



Final PhD presentation

Imagery Within the Southern Continent on a Selection of World Maps: 1527 to 1620

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Speaker

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Location

The Nye Hughes Room

ANU Centre for European Studies

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For nearly two millennia the possible existence of a southern landmass haunted the European imagination. The proposition is attributed to ancient Greek scholars who calculated the size and shape of the earth and advanced theories about the possibility of unknown lands existing to the far south of the northern hemisphere.

Only with the great expeditions of discovery at the end of the eighteenth century did the debate conclude when it was found that a southern landmass did not exist.

Lacking reliable information to the contrary, some European mapmakers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries believed in the southern continent's existence. The principal challenge they faced was the manner of its representation.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the use made of imagery by Dutch, French and Italian mapmakers in the southern continent of world maps produced in the hundred or so years following Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the world 1519-1521. In the past, this imagery had commonly been seen merely as decoration, but the findings of this study demonstrate that it had a much greater significance. This thesis asserts that it served numerous functions. Among other things it concealed a mapmaker's ignorance, communicated a personal and political agenda, persuaded or encouraged calls to action, and celebrated Europe's achievements and failings. My study posits that the imagery was used to communicate subtle messages to the viewer while advancing particular ideas and agendas.

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