# Exploring European Maps of the Early Modern Era
## Syllabus

**Instructor**  
Chet Van Duzer  
Email  
cvanduzer@uchicago.edu

**Quarter:** Spring  
**Start – end date:** March 31 – May 5 (6 weeks)  
**Session day/time:** Thursday, 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM CT  
**Course Code and Section:** HUAS91101 22S1  
**Modality:** Remote learning

## Course Overview

The maps of Google and Apple get us from Point A to Point B, but medieval and Renaissance maps serve a much broader range of functions, and are endlessly fascinating windows into early modern culture. They are complex visions of the world influenced by the cartographer’s culture, interests, purposes, and intended audience. In this course we will learn in detail about the three principal types of medieval maps: *mappaemundi* (circular world maps), the maps in the *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy, and nautical charts. Particular focus will be placed on how early modern maps were made, not only on how the maps were commissioned, but also the sources that cartographers used, both textual and pictorial. Featured maps include a series of fifteenth-century *mappaemundi* that show what was supposed to happen to the world during the Apocalypse, and Martin Waldseemüller’s famous world maps of 1507 and 1516. The segment on the decoration of maps will include discussions of sea monsters, ships, and cartouches. No previous experience with maps is necessary.

This course has a higher lecture content than most courses at the Graham School. This is in part because it is important to see maps in order to learn about them, and even heavily illustrated books or articles do not have enough images, do not show enough details of the maps, to accomplish this goal. In the last class we will have an extended discussion of two of the most elaborate medieval maps that survive today, the Catalan Atlas, made in 1375, and the Hereford *mappamundi*, made in about 1300.

The course is very visual—I will show many images of maps. Out of consideration for the institutions that hold the rights for the images, I cannot share the PowerPoint files, but if you want to know more about a particular map, please take note of its details in the moment and either ask me about it during the times for questions or write to me about it later.
All readings will be available on Canvas as PDFs in the Files section.

Websites Useful for Further Exploration

Luna site of the John Carter Brown Library – images of many historic maps available in high resolution, including descriptions: https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet

*The History of Cartography*, published by the University of Chicago Press – the standard reference work in the field, all chapters from volumes 1, 2, 3, and 6 are freely available in PDF: http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/index.html

Library of Congress – images of many historic maps available in high resolution: https://loc.gov

Website of the digital collections of the Boston Public Library – high-resolution images of many historical maps: https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search

Website of the David Rumsey Map Collection – high-resolution images of many historical maps: https://www.davidrumsey.com/

Gallica – images of many *mappaemundi* and nautical charts in the National Library of France: https://gallica.bnf.fr/

## Course readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 1  | In today’s class I will give an introduction and the three main types of early modern maps (*mappaemundi*, nautical charts, and maps in Ptolemy’s *Geography*), and will also discuss how a buyer went about ordering the creation of a medieval map. | Patricia Seed, *The Oxford Map Companion: One Hundred Sources in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Introduction and pp. 56-57, 64-65, and 68-69  
Week 2
In today’s class I will discuss some very innovative fifteenth-century experiments with mappaemundi and the reception of Ptolemy’s Geography.
Explore the maps in a fifteenth-century manuscript of Ptolemy’s Geography in the University of Valencia (Spain), manuscript 693. A PDF of these maps is downloadable on the course’s Canvas site; if you wish to see the whole manuscript (including the text in addition to the maps), go to this address, where the maps (26 of them) begin at p. 227 of the 252 pages on the site:
https://weblioteca.uv.es/cgi/view.pl?source=uv_ms_0693

Week 3
Today I will discuss the results of a digital humanities project to recover information from a damaged world map by Henricus Martellus that was an important source for Martin Waldseemüller in making his world map of 1507, and will also discuss the relationship between Waldseemüller’s Carta marina of 1516, on the one hand, and both Ptolemaic maps and nautical charts on the other.

Week 4
In today’s class we will look at two ways in which early maps reflect uncertainty about distant parts of the world. First we will look at changing ideas about the oceans as reflected on maps, particularly how European ideas about the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ocean changed as it went from being thought of a place of danger to being a space that humans could control. Then we will look at the early cartography of the southern polar regions, and the shapes assumed by a hypothetical southern continent that was believed to exist long before the discovery of Antarctica.</td>
<td>Chet Van Duzer, “Waldseemüller’s World Maps of 1507 and 1516: Sources and Development of his Cartographical Thought,” <em>The Portolan</em> 85 (2012), pp. 8-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Today I will discuss Urbano Monte’s manuscript world map of 1587, one of the largest early maps to have survived at ten feet in diameter, and how Monte went about making the map. This will be followed by an analysis of the decoration of maps, in particular the images of sea monsters, ships, and cartouches.</td>
<td>Jennifer L. Roberts, “The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention,” <em>Harvard Magazine</em> Nov.-Dec. 2013, pp. 40-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>In today’s class I will demonstrate how we can discover information hidden in early modern maps by looking at them slowly and carefully. We will then view and discuss together two important and elaborately decorated maps, the Catalan Atlas of 1375,</td>
<td>Jennifer L. Roberts, “The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention,” <em>Harvard Magazine</em> Nov.-Dec. 2013, pp. 40-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience">https://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
one of the most elaborately decorated nautical charts to have survived, and the Hereford mappamundi, a large and elaborate world map made in about 1300.


---

**Accessibility information**

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class session at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

**Accessing remote courses**

Remote courses are taught through our Canvas platform. Approximately two weeks before your class begins, we will add you to your canvas site using the email address you provided at the time of registration. An invitation will then be sent to that email. Click the “Get Started” button in the email to begin the Canvas login process. For step-by-step instructions, please visit https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts. Once you’ve created your Canvas account, you can access any Graham School canvas course for which you are registered at: https://canvas.uchicago.edu.

Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zme1@uchicago.edu.