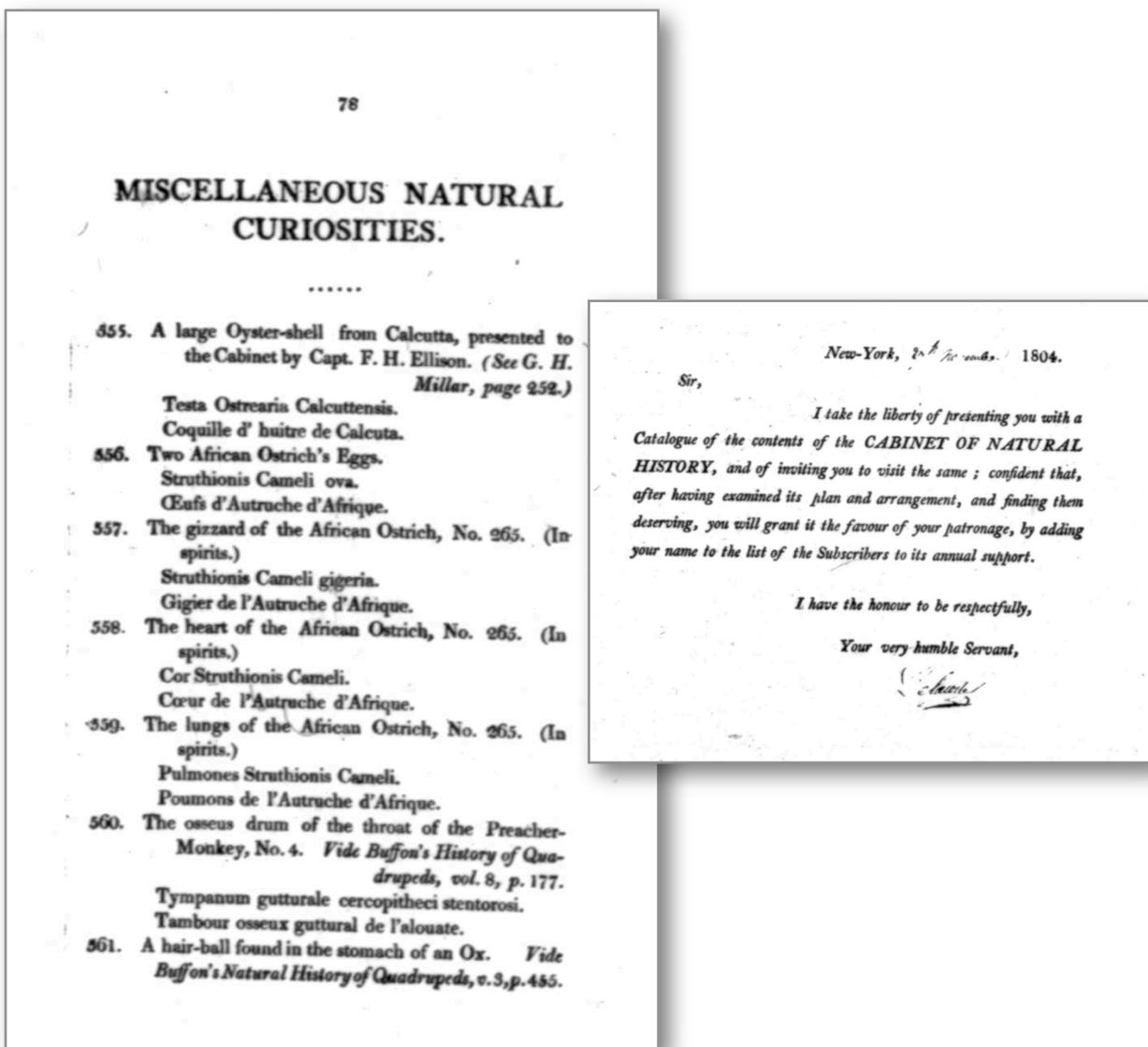
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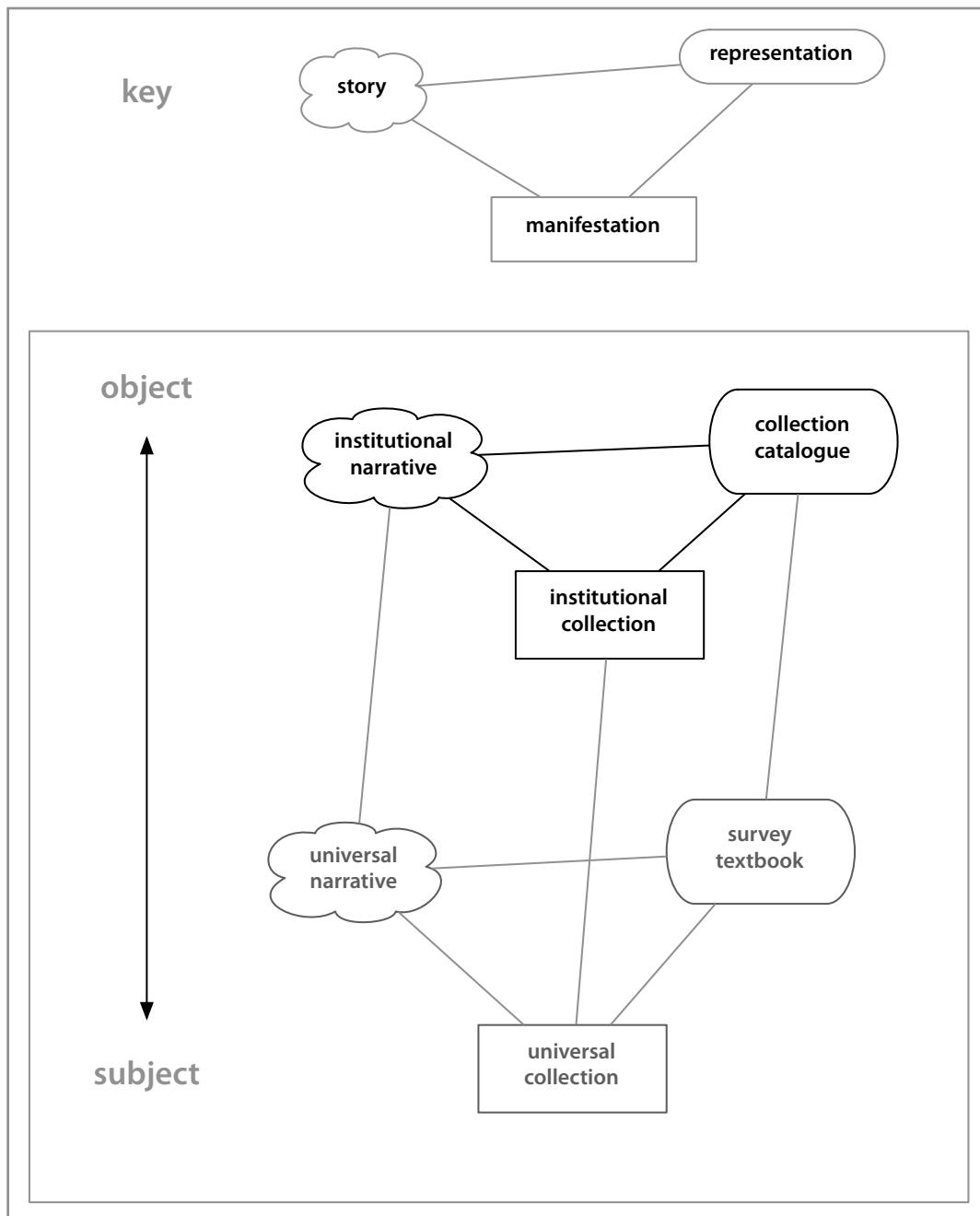
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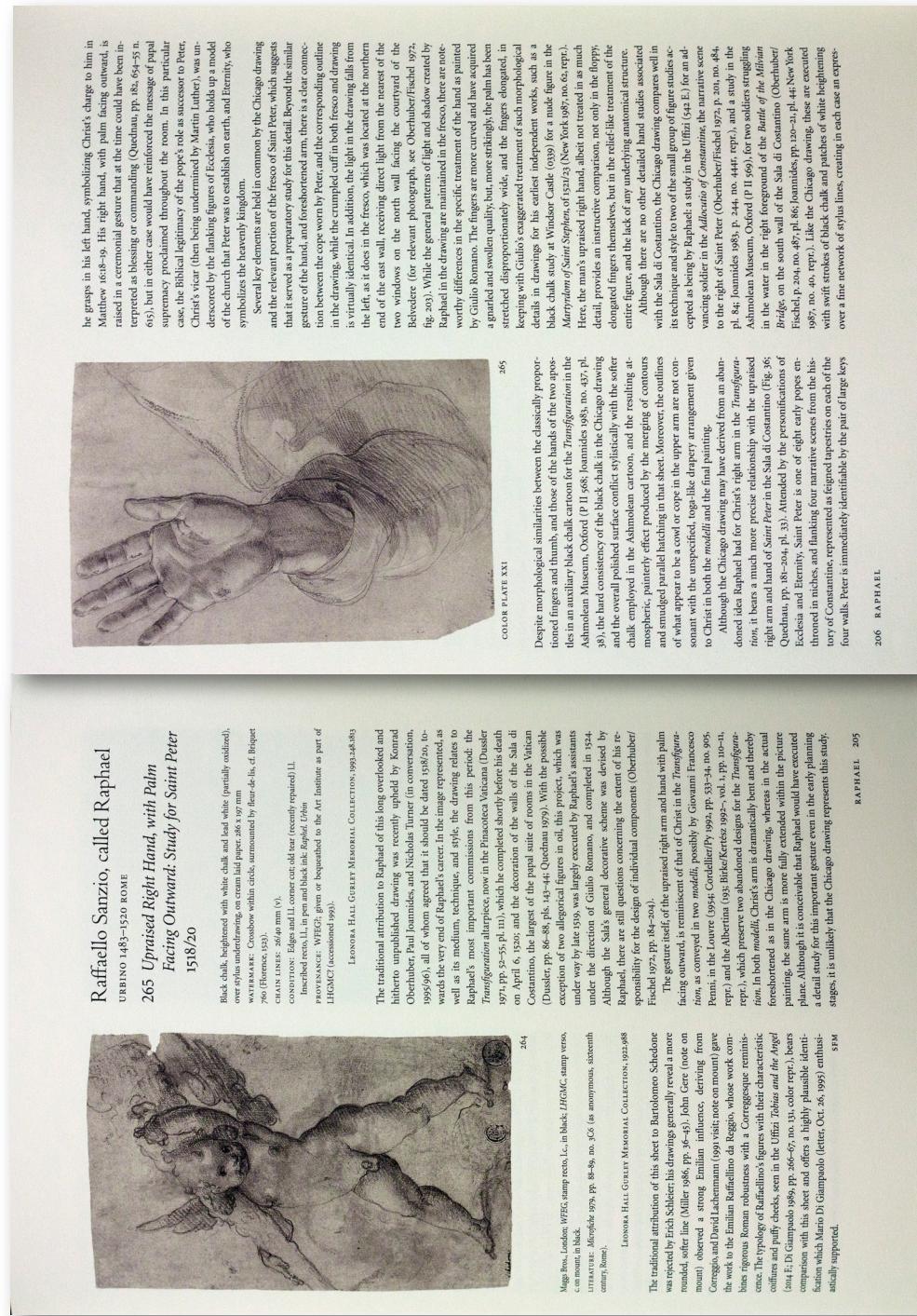
Figure 1



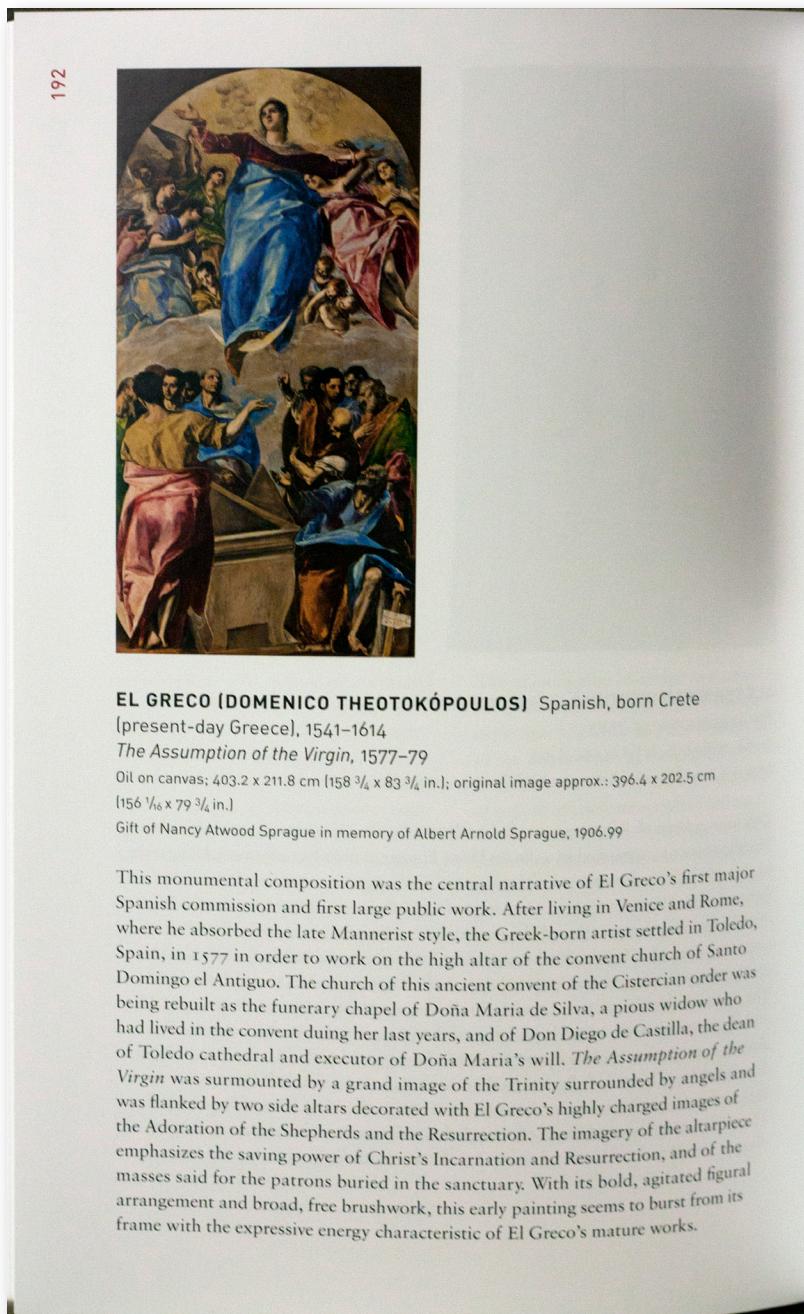
*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*



*Figure 5*

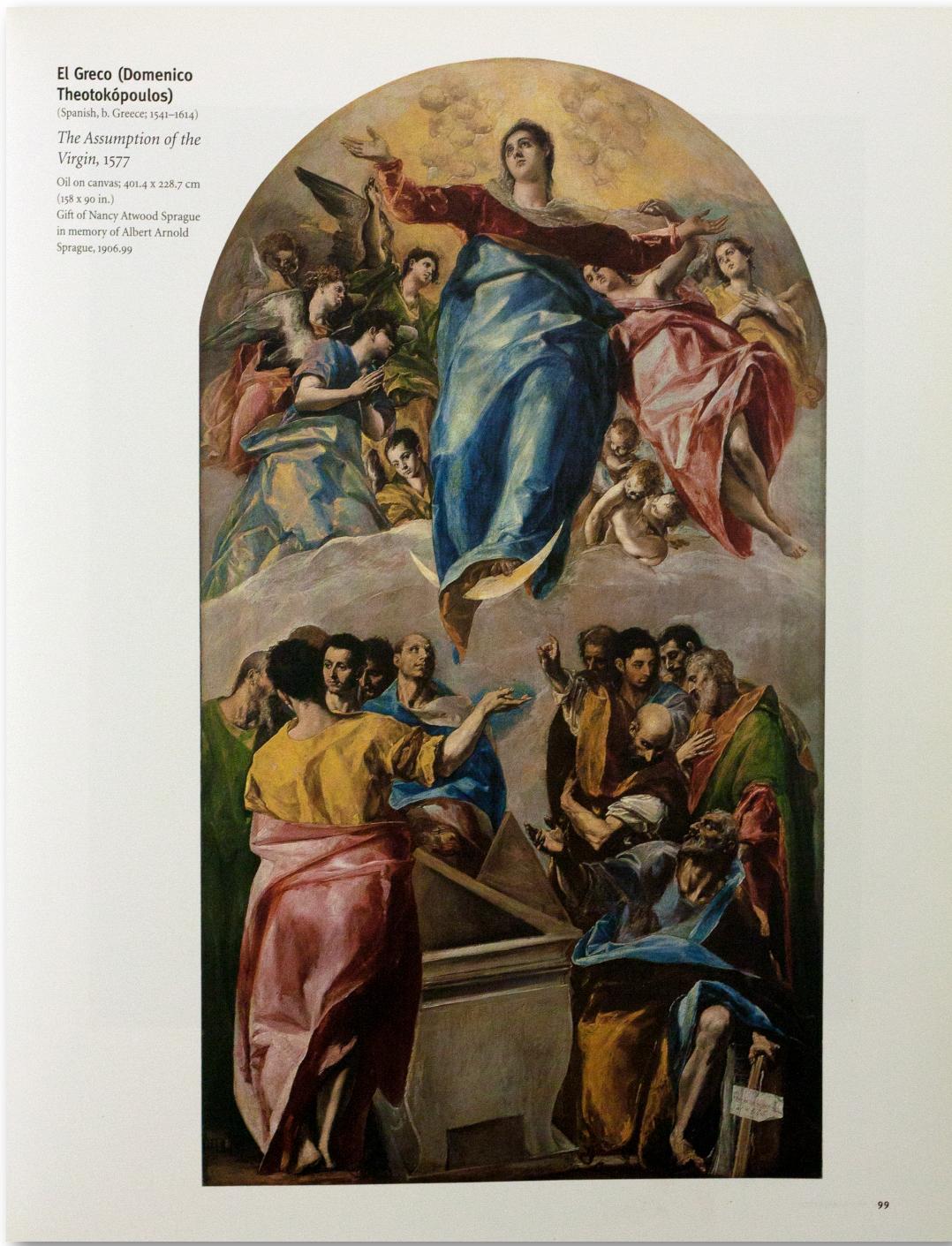


Figure 6

CATALOGUE.

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Hall.

No. 1.

RUBENS.

THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL.

And Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.  
And desired of him letters to Damascus to the Synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound into Jerusalem.  
And as he came near Damascus, suddenly there shined round about him, a light from Heaven.  
And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice, saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? . . . I am Jesus.

This Picture was formerly the property of M. de Montesquieu, who was one of the victims of the French Revolution. It was selected by the Commissary appointed by Government to search for objects of Science or Art, worthy of being admitted into the National Museum of France; and, having been restored to his family by virtue of the law in favour of condemned persons, was afterwards purchased, and brought to England, by M. de la Haute, who disposed of it, with the celebrated "Candle Light," by the same Master, to Mr. Hastings' Elwyn. The latter Picture was purchased by Charles Duncombe, Esq. for two thousand two hundred guineas; and the St Paul was sold, at the same time, for four thousand pounds, to Richard Ward Davis, Esq. by whom it was subsequently transferred to

ent of the Flemish School, this Collection has three  
nts, that it would be difficult to find any Collection  
ires. Highly gifted by nature, and improved by edu-  
as a Scholar and a Statesman, than as an Artist. He  
o Venus, from whose literary acquirements and pro-  
advantage. Rubens painted an incredible number  
Low Countries; and although many of his designs  
ers, who were his pupils; yet, in no Painter's works,  
of others.

8 ft. high. 11½ ft. wide.

B



Figure 7

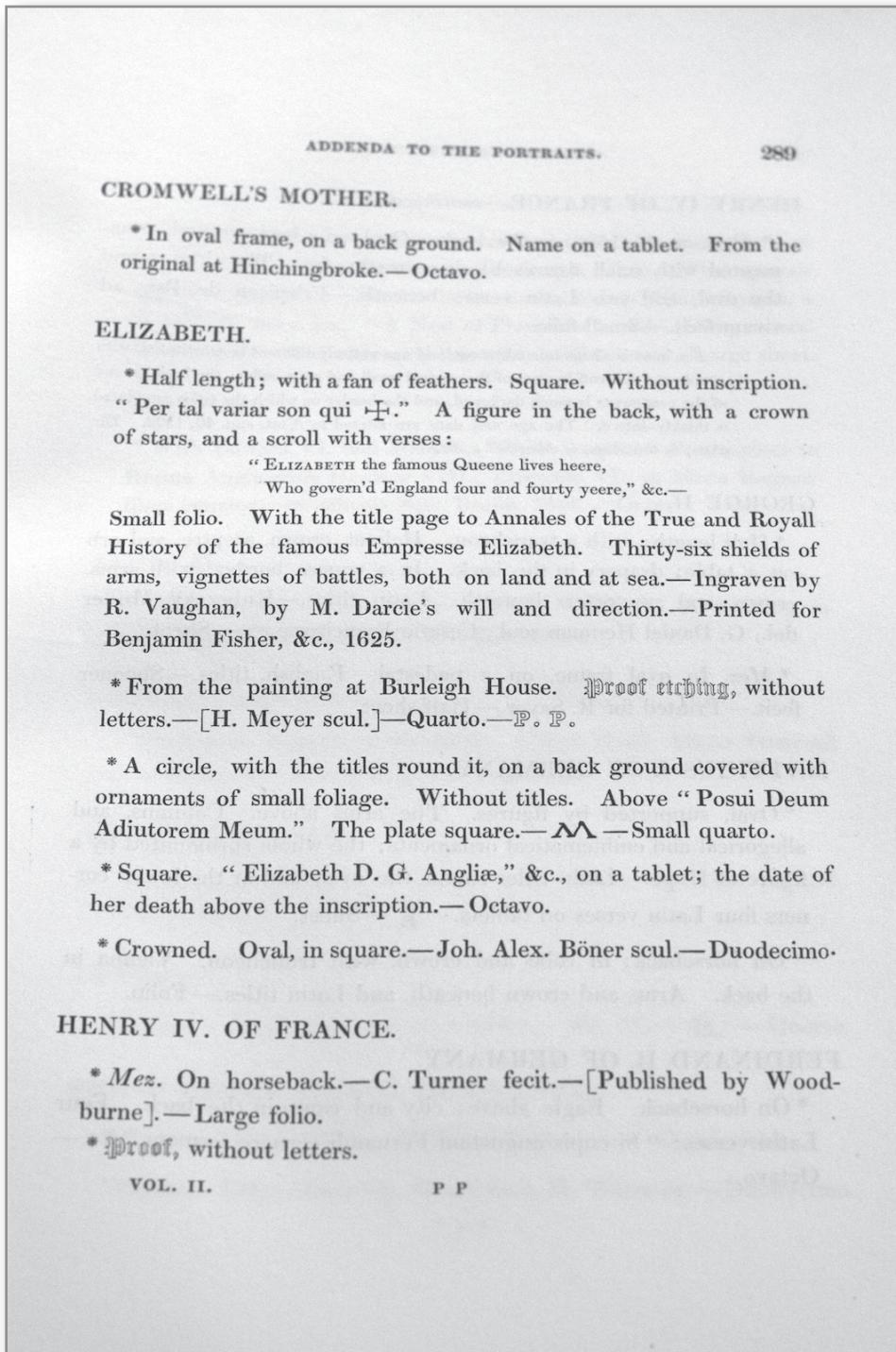
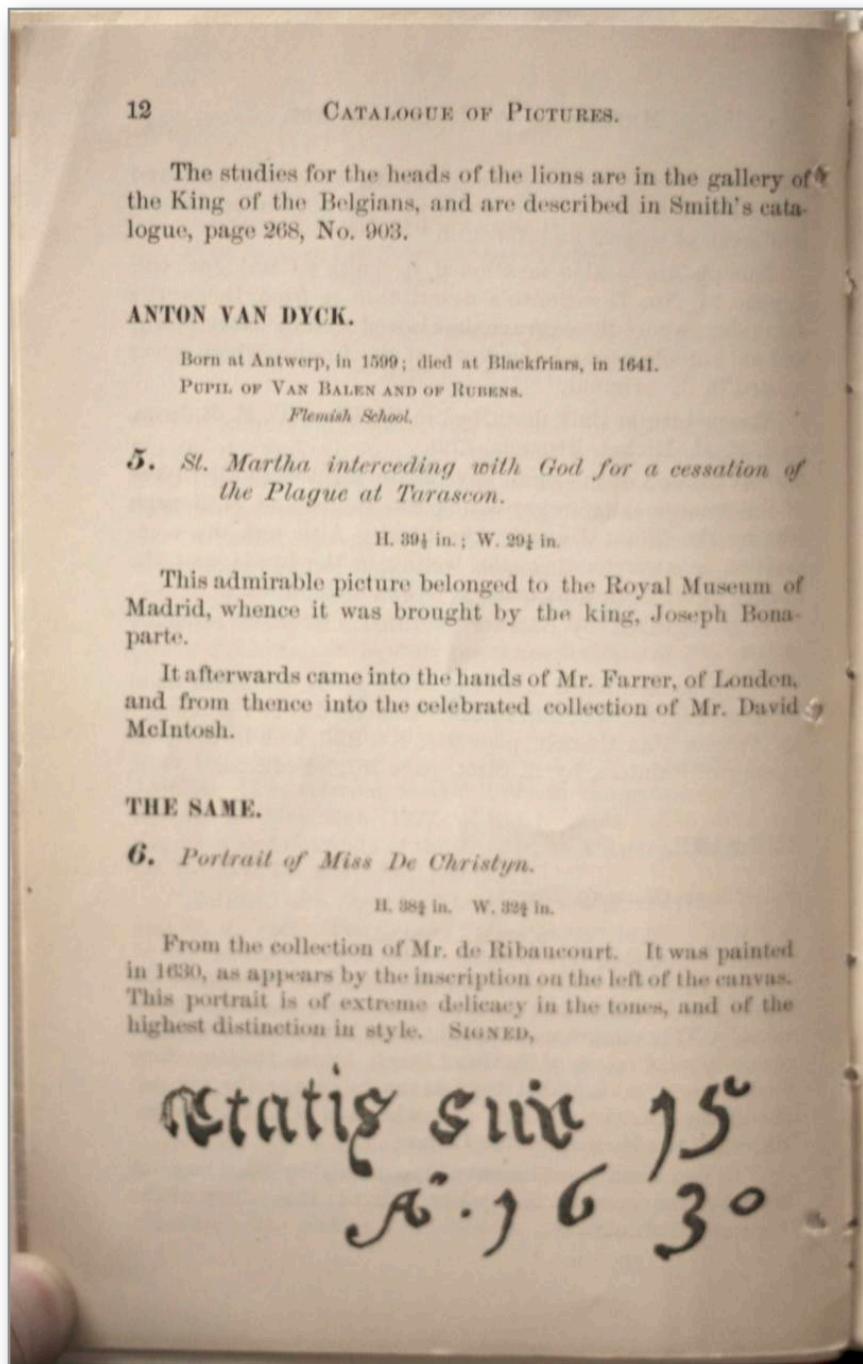
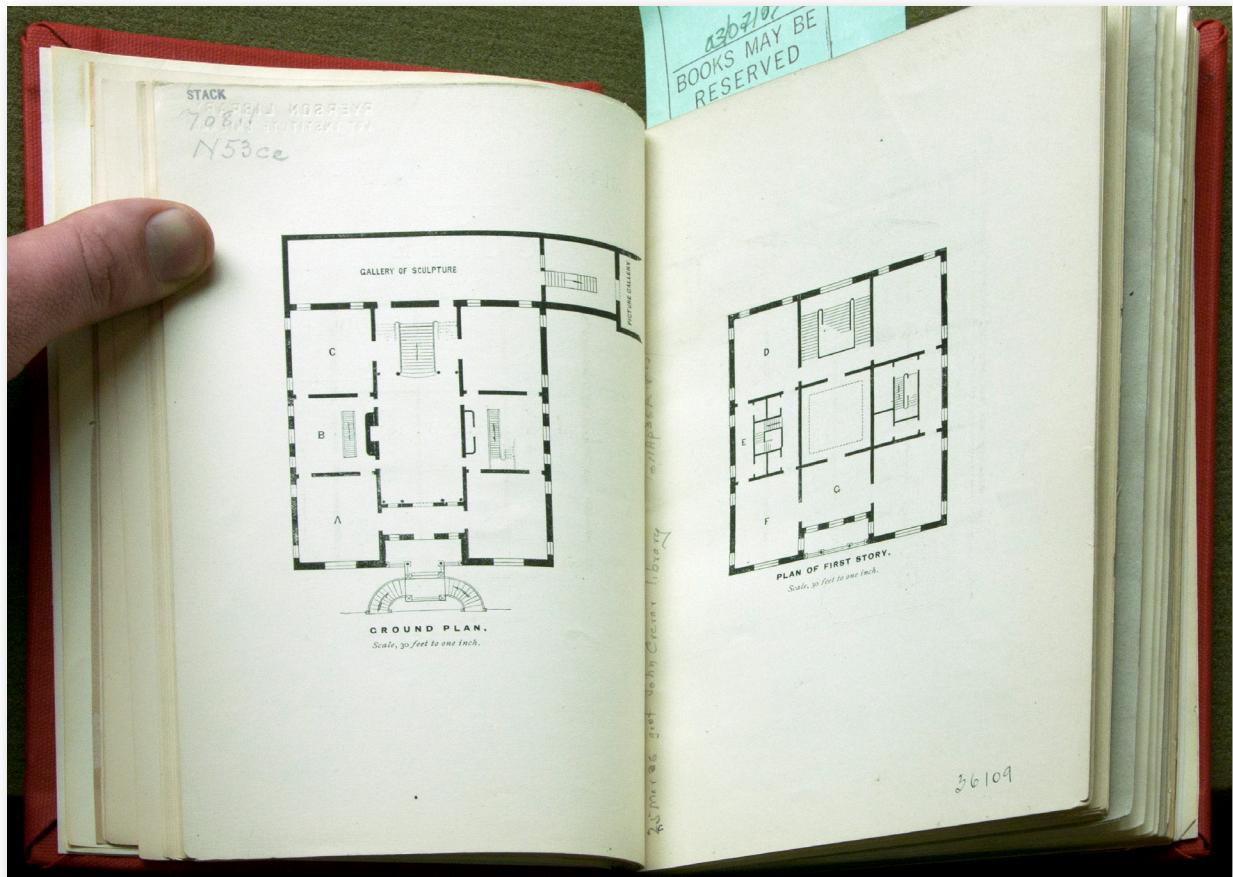


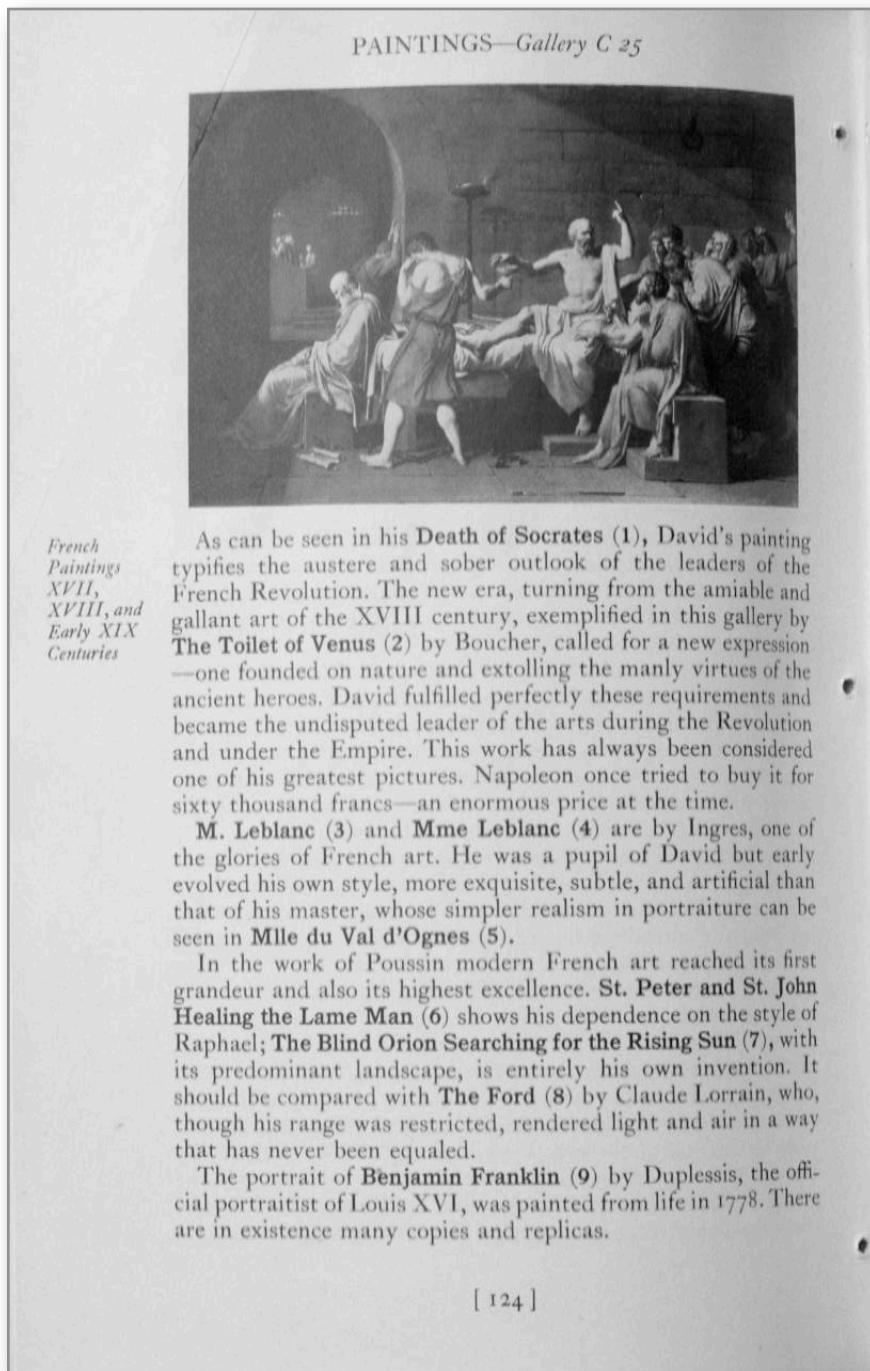
Figure 8



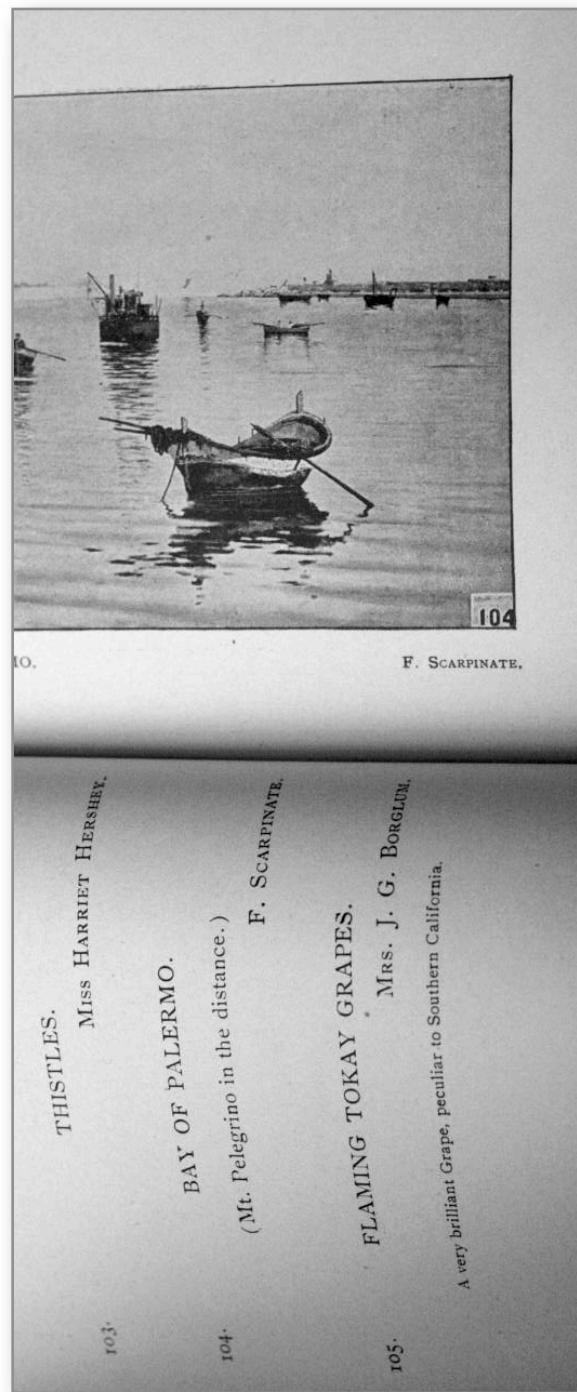
*Figure 9*



*Figure 10*



*Figure 11*



THISTLES.

Miss HARRIET HERSHY.

103.

BAY OF PALERMO.

(Mt. Pelegrino in the distance.)

F. SCARPINATE.

104.

FLAMING TOKAY GRAPES.

Mrs. J. G. BORGUM.

105.

A very brilliant Grape, peculiar to Southern California.

F. SCARPINATE.

Figure 12

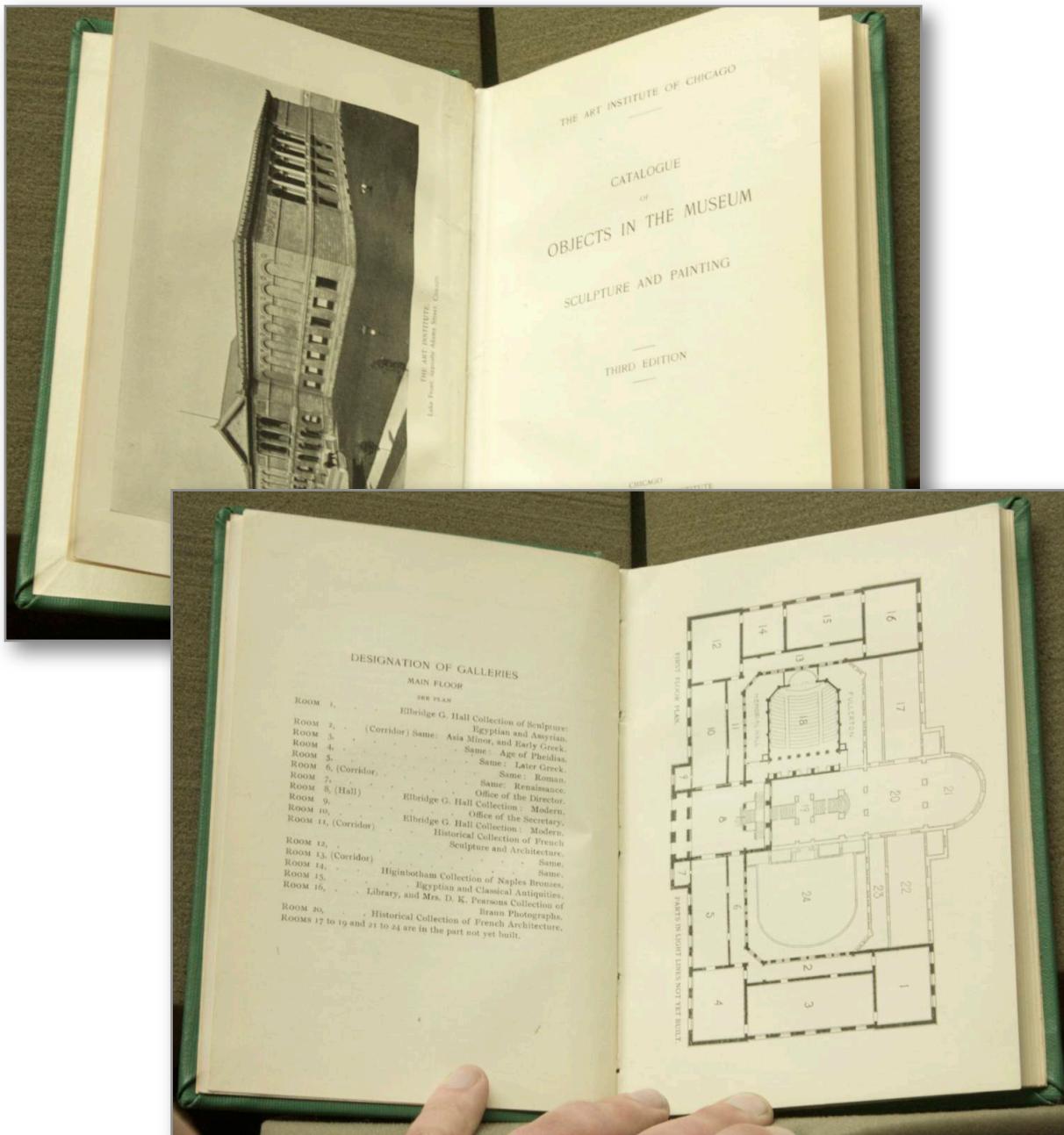
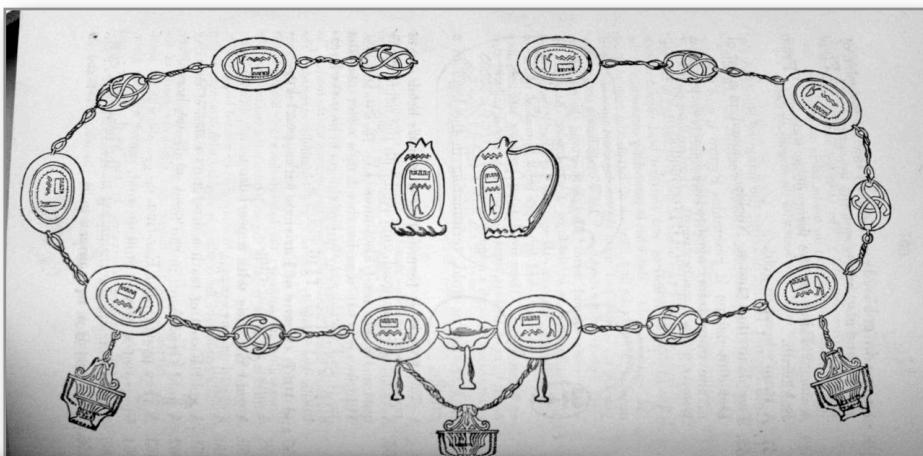


Figure 13



69

OF EGYPT 2750 YEARS B.C.

only instance of a royal name similarly encircled is a porcelain example in this collection, enclosing the name of the father of Sesostris. (See No. 599.) The O in the name is placed as in the examples sculptured in the tombs, not in the axis of the cartouche. The chickens have their unfledged wings; the Cerastes its horns, now only to be seen with the magnifying glass.

- 1051. A Ram's head in gold.
- 1052. Two Ear-rings and a Necklace, found in a jar at Dendera.

These ornaments are made of gold leaf, similar to that upon which hieroglyphics are usually stamped. There are three pendants of lapis-lazuli, and two beads of blue glass attached to the centre; where is also an oval amethyst bead, capped at each end with gold. But what is particularly curious is, that the name of Menes (the first Pharaoh of Egypt, who reigned 2750 years B.C.) is stamped upon the ear-rings, and upon eight oval plates of the necklace. These ovals have a dotted ornament around them. The circle around the ear-rings is plain, and is in the form of a cartouche. At equal distances between these ovals are curiously entwined devices, attached by a rude chain, formed of thin strips of flattened gold. There are also three pendants attached; they are in form of baskets, most beautifully executed, and will bear examination through a magnifying glass.

- 1053. An Ear-ring in gold, terminating in the head of a gazelle.
- 1054. A gold Ear-ring, terminating in a lion's head.      III
- 1055. A Scarabaeus in gold, engraved with the name of the queen of Horus (Thothmes IV., of Sir Gardner Wilkinson). It was by this king's order that the



Figure 14

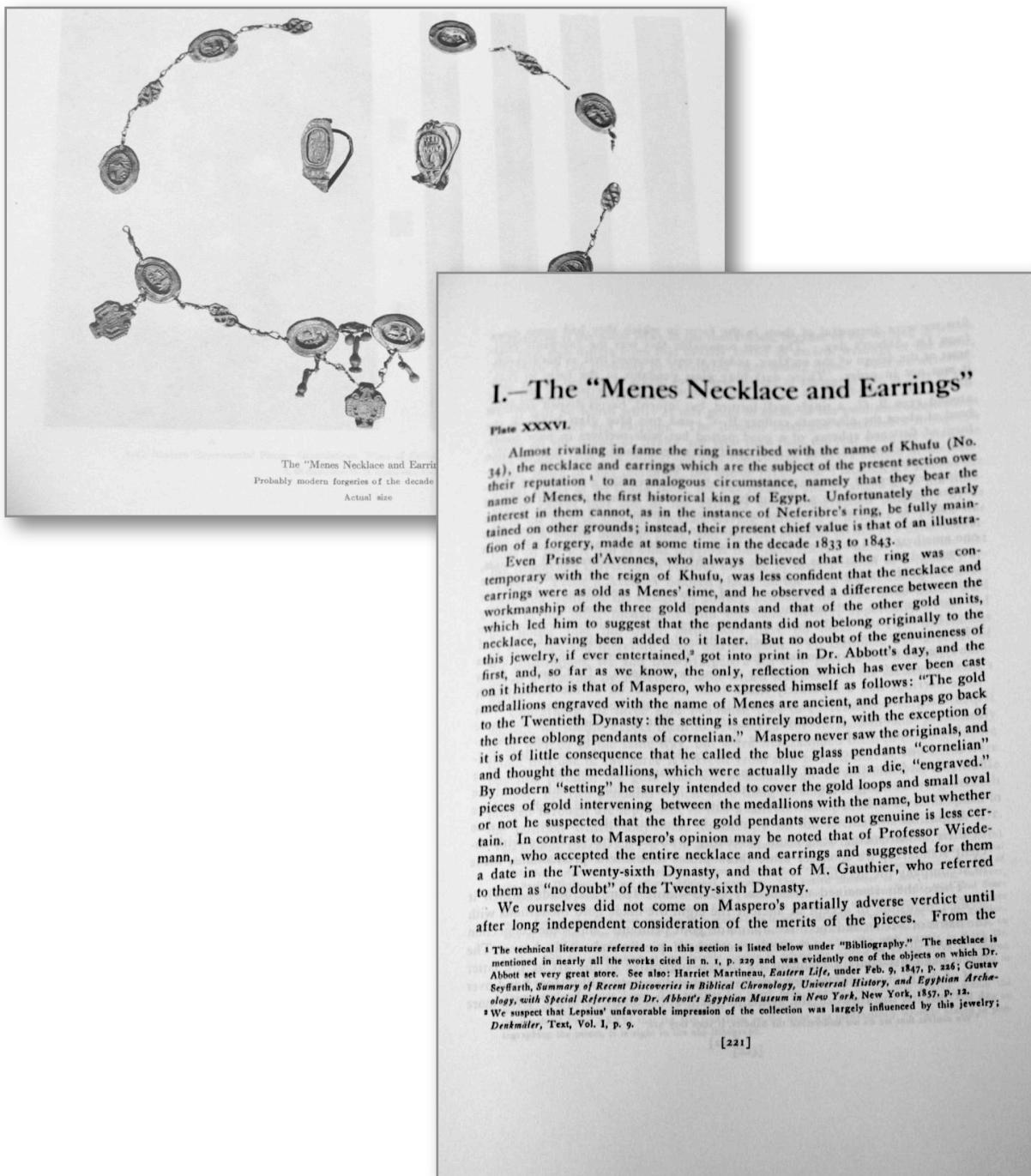


Figure 15

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

HOME COLLECTION EXHIBITIONS CALENDAR FAMILIES VISIT EDUCATION LIBRARIES ABOUT US MEMBERS SHOP

You are here: [Home](#) > [The Collection](#) > Object Information

## Object Information

Domenikos Theotokopoulos, called El Greco  
Spanish, born Crete, 1541–1614

*The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1577–79

Oil on canvas  
158 3/4 x 83 3/4 in. (403.2 x 211.8 cm); original image,  
approximate: 156 1/16 x 79 3/4 in. (396.4 x 202.5 cm)  
Inscribed on paper at lower right in Greek: (Domenikos  
Theotokopoulos, Cretan, displayed this in 1577)  
Gift of Nancy Atwood Sprague in memory of Albert Arnold Sprague,  
1906.99

Medieval to Modern European Painting and Sculpture  
Gallery 211

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