

Chapter 12

Organizing the Cartographic Series: New Technical and Conceptual Contexts

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ABSTRACT

First of all, the author points out that the map materials are badly treated in the libraries. Then it presents the reasons why the cartographic series are so poorly cataloged. After this introduction, the chapter is divided into five parts. The first presents the general features, the history and the peculiarities of the cartographic series. The second part is mostly devoted to a particular category of document: the sheet indexes. It exposes how they are an essential tool to understand the geographic organization of each series. The third part deals with the statements printed on the sheets. It shows that they can be very useful but that, sometimes, they are misleading. The fourth part exposes how the new website CartoMundi takes a step forward in the world of the map libraries. To finish, the fifth part points out the futures issues of the map libraries in a changing context.

INTRODUCTION

Literature on the treatment of cartographic materials in libraries is rare. The main reason for this situation is that maps are treated as books, or rather that librarians

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tend to treat them as books, with only limited success. The standard used currently for classifying cartographic documents is in fact an adaptation of the standard used for books. As a result, it is difficult to produce consistent descriptions of maps and yet, at the same time, many readers are disappointed in their search for cartographic documents in library catalogs.

The reason is very simple. When searching for a map, the reader will look first for the representation of a physical place, usually by its name. The second step is to include other research criteria, whether generic (*author, title, publisher, date, etc.*) or specific (*scale, subject, projection method, etc.*). However, while the tools available offer high performance searches on generic criteria, the results are usually inadequate when searching for geographic data. At best, each document will be described by a few geographic names - five or six - which correspond to the most important places on the map, regardless of the hundreds or thousands of other locations it contains. Thus, catalogs are most often unable to respond to requests from readers.

However, it is important to identify two major categories of maps because they are displayed in substantially different ways in digital catalogs: monographs, and series (or sets) of maps. A monograph is a map on a single sheet, regardless of its scale. Many maps covering a town, a region or a country fall into this category. A map series is a map which, because of the scale of reduction, size of area represented and / or restrictions relating to paper size, must be represented on several sheets. Series can use a variety of scales: from a cadastral map with a scale of 1:500 to a world map at 10 millionths. It can also be produced on anything from 2 and more than 2,000 sheets. Unlike periodicals, there is no specific method for cataloguing maps series. Monographs usually bear titles which refer to their geographic content, e.g. *Carte de France, Map of London*. On the other hand, sheets in a map series are not always given a proper title and are sometimes only identified by a number. Even if there is a title, it is often unrepresentative or misleading. For example, the map of *Constantinople* in the *Balkans 1:100.000e* series represents the city of Istanbul with a very simplified image measuring less than a centimeter (Figures 1 and 2). For this reason, traditional catalogs are more effective for monographs than for series.

Digital catalogs are so poorly adapted to the peculiarities of map series that most map librarians continue to use old card catalogs, rather than take advantage of leading computerization programs. Similar observations have been made in many major map libraries around the world. In France, for example, the National Library's Maps Department - one of the 15 largest map libraries in the world - still uses a card catalog for map series¹ and its earliest records date back to the late nineteenth century. This card catalog covers approximately 350,000 documents, about a third of its total holdings (Figure 3).

This situation is changing for two reasons. First, multi-purpose databases developed during the last decades of the twentieth century have their limitations. Cur-

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