Veronica Della Dora, *The Mantle of the Earth: Genealogies of a Geographical Metaphor*

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021. Pp. 416. ISBN 978-0-2267-4129-1. $65.00 (hardback).

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As historians of science and of knowledge, the words we use are inextricably connected to the worlds we research, and vice versa. Veronica Della Dora's *The Mantle of the Earth* provides a revealing and detailed study of the 'textile' metaphors that have been used by geographers, geologists, mapmakers and other thinkers and crafters throughout many centuries. The book is structured chronologically and falls into four different sections, each with a specific thematic accent. Each part of the book subsequently contains two or three chapters each. The third part, entitled 'The surfaces of modernity', provides an excellent read on the history of geography and cartography. In the first chapter of this part, the emergence of geography as an academic discipline is discussed, paying specific attention to the changing role of the geographer: the geographer slowly became 'an objective describer of the surface of the earth and its regions' (p. 163). This shift happened roughly during the early years of the twentieth century. The 'birth' of the academic discipline we know today is discussed before, but by positioning this development in a longer tradition and by focusing on the ways geographers describe their activities, Della Dora offers a very innovative perspective on the existing historiographical narratives. She brings together knowledges, practices and verbal and visual representations of how people from the past have approached the world around them. For instance, in describing the changing nature of geography in the early twentieth century, she says,

> The old mantle of the earth thus becomes a tablecloth under the scrutiny of the geographer's omniscient gaze. Humboldt's contemplation of landscape as a theatre made of visibilities and invisibilities, the Romantic pantheistic interfusion with its elements, the mystical curtains of haze and light have now all been replaced by the systematic study of the morphology of the tablecloth, of its ripples, folds, and tattered edges, of the features lying upon it. (p. 168)

Citations such as these illustrate how Della Dora uses the strong metaphor of different textile forms throughout the entire book. They are not static metaphors, with singular meanings; rather, she describes how mantles, cloaks, veils and other textures, as well as verbs such as 'weave', have acted throughout the ages.

Whereas this third part is evidently a rich text for historians of geography, the disciplinary scope of the book is much wider. *The Mantle of the Earth* brings together the fields of history and geography, but unlike – or at least, unlike *most* – other books on the history of geography, brings aspects of iconography, the visual arts and literature studies onto the stage. This proves to be an insightful interdisciplinary approach to understanding knowledges as well as the process of knowledge making from the past. Geography and geology are, of course, highly 'visual' disciplines, with their unique relationship with visual representations such as maps and graphs. By means of many examples throughout the book,

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from ancient times to the present day, Della Dora explores the representations of the world we inhabit, the soil we stand on and the space we look up to in captivating ways: is the earth 'unveiled' by voyagers, or is it, as environmentalists from the 1960s described, a tightly woven craft, a complex fabric?

Della Dora describes the interconnectedness and multi-layeredness of our perspectives on the world around us, but she does something more meaningful in her book as well:

> Cloak, garment, vernicle. Stage curtain, drape, veil. Tablecloth, carpet, surface. Web, tapestry, skin. Multiple incarnations of the earth's mantle metaphor speak of the unbounded imaginative power of the human mind and its continuous attempt to comprehend the plane we inhabit. Spanning three millennia of human history, all these metaphors share a basic matter of fact: our experience and knowledge of the planet are by necessity superficial. (p. 274)

She acknowledges and appreciates the interconnectedness with our recent and not-so-recent predecessors – to what extent are we actually able to grasp the meaning, the essence, of the world itself? The metaphors used reveal this dynamic between knowing and not knowing, between getting to know the world and realizing what we do not know about the world. This shared, complex epistemological relationship has shaped all geographical and geological thinkers, whether they considered themselves part of an academic discipline or not.

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Thomas Simpson, *The Frontier in British India: Space, Science and Power in the Nineteenth Century*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xvi + 298. ISBN 978-1-1088-7915-6. £75.00 (hardback).

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In his famous 1960 article on 'turbulent frontiers', the pioneer of imperial history John Galbraith argued that the edges of British power in the nineteenth century were imbued with a magnetic quality, pulling officials towards intervention and the eventual, often unintended, expansion of territory. Although the idea that British expansion was primarily driven by unwitting 'men on the spot' has long been challenged, a new interest in spatial formations, imperial administration and agents on the frontier has emerged. Thomas Simpson's *The Frontier in British India* builds on this scholastic momentum by exploring the complexity of frontiers as messy, heterogeneous and fractured spaces best understood from the perspective of agents on the ground. This refreshing bottom-up perspective centres the idea of 'productive difficulties' – individual and administrative failure and opaqueness – as constitutive of the frontier itself. This perspective enables Simpson to account for governance, violence and knowledge production as simultaneously 'spectacular and … chaotic', 'fragile and threatening', 'dramatically present and