

a history of the world in 12 maps

****A History of the World in 12 Maps****

a history of the world in 12 maps offers a fascinating journey through time, revealing how humanity has understood, shaped, and navigated the globe. Maps are more than just geographical tools; they are windows into the cultural, political, and technological shifts that have defined civilizations. By exploring a history of the world in 12 maps, we can uncover stories of exploration, empire, conflict, and innovation that have shaped the modern world.

Maps have long been essential for understanding our place on Earth, but they also reflect the worldview, knowledge, and ambitions of their creators. From ancient cartography to contemporary digital mapping, each map tells a unique story. Let's embark on an engaging exploration of history through twelve significant maps that capture key moments and transformations across centuries.

1. The Babylonian World Map (circa 600 BCE)

The Babylonian World Map is often considered one of the earliest known world maps. Created on a clay tablet, this map reflects how the ancient Mesopotamians visualized the world around them. Unlike modern maps, it depicts the world as a flat disk surrounded by a "bitter river," or ocean. The map centers on Babylon, emphasizing its importance in the ancient world.

This artifact provides insight into early cartographic techniques and the cultural significance of geography in Mesopotamian society. It reminds us that maps are as much about perspective as they are about accuracy.

2. Ptolemy's Geographia (2nd Century CE)

Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* was a revolutionary work in the history of cartography. Compiled around 150 CE, it presented a systematic approach to mapping the known world using a coordinate system based on latitude and longitude. This was a game-changer for navigation and geography.

Although Ptolemy's map had inaccuracies, especially regarding the extent of Asia and Africa, it laid the groundwork for future explorers and mapmakers during the Age of Discovery. His ideas influenced cartography for over a millennium, demonstrating the lasting impact of scientific methods on world mapping.

3. The Hereford Mappa Mundi (circa 1300)

Moving into medieval Europe, the Hereford Mappa Mundi stands out as a fascinating example of a medieval worldview mapped onto a single parchment. This map is not just geographical; it blends history, mythology, religion, and geography into one cohesive image.

Jerusalem is at the center, reflecting the religious focus of the time. The map includes biblical scenes, legendary creatures, and fantastical lands alongside real places. It's a vivid reminder of how medieval Europeans understood their place in the cosmos, where faith and geography intertwined.

4. The Catalan Atlas (1375)

Created by the Majorcan cartographer Abraham Cresques, the Catalan Atlas is one of the most important medieval maps for understanding Mediterranean trade and exploration. It combines detailed coastal outlines with rich illustrations of rulers, trade goods, and famous travelers like Marco Polo.

This map highlights the growing influence of commerce and cross-cultural exchange during the late Middle Ages. It also reflects the increasing accuracy of maritime navigation, which was crucial for the upcoming age of global exploration.

5. Waldseemüller's World Map (1507)

Waldseemüller's map is famed for being the first to use the name "America," honoring the explorer Amerigo Vespucci. This early 16th-century map reflects the excitement and uncertainty of the Age of Discovery, as European explorers charted new continents.

The map is notable for its attempt to represent the New World as separate from Asia, a breakthrough in geographic understanding. It also shows the merging of classical knowledge with fresh discoveries, marking a turning point in global awareness.

6. Mercator's Projection (1569)

Gerardus Mercator's 1569 world map introduced a groundbreaking projection that became the standard for navigation. The Mercator projection preserves accurate angles, essential for sailors plotting straight-line courses across oceans, though it distorts the size of landmasses near the poles.

This map revolutionized maritime exploration and trade, playing a critical role in the expansion of European empires. Today, it remains widely used despite its spatial distortions, illustrating how practicality can outweigh perfect accuracy in map design.

7. The Map of the British Empire at Its Height (circa 1920)

By the early 20th century, the British Empire spanned continents, and maps from this era vividly

display its vast reach. These imperial maps often emphasize British territories in bright colors, symbolizing global dominance and colonial power.

Studying such maps provides insight into the political geography of the time, the impacts of colonialism, and the geopolitical tensions that would shape the 20th century. They also remind us how maps can be tools of influence and propaganda.

8. The Cold War World Map (mid-20th Century)

During the Cold War, maps were critical in visualizing ideological divides and military alliances. Maps showing NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, nuclear missile ranges, or spheres of influence helped shape global strategies and public perceptions.

These maps reflect the tension and complexity of a bipolar world order, where geography was inseparable from politics and security concerns. They also illustrate how technological advances in mapping and reconnaissance transformed intelligence gathering.

9. The United Nations Member States Map (present day)

A contemporary map of United Nations member states showcases the political boundaries and diplomatic framework of today's world. This map reflects decades of decolonization, the emergence of new nations, and the ongoing quest for international cooperation.

Such maps are vital tools for understanding global governance, international relations, and the sometimes fragile nature of peace and diplomacy in a diverse world.

10. Climate Change Maps and Environmental Impact

In recent decades, maps have become crucial in visualizing climate change's effects. From rising sea levels to deforestation patterns and temperature anomalies, these thematic maps help scientists, policymakers, and the public grasp the environmental challenges facing the planet.

This new era of cartography highlights how maps are evolving beyond political borders to address global issues that affect every aspect of life.

11. The Internet and Digital Mapping Revolution

The advent of digital maps, GPS, and satellite imagery represents a monumental shift in how we interact with geography. Platforms like Google Maps and GIS technology provide real-time data and interactive experiences, transforming everything from travel to urban planning.

This digital revolution democratizes access to geographic information and allows for unprecedented precision and customization in mapping — a far cry from the ancient clay tablets and hand-drawn parchments of the past.

12. Future Maps: Space Exploration and Beyond

As humanity looks beyond Earth, new maps are emerging to chart the Moon, Mars, and other celestial bodies. These maps combine scientific data with imaginative projection, guiding future exploration and colonization efforts.

Mapping the universe extends the history of cartography into entirely new realms, continuing the tradition of using maps to navigate and understand the unknown.

Exploring a history of the world in 12 maps reveals not only how our understanding of geography has evolved but also how maps reflect broader human stories — ambitions, discoveries, conflicts, and hopes. Each map acts as a historical snapshot, capturing the worldview of its time and the ever-changing relationship between humans and the planet. Whether ancient or modern, these maps are invaluable tools for connecting past, present, and future in the ongoing narrative of the world.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'A History of the World in 12 Maps'?

'A History of the World in 12 Maps' explores the development of human understanding of the world through twelve significant maps, highlighting how cartography has shaped history and culture.

Who is the author of 'A History of the World in 12 Maps'?

The book 'A History of the World in 12 Maps' is authored by Jerry Brotton, a renowned historian and cartography expert.

Why does the book use only twelve maps to tell world history?

The twelve maps were carefully selected to represent key moments in history where maps influenced politics, exploration, culture, and scientific understanding, thus providing a concise yet comprehensive narrative.

How does 'A History of the World in 12 Maps' connect maps to cultural and political developments?

The book shows that maps are not just geographical tools but also reflect the worldview, power dynamics, and ideologies of the societies that created them.

Can 'A History of the World in 12 Maps' be used as an educational resource?

Yes, it is widely used in educational settings to teach history, geography, and the history of science because it provides visual and contextual insights into how humans have understood the world.

What time periods does 'A History of the World in 12 Maps' cover?

The book spans from ancient times, including early Babylonian maps, through the Age of Exploration, and up to modern cartographic developments.

Does the book include maps from non-Western cultures?

Yes, it includes maps from various cultures around the world, such as Chinese, Islamic, and Indigenous cartography, emphasizing a global perspective.

Has 'A History of the World in 12 Maps' been adapted into other media formats?

Yes, the book has inspired documentary series and lectures, expanding its reach beyond print to engage wider audiences.

Additional Resources

****A History of the World in 12 Maps****

a history of the world in 12 maps offers a fascinating lens through which to view the unfolding of human civilization, geography, and political power. Maps are more than mere representations of physical spaces; they are artifacts of their time, reflecting the knowledge, ambitions, and ideologies of the cultures that produced them. By examining twelve pivotal maps from different eras, one can trace the evolution of global understanding, territorial conflicts, and the shifting tides of empire and influence.

This approach not only enhances our appreciation of cartography but also provides critical insights into world history's complex narrative.

Mapping the Past: An In-Depth Analysis

Maps have long been tools of exploration and control. Each map tells a story about the world as it was understood at a particular moment, revealing the technological, political, and cultural contexts of its creation. From ancient depictions of the known world to modern geopolitical charts, the history of the world in 12 maps encapsulates humanity's ongoing quest for knowledge and dominance.

The Babylonian World Map: The Earliest Known Geographic Representation

The journey begins with the Babylonian World Map, dating back to the 6th century BCE. This clay tablet, one of the oldest surviving maps, depicts Babylon at its center, surrounded by a circular water body and various neighboring regions. The map illustrates the Mesopotamian worldview, where myth and reality blend, and geography serves a cosmological purpose. Although rudimentary, it marks a profound moment when humans began to conceptualize their place in the universe spatially.

Ptolemy's Geographia: The Foundation of Modern Cartography

Fast-forward to the 2nd century CE, Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* revolutionized mapping by introducing a coordinate system based on latitude and longitude. This map compilation laid the groundwork for future explorers and cartographers. Its influence persisted through the Renaissance, underpinning European expansion and the Age of Discovery. Ptolemy's emphasis on empirical observation and mathematical precision represents a shift from symbolic to scientific cartography.

The Hereford Mappa Mundi: Medieval Europe's Worldview

The Hereford Mappa Mundi, created around 1300 CE, offers a medieval Christian interpretation of the world. Centered on Jerusalem, it combines biblical history, mythology, and geography in a symbolic circular layout. This map reveals the inseparable link between religion and knowledge during the Middle Ages and the Eurocentric perspective that shaped Western cartography for centuries.

The Age of Exploration and the Expansion of the Known World

The next set of maps highlights the dramatic changes brought about by European exploration between the 15th and 17th centuries.

Mercator's Projection: Navigating the Uncharted Seas

In 1569, Gerardus Mercator introduced a projection that preserved angles and shapes, dramatically improving navigational accuracy for sailors. Although it distorts size—exaggerating regions near the poles—Mercator's map became the standard for maritime navigation. This cartographic innovation facilitated global trade and colonization, underscoring how technological advances in mapping can accelerate geopolitical dominance.

The Waldseemüller Map: Naming America

Martin Waldseemüller's 1507 world map is historically significant for being the first to use the name "America," acknowledging the New World discovered by Europeans. This map encapsulates the transformative impact of exploration on world geography. It marks a departure from Eurocentric maps by incorporating the vast American continents, albeit with many inaccuracies reflecting the limited knowledge of the era.

The Dutch Golden Age Maps: Trade and Empire

During the 17th century, Dutch cartographers produced highly detailed maps reflecting the Netherlands' maritime supremacy and global trade networks. These maps emphasized ports, sea routes, and colonial possessions. Their precision and aesthetic quality made them prized tools for merchants and imperial administrators, illustrating how cartography supported economic and political power.

Shifting Borders: The Rise and Fall of Empires

Maps from the 18th to the early 20th centuries trace the complex interplay of empire-building, nationalism, and conflict.

The Treaty of Tordesillas Map: Dividing the New World

The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas map delineated Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence by drawing an arbitrary line across the Atlantic. This political map initiated centuries of colonial rivalry and shaped the linguistic and cultural landscape of the Americas. It demonstrates how cartography can be politicized to legitimize territorial claims.

The Napoleonic Empire Map: Europe in Flux

At the height of Napoleonic power, early 19th-century maps showcased France's territorial expansion and influence across Europe. These maps reveal how military conquest reshaped borders and challenged the established order. They also underscore the role of cartography in propaganda, as empire builders used maps to project power and justify rule.

The Scramble for Africa Map: Imperialism's Partition

The late 19th-century maps depicting the Scramble for Africa highlight the rapid and often arbitrary division of the continent among European powers. These maps reflect the colonial mindset that disregarded indigenous boundaries and cultures. The legacy of these cartographic divisions continues to influence political and social dynamics in Africa today.

Modern Cartography: Understanding a Complex World

In the contemporary era, maps have evolved from simple territorial outlines to complex visualizations incorporating demographic, economic, and environmental data.

Cold War Maps: Ideological Divisions

Maps from the Cold War period visualize the global ideological divide between the Western bloc and the Soviet sphere. These maps not only chart alliances and military reach but also symbolize the global tension and the balance of power that defined the second half of the 20th century. The use of color coding and thematic layers exemplifies advances in thematic cartography.

Digital and Interactive Maps: The Future of World History Visualization

The evolution culminates in modern digital and interactive maps that allow users to explore history dynamically. Platforms like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) enable layering historical data over geographic spaces, offering unprecedented depth in analyzing historical trends. This technological leap enhances education, research, and public engagement with the history of the world in 12 maps and beyond.

Reflecting on the Journey Through Cartographic History

Examining the history of the world in 12 maps reveals the profound connection between geography and human development. Each map serves as a snapshot of its time, encapsulating prevailing knowledge, cultural perspectives, and political ambitions. Together, they offer a layered understanding of how humans have increasingly mapped, contested, and conceptualized the world. Through this cartographic journey, it becomes evident that maps are not merely tools for navigation but powerful instruments shaping our comprehension of history and the global landscape.

[A History Of The World In 12 Maps](#)

a history of the world in 12 maps: A History of the World in Twelve Maps Jerry Brotton, 2012
Throughout history, maps have shaped our view of the world and our place in it. In this scintillating book, Jerry Brotton argues that far from being purely scientific objects, maps of the world are unavoidably partial and subjective, intimately bound up with the systems of power, authority and creativity of particular times and places. Mapmakers do not simply represent the world, they construct it out of the ideas of their age. The book examines the significance of twelve world maps drawn from global history - beginning with the mystical representations of ancient history and ending with the satellite - derived imagery of today. It vividly recreates the environments and circumstances in which the maps were made, showing how each conveys a highly individual view of the world- the Jerusalem-centred Christian perspective of the fourteenth-century Herefordmappamundi; the earliest Korean map showing the world including Europe; the first truly globalised world view of the Portuguese Diogo Ribeiro in the early sixteenth century, the Peters projection of the 1970s which aimed to give equality to 'the third world'; and the earth according to Google. Brotton shows how the maps both influenced and reflected contemporary events and how, by reading it, we can better understand the world that produced it. Although the way we map our surroundings is once more changing dramatically, Brotton argues that maps today are no more definitive or objective than they have ever been - but that they continue to recreate and mediate our view of it. Readers of this book will never look at a map in quite the same way again.

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Throughout history, maps have been fundamental in shaping our view of the world, and our place in it. But far from being purely scientific objects, maps of the world are unavoidably ideological and subjective, intimately bound up with the systems of power and authority of particular times and places. Mapmakers do not simply represent the world, they construct it out of the ideas of their age. In this scintillating book, Jerry Brotton examines the significance of 12 maps - from the almost mystical representations of ancient history to the satellite-derived imagery of today. He vividly recreates the environments and circumstances in which each of the maps was made, showing how each conveys a highly individual view of the world. Brotton shows how each of his maps both influenced and

reflected contemporary events and how, by considering it in all its nuances and omissions, we can better understand the world that produced it. Although the way we map our surroundings is more precise than ever before, Brotton argues that maps today are no more definitive or objective than they have ever been. Readers of this beautifully illustrated and masterfully argued book will never look at a map in quite the same way again. "A fascinating and panoramic new history of the cartographer's art." - The Guardian "The intellectual background to these images is conveyed with beguiling erudition.... There is nothing more subversive than a map." - The Spectator "A mesmerizing and beautifully illustrated book." —The Telegraph

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University Maps organize us in space, but they also organize us in time. Looking around the world for the last five hundred years, *Time in Maps* shows that today's digital maps are only the latest effort to insert a sense of time into the spatial medium of maps. Historians Kären Wigen and Caroline Winterer have assembled leading scholars to consider how maps from all over the world have depicted time in ingenious and provocative ways. Focusing on maps created in Spanish America, Europe, the United States, and Asia, these essays take us from the Aztecs documenting the founding of Tenochtitlan, to early modern Japanese reconstructing nostalgic landscapes before Western encroachments, to nineteenth-century Americans grappling with the new concept of deep time. The book also features a defense of traditional paper maps by digital mapmaker William Rankin. With more than one hundred color maps and illustrations, *Time in Maps* will draw the attention of anyone interested in cartographic history.

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reminds us how crucial the four cardinal directions have been to everyone who has ever walked our planet. For anyone interested in history, geography, or surprising new ways to think about the world at large, Four Points of the Compass will be a stimulating experience.

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