

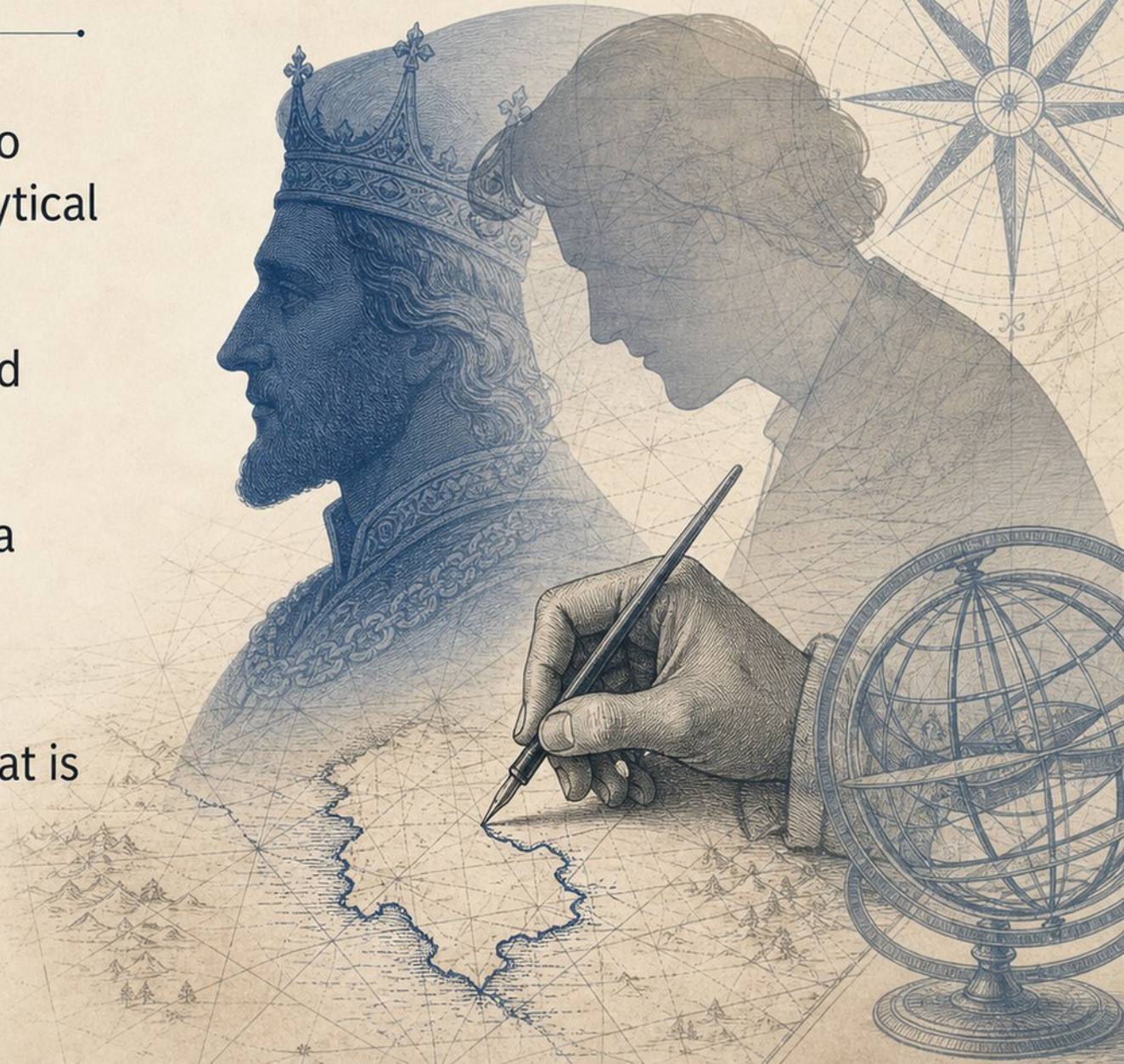
Analyzing Historical Maps: Place, Purpose, and Perspective

- Build critical literacy to ask historical questions about maps
- Core argument: maps are never neutral; every map argues about space, power, and identity
- Learn the Maker–Purpose–Legend–Omission–Context framework
- Structured inquiry turns maps into rich historical evidence



Part 1: The Maker and the Purpose

- Introducing the first two dimensions of the analytical framework
- Who made the map, and for what reason?
- A maker's identity and a map's function shape all content
- Purpose determines what is shown, omitted, and emphasized

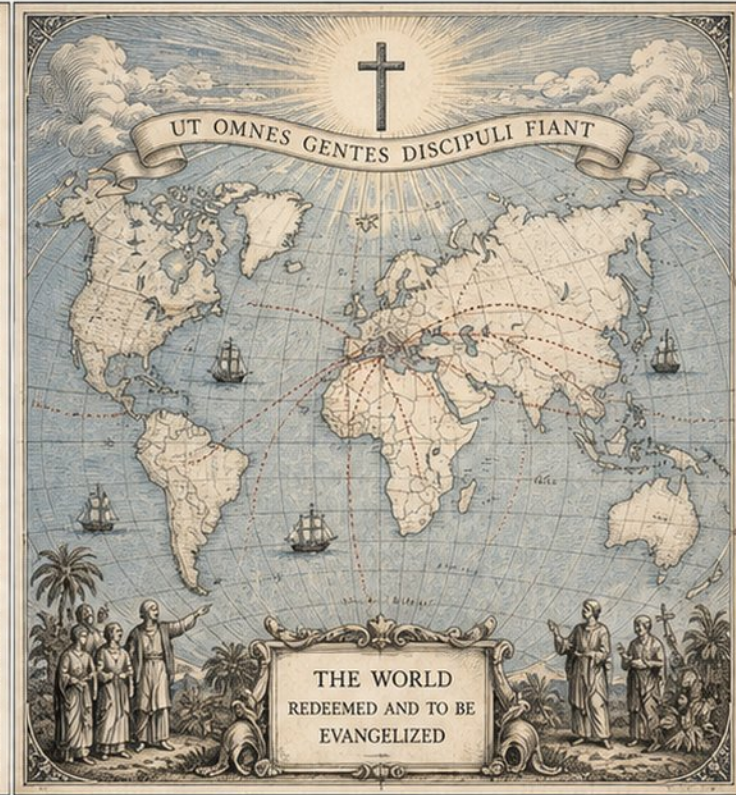
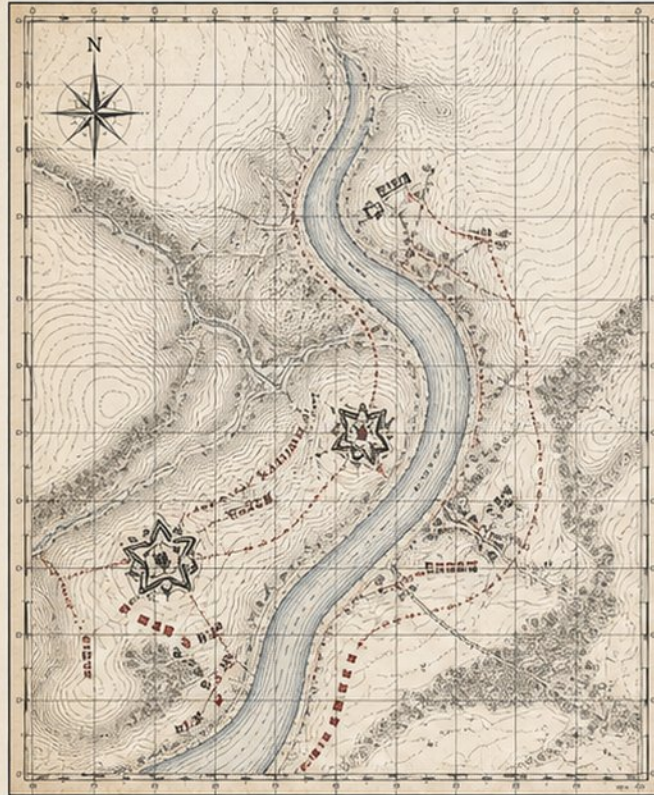


The Mapmaker: Who Speaks Through the Map?

- Identify the cartographer, patron, or commissioning institution first
- Nationality, profession, and agenda fundamentally shape the map
- Religious mission and political power often intertwine in authorship
- 1725 Álvarez Barreiro map: Jesuit networks entangled with Spanish military surveying



Intended Purpose: Persuasion, Navigation, or Control?



- Maps serve political claims, navigation, taxation, proselytization, or military control.
- The same region can be mapped for radically different ends.
- Paratext reveals purpose: dedications, titles, decorative elements, privilege statements.
- Example: Roy Military Survey (pacification) vs. Napoleonic cadastral map (administration).



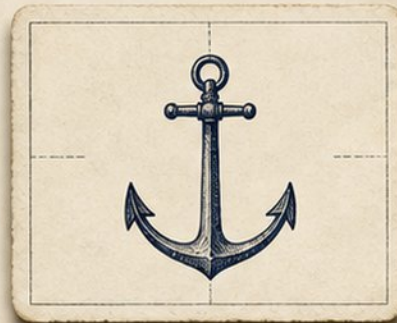
Part 2: The Visible and Invisible Content

- ✦ “Shift focus to the map’s internal language: legend, visual choices, blank spaces”
- ✦ “Every inclusion on a map is a deliberate choice”
- ✦ “Every absence or omission can serve as critical evidence”
- ✦ “Begin asking not just what you see, but what you don’t”



Decoding the Legend: Symbols, Scale, and Strategic Silences

- Legends reveal and conceal: symbol choices are political, not neutral
- Crosses, anchors, blank interiors signal ideology—not just geography
- Scale and centering exaggerate strategic features, shrink peripheries
- **Exercise:** 1846 missionary map of Hawai'i—missions dominate, Native land use invisible



Deliberate Omissions: What the Map Leaves Out

- Silent spaces as evidence: erased villages, unmarked borders, and replaced place names
- Cross-reference maps with texts and oral histories to find biases
- Four omission types: political, economic, cultural, environmental
- Case study: systematic erasure of Palestinian villages from Israeli maps after 1948



Reading the 'Blank' Spaces: Indigenous Persistence in Colonial Maps

- Empty map spaces rarely represent unoccupied land
- 17th-c. Martinique map: a line divides French from Kalinago 'dwelling-places'
- Caribbean windward coasts left blank due to Kalinago maritime strength
- Cartographic 'blanks' reveal indigenous resistance and European limitation



Part 3: The Frame and the Context

- Technology, worldview, and events shape a map's creation
- Projection choices distort area, shape, and perceived importance
- Orientation embeds cosmological and political worldviews
- Materiality—paper, print method—reveals technical constraints
- Every map is an artifact of its historical moment



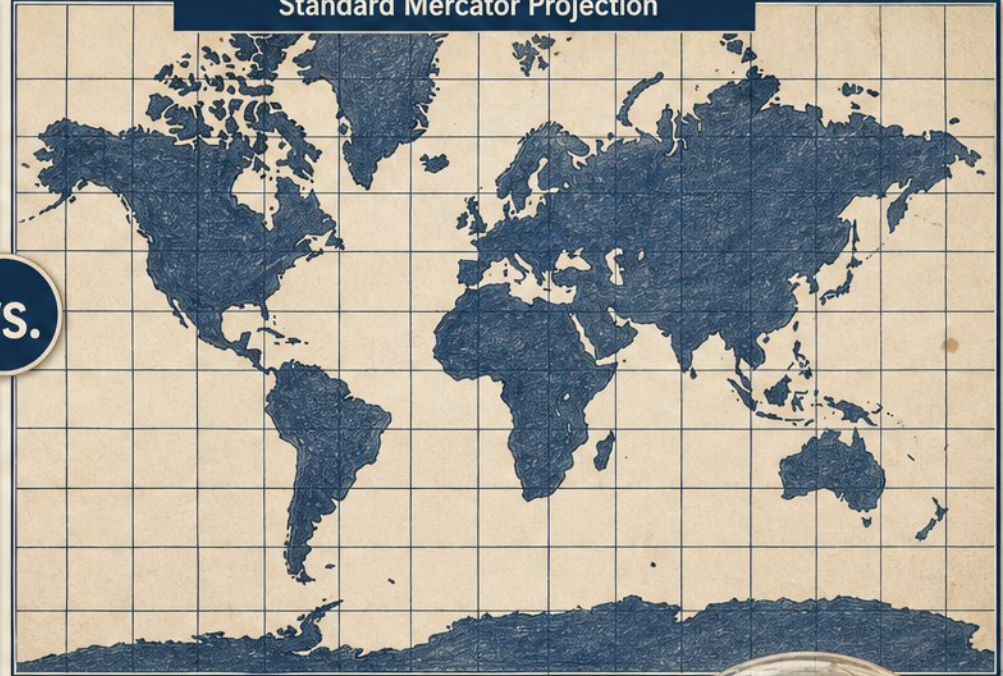
Perspective and Projection: The Geometry of Power

Joaquín Torres García – “América Invertida” (1943)



VS.

Standard Mercator Projection



- Projection choices distort area, shape, and perceived regional importance
- Mercator projection historically inflated Europe and North America visually
- Viewpoints range from 'god's-eye' to panoramic and itinerary-based forms
- 1943 'América Invertida' uses south-up orientation as a decolonial statement



Why North Isn't Always Up: Orientation and Cosmology



12TH CENTURY
Tabula Rogeriana



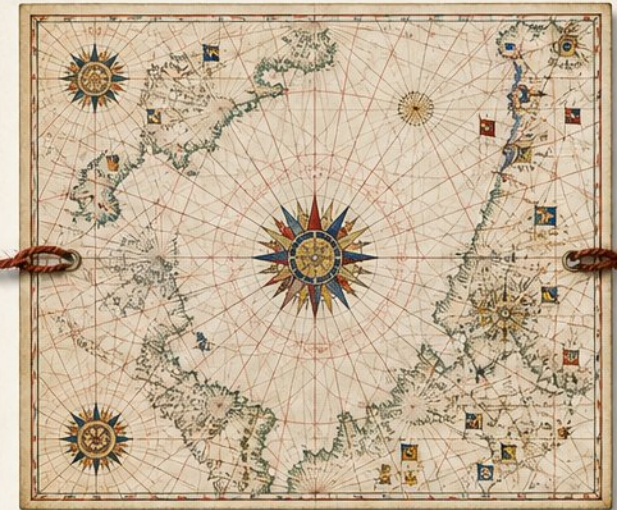
South at the Top

MEDIEVAL PERIOD
T-O Map



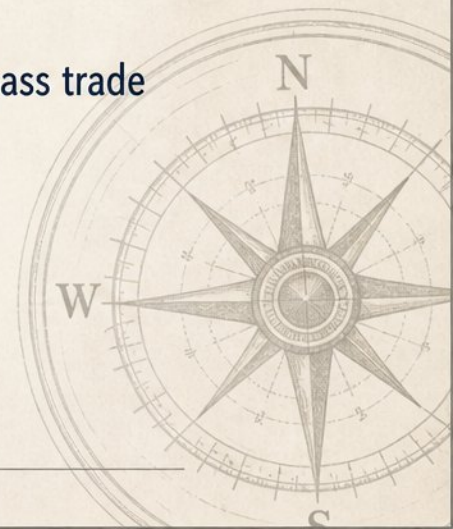
East at the Top

16TH CENTURY
Portolan Chart



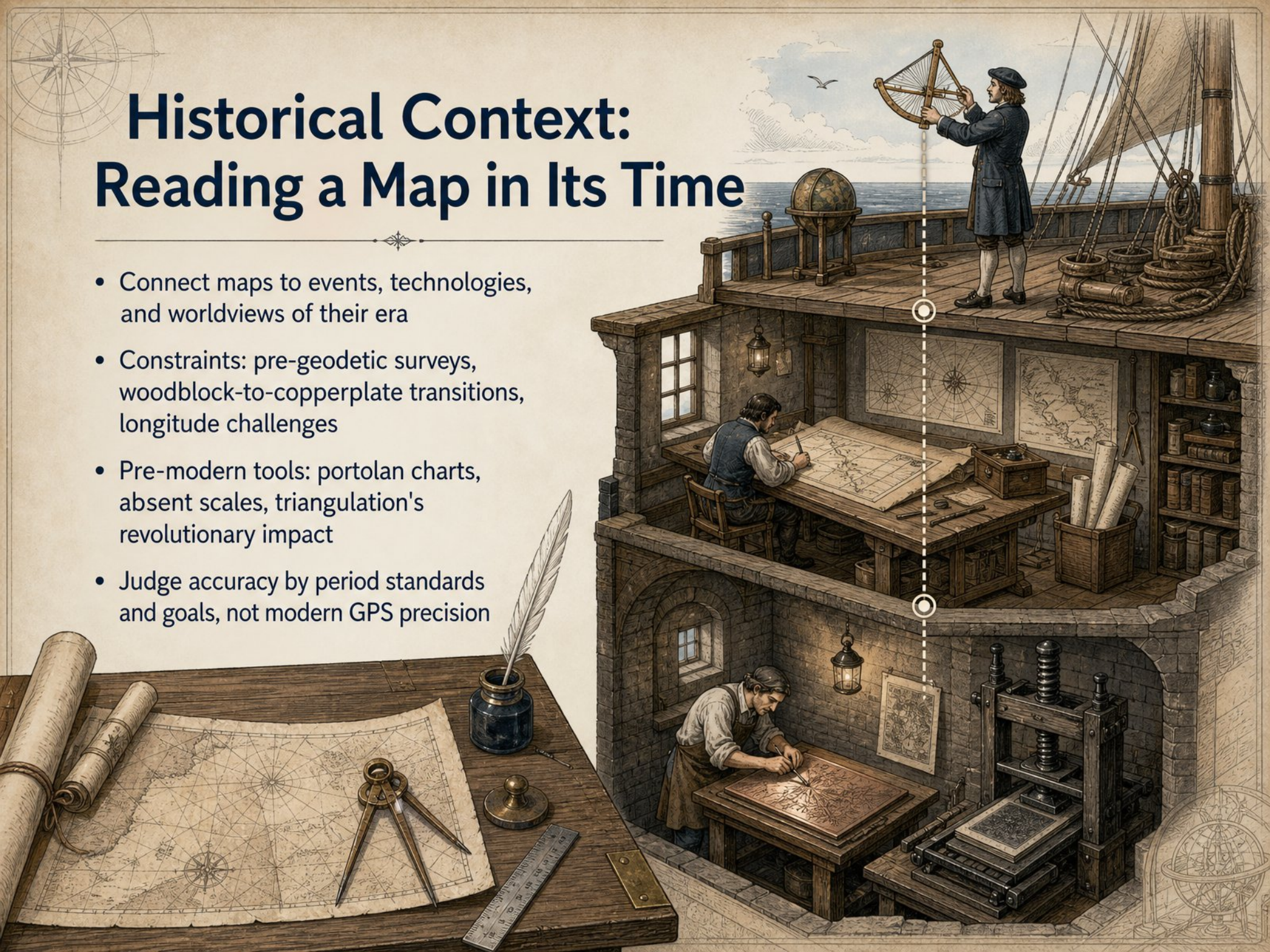
North at the Top

- North-up orientation standardized after 16th-century compass trade
- al-Idrisi's Tabula Rogeriana placed south at the top
- Chinese cosmological maps centered the emperor's authority
- "Up equals good" shapes subconscious geographic biases

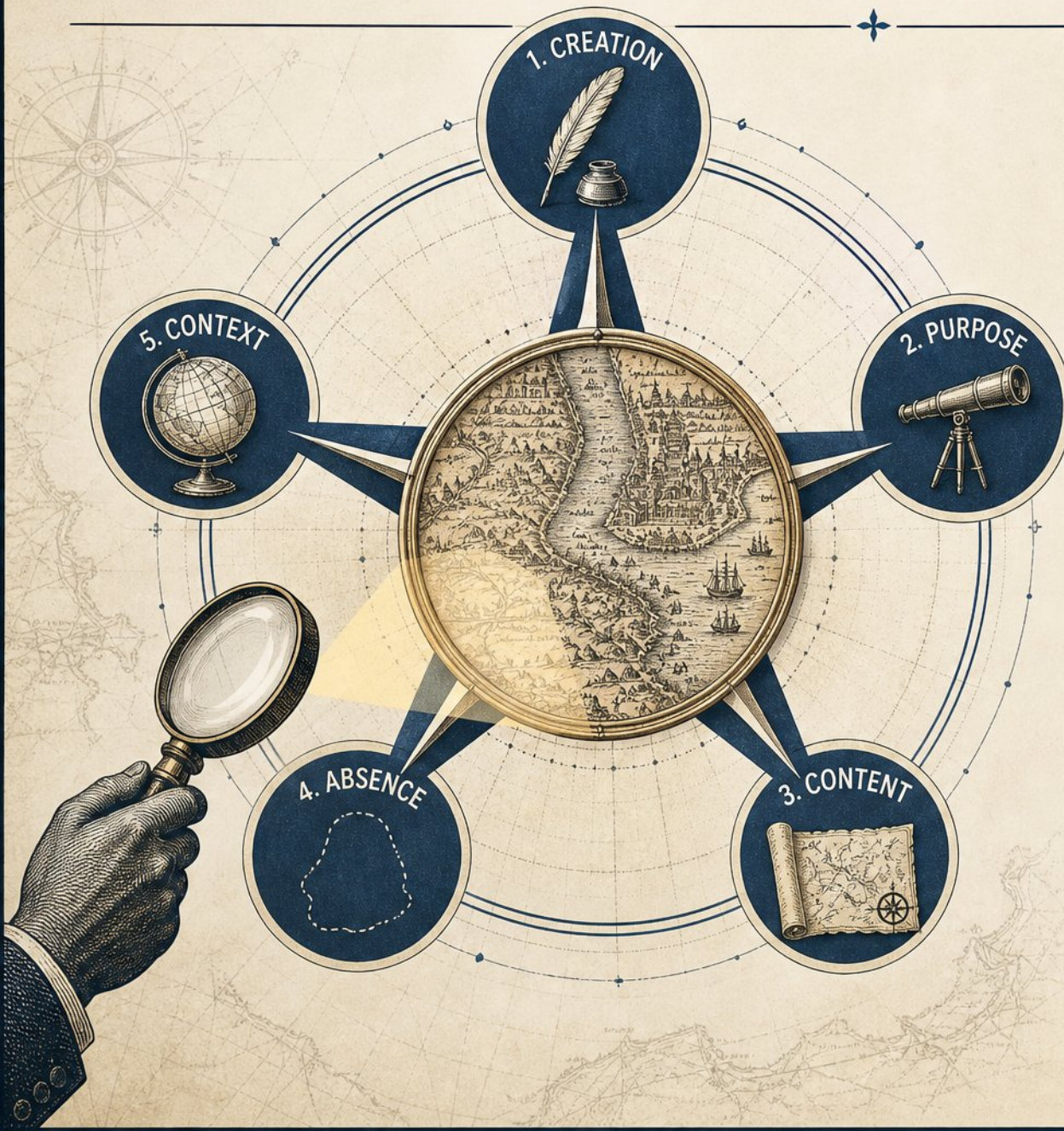


Historical Context: Reading a Map in Its Time

- Connect maps to events, technologies, and worldviews of their era
- Constraints: pre-geodetic surveys, woodblock-to-copperplate transitions, longitude challenges
- Pre-modern tools: portolan charts, absent scales, triangulation's revolutionary impact
- Judge accuracy by period standards and goals, not modern GPS precision



Part 4: Synthesis and Application



- Integrate all five dimensions into one repeatable inquiry routine
- Ask: Who made it? Why? What is shown and how? What is missing? When and where?
- Move from simple observation to layered interpretation and corroboration
- Apply the framework to a complex historical map for analytical confidence

The Questioning Toolkit: Structured Inquiry for Any Map



- **Ask:** Who made it, why, and for whom?



- **Observe:** What is shown and how is it symbolized?



- **Interrogate:** What is missing or left blank?



- **Contextualize:** When and under what conditions?



- **Corroborate:** Cross-reference with other sources and narratives.



LEGEND (Source A)

- District Boundary
- - - Subdistrict Boundary
- Railway
- Main Road
- Cultivated Land
- Forest

LEGEND (Source B)

- - - Administrative Boundary
- - - Tribal Boundary
- - - Caravan Route
- Pasture
- Uninhabited

*Survey Department
Field Note*

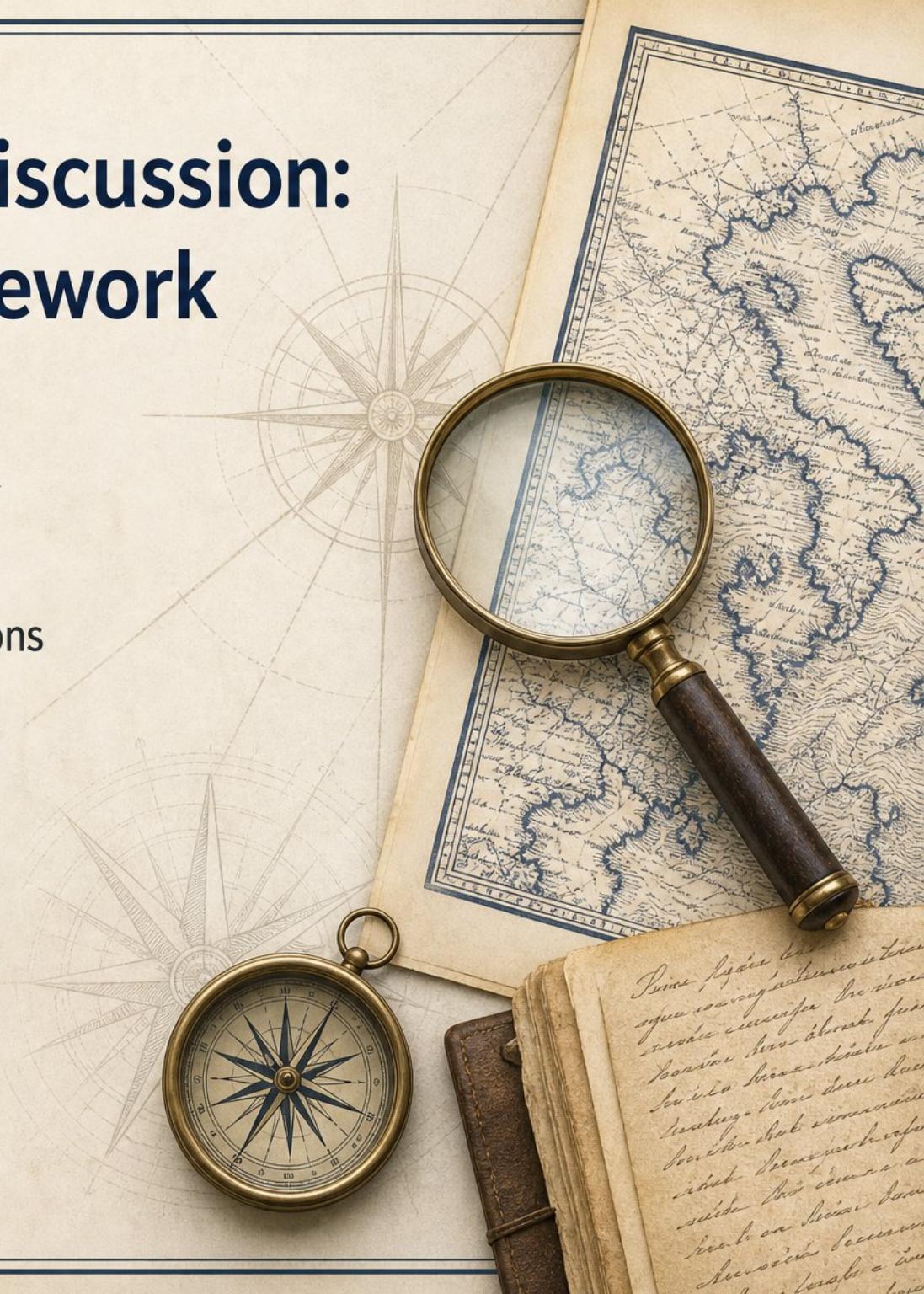
*Information collected
under restrictions.
Verify with local
testimonies.*

*What else lies
beyond the border
not drawn here?*



Application and Discussion: Bringing the Framework to Your Work

- Independently analyze a chosen historical map using all five dimensions
- Facilitate inclusive group discussion across varied knowledge levels
- Avoid projecting modern accuracy standards onto historical documents
- Cross-reference maps with textual, oral, and archival sources



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