



WORLD VIEW: A new initiative aims to expand the understanding of the medieval world, depicted here in Robbins Library's facsimile of a 1457 map.

## NEW KNOWLEDGE, NEW FORMS

# Beyond Medieval

Early Worlds Initiative highlights interdisciplinary scholarship.

By Jordan Mangefrida '20

A new interdisciplinary research project is taking a deep dive into a complex era that stretches from before traditional conceptions of the medieval period up to early modern times.

Encompassing social and cultural developments from the 5th to the 18th centuries, the Early Worlds Initiative is designed to take an interdisciplinary look at the influence of an intriguing era. Participants hope to answer one of the biggest questions among some outside the field: why, in the 21st century, should people care about what happened so many centuries ago?

"Issues like nationalism, representative

government, certainly race—all these things existed in this previous age," says Tom Hahn, a professor of English and a key contributor to the project. "Looking at those very different models of how they existed, not just in Europe but all over the world, helps us understand our own lives a bit more clearly."

The project originated last fall with Joan Rubin, the Ani and Mark Gabrellian Director of the Humanities Center and the Dexter Perkins Professor in History.

"Rochester's long-standing strength in the study of medieval and early modern cultures seemed to me to be the best foundation on which to build an innovative set of scholarly projects that would enhance

the University's reputation and create new knowledge in new forms," she says.

"It's a really dynamic opportunity," says Anna Siebach-Larsen, the director of the Rossell Hope Robbins Library and Koller-Collins Center. "This is both where medieval studies is tending to go, and needs to go. There's so much going on, and one person can't learn all of it. We really have to work together."

She says students and the general public will find value in the project's collaborations and resources while contributing their own perspectives and insights.

"There's this whole world out there that we're just starting to uncover. And there's a place for everyone in it." 