

Zentralbibliothek Zürich

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The Zentralbibliothek Zürich (ZB) is the public and university library of Zurich (www.zb.uzh.ch). With more than six million documents and more than half a million visitors per year, the ZB is one of the largest Swiss libraries. The map collection is the most comprehensive in Switzerland (karten@zb.uzh.ch).

The map department of the Zentralbibliothek Zürich is consulted by both the public and scholars. Since 2019, its staff have organized conferences, workshops, and a big exhibition. In addition to collecting traditional paper maps from around the world, the team is also involved in various innovation projects such as a nationwide map query tool, knowledge visualization and citizen science projects.

Collecting activities

The map department of the Zentralbibliothek pursues an active purchasing policy. It collects topographic maps, map series and maps of all countries. As a service provider regarding map history, it also acquires literature on this subject area (incl. bibliographies, gazetteers, and journals).

Researchers, teachers, and students at the University of Zurich are the main patrons of the map collection. As part of a public library, the department staff are helping other patrons, too.

Regarding printed maps, the collection holds the biggest number of map sheets in Switzerland, i.e., more than 330,000 items. It consists mainly of topographic maps from the 15th to the 21st century. Moreover, the collection contains about 4,000 atlases of which 530 date from before 1900 (notably 2 from the 15th century and 18 from the 16th century).

In 2022, the map department was able to acquire the South America documentation of the cartographer and mountaineer Robert Helbling (1874-1954). Helbling, honorary doctor of the University of Zurich, is relevant to the history of cartography because he was instrumental in promoting stereophotogrammetry as a surveying technique in Switzerland. The approximately 200 objects (incl. photos, sketches, original cartographic drawings, hand-coloured map prints and correspondence) document the Aconcagua region on the Chile-Argentina border in various decades and therefore also offer glaciologists a unique source. About ten years ago, the Swiss Alpine Museum held an exhibition on these very objects, followed by an

article in the journal *Cartographica Helvetica* (49/2014).

The ZB map department raises the public awareness of the collection by repeatedly conducting own exhibition projects.



Figure 1: Map reading room in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Zaehringplatz 6.

Science outreach

In 2019, numerous collaborations enabled the ZB exhibition «Cosmos in the chamber», which attracted an above-average number of visitors within three months (1,560). Specific fields of research at the University of Zurich were considered. In collaboration with the ETH Institute for Photogrammetry and Geodesy, a handicraft sheet on the St Gallen Globe and an interactive application of this famous globe via touchscreen were developed. The exhibition space was reminiscent of a 16th century art chamber («Kunst-kammer»). Not only the well-known cosmographers of the early modern period were honoured, but also a dozen or so Swiss scholars whose cosmographic undertakings had hitherto been little

known. Many of them were discussed in depth during the supporting programme, e.g., at the conference "Cosmos in Zurich Chambers" in cooperation with the University of Zurich. Seven lectures formed the scientific part of the programme, which attracted not only young academics but also numerous listeners from the non-academic public. Part of the didactic preparation were 42 guided tours and an accompanying publication, issued by the publishing house Cartographica Helvetica.

In the same year, Stanford scholar Chet van Duzer conducted the Workshop «Reading Medieval and Early Modern Maps» in the map department reading room (Figure 1). Eleven patrons from the public and the University attended.

The 14th International Globe Studies Symposium in October 2019 was organised by the map department staff in collaboration with the Swiss National Museum and the Abbey Library of St Gallen. In Zurich, 67 participants from 13 nations (including Australia and the U.S.) discussed 16 presentations.

Innovation projects

In addition to its traditional service, the map department is increasingly involved in innovative projects for the indexing and exploitation of the ZB map stock:

The St. Gallen Globe online project (Figure 2) was developed after several years of preliminary work in collaboration with the Knowledge Visualization research group of the Zurich University of the Arts

(ZHdK). A consortium led by the ZB map department represents the commissioning body, which also includes the Swiss National Museum and the Abbey Library of St Gallen. A basic model of the online globe has been accessible to the public since 2022. Further developments are underway to explain special points of interest. The visualization of population growth and the history of trade routes are planned. Furthermore, the online globe will be able to serve citizen science projects, such as tagging and georeferencing of place names: <https://3dglobe.ch>.

Kartenportal.CH is an online research tool for maps in Swiss library holdings, which has been developed in the last decade under the management of the ZB map department. Various Swiss libraries and archives are collaborating for the purpose of this central map reference. The innovative platform is internationally renowned for its stable and cost-effective technology, which provides a national scientific map catalogue with spatial search and easy-to-use filter options: <https://www.kartenportal.ch/>.

The map department has also conducted two citizen science georeferencing projects: Eminent holdings such as the manuscript maps, old Swiss maps and old atlases were digitised and georeferenced through a crowdsourcing approach (2509 maps in 2020 and 2919 maps in 2023). More than 30 citizen scientists registered for each project (the results have been uploaded on <https://www.oldmapsonline.org>).



Figure 2: Knowledge visualization through St Gallen Globe – online, <https://3dglobe.ch>.