

Georgia on Printed World Maps in 15th-18th Centuries

SORDIA GIORGI, PHD

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

TBILISI, GEORGIA

ORCID: [0009-0005-5663-9713](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5663-9713)

ABSTRACT

Describing Georgia has been an essential part of the work of European geographers and cartographers throughout the centuries. In one form or another, Georgia appears in the earliest cartographic works, the number of which reaches the thousands. Some of these maps focus directly on Georgia. In contrast, others depict broader continents or geographic regions, and others show various continents or vast regions, all while conveying important information about Georgia. This article reviews printed world maps created between the 15th and 18th centuries, which are particularly relevant to the study of Georgia. We have identified over 100 such maps that contain geographic, cartographic, and ethnographic information related to Georgia. The study of world maps is essential because they serve as unique primary sources for understanding Georgia's historical place and role among the countries and peoples of the world. Based on these maps, we can also examine the ideas and perceptions that European society had regarding Georgia. The article summarizes the world maps recognized as part of Europe's cartographic heritage. We used four world maps depicting Georgia for illustration. Fragments related to Georgia are presented separately in the article in an enlarged form. Two of these maps represent the world in the ancient era, while the other two represent the "modern" one.

Keywords: Georgia, Caucasus, World maps, European cartography

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INTRODUCTION

Geographical maps have been created since time immemorial; however, the invention of a printing press by the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg had a profound impact on the development of cartography. This development is closely associated with the beginning of the European Renaissance. It is noteworthy that newly established publishers quickly identified the publication of geographical texts and cartographic materials as a priority. One of the earliest obtainable printed geographical works is the book published by German author and publisher Guntherus Ziner in Augsburg in 1472. The uniqueness of this book lies in its inclusion of the first printed map in the history of cartography. This is a miniature world map (*Mappa Mundi*) integrated into the text. Soon this publication was followed by the work of the ancient Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy, "Geography". Publishing this book is regarded as the foundation of modern European cartography. In a short period, map printing in Europe took on an unprecedented character. Some were prepared for geographical atlases, while others were published as individual maps.

When it comes to content, antique European printed maps come in a vast variety. They depicted the entire world, as well as individual continents, large regions, empires, countries, or relatively small political units.

As for the timeframe, these maps typically depicted two main stages in the development of humankind: the ancient and the modern eras. In most atlases, historical geography is presented in these two categories. However, none of these atlases and geography textbooks clearly define which specific century or historical event serves as the dividing line between the antique and "modern" world. Broadly speaking, one could say that the early Byzantine period is reflected in the maps of the antique period, while the "modern" countries are political units established in the 10th-11th centuries. It should be noted that the maps showing "modern" countries often use antique toponymy, i.e., city or settlement names that were no longer in use by the time these maps were created. Another significant factor common to both antique and "modern" maps is that most of them don't reflect the historical or geographical reality of the time of their creation, but rather the condition of a given country from a historical perspective. For example, a "modern" map of Georgia created in the 17th century (of which there were many) does not depict the Georgia of the 17th century, but rather the historical and geographical knowledge of Georgia accumulated by Europeans throughout the "modern" era.

Georgia is well represented in both antique and "modern" European maps. Antique maps mainly show it as Colchis and Iberia, while "modern" maps depict it under the name of Georgia.

Naturally, maps focused directly on Georgia or the Caucasus contain far more detailed information about the region. Maps showing continents or large empires surrounding Georgia were also produced in considerable detail; however, this article focuses primarily on world maps and the geographical and cartographic information they provide about Georgia. Compared to maps explicitly devoted to Georgia, world maps often present its historical borders, territories, and settlements more clearly, reflecting how European geographers

and cartographers of the period understood the region. World maps also define Georgia's place and role in the international orbit and global politics.

The cartographic material reviewed in this article includes world maps from the mid-15th century, specifically those from the first published geographical atlases of Claudius Ptolemy, through to the end of the 18th century. The selection of this timeframe is determined by the fact that Ptolemaic maps, including world maps, were the first attempts to include Georgia in printed cartography. At the end of the 18th century, the European cartographers were still extensively depicting Georgia and considering it a significant political player. From the beginning of the 19th century onwards, attempts to show Georgia on European maps drastically diminish after the phased occupation and annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire.

METHODS

This article employs content analysis to examine antique maps and atlases. Research material was obtained in recent years from various libraries and depositories in the United States, Switzerland, Germany, France, and Italy. Additionally, studying digitized cartographic collections from various libraries proved very useful for the research. The National Library of France, the Bavarian State Library, the British Library, the Marciana Library, Stanford University Library, Yale University Library, and Harvard University Library have especially rich resources for this purpose. Some of the original printed maps discussed in the article are held in our private collection, assembled over the years from foreign private collectors and official dealers of antique maps.

In addition to publications of early maps and atlases, the article also draws on academic research in the history of cartography. The most significant among them is a fundamental work by Rodney Shirley, one of the best existing works on world maps ([Shirley, 1993](#)). World maps are also well studied and documented in works by Nathaniel Harris ([Harris, 2002](#)) and David Woodward ([Woodward, 1975](#)). When it comes to comparatively small, miniature world maps and their analysis, the comprehensive and highly competent work of Geoffrey L. King proved very useful ([King, 2003](#)). The article also uses works by Georgian authors. First and foremost, among these is the comprehensive book by Lasha Bakradze, which discusses Georgia on old maps in general, and also includes world maps ([Bakradze, 2020](#)). We have likewise studied and published several world maps, particularly miniature world maps, some of which are included in this article ([Sordia, 2024](#)).

RESULTS

Studying hundreds of antique maps and geographical atlases revealed that from the moment printed maps appeared in Europe until the end of the 18th century, European cartographers, geographers, and travelers showed a great interest in Georgia. During the mentioned period, Georgia experienced a drastic political and economic decline. The country was divided into separate kingdoms and principalities, and it was subject to significant political influence

from neighboring empires. Despite this, in the perception of some European cartographers, Georgia remains a unified political unit. Moreover, the term “Georgia” often encompasses the entire Caucasus region. Such a perception of Georgia is especially evident in world maps and in geographical tables listing the world’s leading countries and territories.

Analysis of world maps and geographical tables listing countries worldwide makes it clear that Georgia was assigned an important function and place during the regional division of continents. For example, according to the leading and most influential European cartographers, Georgia was a country that represented a vast regional unit of the Asian continent, alongside Persia, Turkey, Arabia, Tartaria, etc. The entire continent was divided into ten such large units.

As to the ancient world, Georgia is represented on world maps alongside approximately 90 other countries and depicted as the kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia.

DISCUSSION

Georgia on World Maps Depicting the Antique World

When discussing maps of the ancient world, the most notable are those created by the ancient Greek geographer, mathematician, and astronomer Claudius Ptolemy. One could say that his works became the foundation of the history of European cartography. Ptolemy lived approximately between 100 and 170 and worked in the city of Alexandria. His fundamental work, “Geography,” consists of eight parts and includes a description of the world based on the works and notes of Greek and Roman authors available at the time. This work by Ptolemy stands out because the author provides a coordinate chart for each geographical location. He created a list of all cities, settlements, rivers, mountain ranges, and climate zones for the countries and regions he was familiar with. Besides texts, the book also included maps. Ptolemy divided the world into three continents, Europe, Africa, and Asia, further dividing each of them into regions. The book includes 27 maps. These are: the world map, 12 maps of Asia, four maps of Africa, and 10 maps of Europe. Manuscripts in Greek have reached us; however, the maps have not. The oldest surviving handwritten maps from Ptolemy’s “Geography” date back to no earlier than the 13th century, which in reality makes them a reconstruction of the original maps.

Even though Ptolemy’s geographic work became highly influential from the very beginning, its existence remained unknown in Western Europe until the end of the 13th century. “Geography” began to spread widely in Europe after the invention of the printing press and the establishment of the book publishing tradition in the 1450s. Its first edition was published in 1475 in Vicenza; however, the 1477 edition published in Bologna is considered the first complete edition.

Interest in Ptolemy’s “Geography” in Europe increased even more in the 16th century. It had been published by famous geographers and cartographers such as Martin Waldseemüller, Laurent Fries, Sebastian Münster, Gerardus Mercator, Giacomo Gastaldi, and others. Since its first publication, over fifty editions have been printed in various European cities over

the course of 200 years. These editions differed from each other in translation (depending on the translator's and editor's interpretation), as well as in the number of maps and printing technique. The first two editions only included maps of the ancient world, i.e., the old world. In all other editions, the number of "modern" maps gradually increased. By adding these maps, publishers attempted to include regions and countries that Ptolemy had not described, as well as to update the places he had already documented and depicted on his maps.

The world described by Ptolemy includes 89 countries and territories spread over three continents. Two out of these, Colchis and Iberia, represent ancient Georgia. Ptolemy describes the following countries (the number and names of the countries are identical in every edition of Ptolemy's atlas); however, there are small differences in the spelling of the countries' names. We used Latin names used in Ptolemy's atlas, published in 1522-1541 by Laurent Fries:

European continent: Albion Insula Britannica, Hispania Betica, Hispania Lusitania, Hispania Terraconensis, Gallia Aquitana, Gallia Lungdunensis, Gallia Belgica, Celtogalatia Narbonesis, Germania Magna, Rhetia & Vindelicia, Noricum, Pannonia Superior, Pannonia Inferior, Illyris, Liburnia, Dalmatia, Italia, Cynros Insula, Sardinia Insula, Sicilia Insula, Sarmatia in Europa, Taurica Chersonesus, Lazyges Metaneste, Datia, Mysia Superior, Mysia Inferior, Thracia, Chersonesus, Macedonia, Epirus, Achaia, Peloponnesus, Europae Igitur Prouincae.

African continent: Mavritania, Aphrica Numidia, Cyrenaica, Marmarica, Lybia, Aegiptus, Thebais, Lybia Interior, Aethiopia sub Aegipto, Aethipia omnibus his australior, Aphiricae prouinciae

Asian continent: Pontus, Bytinia, Asia Propriae Dictam in qua Phrigya, Lytia, Pamphilia in qua Pisidia, Galatiam in qua Paphlagonia, Cappadocia, Armenia Minor, Cilicia, Sarmatia Asiatica, Colchis, Iberia, Albania, Armenia Maior, Cyprus Insula, Syria, Phoenicia, Iudea Palestin, Arabia Petrea, Arabia Deserta, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Assyria, Susiana, Media, Persis, Parthia, Carmania Deserta, Hyrcania, Arabia Felix, Carmania, Margiana, Bactriana, Sogdiana, Sacae, Scythia intra Imaum montem, Scythia extra Imaum montem, Serica, Aria, Paropanisadae, Drangiana, Arachosia, Gedrosia, India intra Gangem, India extra Gangem, Syrarum region, Taprobane insula, Suntigur Asiae Prouincie quadraginta octo, Omnis prouinciae nostrae habitabilis.

These 89 countries of the ancient world are presented in Ptolemy's atlas in 26 maps. Colchis and Iberia are to be found among the maps of the Asian continent. They are presented together with Albania and Greater Armenia in the third map. This map of the historical Caucasus is named *Tabula Asiae III* in Ptolemy's atlases ([Lomouri, 1955](#); [Mshvildadze, 2015](#); [Sordia, 2020](#)).

Besides the 26 maps mentioned, which focus on various countries and regions, Ptolemy's atlases include an additional map of the ancient world. We present one of the earlier examples to illustrate Ptolemy's world maps. This is a map from Ptolemy's atlas, published in 1482 in the German city of Ulm, edited and published by the famous Benedictine monk

Nicolaus Germanus (Figure 1). We also present a detail from the said map that shows the Caucasus region of the antique period (Figure 1a).

It should be noted that antique Georgia, i.e., Colchis and Iberia, isn't presented in European cartography only through Ptolemaic maps. Various European cartographers continued to enrich Ptolemy's cartographical heritage with data from other authors. One map that stands out among others of its kind is a wall map of the world dated 1507, created by the famous German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller. The Latin name of this significant cartographical creation is *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespuccii aliorumque lustrationes* (The Universal Cosmography according to the Tradition of Ptolemy and the Discoveries of Amerigo Vespucci and others). Its uniqueness lies in its depiction of the entire world, including the newly discovered continents. Waldseemüller is the first cartographer to use the name "America" to define this new continent, or rather, its southern part. Below, you will see the fragment depicting Georgia from the ancient period (Figure 2). Unlike the classical world maps of Ptolemy, it includes the names of several geographical entities, such as Lubium, Sura, Zalissa in Iberia, and Dioscuria, Corax, Siganeum, Sarace in Colchis.

The cartographical heritage of Waldseemüller includes another large wall world map. This is a maritime world map from 1516 (*Carta Marina*), considered the first navigational world map in the history of cartography. Here, the territory related to Georgia is also presented as the kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia, the same as in the 1507 world map; however, it also includes a new name, *Georgia Regnu[m]* (Kingdom of Georgia). In other words, toponymy, which defines both ancient and modern Georgia, is included on this map. The map of the Kingdom of Georgia includes a small text in Latin stating that the country has 18 dioceses and that its population is Schismatic Christian ([Bakradze, 2020, p. 43](#)). Another sign of Christianity's spread in Georgia is a church near the capital city of Tbilisi, as depicted on the map.

Both of Waldseemüller's maps are significant and unique in the history of world cartography. They both survive in a single copy and are displayed in the Library of Congress.

Georgia on World Maps Depicting the Modern World

While Georgia was presented as Colchis and Iberia on ancient world maps, modern maps show it as Georgia, with various spellings: Georgia, Georgie, Georgien, Giorgia, and Giorgiani. It is also common for Oriental names of Georgia to appear on various maps, including world maps, such as Gurgistan. Another name that comes across, albeit rarely, is Georguria ([Sordia, 2024, p. 17](#)).

Georgia is depicted under the above-mentioned names on many modern world maps. Particularly noteworthy are the maps by such renowned European cartographers and geographers as Gerardus Mercator, Giacomo Gastaldi, Nicolas Sanson, Nicolas de Fer, Pierre Duval, Herman Moll, Pieter van der Aa, Johann Baptist Homann, Matthäus Seutter, Tobias Conrad Lotter, Johann Hübner, Johann Georg Schreiber, and others.

These world maps are interesting from several aspects. They provide insight into how European scholarly circles perceived Georgia and the significance of Georgia's various names in European political discourse. The primary distinction between world maps and regional or continental maps is that Georgia is depicted as a unified entity, occupying a vast geographic area between the Black and Caspian Seas. From the north, the river Don is often marked as Georgia's border, while from the south it is the river Arax. It can be said that Europeans saw Georgia as a geopolitical formation uniting the Caucasus region. This is to say that, for Europeans, Georgia played a dual role. It includes Georgia proper, i.e., a political unit created by ethnic Georgians, as well as a larger geographical region.

There are multiple examples showing the united Georgia on world maps. The article presents the world map (Figure 3) and its segment (Figure 3a) created by a renowned French cartographer, Nicolas de Fer. It clearly shows that Europeans perceived Georgia not only as a country but also as a large territorial unit. This map is of medium size; accordingly, the cartographer included only the leading countries of the era, further confirming Georgia's significance to European geographers and cartographers.

Other French, English, Italian, and German cartographers of the same era depict Georgia similarly on their world maps. These maps differ in size and the number of countries and settlements they display; however, most include cartographic data about Georgia. The largest printed world map with a detailed description of Georgia we identified is a 1569 wall map by Gerardus Mercator. It is called *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio ad Usum Navigantium Emendate Accommodata* (New and more complete representation of the terrestrial globe properly adapted for use in navigation). Consisting of 18 printed pieces, the entire map measures 135 x 212 cm. On the other hand, the smallest world map depicting Georgia is the miniature world map *Planisphaerium Globi Terrestris*, created by the German cartographer Tobias Conrad Lotter. This map is from a portable atlas, the *Atlas Geographicus Portatilis*, published multiple times in Augsburg during the 1740s. This miniature world map is only 9.5 x 12.5 cm.

As mentioned above, in most maps, Georgia spans a vast area between the Black and Caspian Seas. "However, there are exceptions in which Georgia is shown as occupying the territory between the Mediterranean and the Caspian Seas. For example, maps created by the renowned German cartographer Johann Baptist Homann depict Georgia in this form, as do other world maps created by cartographers influenced by him. Here we would like to mention cartographers Matthäus Seutter and Tobias Conrad Lotter.

It is not uncommon to find in the works of European geographers and cartographers the name of "Samegrelo" to define Georgia and the entire Caucasus region. This name, alongside "Georgia", had a regional meaning. Numerous cartographic examples depict Samegrelo in this form on maps of continents or separate geographical areas. We identified two examples of Samegrelo depicted on world maps in the regional context. Below you will see one of them, a world maritime map by Girolamo Ruscelli (Figure 4), and a fragment from the Caucasus region, displayed under the name Samegrelo (Figure 4a). This map is considered one of the benchmarks among the world maps. Its first version was created by Italian cartographer Giacomo Gastaldi. Another world map showing Samegrelo in the same

context is a maritime map by Italian cartographer Tomaso Porcacchi.

Another name that some European cartographers used, though rarely, for defining the Caucasus region, including Georgia, was “Armenia”. One example we can cite is a world map by the famous 16th-century Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius from the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* atlas, which plays a significant role in the history of cartography. In terms of textual descriptions, a noteworthy example is the collection of geographic cards by the 17th-century Italian author and engraver Stefano della Bella. According to one of these cards, “Armenia lies from the river of Euphrates to the Caspian Seas and the Caucasus Mountain range. It includes Samegrelo, Georgia, and Great and Minor Armenia” ([Sordia, 2024, p. 90](#)). Of course, in this case, “Armenia” is used not as a state unit, but as a geographical and territorial unit. In general, Armenian historical maps can be observed in a comprehensive study by Rouben Galichian ([Galichian, 2004](#)).

Examining world maps reveals the number of state and territorial formations that existed at the time these maps were created, the number of continents and parts that European geographers and cartographers divided the world into, and Georgia’s place within this division. From this point of view, maps including explanatory tables are most valuable. In these tables, authors listed the political units they considered significant by continent. It is worth noting that the majority of world maps and accompanying explanatory tables have traditionally included Georgia.

For example, the influential 17th century French cartographer, who is considered the founder of the French cartography, Nicolas Sanson, lists 38 countries and territories (besides islands) in an explanatory table named *Geographical Tables of the Divisions of the Terrestrial Globe* (*Tables Geographiques des Divisions Du Globe Terrestre Par le Sanson. Geographe ordinaire du Roy*) for the world map that he created. Georgia is among those countries.

The list of these countries goes as follows:

- European continent: Scandinavia, Moscovia, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy, Turkey in Asia
- Asian continent: Turkey in Asia, Georgia, Arabia, Persia, India, China, Tartaria
- African continent: Barbaria, Egypt, Biledulgerid, Zaara, Country of Negros, Guenea, Nubia, Abyssinia, Zangebar, Congo, Monomatapa, Cafre
- American continent: Arctic lands, Canada or New France, Florida, Mexico, New Spain, Terra Ferme, Peru, Chili, Brazil, Paraguay, Terra Magelanique.

In comparison, a greater number of countries and territories are shown on the world map by the 18th-century German cartographer and publisher Johann Georg Schreiber, which was published in 1740 and 1749. This map mentions countries in an abbreviated version. The lower part of the map includes explanations for the abbreviations for the four continents (Europe, Asia, Africa, and America). For example, Georgia is mentioned as GE, while the explanatory part states: GE. Georgia.

In Schreiber's table, the world is divided into 50 countries besides Asian island territories. These are:

- European continent: POR. Portugalia, HIS. Hispania, GAL. Gallia, AN. Anglia, GER. Germania, DA. Dania, POL. Polonia, HUN. Hungaria, IT. Italia. GRAE. Graeciae, MOS. Moscovia, TAR. Tartaria Minor, SU. Suecia, NOR. Norwegia, LA. Laponia, N.ZE. Nova Zembla.
- Asian continent: NA. Natolia, GE. Georgia, AR. Arabia, PER. Persia, TAR. MAG. Tartaria Magna, SIB. Siberia, TER. IED. Terra Iedso, MOG. Mogol, IN. India, CHI. China.
- African continent: Bar. Barbaria, AEG. Aegyptus, BIL. Biledurgarid, SAR DES. Sara Deserta, NIG. Nigritae, GUIN. Guinea. NU. Nubia, AI Ajan Zangubar, ASYS. Abysinia, CON. Congo, MO. Monocnugi, MON. Monomontapan, CAF. Caffa.
- American continent: N. HIS. Nova Hispania, FLO. Florida, LO. Lovisinia, N. ME. Nova Mexico, CA. Canada, VIR. Virginia, CAL. California, TER. FIR. Terra Firma, PE. Peru, CHI. Chili, T. MAG. Terra Magelanica, BRAS. Brasilia.

As we can see, following the tradition from the ancient period, Georgia is listed in both geographical tables as part of the Asian continent. Sanson divided the Asian continent into seven parts, while Schreiber divided it into nine parts (excluding the islands).

We see a similar picture in other geographical tables showing countries from the same era. For example, we can mention geographical tables created by geographers, cartographers, and authors such as Pierre Duval, Antoine Phérotée de La Croix, Luigi Montieri, and others.

CONCLUSION

Georgia is depicted on hundreds of world maps. Moreover, analysis of these maps and accompanying geographical tables makes it clear that Georgia was assigned an important function and place during the regional division of continents. According to the leading and most influential European cartographers, Georgia is a country that represents a vast regional unit of the Asian continent, alongside Persia, Turkey, Arabia, Tartaria, etc. It is also clear that European cartographers, geographers, and travelers were deeply interested in Georgia, as reflected in the production of numerous regional maps focused on Georgia.

Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Figure 1. *World map from Ptolemy's Geography. Published by Nicolaus Germanus. Ulm, 1482.*
National Library of Sweden.

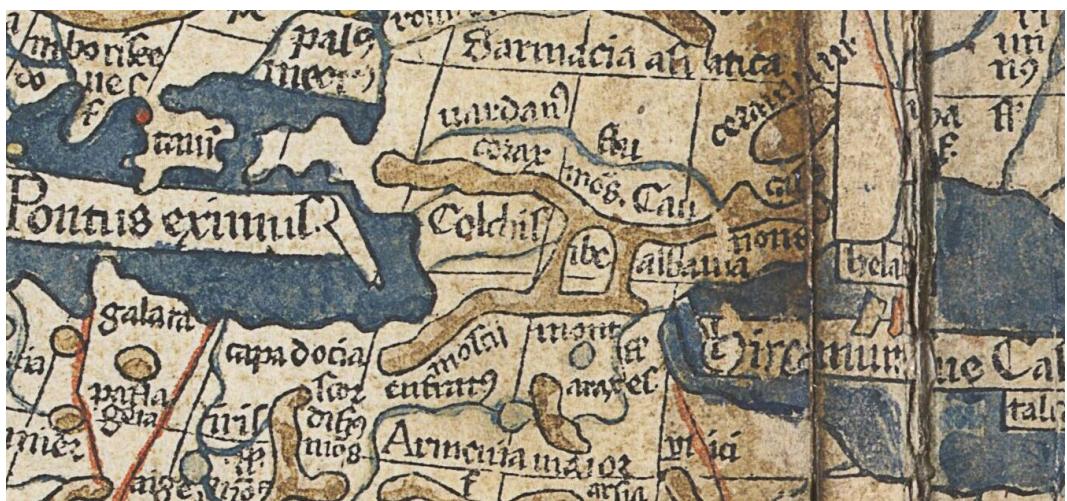


Figure 1a. *World map from Ptolemy's Geography (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Published by Nicolaus Germanus. Ulm, 1482. National Library of Sweden.*



Figure 2. World map by Martin Waldseemüller (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Strasbourg, 1507. Library of Congress.



Figure 3. World map by Nicolas de Fer. Paris, 1714. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.



Figure 3a. World map by Nicolas de Fer (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Paris, 1714. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.

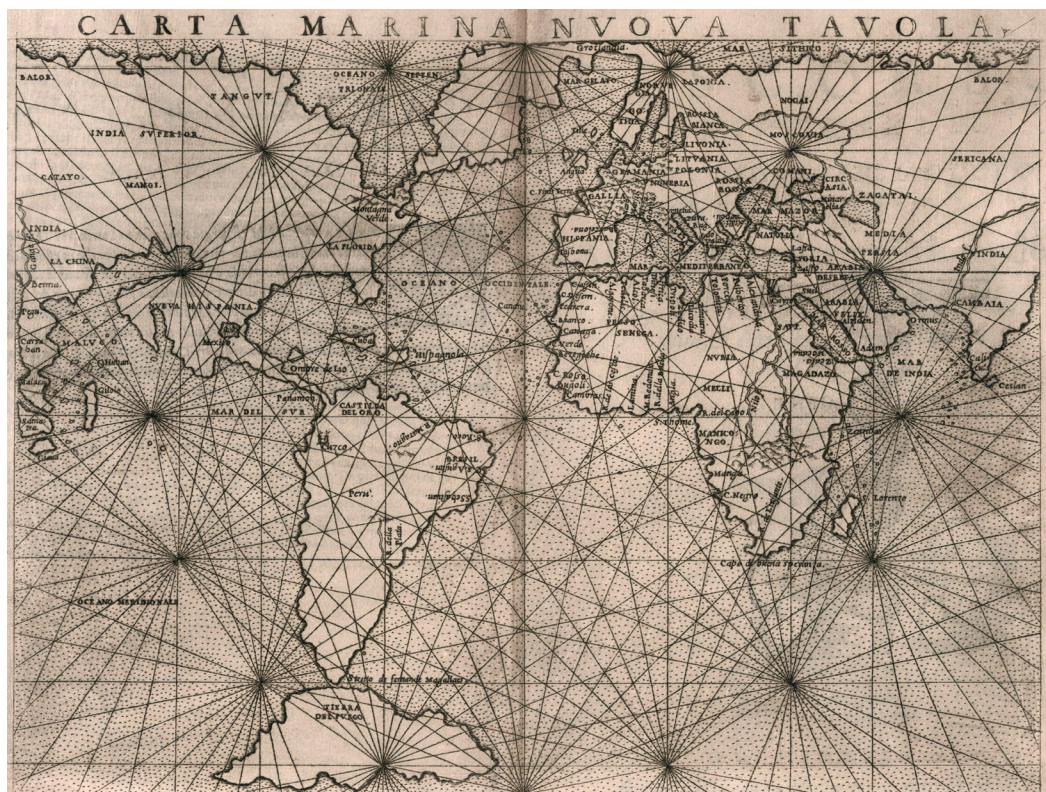


Figure 4. World map by Girolamo Ruscelli, based on earlier map of Giacomo Gastaldi. Venice, 1564. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.



Figure 4a. *World map by Girolamo Ruscelli, based on earlier map of Giacomo Gastaldi (Fragment focused on Caucasus). Venice, 1564. David Rumsey Map Collection, Stanford Libraries.*