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BOOK REVIEW

European Perceptions of Terra Australis

Anne M. Scott, Alfred Hiatt, Claire McIlroy, and Christopher Wortham (eds.)

Ashgate 2012, 334 p. ISBN 978-1-4094-2605-9 (hardcover), 65.00 GBP + VAT

Terra Australis – the southern land – has been one of the most widespread concepts in European geography from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. This book comprises a set of 14 interdisciplinary scholarly contributions that deal with personal perceptions of *Terra Australis* by cartographers and explorers, and with putting these perceptions in their historical and cultural environments. This book seems, at a first glance, to be very remote from astronomy – and even from the history of astronomy – however, as it also offers an excellent background to Captain James Cook's second voyage to observe the 1769 transit of Venus from Tahiti, it definitely is a work of truly interdisciplinary character. Cook's voyages, in fact, became a model in which key scientists of many nationalities and disciplines traveled together on ships. In these voyages, art, science, technology and political power were centralised and united.

The chapters range across history, the visual arts, literature, popular culture, technology, politics and science. Issues of scientific reasoning are raised in the description of how people did think about the south before there even existed a perception of the unknown land – quite comparable to how ancient and early-modern astronomers had their thought about cosmology even before any observational data were available.

Several early map systems – like the zonal and T-O maps (medieval world maps with the letter T inside an O representing the lands inside a circle of oceans) – are described, and the description of Roman geography shows the amazing fact that theory and practice were not unified, and existed independently of each other insofar that a real paradox between theory and observation had persisted for a very long time. The maps and charts also exemplify the long-lasting consequences of early modern copy-paste practice: navigators copied original sketch charts of coasts that were previously unknown to them, herewith committing many translation and transposition errors and thus creating pidgin or even fake geographical appellations. The evidence presented in this work brings out many issues of cartographic authorship credit, exploratory competition and plagiarism, and even ghostwriting.

The book is of interest, among others, to cultural historians, historians of science, historians of cartography, the visual arts, and to scholars in the history of slavery and post-colonial studies. The Editors of this Volume have done a fine job by arranging all references into one single bibliography list at the end of the book: as such, the reader has access to one alphabetical list of about 30 pages of sources and references. The book contains more than 50 figures, mostly zonal maps and charts, world maps, and also reproductions of painted landscapes and portraits. Regretfully, none of these illustrations is in colour, and the low-contrast greytone reproductions lack the necessary luster to fully appreciate the scientific and artistic content. Worse even, some graphics are extremely poor in terms of image resolution: for example, a full-page reproduction from a 15th-century morality play has been copied from the given website at a graphical resolution of 85 dpi only. This is in complete contradiction with the hardcover-with-sleeve product of that price level.

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