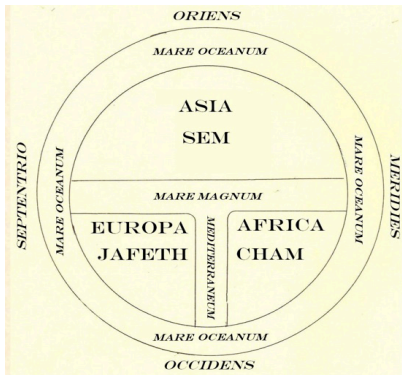


# Medieval Maps and Monsters

## Introduction

The Middle Ages was a period of time in Europe where there was very little trade or contact with other parts of the world. Even after the Middle Ages ended and Europeans were exploring faraway areas, there was an idea that monsters might exist in the ocean or an undiscovered land. We're going to look at some maps made right after the Middle Ages in the 1400s and 1500s to see the creatures they believed in.



**This is a diagram of what Europeans maps during the Middle Ages looked like.**

Medieval maps are called T-O maps because they show the continents surrounded by an "O" of water and separated by a "T" of water.

*Interaction:* What continents did they know of during the Middle Ages? (Asia, Africa, and Europe). Where is north on T-O maps? (to the left). Would you like to travel using this map? (You would get very lost).

Maps made in the medieval style were not trying to show the world as it really looks. First of all, they didn't know the exact shape of the continents, and second of all, they generally weren't traveling anyway, so there wasn't a lot of demand for maps they could travel by.

**This map, made in 1475, is a good example of a T-O style map.**

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church was in charge of education. They chose what could be taught and to whom. So maps that were published in books often had very religious themes.

For example, the medieval church taught that human beings were first created in the Garden of Eden, which was located in the far east. It is pictured at the very top of this map. They believed that spices, which usually came from East Asia, were twigs that people pulled from the rivers that flowed out of the Garden of Eden.

Another example is the picture of Gog, the evil king of Magog. According to the medieval church, the end of the Christian world would come when Gog and his subjects were released from the land they were trapped in. If you look closely, Gog has horns and a tail and apparently just stole a man's arm.

It was believed that there were monsters in the faraway places on Earth. This map, for example, shows dragons in Africa. It also shows a phoenix in Asia.

*Interaction:* Who can tell me what a phoenix is? (It is a mythical bird that bursts into flames every 500 years and is born again in its own ashes).

By the time this map was made, people were already exploring faraway parts of the world. But during the Middle Ages, European ships usually wouldn't sail out of sight of land unless they were in the Mediterranean Sea. It was said that the Greek god, Hercules, places pillars at the entrance to the Atlantic Ocean to warn sailors not to go any further. They are even pictured on this map.

*Interaction:* Who can name a country that touches the Mediterranean Sea? (Lots of possible answers: Italy, Turkey, Palestine, Greece, Spain, Egypt, etc).

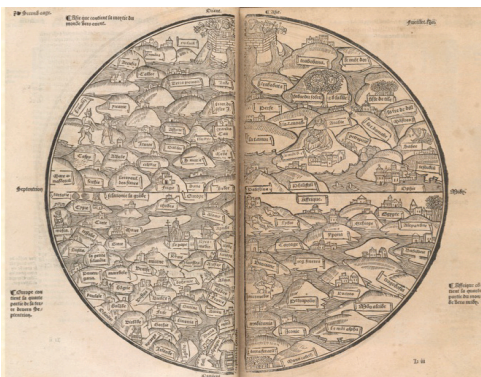
**This map was made less than twenty years after the last map. It was published in a book that described everything that was "known" about the world, sort of like an encyclopedia.**

This map was made before Europeans knew about North and South America. It shows Asia, Europe, and Africa along with pictures of the men that settled each continent according to the medieval church. A man named Sem was believed to be the father of all of Asia, Japhet the father of all Europe, and Cam the father of all Africa.

On the side of the map are pictures of monstrous people that were believed to live in faraway places. Medieval scholars believed in them because the ancient Greeks and Roman writers had described them.

*Interaction:* This top picture shows a man with six arms. Can anyone tell me where you might have seen pictures of people with many arms? (Hindu gods are often pictured with four, six, or eight arms).

The picture second from the top shows a woman covered in hair. This is probably based on a birth defect, called Hypertrichosis, which makes a person grow thick hair all over their bodies. There are even portraits of people suffering from Hypertrichosis from the 1500s.



**The page on the left is from the same book as the last map.**

Probably the strangest monster on this page is the one on the top left. It shows a man with a dog's head. The ancient Greek and Roman writers described a race of monstrous people in Africa who walked like men do, but had the heads of dogs and lived on raw meat. Their language also sounded like the barking of dogs.

*Interaction:* The Greeks and Romans did actually meet these creatures, but they aren't a race of monstrous humans. Can anyone guess what the Greeks and Romans were actually describing? (Baboons).

The Greeks and Romans who actually saw baboons most likely did not mistake them for a tribe of human beings. But the people who wrote about them had probably heard them described from someone who had heard them described from someone else. So after hundreds of years, baboons were thought to be a tribe of human beings.

Before we move on, I just want to point out the monster second from the top on the right. It shows a person with a very large lip, and we'll see this again on another map.

**This page on the right shows several strange creatures that medieval scholars had heard of.**

*Interaction:* Can you recognize any of these creatures?

**This map was made in the 1550s, when European nations were conquering parts of the New World and Africa.**

Even though Europeans had come in contact with native people that were clearly not monsters, there was still some fear that people from other parts of the world might be monstrous, either in the way they looked or the way they acted.

These two men in the top left corner have the large lip that we saw on the last page we looked at. This is probably based on the Mursi tribe in Ethiopia. When a woman becomes engaged in the Mursi tribe, she might choose to pierce her lip. Over many years, she slowly stretches out the piercing until she can fit a small plate in it. It might seem strange to our eyes, but it is considered beautiful to the Mursi people.

*Interaction:* The men pictured in the lower left corner do not appear monstrous, but they are doing something that Europeans believed made them monsters. Can anyone figure out what they are doing? (eating people)

There are a few more creatures on this map that we might find interesting. Near the top of the map are a few Amphiptere, dragons with wings but no legs. And near the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean is a sea monster.

**This map has even more sea monsters on it. It was made by a man named Abraham Ortelius about 15 years after the last map we saw.**

It might seem silly for people to have believed in sea monsters for so long, but a lot of the stories were based on real animals.

*Interaction:* For example, the monster labeled "A" at the top of this map is called Nahual. What real creature might the Nahual be based on? (Narwhals)

*Interaction:* The sea monster labeled "I" is another one probably based on a real animal. What animal does this look like? (stingray)

### Activity Transition

I have a book about sea monsters that each of you will get to take home, but first we need to finish them.