



Abbey Library of St Gall

Holdings, Mission and Organisation

The Abbey Library of St Gall is one of the most important historic libraries in the world and one of the oldest still in existence today. Its origins go back to Gallus, who brought the first books to St Gallen around 612.

Having evolved historically, the book collection is unique in its unity, completeness and quality. It illustrates the development of European culture and documents the cultural achievements of the Abbey of St Gall from the 7th century to its demise in 1805.

The library with its famous Baroque Hall is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in the world. As a whole, it forms the cultural and tourist centre of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Abbey District of St Gall (1983) and is its main attraction.

The Abbey Library has twice been listed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, in 2017 with its historical book collection up to 1805, and in 2009 with the St Gall Nibelung manuscript (Cod. Sang. 857) as one of the principal versions of The Song of the Nibelungs.

The unity of a book collection, a building and an intangible heritage constitutes the Abbey Library. Since its beginnings in the early Middle Ages, it has been a library and academic institution with supraregional appeal, and since the middle of the 20th century has been one of the most visited historical museums in Switzerland.

The library is an institution of the Catholic Administration of the canton of St Gallen, the principal heir to the cultural treasure of the Abbey of St Gall. The Swiss Confederation, the canton of St Gallen and the city of St Gallen contribute financially to the preservation and maintenance of the library.

The organisational structure of the Abbey Library is divided into three areas: the library, the museum and scholarship. These form an indivisible operational unit, and they support each other in the care of the important heritage. The library conducts its public relations work independently and its activities are governed by the principles of freedom of programme and freedom of scholarship.

The Abbey Library upholds values such as human dignity, respect and tolerance, justice and fairness, honesty, credibility, responsibility, trust, sustainability, foresight and reliability. The employees uphold these values both internally and externally.

The Abbey Library works locally with the Abbey Archives of St Gall, the Diocese of St Gallen and the parishes of the Catholic Administration, the Abbey District World Heritage Association and the St Gallen–Lake Constance Tourism Organisation. Regionally, nationally and internationally, it cooperates with libraries, museums and archives and fosters collaboration with cultural, educational and research institutions in Switzerland and abroad. It also collaborates with World Heritage Sites as well as with tourism organisations and tour operators in Switzerland and beyond.

1. The Library

The library holdings have developed continuously since the beginnings of the monastery and have been preserved on site as completely as in no other comparable collection worldwide dating back to the 1st millennium. Around 60 percent of the manuscripts mentioned in the catalogues of the 9th and 10th centuries are still on site today.

In addition to European cultural history, the holdings also reflect the development of the library system and book trade from the early Middle Ages to the present day.

The manuscripts produced in the library's own scriptorium from the 8th to the 11th century form the core of the holdings. They include many highlights of European importance, among them magnificent manuscripts such as the *Evangelium longum*, the *Golden Psalter* and the *Folchart Psalter*, but also many important – sometimes unique – textual versions as well as the main witnesses of the cultural activities of the St Gall monks themselves, some of whom attained importance far beyond the monastery.

Various acquisitions from outside, for example classical manuscripts and palimpsests, Irish manuscripts or the St Gall Nibelung manuscript (*Memory of the World Programme*), have organically enriched the library holdings over the centuries.

Despite the great completeness of the library, many St Gall manuscripts are to be found outside St Gallen. As far as possible, the Catholic Administration – with the support of the Friends of the Abbey Library, among others – works to reacquire books and objects that once belonged to the library.

Prints have also been collected since the 15th century. Particularly noteworthy are the 5 block books and around 1,100 incunabula; an incomplete collection of valuable broadsheets of the 15th-century monk Gallus Kemli; and around 650 St Gall monastery prints. The library also includes a special collection with the remains of the monastery's cabinet of curiosities and other art objects.

Today, the Abbey Library is a specialised research library that is open to the public and an active lending library with a total of about 160,000 books and other media housed in the Baroque Hall and in several storerooms. The library maintains and documents its own historical holdings and supplements them in accordance with its acquisitions policy, which focuses on the history of the monastery and the Abbey District of St Gallen.

The catalogue is indexed according to the standards of the Swiss Academic Libraries. It is intended to be easily searchable for all who are interested in the Abbey of St Gall. Among the resources of the library is an on-site reading room. On the e-codices platform, the manuscripts can be easily consulted worldwide.

2. Museum

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Abbey Library has run a successful museum with worldwide appeal to tourists. Until 2018, it was limited to the Baroque Hall of the Abbey Library and the so-called Lapidarium in the cellar below the library wing.

The museum was expanded in 2019 and now consists of three highlights: the Baroque Hall as the main attraction, along with the Vaulted Cellar of the Abbey Library and the Exhibition Hall of the Abbey Archives. The museum operations are run by the Abbey Library on behalf of the Catholic Administration of the Canton of St Gallen and the Canton of St Gallen. While the Baroque Hall and the Vaulted Cellar are located in the former enclosure of the monastery, the Exhibition Hall is in the armoury wing on the other side of the Abbey District. In addition, there are two shops with ticket offices.

Spatial separation is a challenge for both the museum service and the perception of a World Heritage site. In addition to the Abbey Library, the library building houses a section of the “flade” secondary school. School activities generate some commotion, but the students also contribute to the liveliness of the place.

The Abbey Library runs its museum service in accordance with the standards of the Swiss Museums Association (VMS) and the ethical guidelines of the International Council of Museums ICOM. It participates in local, regional and supraregional initiatives in the museum sector. Likewise, the Abbey Library is closely networked with the regional tourism authority and the other World Heritage sites in Switzerland.

The museum service of the Abbey Library sees itself as a permanent public institution serving the community. Researching, collecting, preserving and presenting are the responsibilities of scholarship and the library. The museum service, on the other hand, is responsible for cultural mediation, visitor services and public relations.

Inclusion, participation and sustainability are important aspects of the museum’s mission. The educational offers, such as guided tours, workshops and other events are carried out in cooperation with the academic team. In addition to the management of the museum service and education, the museum team includes the staff of the museum shops, the supervisors and the mediators.

The first impression made on all guests is the museum service. Friendliness and good-quality assistance are top priorities.

As a World Heritage Site, the anchoring and identification of the local community with its heritage are just as important as its regional and international appeal. The target audience are people of all ages, genders, cultures and religions.

3. Scholarly work

Since its beginnings, the Abbey Library has been a place of learning and the mediation of knowledge and scholarship by providing academic resources not only in the form of books and media, but also by having people here who engage in academic work.

The Academic Department of the Abbey Library mainly works to catalogue the holdings, to research the history of the Abbey Library and the monastery of St Gall and to communicate their findings through exhibitions, publications, lectures and conferences. With its research work, the academic staff, in collaboration with the Abbey Archives and international research, defines the fundamental narratives of the monastic history of St Gall. The principle of academic freedom applies. The staff's participation in scholarly discourse is an essential basis for ensuring quality in the cataloguing and research of the holdings.

Through the scholarly cataloguing of its holdings according to the highest standards, the Abbey Library contributes to basic research in history. It provides scholars with the necessary information and enables them to gain a competent understanding of the collection.

With e-codices, the Abbey Library of St Gall co-founded one of the first and still leading platforms for the digitisation of manuscripts, which it continues to run in collaboration with the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. E-codices provides scholarship with access to the digitised manuscripts and their metadata and makes a significant contribution to the worldwide communication of the cultural heritage of the Abbey of St Gall.

Academically-based mediation is of particular importance in a World Heritage Site. Through exhibitions, conferences, summer schools, lectures and publications, the Academic Department communicates knowledge about the library and the Abbey of St Gall to the world at large. This activity forms the basis for the mediation of the Abbey Library and the Abbey District, a link to scholarship that ensures quality. Important target groups of this scholarly mediation work are schools, the professional world, tourist guests as well as the public of the region.

The Academic Department includes the Specialist Office for Written Heritage which makes the knowledge and skills of the Abbey Library available to others. It advises monasteries and other historic institutions in Switzerland on how to deal with written cultural heritage and promotes professional networks in the German-speaking world. The Specialist Office maintains the Helvetia Sacra database, the most important electronic collection of information on the history of Switzerland's ecclesiastical institutions. In addition, on behalf of the Catholic Administration Council, the Specialist Office is responsible for implementing the Cultural Artifacts Decree of the Catholic Administration of the Canton of St Gallen.

The Abbey Library uses contemporary media for its publishing activities. Printed publications are generally published by Verlag am Klosterhof, whose office is run by the Library.

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