



# The many ways of GIS for digital humanities

Summer School on Digital Humanities

Web site: <https://bit.ly/dt4h-gis>

Augusto Ciuffoletti

9 giugno 2025

# Plan of the Tutorial

- The tutorial is divided into seven sessions.
- The first session is lecture-style introducing basic concepts, terminology, and background.
- Each of the following six sessions focuses on a specific tool or concept and includes hands-on exercises:
- Only minimal prior GIS knowledge is expected so everyone can participate.
- All learning materials are available online, so you can revisit and try exercises at home whenever needed.
- You can keep the slides on your phone and practice on your PC.



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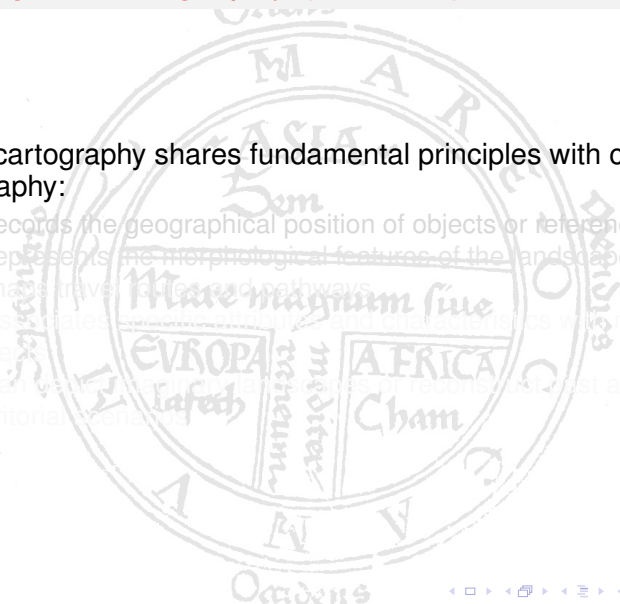
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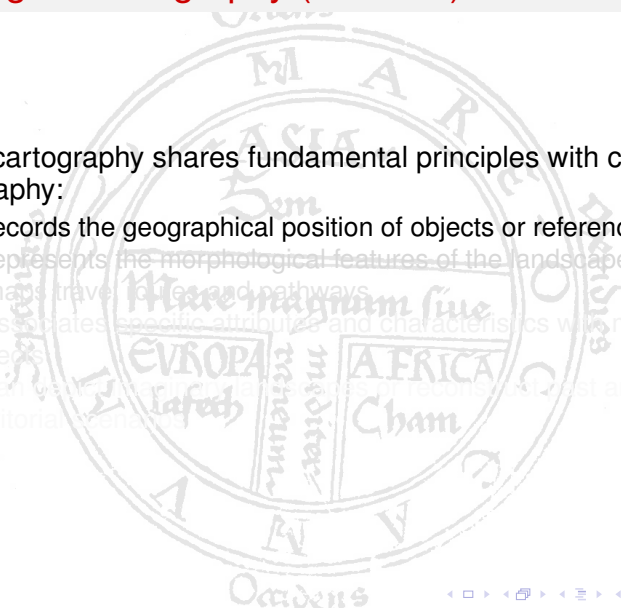
# What is digital cartography (aka GIS)

- Digital cartography shares fundamental principles with classical cartography:
  - It records the geographical position of objects or reference points
  - It represents the morphological features of the landscape
  - It maps travel routes and pathways
  - It associates geographical attributes and characteristics with mapped objects
  - It can depict imaginary landscapes or reconstruct past and future territorial scenarios



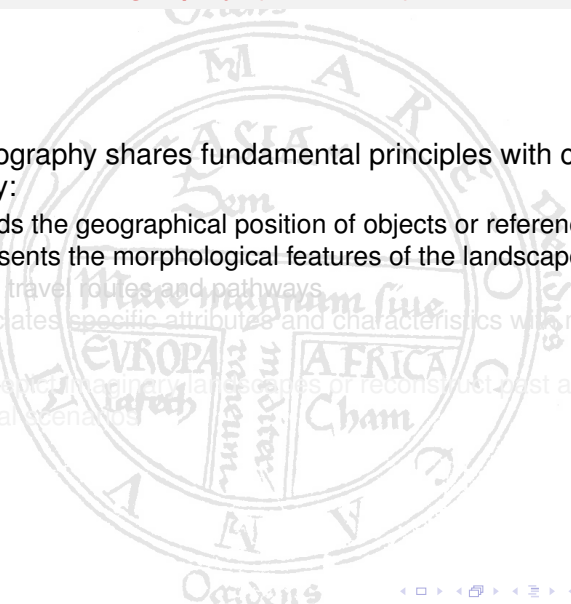
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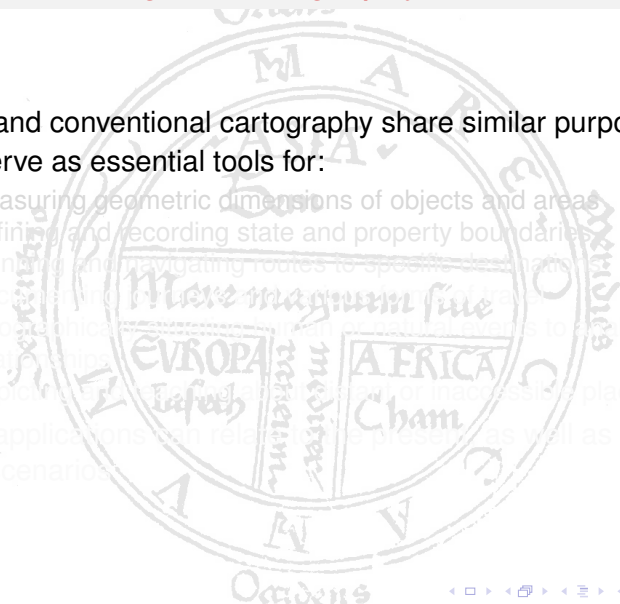
# Why do we use digital cartography?

- Digital and conventional cartography share similar purposes
- Both serve as essential tools for:
  - Measuring geometric dimensions of objects and areas
  - Defining the existing state and property boundaries
- These applications can relate to the present, as well as to past or future scenarios



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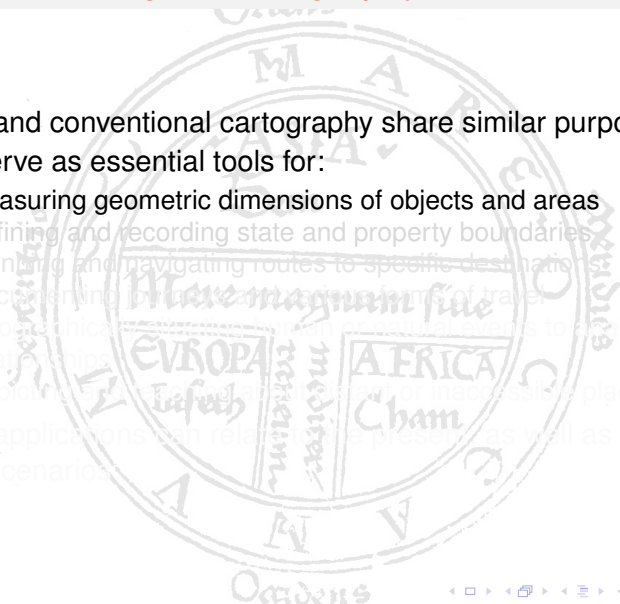
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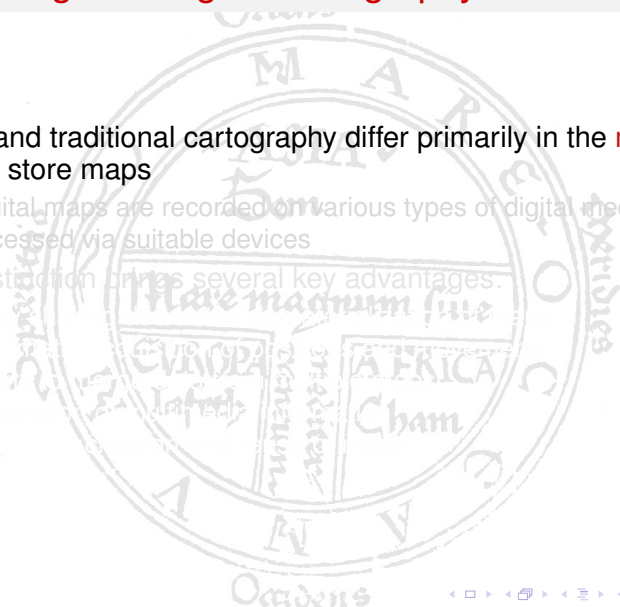
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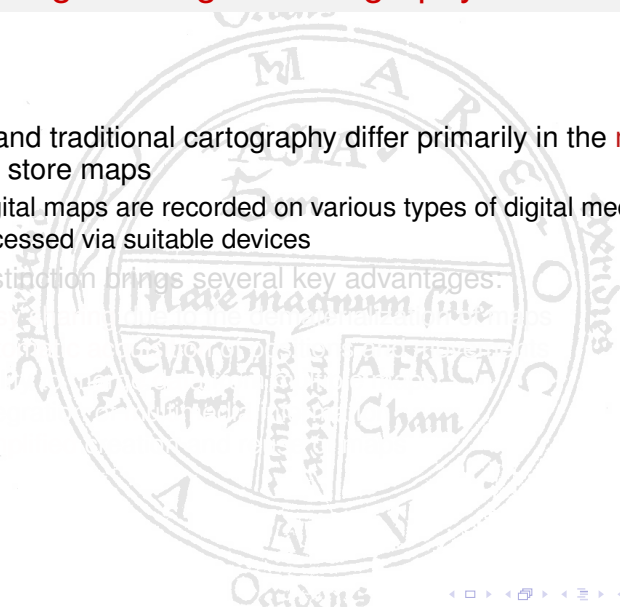




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- Easy access to maps via the Internet
- Possibility to create interactive maps



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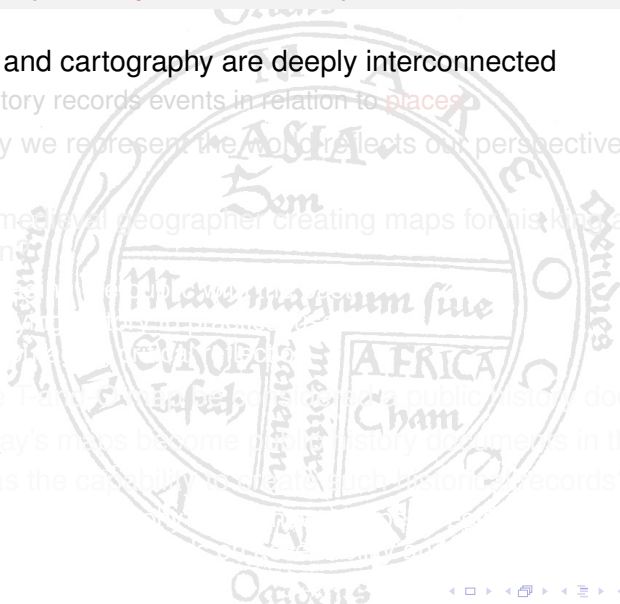
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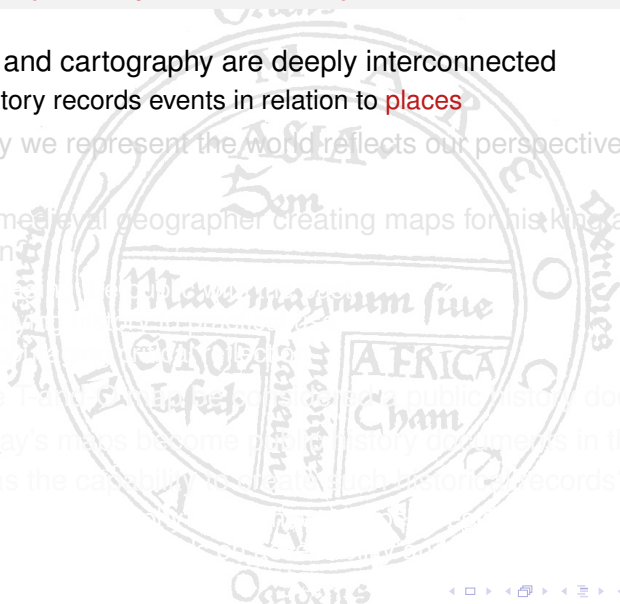
- History and cartography are deeply interconnected
  - History records events in relation to **places**
- The way we represent the world reflects our perspectives and values
- Was a medieval geographer creating maps for his king a **public** historian?
- Can the Ptolemy world map be considered a public history document?
- Will today's maps become public history documents in the future?
- Who has the capability to create such historical records?





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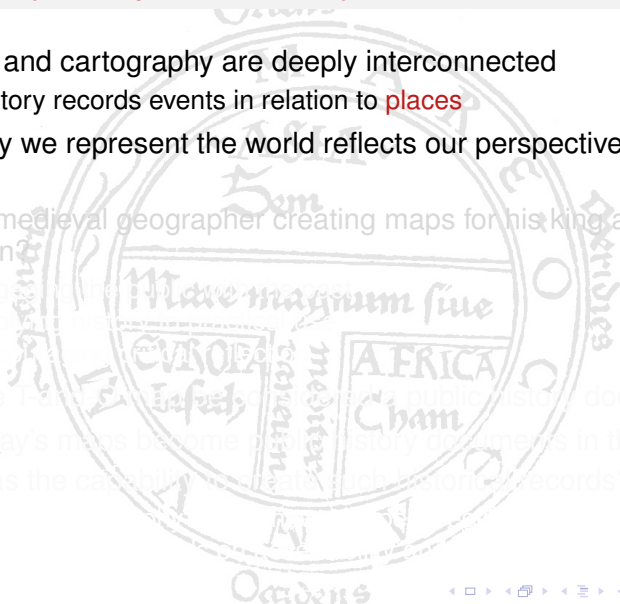
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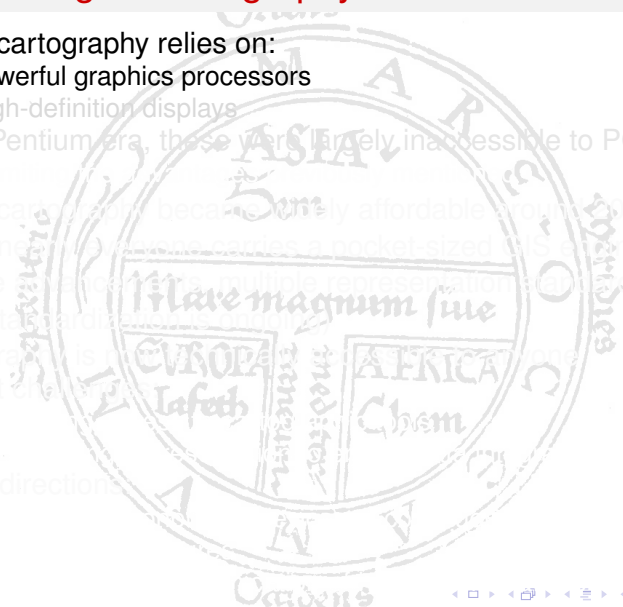
# Diffusion of digital cartography

- Digital cartography relies on:
  - Powerful graphics processors
  - High-definition displays
- In the Pentium era, these were largely inaccessible to PCs
- Digital cartography became more affordable around 2005
- Today, nearly everyone carries a pocket-sized GIS engine
- Despite advances, multiple representation standards still exist (standardization ongoing)
- Cartography is now accessible to almost everyone
- Current challenges
- Future directions



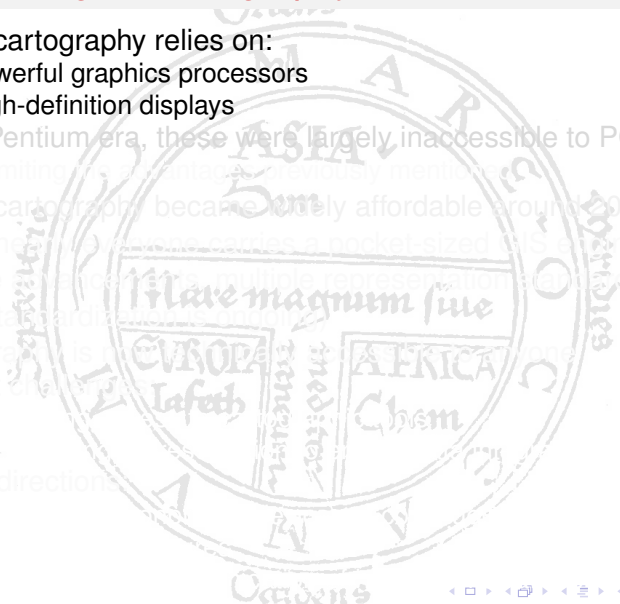
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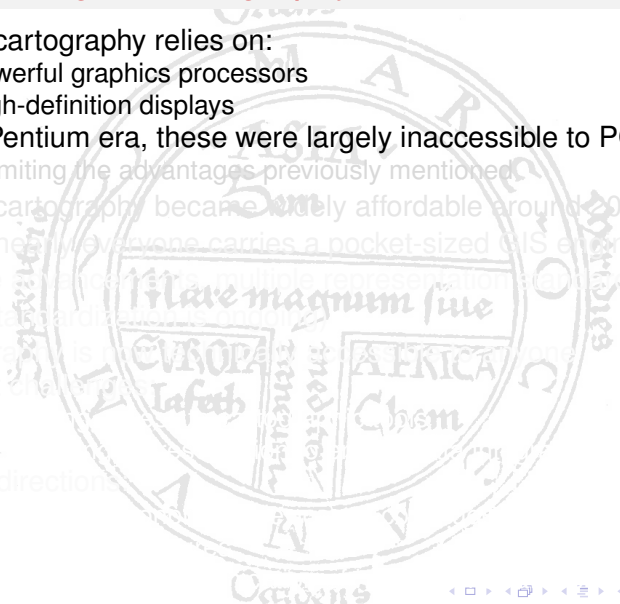
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- Future directions:
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  - Enhancing the **communication** of historical narratives

# Diffusion of digital cartography

- Digital cartography relies on:
  - Powerful graphics processors
  - High-definition displays
- In the Pentium era, these were largely inaccessible to PCs
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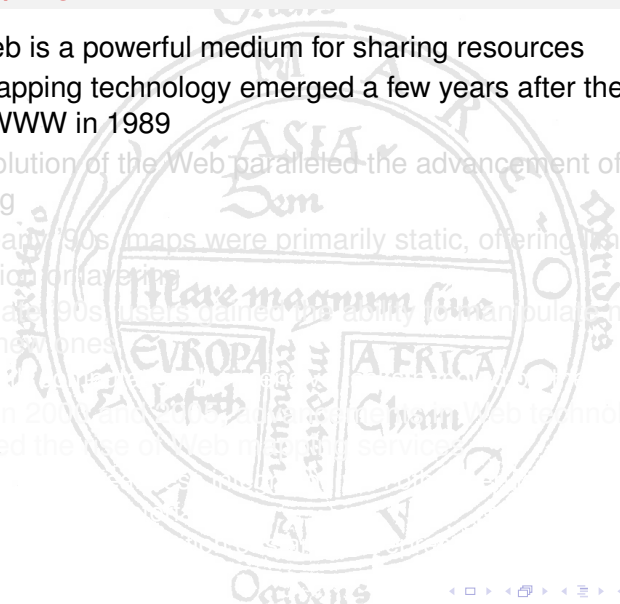
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- The Web is a powerful medium for sharing resources
- Web mapping technology emerged a few years after the creation of the WWW in 1989
- The evolution of the Web paralleled the advancement of Web mapping
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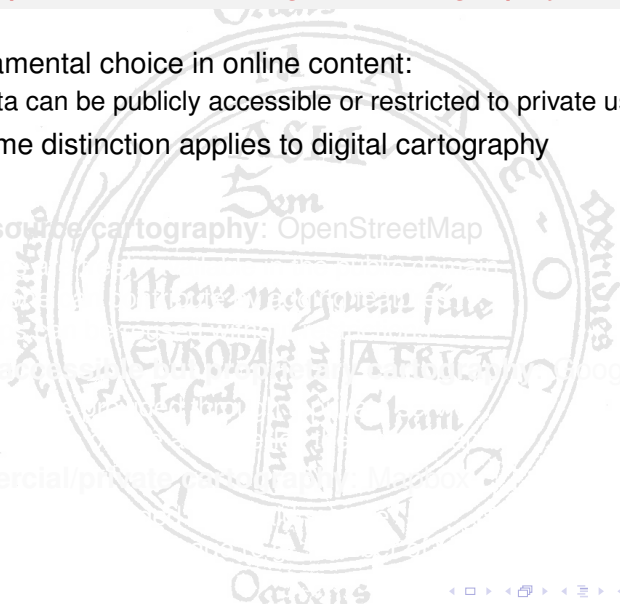


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## Fundamental Core Concepts



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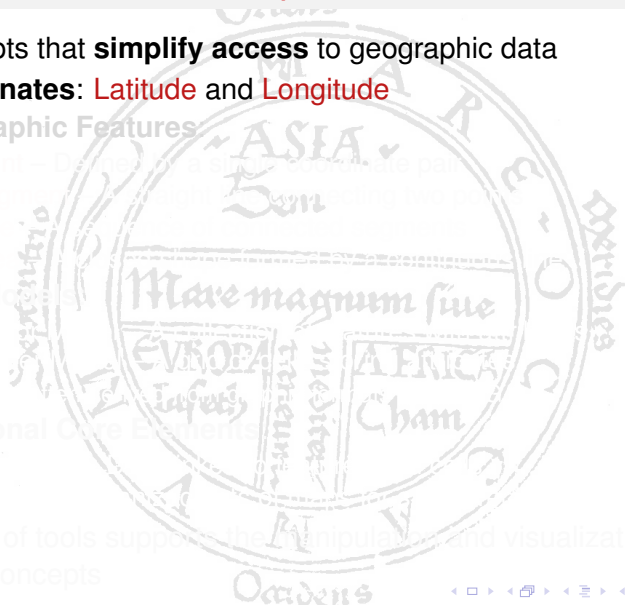
- Concepts that **simplify access** to geographic data
- **Coordinates:** Latitude and Longitude
- **Geographic Features**

- Point – Defined by a single coordinate pair
- Segment – A straight line extending two points

- **Data Models**

- **Additional Core Elements**

- A suite of tools support the manipulation and visualization of these concepts





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  - **Point** – Defined by a single coordinate pair
  - **Segment** – A straight line connecting two points
  - **Line** – A sequence of connected segments
  - **Area** – A closed sequence of connected segments
- **Data Models**
  - **Vector** – A sequence of points
  - **Raster** – A grid of cells
- **Additional Core Elements**
  - **Metadata** – Information about the data
  - **Geoprocessing** – Tools for manipulating and analyzing geographic data
  - **Visualization** – Tools for displaying geographic data
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  - **Coordinate Reference Systems** – Like UTM, WGS84, etc.
  - **Map Projections** – Like Mercator, Robinson, etc.
  - **Map Scales** – Like 1:50,000, 1:100,000, etc.
  - **Map Symbols** – Like points, lines, polygons, etc.
  - **Map Legends** – To explain the symbols used on the map
  - **Map Data Sources** – Like GIS databases, web services, etc.
  - **Map Display Software** – Like ArcGIS, QGIS, etc.
  - **Map Output Formats** – Like PDF, PNG, etc.
  - **Map Annotation Tools** – Like text, lines, polygons, etc.
  - **Map Navigation Tools** – Like zoom, pan, etc.
  - **Map Analysis Tools** – Like overlay, buffer, etc.
  - **Map Communication Tools** – Like web maps, mobile apps, etc.
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- A standard GCS plays a crucial role in sharing meaningful information about positions, paths, and distances
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- A widely adopted Geographic Coordinate System (GCS) today is WGS84 (World Geodetic System 1984)
- The label EPSG:4326 refers to its "non-projected" version
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- A widely adopted Geographic Coordinate System (GCS) today is WGS84 (World Geodetic System 1984)
- The label EPSG:4326 refers to its "non-projected" version
  - For example, EPSG:3856 represents its Pseudo-Mercator projection on a square surface
- WGS84 EPSG4326 is used by the Global Positioning System (GPS) and for data storage formats such as GeoJSON
- WGS84 EPSG3856 is used by Google Maps and computer visualization tools
- Key features of WGS84 EPSG4326:
  - Coordinates are expressed in latitude (north) and longitude (east) (in this order)
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# Storing a digital map

- A digital map usually includes:
  - raster tiles as a visual background
  - a collection of vector features
- **Raster tiles** are available from various providers like OpenStreetMap (free) or Mapbox (paid)
- Tiles are accessed by specifying the zoom level and the tile's position in a grid
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# PostGIS: a relational GIS database

- A sample query that creates a new feature:

```
INSERT INTO places (name, coord)
```

```
VALUES ('Pisa', ST_GeographyFromText('SRID=4326;POINT(10.41_43.72')));
```

- Legend:

- place created beforehand

- It can be used to create a new feature

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- **places** is a table created beforehand
- It contains two columns: one for the **name** of a place and one for its **coordinates**
- The **INSERT** command adds a new row to the table
- The next part is its value
- Coordinates are provided using the **ST\_GeographyFromText** function from PostGIS
- The input string includes a **SRID** to define the coordinate system
- 4326 refers to the **WGS 84** standard (EPSG:4326)
- Coordinates follow the format **longitude first, then latitude** — note the order is reversed from the standard

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# GeoJSON: maps as JavaScript objects

- GeoJSON is a GIS extension of the JSON object description language
- A `map_layer` variable hosting a collection of features is initialized as

```
map_layer = { "type": "FeatureCollection",
              "features": [] }
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- A new point feature is defined with

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- And the JavaScript statement to insert the new feature in the empty collection is:

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map_layer["features"].append(new_feature)
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# GeoJSON and noSQL databases

- The previous example refers to variables in the scope of a Javascript program
- Using a noSQL database service, the service provides an API based on JavaScript objects
- The following snippet connects to a MongoDB server, selects a collection and inserts a new feature

```
client = MongoClient("mongodb://localhost:27017") # Connect to DB
db = client["gis_database"] # Select a database
collection = db["map_layer"] # Select a collection
# insert the feature
collection.insert_one(
  { "type": "Feature",
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- Note: the `insert_one` call corresponds to the SQL `INSERT` query seen above

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## Going deeper

The rest of this tutorial is divided into six introductory hands-on sessions:

- Fundamentals of QGIS
- Working with OpenStreetMap
- Creating Maps with uMap
- Using GaiaGPS for Field Data
- Georeferencing in QGIS
- Introduction to the Leaflet Library