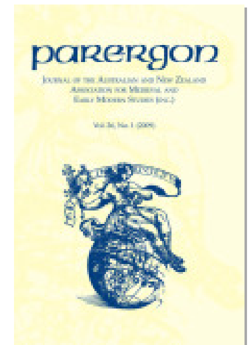
Terra Incognita: Mapping the Antipodes before 1600 (review)

Judith Collard



Parergon, Volume 26, Number 1, 2009, pp. 237-239 (Review)

Published by Australian and New Zealand Association of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (Inc.)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.0.0149

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/362881

[This content has been declared free to read by the pubisher during the COVID-19 pandemic.]

to the fore little-studied material and bringing new insights to more familiar texts. It thus makes both a valuable introduction to work on Old Norse mythology for the relative newcomer, and a stimulating addition to the field for the more experienced.

Hannah Burrows
Department of English
University of Sydney

Hiatt, Alfred, *Terra Incognita: Mapping the Antipodes before 1600*, London, British Library Publishing, 2008; cloth, pp. xii, 298; 47 b/w illustrations, 8 colour plates; ISBN 9780712349314.

In recent years there has been a burgeoning of publications focussed on medieval map-making. Books by Evelyn Edson, Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J. P. Kain and Naomi Reed Klein, amongst others, have done much to open up this material to a broader range of readership, beyond those interested in the history of cartography. Art historians, literary scholars and those involved in the history of science have begun exploring this material in a more nuanced way. The British Library has published some of the most interesting of these texts, including both this work and Hiatt's previous book, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries*, that included a discussion of John Hardyng's maps of Scotland.

Medieval diagrammatic representations of the world, the *mappae mundi*, have been one important strand in recent research. Such maps are less a geographically precise measure of the world and more a symbolic one. In this book, Hiatt focuses less on these visual representations, although these continue to constitute a significant element in his discussion. Instead he examines these works within the wider context of scientific, philosophical and theological thought from the Classical to the Early Modern periods.

Having first encountered the weirdly speculative maps of *terra australis* in primary school, it is fascinating to read Hiatt's tracing of the idea of the antipodes from the classical period. As he points out, the concept of the 'antipodes' is a product of classical Greek geometry. The term means literally 'with feet against', referring to the people who live opposite to the known world. It was not originally limited to a north-south dichotomy, encompassing east-west as well. Given that maps were often 'orientated', with the east at the top, this is not so surprising.

The appearance of a southern land is first depicted visually in zonal maps. The division of the planet into five distinct zones, apparently invented by Parmenides in the fifth century BCE, can be found in works from both antiquity and the Middle Ages. These zones consisted of two frigid, uninhabitable zones at either end of the earth, around the poles, a central zone of intolerable heat and two temperate zones in either hemisphere. It is a conceptionalization anchored in both symmetry and logic. The fifth-century Martianus Capella proved through geometry that the world was a sphere with two hemispheres.

Christian responses to these scientific theories were mixed. Augustine was troubled by the idea that there might be people beyond the reach of Christianity, separated by an impenetrable zone of heat at the equator. While this was theologically challenging, he was prepared to conceive of these lands as being inhabitable. Tertullian and Origen were more accepting; the latter regarded the antipodes as a sign of both divine knowledge and human ignorance. Lactantius was at his most extreme in his rejection of classical science in general. He explains as he ridicules the Stoic process of 'hypothesising false positions from false suppositions'.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Hiatt outlines the shifting attitudes to both the idea of the antipodes and of the physical makeup of the world. Although Christopher Columbus' epic journey is included, his achievement is grounded within this wider context of discovery and debate. After all, in a world that knew the writings of Marco Polo and John Mandeville, the idea of searching for a world beyond the known seems less suicidal, even while being an act of remarkable boldness.

Hiatt brings into his discussion such significant proto-scientists and theologians as William of Conches and Roger Bacon. Bacon argued for the importance of geography in theological terms, referencing both exegesis and conversion and the Antichrist. His scientific reasoning, in which he explores the physicality of the world, draws on Aristotle, the Old Testament and Church Fathers. Another strong element in Hiatt's discussion is the political interests of both royal and ecclesiastical power.

Throughout the very different periods covered, the role of the antipodes as a site for critique of European values is also referenced, including the satirical writings of Lucian and Seneca as well as Thomas More's *Utopia.* In the final section, however, we also enter the more familiar territory with the impact of exploration and cartographical science, of Mercator and the continuously changing shapes found on globes and splendid printed Dutch

maps. Yet, despite the growing knowledge gained through increasing contact with other lands, both in the New World and South-east Asia, speculative representation of the antipodes persisted.

This is a very useful compendium of ideas and information about historical geography and science. The scholarship is exemplary and the range of sources drawn on is masterful. This is a beautiful looking book, well illustrated with clear manuscript and printed images of early maps and diagrams. I know that this is one work I will be continually consulting. It is also one that I will be recommending to colleagues working on Australian and New Zealand history.

Judith Collard
Department of History and Art History
University of Otago

Howe, Elizabeth Teresa, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; hardback; pp. xvi, 240; 12 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN: 9780754660330.

In her preface to this well-researched study, Elizabeth Howe suggests that, though under-represented in the early modern Hispanic literary world, some women *did* 'take up the pen' and this fact raises questions about their education and their roles as advocates for the education of other women (pp. x-xi).

The first chapter traces classical ideas which 'came to fruition in the Renaissance' (p. 1), along with biblical exempla, which Patristic writers like Saint Jerome appropriated, passing over female heroism and other so-called 'masculine' or 'Amazonian' traits while praising the female 'embrace of chastity' (p. 7). Howe also addresses the Renaissance '*querelle des femmes*', discussing Boccaccio and Jean de Meun, and their respondent, Christine de Pizan, who argued, in the *Book of the City of Ladies* (1404), that women's 'natural curiosity' equips them for intellectual pursuits (p. 15).

Indeed, Howe shows that intellectual women routinely hijacked patriarchal arguments about gender difference. Thus, Sor Juana de Cartagena argued that, just as it is 'easier to accept eloquence in a woman than physical strength … it is easier for a woman to wield a pen than the sword' (p. 27). Likewise, when female dramatist Maria de Zayas (1590-1661/9) revisited 'the question of educating women', she maintained 'women's aptitude for letters' (p. 145).