Hart, Katherine H. "The Atlas of Early Printing."

Citation details

Early Modern Digital Review, vol. 4, no. 3, 2021, https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38000.

Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme, vol. 44, no. 3, 2021, pp. 222-227, https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38000.

Peer review

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Early Modern Digital Review

Early Modern Digital Review is an online, open-access, and refereed journal publishing high-quality reviews of digital projects related to early modern society and culture. It is committed to productive evaluation of both established digital resources and recent tools and projects. Its publications are distributed online by the journal and its partners, and in print by *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme.*

(e.g., with a glossary that gives the English translation of the Italian words that constitute the dataset) or by showing the many ramifications of the research work done so far by the DECIMA team. Another strength of the website is that it provides useful documentation about the technology used for the map (ArcGIS) and a most useful list of resources such as affiliated projects and bibliographical references in a variety of fields, including 3D modelling, urban history, social history, online mapping, Florentine architecture, early modern maps, and cartography.

In conclusion, DECIMA is a project both wide-ranging and field-specific, which is of potential interest to researchers who intend to explore the history of early modern Florence. DECIMA opens new avenues of research in digital mapping and in the re-encoding of archival information.

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https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.37999

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The Atlas of Early Printing. Other.
Iowa City: University of Iowa Libraries, 2008. Accessed 14 May 2021.
atlas.lib.uiowa.edu.

Background

The Atlas of Early Printing is an interactive map that integrates data found in common bibliographic catalogues of fifteenth-century printing with GIS technology to present a novel teaching resource. This interactive map visualization provides users with the ability to situate early printing history at a given place and time within a cultural context. The atlas is built upon digital versions of multiple scholarly sources, a primary resource being the *Incunabula Short Title Catalog* (*ISTC*; data.cerl.org/istc/_search).

The atlas went online initially in 2008, was updated in 2013 and again in 2019, expanding from the basic map points based on data found in the *ISTC* to the addition of ecclesiastical borders and other information, including the

spread of typefaces detailed in the digital edition of *Typenrepertorium der Wiegendrucke* (*TW*; tw.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de). The website is constructed using WordPress, and the interactive map is created with Esri's ArcGIS software. The animated maps bring to life the maps depicting the spread of printing found in Febvre and Martin's *L'Apparition du Livre* (The coming of the book).[1] The data found on the map is derived from multiple authoritative resources; as such, the FAQ reminds users that gaps on the map are likely due to gaps in the original resources.

The website, searching and cartography

The website is centred on the interactive map. Drop-down menus under "About the Atlas" describe "Using the Atlas," the "Project Team," "Contributors & Partners," the "Project History," "Presentations & Publications," and importantly, the "Sources." Another drop-down menu, "About Early Printing," provides useful instructional videos on bookmaking, as well as readings and presentations on the topic of incunabula and early printed book catalogues.

The map includes a timeslider at the top and a selection of filters on the left. The timeslider provides the option to select a starting and ending date. Once selected, the timeslider can also move forward in time, using the play button, and retains the selected time span: for example, a one-year or ten-year period. The map's content is presented using filters, starting with red points representing the "Spread of Printing," then golden circles of increasing size that show the data from the *ISTC* as "Output by Location." Next, the user can select "Typography," triangles that are colour coded to represent data from the *Typenrepertorium*; and then "Ecclesiastical Borders," areas shown by colour but not labelled; then "Political Borders" and "Trade Routes," which are an interesting addition but also unlabelled, and continuing with "Bishoprics," "Paper Mills," "Universities," "Fairs," and lastly, "Conflicts." These last few map layers are self-explanatory and are represented by different-coloured markers.

1. Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre* (Paris: Les Editions Aldin Miche, 1958).

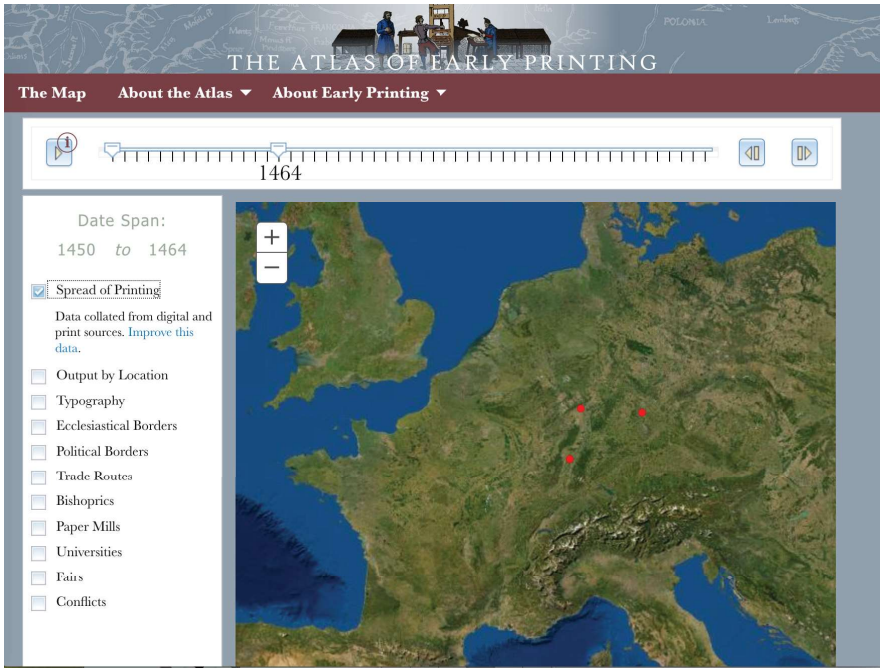

Figure 1. "Spread of Printing" filter applied to "1450 to 1464" timeslider.

To search the Atlas, this reviewer moved the right-hand timeslider to 1464 so that the date span changed to "1450 to 1464," and filtered on "Spread of Printing." Three red markers appeared (see fig. 1). Clicking on one red marker, the *ISTC* metadata appeared and included the "City," "Year of First Printing," "Printer," and a link to the "*ISTC* Record" (see fig. 2). Additional metadata fields were entitled "First Work" and "Author"; however, no information was shown, likely due to gaps in the original source data. The link to the *ISTC* record opens in the same window as the map (see fig. 3). Selection of additional fields, including typography, and the time period 1475 to 1480 is shown in Figure 4. Unfortunately, there is no legend on the map, so users must infer the content based on the changes that appear on the map when layers are selected.

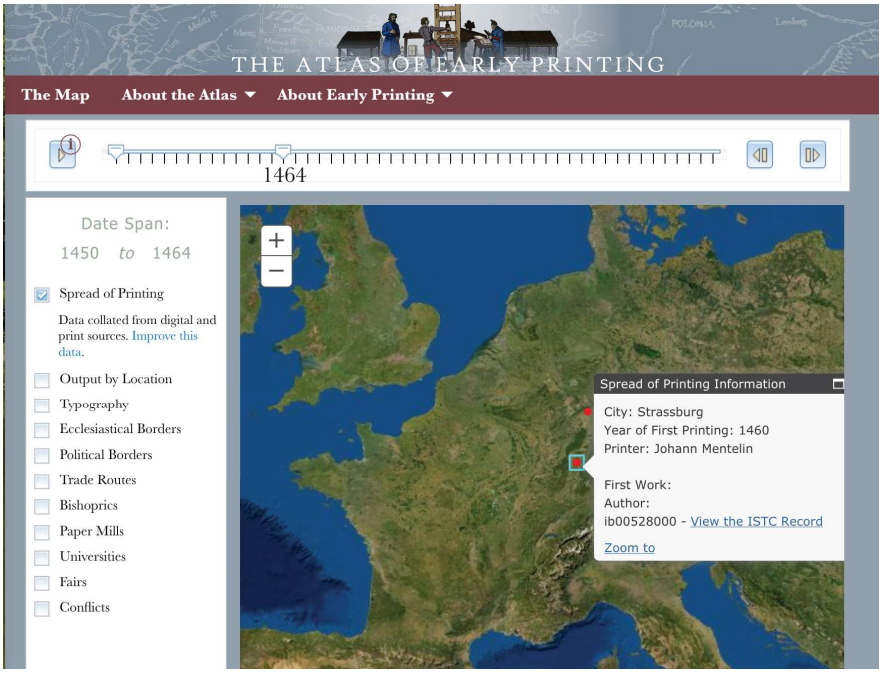

Figure 2. A comment box appears after selecting a red marker on the map that contains *ISTC* metadata, including "City," "Year of First Printing," "Printer," and a link to the "ISTC Record."

Assessment

The map is straightforward and provides a wealth of information; however, a few adjustments could strengthen the user experience. Providing a modern administrative boundary basemap option would allow users to more easily orient themselves. And adding a legend, a basic component of both print and digital maps, would provide immediate meaning to the colours and symbols displayed. Of lesser importance, but worth considering, is the incorporation of a scale bar that would provide perspective of distances. Lastly, the creators may reconsider the function and utility of the political borders layer, and perhaps add labels in order to make this information meaningful to the viewer.

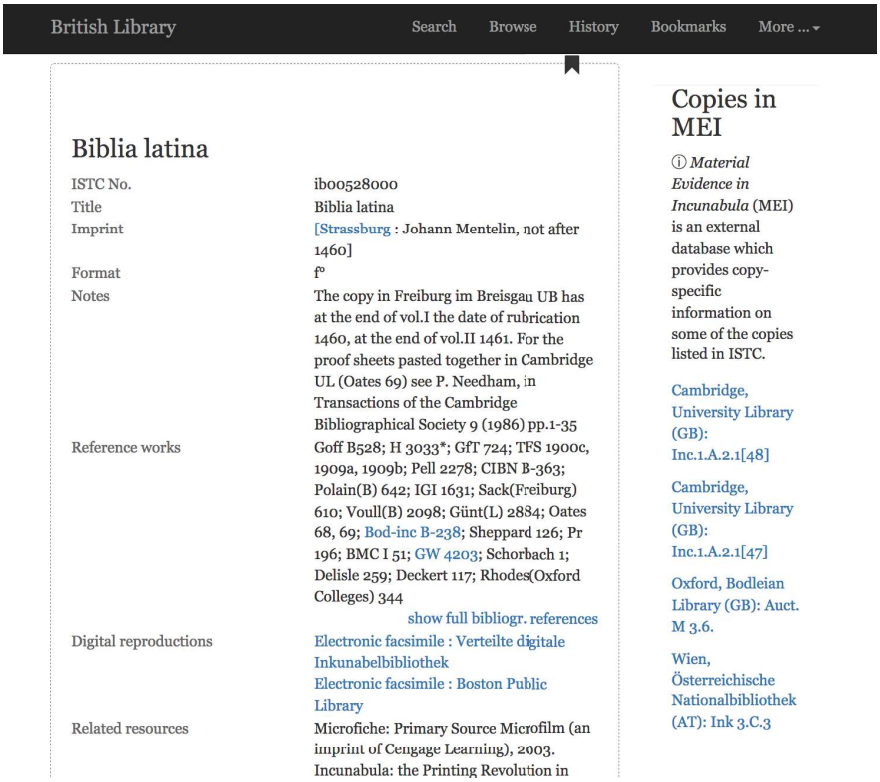

Figure 3. The link to the *ISTC* record can be accessed through the comment box on the map.

The website's "How to Use the Atlas" describes the provenance of the data as "of critical importance to using the Atlas" and further shares some difficulties and caveats with the determination of date. The problem of mapping uncertain dates is a common dilemma in digital geohumanities. The Atlas's statement and description of the temporal challenges that their data presented and their approach in mapping are useful and appropriate. As some users may want to download the data, it would be worth stating how this might be done.

The Atlas of Early Printing should appeal to both general users and scholars of early printing. Through its interactive visualization, it supports new topics of inquiry, as an example of the ever-expanding realm of geohumanities. The strength of this site is its contribution to those engaged in scholarship

on early printing: namely, a complex atlas that uses multiple, well-regarded, scholarly sources. Overlaying the various data sets provides the user with a new approach to understanding the contexts—cultural and economic—surrounding the expansion of early printing. The Atlas provides a visualization and intellectual *entrée* to the geographical aspects of the evolution of printing. It acknowledges its many partners, and appropriately credits the graduate assistants and students who have contributed since its inception.

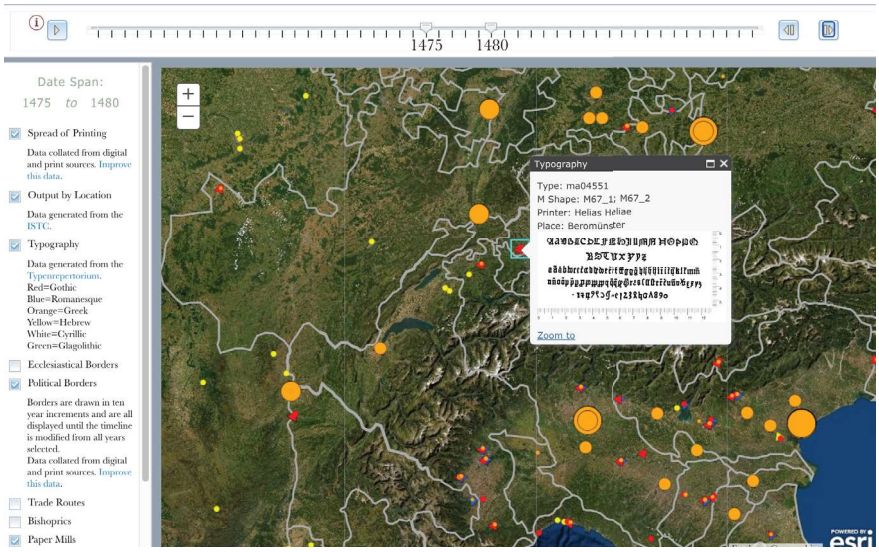

Figure 4. Selection of additional fields, including typography and the years 1475 to 1480.

Some aspects of the map could be more polished and user friendly; however, the site is quite usable and contains a wealth of information. The Atlas of Early Printing is unique in its geographic and interactive presentation via a compilation of scholarly print resources. It supports analysis of spatial patterns and the distribution and dispersion of early book phenomena, and is a welcome and significant resource in the field.

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https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38000