Course Title: Exploring European Maps of the Early Modern Era
Course Code: HUAS91101
Spring, 2021 – Online
April 1-22, each Thursday, 6-8:30 pm Central Time
Instructor: Chet Van Duzer, cvanduzer@uchicago.edu

Course Description

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 more about our own vision of the world by examining others, specifically European medieval and Renaissance maps. The three principal types of medieval maps—*mappaemundi* (circular world maps), the maps in the *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy, and nautical charts—will be discussed in detail. 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 third and fourth classes 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.
Schedule and Readings

Week 1
Thursday, April 1, 6-8:30 pm Central Time

Lecture:

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.

Required Readings:


Week 2
Thursday, April 8, 6-8:30 pm Central Time

Lecture:

In today’s class I will discuss some very innovative fifteenth-century experiments with mappaemundi and the reception of Ptolemy’s Geography.

Required Readings:

Chet Van Duzer, “A Neglected Type of Medieval Mappamundi and its Re-Imaging in the Mare historiarum (BnF MS Lat. 4915, f. 26v),” *Viator* 43.2 (2012), pp. 277-301

Week 3
Thursday, April 15, 6-8:30 pm Central Time

Lecture:

In today’s class I will discuss the famous early sixteenth-century cartographer Martin Waldseemüller and the relation between his maps and both Ptolemaic maps and nautical charts, and I will also demonstrate how we can discover information hidden in early modern maps by looking at them slowly and carefully.

We will also have a (virtual) group viewing and discussion the Catalan Atlas of 1375, one of the most elaborately decorated nautical charts to have survived.

Required Readings:


Week 4
Thursday, April 22, 6-8:30 pm Central Time

Lecture:

In today’s class I will discuss the decoration of maps, in particular the images of sea monsters, ships, and cartouches.

We will also have a (virtual) group viewing and discussion the Hereford mappamundi, a large and elaborate world map made in about 1300.

Required Readings:


Additional optional readings for further exploration

For week 1
https://press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC_V3_Pt1/HOC_VOLUME3_Part1_chapter7.pdf

For week 2

For week 3

For week 4
Scott D. Westrem, The Hereford Map: A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001)
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/