Introduction

Following a proposal to the 7th International Geographic Congress (Berlin 1899), for the development of an international agreement on nomenclature and terminologies for sub-oceanic features, the Congress nominated and tasked a Commission with the preparation of a series of bathymetric ocean charts. Eight leading scientists of the day were appointed to the Commission, which set about producing the first edition of the GECBO chart series.

Since that important first step, the Principality of Monaco has played an important role in supporting the GECBO project. In the spring of 1903, work started on assembling the data required to produce the first charts. The hydrographic services of all the maritime nations were invited to provide any data that they had in the form of charts or logs. Significant contributions were made by the British Admiralty, the Ministry of the Imperial Navy of Berlin, the Coast and Geodetic Survey of the United States, the French Hydrographic Service and various underssea cable laying companies.

On the 11th of January 1904, Prince Albert I presented drafts of the entire set of the GECBO first edition charts to a session of the Académie des sciences de Paris. They were well received and widely commented on in both the French press and abroad. Later that year, the charts were presented to the 8th International Geographical Congress held in Washington, D.C.

Following the death of Prince Albert in 1922, the Government of Monaco invited the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHBr) to take over the production of the GECBO charts. Since that time, the IHBr has maintained a repository of the five successive series in its archives and in 2015, it undertook to digitally scan these charts. A snapshot of the scanned GECBO charts is presented here.

Conclusion

When presenting the 1st Edition to the 8th International Geographical Congress held in Washington, D.C., Professor Thouvenot’s prophetic words (cited below) reflect the spirit of this great enterprise:

“The work is finished to the name of His Serene Highness Prince Albert I of Monaco. I have the honour and, I dare say, the pride to submit this to the Congress. Here then is everything which is known hitherto about the relief of the ocean floor.

For many years to come, cartographers, geographers, oceanographers and scientists will continue their soundings, for now we must proceed to fill in the details, no point of any area on the globe will escape our investigations. The incessant and unfailing efforts of succeeding generations are the glory of mankind. In one century – in ten centuries – this is the chart our great-great-neighbours will use, perfected but not changed.”

More about GECBO – (http://www.gebco.net)