Maps & Minds

The Beginning

We do not know when maps began. There is evidence of maps on papyrus scrolls from ancient Egypt, and on clay tablets from ancient Babylonia. The earliest recorded map was a drawing on a clay tablet from the city of Ninivah, in what is now Iraq, dating from the 7th century BC. The map was a plan of the city, showing the streets and houses.

The Thinkers – Greeks

All we know of Greek maps is that they were made by Eratosthenes, a Greek geographer who lived in the 3rd century BC. Eratosthenes created the first known map of the world, using the stars as a guide. He also estimated the circumference of the Earth at 250,000 stadia, a figure that was remarkably close to the actual value.

The Builders – Romans

The Romans were cartographers, and their maps were more detailed than those of the Greeks. They used maps to plan the layout of their cities and to guide their soldiers on campaigns. The most famous map of Roman Italy is the Ptolemaic Map, which was created in the 2nd century AD.

Feudal Europe

The last map of Rome, the 13th century Ptolemaic Map, was lost until the 19th century. The most famous map of Feudal Europe is the 13th centuryGoogle Maps, which shows the cities and towns of Europe at the time.

The Explorers

The art of map making was born in the 15th century. The first map to show the Americas was created by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1519. The first map to show the world as a whole was created by the Dutch cartographer Willem de Vaugondy in 1720.

The Measurers

Determining longitude was a significant problem for map makers in the 18th century. The first accurate method for determining longitude was the use of a marine chronometer, invented by John Harrison in 1760.