

The challenge of a global Earth: Longitude and the Birth of Mathematical Cosmography

Attempts at estimating by astronomical means the longitude of newly discovered lands had an enormous increment in the early sixteenth century. The reason behind these efforts was not navigational safety nor the desire for improved geographical knowledge, but quite more prosaically the ambitions of imperial expansion. In this presentation I will provide an overview of the measurements of longitude in the first decades of the 16th century. I will show how the results of these measurements clashed with nautical cartography of the period thus leading to heated scientific and diplomatic debates. I will also argue that the problems created by long distance oceanic voyages and the need for more accurate geographical descriptions led to the development of mathematical cosmography.

Orateur: LEITAO, Henrique (CIUHCT, Faculty of Science ERC Project RUTTER University of Lisbon)