

maps

introduction

Finding your way from A to B is so easy nowadays. Highly accurate satellite navigation systems mean that most of us can now use our smartphones and sat navs to plan our journeys in seconds and arrive safely at our destinations with barely any effort at all. But it wasn't always so easy. Throughout human history, people have tried to make sense of the world around them by drawing maps of one sort or another. For many thousands of years these maps remained very inaccurate, providing only very basic details of very small areas of the world. However, the science of map making (known as "cartography") was revolutionised in medieval times by Muslim travellers and explorers who developed new techniques and processes that led to some incredibly accurate maps. One particular pioneer, Muhammad al-Idrisi, spent his lifetime travelling far and wide, measuring and documenting the lands he visited and recording everything in some of the most accurate maps that had ever been seen. His 12th Century maps showed most of Europe, Asia and North Africa, and his techniques laid the foundations for modern map-making and the extremely accurate maps and navigation systems we rely on today.

questions to think about

- How have maps helped us discover new parts of the world?
- What is the furthest distance you have ever travelled? How would this journey have been different without a map?
- How are maps useful in understanding the history of a place?
- How many different jobs or hobbies can you think of that use maps?
- Can you think of a fictional place that a map helped you to imagine?



Map of Sicily in the anonymous Arabic manuscript called "Book of Curiosities", 13th-century copy of an original written in the second half of the 11th century and preserved at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.



where to find out more

- Learn more about the history of maps: <https://www.gislounge.com/mapping-through-the-ages/>
- How does satellite navigation work?: <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20130927-how-does-sat-nav-really-work>
- Learn more about Islamic contributions to map making (cartography): <http://www.1001inventions.com/maps>
- All about Ordnance Survey maps: <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/about/overview/what-we-do.html>