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Estonian Literary Museum

Map collection of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu
There are 3 big map collections in Tartu (University of Tartu Library, Archival Library of Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian Historical Archives) and several smaller ones (bibliophiles, museums, various institutions). Formation of the 3 largest collections started already during the period of Russian empire. The map collection of the Archival Library has been existing since 1909 when the Estonian National Museum was founded. As several existing map collections were added to this one, the history of this map collection begins at the end of the 19th century. In 1940 the Archival Library with its map collection was separated from the Estonian National Museum and thus the Estonian Literary Museum was founded.

Today this map collection includes ca 7000 maps, of which ca 3500 maps and plans have been published before 1945 and 3500 after 1946. Only a few maps date from the Soviet period, since most of the cartographic works were considered to be restricted literature and were held in special stocks of larger libraries. Comparatively few maps were published during that period in Estonia and it was not compulsory to send copies to the Estonian libraries from the cartographical centers of the Soviet Union.

The oldest map in the Archival Library is a map of Livonia from the atlas "Theatrum orbis terrarum" (1573) by Abraham Ortelius. There are a lot of cartographic works by Dutch and French cartographers of the 17th century. Since the Estonian region belonged to the Russian Empire in the 18th century, we can find here many maps and atlases by well-known Russian cartographers. Maps of Livonia, Estonia, the Baltic Sea and the neighboring regions have been of greatest interest, but also other maps, especially those of Russian Empire and Europe have been stocked. Another principle is to collect cartographic materials in Estonian. The Archival Library owns the most complete collection of atlases, plans and maps in the Estonian language. Alongside printed works, some manor and farm plans in manuscript from the Swedish time are preserved. The most interesting of them is "Karten aller Bauerhöfe zu Laitz" (1877), a convoluted which includes 65 plans.

Many libraries did not preserve restricted cartographic materials during the Soviet period in Estonia, therefore collection building and bibliographic work were seriously impeded for nearly 50 years. Owing to Soviet regime we miss a lot of maps of Estonian regions and maps published abroad. Although the availability of cartographic works in our major libraries can be found in the database ESTER, map collections of smaller museums and private institutions have not been looked through yet.