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THE VIATICALPES PROJECT.

Valorizing an Exceptional Cultural Heritage: the Illustration of Traveling in the Alps

The aim of the VIATICALPES Project (<http://www.unil.ch/viaticAlpes>) is to review a targeted body of texts concerning the area of travel iconography involved with the representation of Alpine territories and their civilizations. The project, funded by the *Swiss National Foundation* and the *University of Lausanne*, has been made possible thanks to the cooperation between a team of academic researchers specialized in travel literature and a number of important Swiss libraries: the *Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire de Lausanne* and the *Swiss National Library*, among others. The project is part of a larger international program named VIATICA, which was launched by the CRLV at Paris IV-Sorbonne and which deals with illustrations contained in travel literature concerning a variety of different geographical areas.

The iconographic documentation related to this travel literature, however, is not contained in the inventory. It is sparse and difficult to access. Nonetheless, a great deal of it is of significant interest from historical, artistic, literary and geographical perspectives; not to mention its witness value to our cultural heritage in general. At the present and for a variety of reasons, however, it is virtually impossible to work on these documents seriously: no index of them exists; access to them is highly impractical and fastidious, as they are scattered through numerous books that are rarely available at the same site.

To date, the VIATICALPES team has already inventoried over 10,000 illustrations of the Swiss, Savoyard and Italian Alps, published between 1544 and 1866. A thousand of these have already been digitalized, described and indexed, this corpus is, at last, easily available to researchers and the general public alike. This has been achieved by placing it on a knowledge base — dedicated to the field of the illustration of printed travel writing — that is openly accessible on Internet.

In their presentation, images are linked to their associated texts — both in the form of extracts and of hyperlinks directing the user to the complete version of the work in which they were originally published (once these latter have been digitalized for the web). Furthermore, biographical and bibliographical information about the authors and illustrators concerned appears alongside the images displayed, thus allowing the context of their usage and production to be elucidated.

One of our principal goals is to facilitate user-access to such illustrations: thus it will also be possible to situate the actual location of the original illustration on an interactive map. The heterogeneity of subjects and the richness of the image corpus required a considerable refinement of the indexing (thematic as well as geographical), grouping and description techniques involved, so as to provide an optimal response to the needs of different users. The RIVES Database of travel images is the joint property of the University of Lausanne and the University of Paris-Sorbonne and is a platform shared by a number of different research teams. Later, it will also contain documentation originating in other geographical regions. There is an overall potential, combining all associated projects, of many thousands of images. Ultimately, this will constitute a quite exceptional documentary fund. The database will also become a valuable teaching tool at all levels. The knowledge base is accessible online at: <http://www.unil.ch/viatimages> and has been available to all kinds of public since April 2009.

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