

National Background: Switzerland 2015

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Switzerland's federal structure is mirrored in its network of libraries and archives. In every Canton there is a library in charge of storing the cultural documentary heritage (mainly books and manuscripts), as well as a State Archive. The two national institutions, the Swiss National Library (founded in 1895) and the Swiss Federal Archives created after the birth of the Federal State in 1848, both located in Berne, keep very few documents prior to the 19th century. The main manuscript collections are held in cantonal libraries and in convents. The web page www.codices.ch, which is maintained by the Curatorium for the cataloguing of medieval and premodern manuscripts (see below), contains information on Swiss collections and compiles a list of catalogues and other finding aids. An inventory of the manuscript transmission of German medieval texts is kept up to date by the project group 'Handschriftencensus', which counts Rudolf Gamper, formerly of the Vadiana Library of St.Gall, among its members. As a major development for scholarly research on manuscripts, the E-Codices project 'Virtual manuscript Library of Switzerland' makes 1233 complete digital copies of manuscripts from 51 different collections available on the internet. A complementary project is E-Manuscripta operated by the Zentralbibliothek Zürich but open in principle to all Swiss manuscript collections. It presents early modern and modern manuscripts as well as letters, autographs and personal papers. Only the major Swiss collections are mentioned below.

Content: Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen; Kloster Einsiedeln; Universitätsbibliothek Basel; Burgerbibliothek Bern; Zentralbibliothek Zürich; Bibliothèque de Genève; Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Cologne; Zentral- und Hochschulbibliothek Luzern

Universitätsbibliothek Basel

<http://www.ub.unibas.ch/en/ub-hauptbibliothek/recherche/historischer-bestand/>

The University Library of Basel, first mentioned in 1471 (the University was founded in 1460), is the oldest secular Swiss library and keeps over 1700 medieval manuscripts, many of them of indigenous origin. Among the collections inherited from monasteries, the Greek manuscripts of the Dominican theologian John of Ragusa, who played an important part in the Council of Basel, deserve special mention.

Burgerbibliothek Bern

<http://www.burgerbib.ch/d/abteilungen/abteilungen.html>

The Burgerbibliothek in Berne, which belongs to the civic community, houses a well-known collection of medieval manuscripts, the Bongarsiana Codices, assembled by the French humanist and diplomat Jacques Bongars (1554-1612) whose heir, Jakob Graviseth (1598-1658), married the daughter of a Bernese patrician.

Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, Cologne

<http://fondationbodmer.ch/bibliotheque/recherches/en-collaboration/>

Near Geneva, in Cologne, the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, owned by a foundation created in 1971 by the collector Martin Bodmer (1899-1971), houses a distinguished collection of books and manuscripts, on display in a museum designed by the Swiss architect Mario Botta in 1999.

Kloster Einsiedeln

<http://www.kloster-einsiedeln.ch/>

The Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedeln, founded in 835, in the canton of Schwyz, is still active and is an important pilgrimage site.

Major holdings:

- 1230 manuscripts (500 of them written before 1500)
- 1100 incunabula and early prints (up to 1520)
- about 650 medieval codices.

Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen

<http://www.stibi.ch/>

Included in the UNESCO list of global cultural heritage sites in 1983, the Abbey Library of St. Gall is the oldest library in Switzerland, and one of the earliest and most important monastic libraries in the world. The abbey was founded in 612, and followed the Rule of St. Benedict from 747 onwards. The first indication of the existence of a library and scriptorium appears in the famous plan of the abbey dating from around 820.

Major holdings:

- Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts dating from the 8th to the 11th centuries

Bibliothèque de Genève

<http://www.ville-ge.ch/bge/>

Major holdings:

- 88 manuscripts from the Petau library (Paul and Alexander Petau were French members of Parliament in the late 16th and early 17th century) Many of these manuscripts are illuminated (the Geneva collection is renowned for its relevance in the field of history of art), and come from France and Italy.

Zentral- und Hochschulbibliothek Luzern

www.zhbluzern.ch/index.php?id=942

Major holdings:

- 82 medieval manuscripts, most of which come from the Franciscan monastery of Luzern and the Cistercian Abbey of St. Urban that was dissolved in 1848

Zentralbibliothek Zürich

<http://www.zb.uzh.ch/spezielsammlungen/index.html.de>

Major holdings:

- 650 medieval manuscripts, including quite a few Hebrew and Oriental documents
- It inherited the libraries of the Cathedral chapter of the Grossmünster, as well as of the Rheinau Monastery.
- Among its most famous manuscripts are the Purple Psalter (Zürcher Purpurpsalter, 6th century) and the World Chronicle of Rudolf von Ems (around 1340).