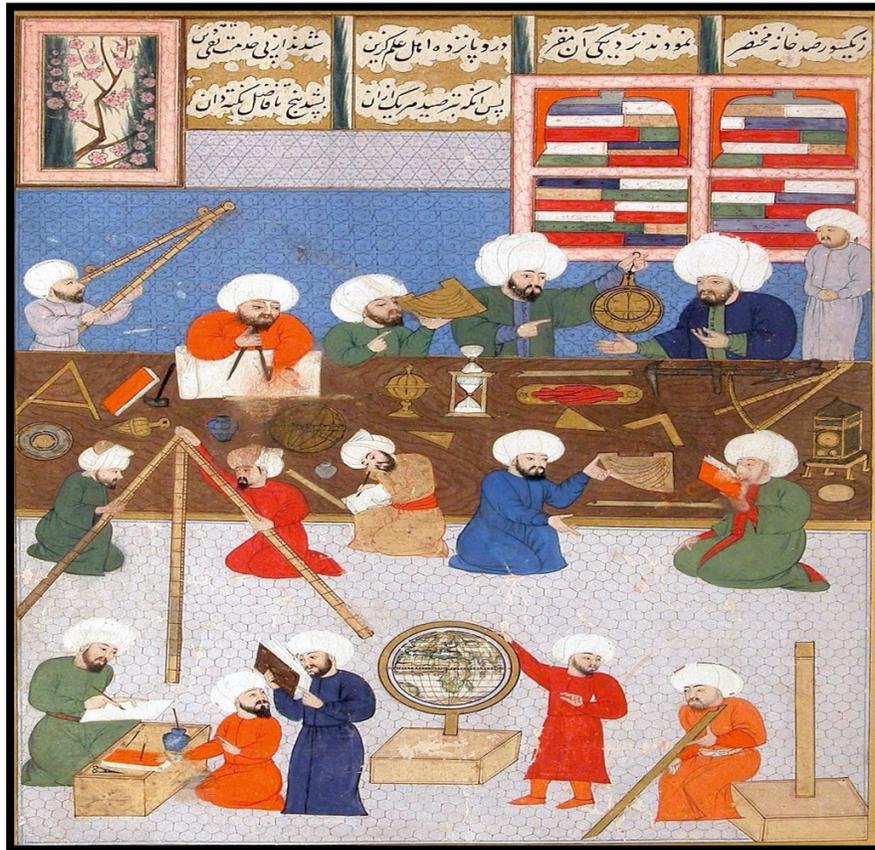


Inventing the World

Explorations, Empires, and Encounters (1400-1800)



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TBA

Course Description

What did the “world” mean before the modern age, and who got to imagine it? This course explores how people across empires — from the Ottoman and Mughal courts to Iberian colonies, African kingdoms, and Chinese and Japanese polities — envisioned and represented the globe between 1400 and 1800. We will examine how exploration, conquest, trade, and migration connected distant societies and how those encounters inspired new ways of seeing and mapping the world. Rather than treating globalization as a modern or Western invention, we will trace its deeper roots in the early modern era, a time when goods, ideas, and beliefs moved faster and farther than ever before. Through travel accounts, maps, cosmologies, artworks, and literary texts, we will compare how different cultures understood the planet and their place within it. Along the way, we will also explore how these connections brought about colonization, displacement, disease, and environmental change, as well as creativity, adaptation, and resistance.

Course Policies

- **Communication:** Email is the best way to reach me. I usually respond within 24 hours on weekdays (often faster, sometimes slower). Please check your email and Canvas regularly, since I will use both for announcements, updates, and important course information. If something is confusing, half-formed, or just needs talking through—reach out! That is what I am here for.
- **Meetings:** I do not hold fixed office hours, but I am very happy to meet by appointment (either in-person or virtually). If you want to talk about your project, a reading or the course in general, just email me. A day’s notice is appreciated so I can make time for you.
- **Recording & Classroom Culture:** To keep our classroom a space where everyone feels comfortable thinking out loud, asking questions, and changing their minds, recording any part of class is not permitted. Please also do not post about our class discussions on social media. We are all responsible for creating a space that is respectful, open, and intellectually generous.

- **Academic Integrity and AI:** Talking through ideas with classmates? Great. Helping each other understand difficult material? Encouraged. That said, anything you submit must be your own work, and all sources must be properly cited (we will discuss how to do this in class). You *may* use tools like ChatGPT to brainstorm, clarify ideas, or think through a draft, but you should not use AI to write or generate your assignments. These tools are often inaccurate (and occasionally confident nonsense), so use them carefully and critically. As always, the Honor Code applies.
- **Students with Disabilities:** If you need accommodations for any reason, please contact the Office of Accessible Education as early as possible. Once you receive your accommodation letter, share it with me and we will make a plan that supports your success in the course.
- **Affordability:** Good news: you do not need to buy anything for this course. All course materials will be available via the syllabus and Canvas.
- **Content Note:** Some readings and discussions in this course engage with violence, racism, colonialism, and offensive language. If you know certain material may be difficult for you, feel free to reach out—we can talk through how to navigate it. Not every reading will come with a specific warning, and people respond to material differently, we will approach these topics with care, respect, and thoughtfulness.

Resources (Use Them!)

- **Summer Academic Resource Center (SARC)**

SARC is your go-to place for academic support during the summer. They offer free tutoring on all subjects, either in person (Harmony House) or over Zoom. Tutors are Stanford graduate students who can help you develop strategies to do the work yourself, from exam prep to study habits to big-picture planning. Check out the [SARC Canvas Page](#) for details.

- **The Hume Center for Writing and Speaking**

[The Hume Center](#) is a fantastic resource available to all Stanford students, offering free one-on-one tutoring. Whether you are brainstorming, organizing ideas, revising a draft, or polishing a final version, their tutors can help at any stage of the writing process.

Grading Breakdown

- **Class Participation (20%):** Showing up, Speaking Up, Thinking Together:

History is not made in isolation, and neither is this course. Your participation grade reflects your engagement with the material, your classmates, and the collective work of making sense of the early modern world. This includes:

- **Weekly Canvas Assignments:** Short 100-250 words reflections that help you arrive in class with questions, puzzles, and provocations ready to share.
- **Leading Discussion:** Once during the quarter (starting in week 2), you will guide us through a set of readings, not as an expert, but as a curious interlocutor.
- **Attendance:** Being present matters. The best insights often emerge from unexpected collisions of ideas that happen when we are all in the room together. However, I am aware that life happens. You may miss one class, no questions asked. For any additional absences, please reach out before class so we can discuss a make-up exercise that keeps you on track. Communication after the fact is reserved for genuine emergencies—the unforeseeable kind. This is not about policing your time; it is about making sure you do not fall behind and miss the conversation.

- **The Limits of Global History Assignment (10%), Due Week 3**

Choose one of the following Assignments

- Encyclopedic Entry: *Pinning Down the Unpinnable*

Try to define “The Columbian Exchange” in 500 words. Or ‘early modern globalization.’ Or “the Indian Ocean world.” You will quickly discover that the most important concepts are also the slipperiest. For this assignment, you will write an encyclopedic entry on an early modern global subject or phenomenon—a person, place, object, event, or idea that moved across boundaries. Your task is to produce a clear and well-sourced entry of between 350-500 words suitable for an educated general reader. The catch? You will have to make hard choices. Include a short essay (500 words) reflecting on the following questions: What to include? What to leave out? Whose perspective to center? What to call things? This exercise reveals how much interpretive work hides behind the apparent neutrality of reference texts. You will emerge with a polished piece of writing, and (hopefully) a new appreciation for how difficult it is to capture a multifaceted world in a few hundred words.

- (Counter) Map Assignment: *Redrawing the World*

Every map is an argument. It chooses a center, draws boundaries, names places, and decides what matters enough to include and, more importantly, to leave off. The maps we have inherited from the early modern period are no exception: they reflect perspectives, interests, and blind spots of those who made them. For this assignment, you will create a counter-map: a speculative map that reimagines early modern space from a perspective that dominant cartography ignored, marginalized, or erased. You might ask:

- How might an enslaved African have mapped the Atlantic world?
- What would a Nahua merchant's map of trade routes look like?
- How might a Kongolese Christian have visualized the relationship between Kongo and Rome?
- What did the Indian Ocean look like from the perspective of a Swahili trader?

Your counter-map can be hand-drawn, digitally designed, or assembled from existing materials. It should be accompanied by a short essay (500 words) explaining your choices: What perspectives are you centering? What Sources informed your design? Where did you have to imagine, extrapolate, or invent—and why?

▪ **Research Proposal (20%), Due Week 6**

Finding your Question: Every project starts with a plan. The research proposal is a conversation. You will develop a preliminary idea for your final project, identify a research question, and think through the sources and approaches you might use. Then you will bring this proposal to office hours, where we will discuss it together. This is not a test; it is a workshop. Come with questions, uncertainties, and half-formed ideas. That is where the best projects begin.

What to prepare for our meeting:

- A working research question (it can change!)
- A sense of why this question interests you
- Some initial thoughts on sources—primary and secondary
- An idea of what format your final project might take

Note: You must meet with me during office hours to discuss your proposal before proceeding to the final project. Please schedule this meeting well in advance of the final deadline. You can come any time between weeks 1-6.

- **Final Project (20%):** *Making your Argument*, due Tuesday August 18, 11:59 p.m.

This is the culmination of your quarter's work. Drawing on the research proposal we discussed, you will produce a final project on an early modern global topic of your choosing. Format options:

- *Annotated bibliography:* A curated list of 10 primary and secondary sources with critical annotations explaining their significance and how they relate to your research question (5-pages total).
- *Museum exhibition proposal:* A written proposal for a museum exhibition, including object selection, thematic organization, and interpretive text (5-pages total).
- *Travel guide:* A historically grounded 'guide' to an early modern city, route, or region, written for a curious traveler of the period (5-pages total).
- *A fifteen-minute podcast:* An audio-essay, narrative, or interview-style exploration of your research question.
- *A ten-minute video essay:* A video essay combining narration, images, and analysis.
- Another format of your choice with prior approval

Evaluation criteria:

- Originality: An interesting question or unexpected angle
- Depth of research: Serious engagement with sources
- Clarity of argument: A clear, well-articulated thesis
- Presentation: Polished, coherent, appropriate to format

Deadline Overview

- **Weekly Canvas Reflections (100-250 words):**
Due day of class at 9:00 a.m., beginning week 2
- **Limits of Global History Assignments:**
Due Friday, July 10, 11:59 p.m.
- **Research Proposal:**
Meetings held Weeks 1-6 (by appointment)
Written proposal due Thursday, July 30, 11:59 p.m.
- **Final Project:**
Due Tuesday, August 19, 11:59 p.m.

Course Schedule**Unit 1: Imagining Worlds*****Week 1*****Introduction: Globalizing the ‘World’***When—and in what ways—did the world become ‘one’?***Class 1: What is ‘Global’ History?**

- Frederick Cooper, “Chapter 4: Globalization,” in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- Denis Cosgrove, “Preface,” in *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Class 2: Imagining the Globe

- *Fra Mauro Map* (1450)
- *Waldseemüller Map* (1507)

Choose 1:

- Giuseppe Marocci, *The Globe of Paper: Writing Histories of the World in Renaissance Europe & The Americas* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-48.
- Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 1-22.

Week 2**Globalizing Centers***Where were the ‘navels of the world’? How was the world spatially imagined?***Class 1: Cosmologies in Comparison**

- Caroline Dodds Pennock & Amanda Power, “Globalizing Cosmologies,” *Past & Present*, 2018, 88-115.
- Dario Tessicini, Miguel Á Granada, Patrick J. Boner, *Unifying Heaven and Earth: Essays in the History of Early modern Cosmology* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2016), 9-18.
- Codex Mendoza (c. 1541)

Class 2: Mapping Centers, East and West

- Denis Cosgrove, “Christian Globe,” in *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 54-78.

Choose 1:

- Elizabeth Horodowich & Alexander Nagel, *Amerasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 43-66.
- Thomas D. Goodrich, *The Ottoman Turks and the New World: A Study of Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Americana* (I. Harrasowitz, 2008).
- Marcia Yonemoto, *Mapping Early Modern Japan: Space, Place, and Culture in the Tokugawa Period, 1603-1868* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Unit 2: Moving Worlds***Week 3*****Globalizing Mobility**

Who moved, who wrote, whose accounts were believed?

Class 1: Authorized Mobility and Imperial Intermediaries

- Luke Clossey, “Merchants, Migrants, Missionaries, and Globalization in the Early Modern Pacific,” *Journal of Global History*, Volume 1 (1), 2006: 41-58.
- John-Paul Ghobrial, “The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory,” *Past & Present*, no. 222 (2013), 51-93.
- Ceasar E. Farah, *An Arab’s Journey to Colonial Spanish America: The Travels of Elias al-Mûsuli in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), Introduction + 1-75.

Class 2: Coerced Mobility and Imperial Worldmaking

- Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 45-87.
- Daniel Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 17-40.

Optional: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), introduction + any part you would like.

Week 4

Globalizing Things

What happens when objects travel across cultures and empires?

Class 1: Theorizing Material Culture

- Paula Findlen, “Introduction,” in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500-1800* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1-15.
- Pamela H. Smith, “Itineraries of Materials and Knowledge in the Early Modern World,” in Gerritsen & Riello, *The Global Lives of Things* (London: Routledge, 2016), 31-61.

Class 2: Objects in Motion

- Beverly Lemire, “Early Globalization, Rising Cosmopolitanism and a New World of Goods,” in *Global Trade and the Transformation of Consumer Cultures: The Material World Remade, c. 1500-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1-29.
- Meha Priyadarshini, *Chinese Porcelain in Colonial Mexico: The Material Worlds of an Early Modern Trade* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1-28.
- Leah R. Clark, *Courty Mediators: Transcultural Objects Between Renaissance Italy and the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 104-149.

Visit to Special Collections or University Museum.

- Before our visit, check out the following digitized collections and choose 1 object that interests you. Formulate a couple of questions that come to mind when looking at the object. What questions do you have regarding its history? Bring your questions to class.

The British Museum (London): <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection>

The Freer and Sackler Galleries of Asian Art (Smithsonian):

<https://asia.si.edu/collections/>

Rijks Studio (Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam):

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio>

Ross Archive of African Images (Yale University):

<http://raai.library.yale.edu/site/index.php>

National Archives of Australia: <https://www.naa.gov.au>

Unit 3: Ruling Worlds

Week 5

Globalizing Conquest

How did conquests operate as worldmaking practice across early modern empires?

Class 1: The Violence of Encounter

- Camilla Townsend, *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1-40.

Choose 1:

- Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (2008), 1-14.
- Bartolomé De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 1-89.

Class 2: Conquest Beyond the Atlantic

- Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-52.
- Barbara Fuchs & Yuen-Gen Liang, “A Forgotten Empire: The Spanish-North African Borderlands,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, Volume 12 (2011): 261-273.
- *Piri Reis Map* (1513)

Week 6

Globalizing Translation

What survives when ideas, beliefs, and languages cross boundaries?

Class 1: Translation as Imperial Strategy

- Anne B. McGinness, “Missionary Movements and the Expansion of Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, 1400-2000,” in Cátia Antunes & Karwan Fatah-Black, *Explorations in History and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2016), 76-93.
- Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-56.

- Matteo Ricci, “Excerpts from a letter by Ricci to Francesco Pasio, vice-provincial in the Japan Jesuit mission, February 15, 1609,” in Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China, 1583-1610: A Short History* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2016), 123-126.

Class 2: Contested Translations

- Samantha Kelly, “Translating Ethiopian Sanctity (1516)”, in *Translating Faith: Ethiopian Pilgrims in Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2024), 141-180.

Choose 1:

- Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 1-20.
- Herman L. Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 1-30.

Unit 4: Ordering Worlds

Week 7

Globalizing Nature

How did early modern societies come to imagine nature as a global, ordered system—and to what ends?

Class 1: Nature and Knowledge

- Carla Suzan Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot: Natural History and its Transformations in Early Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1-49.
- Song Yingxing, *Tiangong Kainu* (The Exploitation of the Works of Nature, 1637), selections.

Class 2: Ecological Imperialism

- Alfred W. Crosby, “Chapter 3: Old World Plants and Animals in the New World” & “Chapter 5: New World Foods and Old-World Demography,” in *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1972), 64-121.

- Mackenzie Cooley, “Part I: Knowing and Controlling Animal Generation,” in *The Perfection of Nature: Animals, Breeding, and Race in the Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 23-72.

Optional:

- Barbara E. Mundy, “The Relaciones Geográficas and Other Viceregal Maps in New Spain,” in *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 181-212.
- [“Searching the Relaciones Geográficas,”](#) *New World Nature* Digital Humanities Project at Hamilton College

Week 8

Globalizing Humans

How did early modern practices of comparison, description, and display transform human difference into global knowledge?

Class 1: Imagining Humanity at a Global Scale

- Anthony Pagden, “The Problem of Recognition,” in *The Fall of Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10-56.
- Surekha Davies, “Climate, Culture or Kinship? Explaining Human Diversity c. 1500,” in *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 23-46.
- [Albert Eckhout’s Paintings](#) at the National Museum in Copenhagen.
- Anonymous, *Las Pinturas de Castas* (XVIII), Museo Nacional del Virreinato (Tepotzotlán).

Final class: Unfinished Worlds

- In class we will discuss the following question: *What early modern ways of imagining the globe continue to shape how we think globally today and what alternative worlds might still be imagined?*
- Assignment to be completed before the final class: For our final session you will prepare a short comparative exercise that brings together the course’s central themes of worldmaking, scale, and global imagination.

Step 1: Choose one early modern course

Select one early modern source we have encountered this quarter. This may be (1) a map, (2) a visual object, (3) a text, or (4) a material object discussed in class. You should choose a source that you found particularly striking, troubling, or illuminating.

Step 2: Choose one contemporary artifact

Select one contemporary artifact that presents the world, humanity, or nature at a global scale. Examples are (1) a satellite image of the earth, (2) a climate map or global environmental mode, (3) a migration or population visualization, (4) a global index, (5) a world map/interactive digital map or (5) a DNA ancestry or genomics visualization.

Step 3: Prepare a short presentation of 2-3 minutes in which you reflect on the following questions:

- What assumptions about the world, humanity, or nature does each artifact make?
- How does the early modern source help you see the contemporary artifact differently?
- What ways of imagining the world persist across time?

You do **not** need to argue that the modern artifact directly descends from the early modern one. Instead, focus on shared logics, tensions, or contrasts.