During the Age of Encounters, Europeans regularly saw Asia in the newly discovered lands of the Americas, and the association of America and Asia dominated the geographical imagination of Europe for over a century after 1492. By considering a plethora of texts, maps, objects, and images produced between 1450 and 1700, it becomes possible to inhabit a coherent, if malleable, vision of a world where Mexico really was India, North America was an extension of China, and South America was populated by a variety biblical and Asian sites. We ask, further, what does it mean that Europe was coming into cultural self-definition during the very period that it inhabited an Amerasian worldview? The study of Ameriasia will bring into view a colorful, multi-faceted, and dynamic model of the world and of Europe’s place in it that was later suppressed by Eurocentric and colonialist narratives. To rediscover this history is, we believe, a necessary part of coming to terms with the emergent polyfocal global reality of our own time.

In most accounts of the post-1492 discoveries, it is a foregone conclusion that an initial confusion with the continent of Asia steadily and even swiftly gave way to the realization that America was a New World. The so-called confusion is most often presented as a face-off between modern reason and medieval superstition (superstitio: literally, staying or persisting on): those who remained attached to the old world were eventually and inevitably defeated by those who faced up to new and unsuspected truths—and to the fact of the new itself. In our investigations, we have found little evidence of such a battle; indeed, we repeatedly find that newly discovered lands in both Asia and America delivered the shock of the new. Even the term “new world” was not a monopoly of America; the formulas mundus novus and novus orbis were also used to
describe the lands newly discovered by the Portuguese in Asia. Most importantly, the new realms
discovered to the East and to the West were understood to be convergent. Using an abundance of
sources from different media, our proposed monograph investigates how the idea of the New
World was entirely compatible, for an extended period, with the idea that the newly discovered
lands were part of Asia or bordered Asia. Historians have tended to focus on a rising
consciousness of America in the sixteenth century, but our research will explore how much this
was, in effect, a rising Western consciousness of Asia.

Seemingly innumerable chroniclers, writers, historians, cartographers, printmakers, and
artists described and represented America as China, India, or Southeast Asia in the early modern
period, well into the seventeenth century. To offer just a few examples, Christopher Columbus
famously thought he had arrived in Asia. For Columbus, Cuba shared a continent with Cathay,
the Caribbean Sea was the Sea of China, and Veragua was either the Golden Chersonese (the
Malay Peninsula) or Ophir, the famous site of King Solomon's mines. In his wake, scores of
European writers and artists continued to adapt these and other Asiatic associations. For inst
ance, in a striking passage in 1501, Peter Martyr, the Milanese historian of Spain and the New World
discoveries, described the island of Cuba as “Alpha-Omega,” the place where West ends and East
begins. Such an idea was not unreasonable, “since the mapmakers have left the boundaries of the
Gangean India undefined, and many are of the opinion that the shores of India are not far from
the coasts of Spain” (Martyr, Decades, 1.3.8) (Appendix:1).

Many sources indicate how the question of the furthest extent of India and Asia remained
an open problem in early modern cosmography, leaving ample and flexible mental room for the
newly discovered lands to exist in relation to an Indian or Asian extension. For example, in his
De insulis meridiani atque indici maris nuper inventis (ca. 1494), Nicolò Scillacio—a Sicilian
doctor interested in geography and cosmography—believed that Columbus had gone all the way
around to Ethiopia, Arabia, or India, a claim that helps explain why the earliest images related to
Columbus’ discoveries show the newly discovered peoples engaged in commercial relations with turban-wearing inhabitants of better-known parts of the Asian extension (Appendix: 2). When Vicente Yáñez Pinzón landed in Brazil in 1500, he thought he was “beyond the city of Cathay and the Indian shore beyond the Ganges.” On his first voyage to South America, Amerigo Vespucci kept searching the Amazon delta for the Asian port of Cattigara: the southeasternmost point of the Asian mainland on maps derived from the ancient cosmographer Ptolemy. (As much as six decades later maps place Cattigara in the vicinity of Peru.) Writing to Domenico Maliperio in 1501, the Venetian ambassador to Lisbon Angelo Trevisan thought that Jamaica was Java, and a great variety of cosmographers and mapmakers thought that Hispaniola (today, the island of Haiti and the Dominican Republic) was Japan. The earliest maps of the New World, including the Cantino Planisphere (1502), the Caverio Map (1505), the Contarini-Roselli map (1506), the Ruysch World Map (1507), and the Waldseemüller Map (1507), as well as many others, indicated the boundaries of East and West by leaving it undecided between the left and right edges of the map. Indeed, the vast majority of sixteenth-century world maps and maps of the Americas present one unified and contiguous Amerasian continent that incorporated the new discoveries into Asian landmasses. While some cartographers experimented with separating the continents, their maps were very much in the minority. Our research shows that many if not most cartographers either unified Asia and America as one continent (often placing camels and elephants across Canada), or employed a wide variety of techniques and formats to express the unclear relationship between the two, by including broken or unclear coastlines, having images of continents “fade out” rather than be defined by a coast, and by cutting off continents with the edges of the map (Appendix :3-6).

In addition, our examination of European practices of representation to date demonstrates that ideas about “Amerasia” actually grew over time, and even after their peak, persisted well into the sixteenth and even seventeenth centuries. The “confusion” between America and Asia was not, in fact, overcome when Martin Waldseemüller famously published his 1507 map of the
world with a discrete continent named America. In fact, Waldseemüller later emended his findings in maps of 1513 and 1516, where North America is named Cuba (not America) and is joined with Asia (Appendix: 7). Even after Magellan’s 1521-22 circumnavigation of the globe, Italian missionaries in New Spain in the 1530s regularly referred to Mexico in their letters as India and Asia. In 1539 the friar Marco de Niza returned to Mexico City reporting the presence of camels, elephants, and people wearing silk on his expedition to the territory along the upper Rio Grande in New Mexico. On a subsequent expedition in 1540, one of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado’s men remarked that “New Spain is a part of a continuous continent with Peru, as well as with greater India or China. There is no strait in this region to divide it.” The Venetian mapmaker Giovanni Andrea Vavassore printed a map by the German cartographer Caspar Vopel in 1558 that represented Asia and America as the same continent. On Vopel’s map, Mexico and China were one and the same, and Chinese and Mexican toponyms alternate with each other; indeed, the circumnavigating Magellan is portrayed taking off from the Amerasian coast (Appendix: 8-9). In 1565 the viceroyalty of New Spain in Mexico City established Manila as the seat of the East Indies trade route to bring Chinese goods to Acapulco in New Spain—suggesting increasingly common knowledge of the vastness of the Pacific—yet the great cartographer Gerardus Mercator labeled the central valley of Mexico in his 1569 Atlas as “India” (Appendix:10).

The idea of Amerasia was resilient, shaping the European geographical and cultural imaginary for many decades. Inventories of the Hapsburg family regularly show that New World objects mingled with Asian ones, yet contemporary scholars treat them separately, according to their fields of academic specialization. The inventories of the Medici family regularly call Mesoamerican objects “Indian” or “from India.” So far from being a designation for exotica in general, as even recent studies have suggested, this was in fact a clear and specific geographical designation. Mexico, we will show, was India. Well into the seventeenth century, Aztec and
Mixtec manuscripts were being classed with “Oriental Manuscripts” in Western collections, or outright as books from China (sometimes referred to as “India Superior”).

These were not merely confusions that occurred when objects traveled. On the ground in New Spain even as late as 1600 missionaries believed they were baptizing the Indians of Asia, as is clear from their writings. On his *Universal Hydrographical Chart* (1634), the French cartographer Jean Guérard noted in the blank space west of the Great Lakes that “it is believed there is a passage from there to Japan”; the French explorer Jean Nicolet donned silk robes after crossing Lake Michigan in 1634, so as to be dressed appropriately to meet the Chinese representatives of the Great Khan. A full understanding of the shape and position of the Americas, and the North American continent in particular, did not become clear until the voyages of Vitus Bering in 1741 and James Cook in 1778; even throughout much of the eighteenth century, no one could completely rule out the possibility of Amerasia. As late as James Weddell’s *Voyage Towards the South Pole* of 1825, a book owned and admired by Richard Fitzroy (captain of the H.M.S. Beagle, which transported a young Charles Darwin to South America in the 1830s), described the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego as descendants of Noah’s son Ham and theorized that several of their words resembled Hebrew.

One of the central questions our research considers is how ideas about Islamic, Indian, and Asian civilization immediately attached themselves to information arriving in Europe about the Columbian voyages, especially in discussions about who and what “Indians” were. Poggio Bracciolini’s *India recognita* (Milan, 1492, though written forty years earlier), for instance, emphasized the strengths and wonders of Indian civilization. News of the Columbian discoveries reached Europe a year later, announcing encounters with peoples believed to be islanders in the region of India beyond the Ganges. On 15 June 1493, Giuliano Dati, a Florentine priest whose ideas we believe were influenced by Bracciolini, published in Rome a vernacular verse rendition of Columbus’ letter announcing his discoveries. In his “Columbus poem,” Dati presented the newly discovered islands as the gateway to India; he then composed two *Cantari dell’India*
(1493-95) as a follow-up publication, which presented legends from India known for centuries, including an account of the reign of Prester John. Shortly thereafter, on 17 May 1497, the Venetian Republic received a visit from a new world king, a gift to the Venetian Doge from the king of Spain. But for the Venetians he was not a new world king—he was a re saracino, a “Saracen king.” The Saracen king arrived with several parrots of different colors, mascots that would have confirmed his eastern provenance (Appendix:11). Similarly, in his 1502 Mundus Novus letter, Vespucci described the men in South America wearing earrings “in the custom of Egyptians and Indians.” Indeed, it was a commonplace of accounts of travel, exploration, and conquest to understand indigenous Americans in terms of Asians. Giovanni da Verrazano for instance asserted that Native Americas were “as nimble as Orientals, and especially the Chinese and Mongolians as described by Polo.” Both the Spanish historian and naturalist Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and the English explorer Martin Frobisher compared the American Indians to Tartars. An Eskimo man and woman brought back by Frobisher, who were immediately portrayed by contemporary artists, were said to be “of Cathay or new land India.”

The sheer quantity of sources that linked America and Asia is staggering, so numerous that it becomes impossible to disregard them as remaining pockets of uncertainty, misunderstanding, or bewilderment. Early modern individuals were not “confused”, but on the contrary, understood the positioning of places around the globe with their own decided clarity and precision, but also with flexibility.

Beyond merely resisting the imposition of modern geographical models on the historical past, our study aims to brings new light to early modern geography and globalization. To bring an alternative early modern configuration into view requires assimilating a different understanding of the world and of Europe’s place in it, one that we are perhaps in a position to grasp now that these relations are undergoing fundamental redefinition in our time. Our research will demonstrate how in the early modern world, much as today, America and Asia, and sometimes Africa, fit together in the historical, anthropological, and cultural imagination of Europe.
Even among the most significant and influential studies of the New World discoveries there is little substantive or focused discussion of the geographical logic at the heart of our problem—a striking lacuna, given how often Asiatic references crop up in descriptions and representations of the “New World.” Episodes of the association of Asia and America are found regularly throughout the record, but since they have been treated piecemeal in the scholarly literature, the full charge of their impact has not been felt. When encountering such cases one by one—for instance, when Columbus thought he was near Cathay, or when Jacques Cartier or Giovanni da Verrazano searched the eastern seaboard of North America for a strait leading to China—they appear as curiosities. When the cases are assembled more systematically, it becomes clear that the sources are articulating a coherent, if developing, view of the world—an Amerasian view of the world. We are asking, what was it like to inhabit that world?

To ask the traditional question, “What was the impact of the New World on European consciousness?” is to presume to know what the New World was—that it was America then because it is America now. It also presumes that the cultural entity “Europe” was always in place. Together with other recent writers, we contest the imposition of these post-Enlightenment certainties onto the early modern situation. How could there be a European colonial consciousness, Vanita Seth asks in her recent book Europe’s Indians, if the very idea of Europe was in formation? We ask, further, what does it mean that Europe was coming into self-definition during the very period that it inhabited an Amerasian worldview? To bring into focus the concept of Amerasia on the basis of a wide range of images, texts, and maps will reveal a coherent if highly dynamic earlier model of the world that has been obscured by modern ways of thinking about Europe, the New World, East, and West.

A series of recent studies directly informs our ideas about Amerasia. Scholars of Latin America in the colonial period, for example, have emphasized connections between the New World and the Middle East, as Serge Gruzininski did in Quelle heure est-il là-bas? (2008), his multi-focal study of the New World, Europe, and Islam in the sixteenth century. The research of
Stephanie Leitch, who has studied illustrated accounts of European voyages along the African coast and to India in the early sixteenth century, has offered strong evidence to support the idea that our modern distinction between the two Indies is “largely anachronistic for the period.” Christian Feest’s studies offer clear-headed accounts of the mingling of Indian and American motifs in sixteenth-century ethnographic prints and drawings: “Calicut was then thought to be a place which could be reached by sailing either to the east or to the west.”

In a major recasting of the problem, Nicolás Wey Gómez’s *Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (2008) showed that the thinking about latitude rather than longitude directly conditioned Columbus’ observations. Sailing South, Gómez showed, was as important as sailing West to reach the East. Columbus had set out to discover the equatorial “torrid zone,” thought by several ancient authorities to be uninhabitable, or inhabited only by marvelous creatures, and to prove that they were, in fact, temperate and habitable. The discovery that the tropics, though certainly marvelous and at times monstrous, were in fact highly fertile and inhabited, made possible descriptions of the Caribbean and its people that corresponded in many ways to descriptions of India, thought to occupy the same latitude. So far from being a traditionalist attached to the old Asiatic references, Columbus was in fact an empiricist disproving a widely accepted model of the climatic zones. He showed through empirical observation that these lands shared the natural conditions of India. As Peter Martyr said, reporting Columbus’ discoveries in 1493, “the parrots brought from there and many other things show that these islands taste of the soil of India, either because of their proximity or because of their natural properties.” (This may help explain why a chapel mosaic in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, commissioned around 1510 by the Spanish Cardinal Bernardino Carvajal, a Spanish prelate very well informed about the Spanish discoveries and a correspondent of Peter Martyr, shows an American macaw and new world maize in the vicinity of the earthly paradise, traditionally placed in the easternmost part of the earth. Appendix:12.) The fact that the entire extension from India to the newly discovered lands occupied the same climatic zone determined
by latitude reinforced the association connecting them, as can be seen well after Columbus in the writings of the first great naturalist of the New World, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. Commonality by latitude produced an association robust enough to persist even as the mileage between them, including a growing knowledge of the Pacific, expanded greatly over the following decades.

Our work also builds on the scholarship of Joan-Pau Rubiés, who has pointed out that there would be no reason for sixteenth-century Europeans to distinguish between new accounts of the Americas and new descriptions of Africa, Asia, or the Levant. The idea of the New World, he writes, “included most of Asia, no less than America, given that much of the East had been equally ‘newly found’ by European navigators: a perspective often overlooked by modern historians all too often concerned with one area of expansion alone.” Confirming Rubies’ insight, we have found that the terms mundus novus or novus orbis were not reserved exclusively for the American continent in early modern sources, but rather described many Asiatic lands to the east. The “New Worlds” in fact converged where East met West, at the limits of European cartographic and cultural understanding.

For instance, in his 1507 oration on the new discoveries as a new Golden Age, pronounced in the Sistine Chapel before Pope Julius II, the Augustinian preacher Giles of Viterbo speaks of the conquests of the Portuguese King in India “in novum terrarum orbem inventum,” making no mention of new lands to the West; for him, the framework of the discovery of New Worlds was entirely Asian. Around this same time, editors of early travelogue compilations regularly mingled texts from what today we call the New World with accounts of discoveries in India and Southeast Asia. For instance, the Paesi novamente retrovati (Vicenza, 1507), which offered the most comprehensive view of the world at the time and served as a model for European collections of travel literature for the rest of the sixteenth century, contained narratives of European sea voyages to the East and the West, comfortably combined the accounts of Alvise Cadamosto on Africa, Vasco da Gama and Cabral on India, and Peter Martyr, Amerigo Vespucci,
and Gaspar Corte Real on America. The *Codice vaglienti* (Florence, 1499-1516), a manuscript compiled by a Florentine silk merchant, similarly mixes together the accounts of John Mandeville, Marco Polo, Vespucci, a series of letters from Portugal to Florentine diplomats regarding India (Calicut), as well as extracts from the Koran and other Islamic texts. The collection of travel literature that became the standard compilation of voyages in Northern Europe, Grynaeus and Münster’s *Novus orbis* (Paris, 1532), considered the “new world” to include any and all lands sufficiently “unknown” outside of Latin Christendom, blending accounts of the East Indies, central Europe, the Holy Land, and the African coast with the works of Columbus, Vespucci, and Peter Martyr. The editor Michael Herr produced a German translation of Grynaeus’ work and notably published all of these accounts from around the world under the single title *Die neue Welt* (Strasbourgh, 1534). None of these collections expressed a sense of confusion or bewilderment. The zonal partitioning of the globe comes up hardly at all; the readers of such volumes would have had little sense of whether the described lands lay in the East or the West.

An approach that begins by recognizing the extent and logic of the Amerasia phenomenon will be able to make sense not only of the Amerasian extension but also of the voices audible in the period that appreciated the newness of the discovered lands. Modern scholars tend to cast a variety of period writers, namely, Peter Martyr, John Cabot, and Amerigo Vespucci, as “naysayers” who saw through the confusion propagated by Columbus and understood America as a new and separate world. Our research however reveals them rather to be quite as involved in the Amerasian world-view as their supposed opponents. The widely read humanist compiler of accounts of the discoveries Peter Martyr, for example, is commonly described as an early critic of the idea that Columbus had landed in Asia, being among the first to see America as a “New World,” entitling his multi-volume work *De orbe novo*. However, upon closer examination, his thinking emerges as quite flexible; the modern misunderstanding results in part from a misconception of the meaning of “new.” Martyr’s famous term *orbis novus* was a
linguistic formula that functioned two ways; new maintained that these lands were unknown, but by saying that this was a new world rather than part of a known hemisphere (novus orbis rather than orbis terrarum), he fundamentally avoided having to judge whether Columbus’ lands were in Asia or not. The phrase could equally imply an Asiatic location, or a landmass smaller than a continent. It was, at any rate, to be understood in relation to the Amerasian extension.

Amerigo Vespucci and Martin Waldseemüller, figures we typically believe saw a new America, also saw an Amerasia. In a 1502 letter given the title Mundus novus in period publications, Amerigo Vespucci described his time spent on the coast of present-day Brazil, calling it a “new world.” The letter was widely enough published that when Waldseemüller published his map of 1507, he described an independent (if narrow) continent to the West, separate from Asia, and called it America after the Florentine navigator. It would seem that in the space of these few years Columbus’s confusion had been dispelled and the New World had displaced the notion of an Asiatic discovery to the West. However, as many commentators have shown, this was not the case. In the same famous 1502 letter, which was repeatedly published on its own and reproduced in many important travel report compilations, Vespucci says, “and certainly, if anywhere in the world there exists an Earthly Paradise, I think it is not far from these regions.” This view was, in fact, not far from Columbus, who in 1498 had stood at the mouth of the Orinoco river in present-day Venezuela and reasoned that such a mighty river implied a great height inland, certainly the earthly paradise at the easternmost part of the earth.

Amerasia pervades the early modern geographical imaginary, well beyond the accounts of navigators. For instance, in Thomas More’s of 1516, the embedded narrator, a mariner left behind on Vespucci’s final voyage, describes a well-governed island reached by traveling west from the Brazilian coast to Calicut, and thence to an island where the people speak a Persianate language and worship Mithras, and where the priests are clad in elaborate featherwork, recalling the feather vestments described in Vespucci’s letters from Brazil. (Appendix:13). This Amerasian image exactly corresponds to the woodcuts by Jörg Breu that accompanied the almost exactly
contemporaneous 1515 publication of Ludovico Varthema’s account of his (real) travels in India and beyond, where for example the inhabitants of Sumatra are shown wearing Brazilian Tupi feather headdresses and carrying a Tupi club, or the slightly later woodcuts of Hans Burgkmair for the Emperor Maximilian I, which show a delegation from “Calicut” wearing American feather skirts and carrying American maize. (Appendix:14)

In trying to grasp such configurations, our language continually betrays us. We say “Brazilian Tupi headdress” or “in present-day Venezuela,” reinforcing the geographical disparity between Asia and America. The challenge, however, is to see that these are not “composite” images but expressions of a coherent and articulated, if malleable, vision of the world.

In both our approach and our choice of material, our project works to integrate early modern European studies into global history. The historian Andre Gunder Frank noted in his groundbreaking study ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age (1998) that “from a global perspective Asia and not Europe held center stage for most of early modern history.” In 1500, Asia was home to most of the world’s population and the world’s five largest cities, at the heart of the world’s greatest empires of the time. In the period of early modernity, Europe was—as global historians often put it—a mere peninsula of Asia, and the driving force of early modern globalism was the desire to obtain Chinese goods and Indian spices. Asia loomed so large physically, economically, and culturally, that we should indeed expect Europeans to be looking for it in America. Both Dante in his Divine Comedy and Columbus in his oceanic voyage traveled West to go East, indicating how early modern mentalities belie our modern separation of East and West.

Our study recasts the problem of the relationship between antiquity and modernity during the Age of Encounters. Reflecting a more traditional historiographical framework, the literary scholar Giuseppe Mazzotta claimed that “If Columbus is the ‘new man,’ the first modern man, a new Adam naming this New World, Spain is for Columbus the land where modernity begins. And it begins by retrieving the culture of Rome.” For Mazzotta and others, modernity as first
formed by the likes of Columbus, Vespucci, and Da Gama emerged out of the intellectual models of the Florentine Quattrocento, and ultimately in turn, from the ancient world. Our research suggests that if Columbus represents modernity, if he represents a “new man”, he does so in relationship to Asia rather than Rome. If we take this idea to its logical conclusion—knowing that Peter Martyr and Oviedo for instance not only used Pliny to understand the New World, but also used information gleaned from the Americas to make classical texts more comprehensible—this means that Europeans used information about Asia (or Amerasia) to illuminate the ancient world, and that “modernity” in fact had its roots in a growing knowledge of Asia.

This study both builds on and redirects a growing body of scholarship across the humanities regarding globalization. To date, early modern historians of diplomacy, art, and material culture have notably begun to examine myriad cross-cultural interactions: between the Islamic East and the Christian West, and between Western Europe and China, Africa, and the New World. These investigations have dovetailed with and resulted in a spate of exhibitions, most recently Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2015-16).

As the art historian Claire Farago noted in her pathbreaking volume Reframing the Renaissance (1995), there has long existed a field of historical study that examines the global expansion of Europe in the Age of Encounters. However, historians whose work has proved seminal in this scholarship such as Lewis Hanke, John Elliot, Edmundo O’Gorman, and Anthony Pagden, have grounded their studies primarily in texts rather than in images, leaving historians of art relatively isolated from these discussions and debates about the Age of Encounters. Much has happened since then to bring about a more pluralistic historical vision, and much remains to be done. Our project—our historical and art historical collaboration—puts the history of art and of collecting in relation to the textual and cartographic sources, and also puts the fields of Asian studies and New World studies, until now quite separated, into dialogue.
Even as our study is in line with current and developing ideas about cross-cultural and global history, we believe that much work remains to be done to integrate fully these new historiographical paradigms. American artifacts (often called “Indian” or “from India”) regularly mingled with Asian objects in Western collections, such as those of the Habsburgs or the Medici, yet contemporary scholars treat them separately, according to their fields of academic specialization. Specialists typically study the part of the collection that pertains to their field: the Americanists study the collecting of Americana, the Asianists study exported Asian goods. For a true picture of Amerasia to emerge, it will be necessary to take the field of studies devoted to the presence of Asia in European culture and make it speak to the field of New World studies.

The concepts of “contact” and “global” sometimes work to reinforce disciplinary divisions—as if the cultures being brought into contact and the world being made global are objectively defined. We affirm instead the importance of point of view. The “global” is always an imaginary and image-based configuration, we believe, never an objective state of affairs. There is no global “out there.” Global consciousness takes shape from specific positions and at specific times. Rather than begin with a ready-made conception of the global, we aim to track an emergent worldview through the study of early modern Western writers, mapmakers, image-makers, and collectors in the earliest phase of global interconnectedness following the Columbian voyages. How, we ask, are places and peoples configured within a geographical and anthropological *imaginaire*? Beyond exploring trade routes, the movement of luxury goods, and the transmission of technical knowledge—recent research that has been fundamental in rethinking the definition and meaning of early modernity—we are attempting to understand how new information became part of the symbolic economy of Western culture, ultimately making it a “European” culture.

At this ideological level, the new discoveries actually informed the past, and thus allowed the past to shape the present in new ways. The dominance of the idea of Asia in the Western understanding of the “New World” required among other things a highly dynamic integration of the old and the new, since Asia was known through ancient sources and always thought to be of
the hoariest antiquity. As Thomas More’s narrator says when describing the island of Utopia, the Amerasian island par excellence, “There were cities there before there were people here [in Europe].”

Taking into account archival documents, cosmographies, natural histories, narratives of exploration, paintings, maps, prints, and an array of objects, our study will be of interest to scholars across the humanities. In addition, in bringing different specializations (Asianists, Europeanists, Americanists, also Africanists) into dynamic dialogue, our project aims to bring about a crossing of cultures in our academic world as much as it aims to illuminate the cultural interactions of the past. We are trying to bring into view a model of the world that was suppressed by colonialist narratives of European and Western centrality. We believe it is important to reconnect with that world in order to understand the changing and polyfocal world of our time.
APPENDIX: Example References to Amerasia

1. “He called [Cuba’s] beginning Alpha Omega, because he thinks that there is the boundary of our orient, since the sun sets there, and of our occident since it rises there. For he insists that the beginning of ‘India beyond the Ganges’ starts from the west [of here], and its ultimate limit is in the east. Nor indeed is this utterly absurd since the mapmakers have left the boundaries of the Gangean India undefined, and many are of the opinion that the shores of India are not far from the coasts of Spain."

Peter Martyr, Selections from Peter Martyr, ed. Geoffrey Eatough, Repertorium Columbianum, vol. V (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1998), 62-64 (Decades, 1.3.8).

2. Illustration to Columbus’ letter on the first voyage, Latin edition, Basel, 1494.
3. Cantino Planisphere (1502), Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

5. Ferrando Bertelli, *Universale descrittione di tutta la terra conosciuta fin qui* (Venice, 1571), British Library Maps, K.top.5


8. Giovanni Vavassore and Caspar Vopel, *Nova et integra universalisque orbis totius ... descriptio* (Venice, 1558), Harvard University, Houghton Library, Boston.
9. Giovanni Vavassore and Caspar Vopel, *Nova et integra universalisque orbis totius ... descriptio* (Venice, 1558), Harvard University, Houghton Library, Boston, detail.

11. “On 17 May, the knight Francesco Cappello, formerly ambassador in Spain, returned with the Barbary galleys captained by Piero Contarini, known as Rosso. He brought with him a dark-skinned king, or more precisely brown like a Canary islander, from those islands newly discovered by the king of Spain, who was given to him by the said king and whom he presented to the Signoria, as I wrote above, when he reported through his letters on the present which the king had made him; he also brought several parrots of diverse kinds and colours. And he went into the Collegio [a Venetian council of ministers] the following morning, then into the Pregadi [the Venetian Senate] on the twentieth, and reported on his embassy, on which he spent about two years [….] Likewise he related how on his return from Tunis the king helped him disembark, and saluted him in the name of Venice; and the said black king was presented to the Signoria, and he was well behaved, but did not know how to talk, although he had been caused to be baptized. It was discussed among the Savii [ministers] of the Collegio what should be done with him; some wanted to send him as a gift for the marquess of Mantua; and on 2 June, in the council of the Pregadi, it was decided that he would go to live at Padua in the palace of the captain, who was given a house for him, and that he would have five ducats a month for his lodging to cover his expenses, and two ducats for someone to stay with him and serve him; and that he would be given clothing from time to time, as he had need. This was written as a memorandum of this present sent by the Catholic King and Queen of Spain. The king (from the islands) said that it seemed to him that he was in Paradise; this one, as it is said, had 2000 persons who ate under him, and in their country they eat human flesh, that is of executed criminals; and together with six other kings, he was brought to Castile by the caravels and troops of Spain, who went to conquer the lordship of the said islands; and it is said, that before they were captured, these chiefs made a stout defense, etc. He was in the procession before the prince on the day of Corpus Christi (25 May), and made the entrance to Padua with Fantin da Pesaro, who went there as captain, on 18 June 1497.”


12. Chapel mosaic in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, commissioned around 1510 by the Spanish Cardinal Bernardin Carvajal, showing a South American macaw and maize in the vicinity of the figure of paradise.
13. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Clarence H. Miller (Yale University Press, 2014), p. 127-8: “In church the people where white garments; the priests clothed in vestments of various colors, marvelous in both workmanship and design, though the materials are not especially expensive, and they are not woven with gold thread or encrusted with rare gems; rather they are fashioned out of the feathers of various birds, so elegantly and skillfully that the costliest material would not match the value of the workmanship.”

14. Jörg Breu, illustration to Ludovico Varthema’s *Voyage to India*. The “inhabitants of Sumatra” carry Tupi headdress and a Tupi club.