

Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human. New Worlds, Maps and Monsters*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2016; XXIII;355 pp., 60 illus., 9781108431828; \$ 32,99.

The title of Surekha Davies' work reveals already a thesis: defining the contribution of Renaissance ethnographic to come to terms with the concept of the Human by dealing with the information brought from new worlds. The proposal is promising and the methodology applied holds to the promise. In effect, S. Davies defines this inspiring look on human diversity through the maps elaborated in this historical period, weaving a fruitful intersection of written and visual sources. Defending that her “book contributes to the understanding of early modern science as a visual pursuit in two ways. It elucidates the ways in which the epistemological rhetoric of maps encouraged viewers to think about new peoples in comparative terms. It also shows how the concept of the monster as a being that broke the category of the human is essential for understanding the long history of the concept of the human and the pre-history of the concept of race.” (p.11) Davies highlights two important legacies of the Renaissance period which have not always been considered jointly: its epistemological reflection on the one hand, and on the other the visual representation of latest information about the world that recently had been “discovered”. Not only the re-discovery of classical authors would be a crucial revelation to Renaissance scholars, but all kind of new achieved knowledge would merit their study and ponderation. Davies thus seeks to analyze Renaissance maps “through their makers 'and viewers' contexts” (p.16) in order to describe through what Baxandall called the “period eye” (p.17) the European constructions of peoples of other Worlds in particular of the people in the Americas. Davies shows “how maps functioned as ways of making knowledge and of thinking about peoples of the Americas, and on their impact on genres that were primarily concerned with making knowledge” (p.19).

This attempt, structured in eight chapters, starts from a more general presentation and problematization in Chapter 1 under the heading “Climate, culture or kinship? Explaining human diversity”, in which Davies focuses on the interpretative frameworks in modern Europe on human diversity. Chapter 2 “Atlantic empires, map workshops and renaissance geographical culture” introduces the centers for map production and their practices and traditions, attesting the close and intense contact between artists, mapmakers and travelers, that will determine the mapmakers’ authority about distant regions. One of the first regions of America to be an ethnographic motif, profusely illustrated, will be Brazil, the theme of Chapter 3 “Spit-roast, barbecues and the invention of the Brazilian cannibal”. As the title evidences, it seeks to present the representational ethnography of Brazil and Brazilians, inserting them in the tradition of cannibal peoples, already formulated and based on texts and images of the Caribbean. Obviously, the conceptualization of the Brazilian cannibal cannot be dissociated from the colonial justification that the Iberian crowns had on the local populations (20). However, other European courts were also interested in producing maps of these American territories, such as the maps and atlases of Normandy, a topic discussed in Chapter 4 “Trade, empires and propaganda: Brazilians on French maps in the age of François I and Henri II”, fruit of an intense commercial and cultural relation that France had with the Americas. Chapters 5 and 6 try to look at the visual and written rhetoric surrounding the aforementioned monstrosity. Chapter 5 introduces Patagonia’s giants as a “monstrous ontology” in “environmental thinking”. Chapter 6 deals with “The epistemology of wonder: Amazons, headless men and mapping Guiana”, highlighting how visual representation in iconographic

sources lends credibility and plausibility to physical monstrosity. On the contrary, cities are symbols of civility, a subject addressed in chapter 7 on the example of Mexico and Peru. The cities of Tenochtitlan and Cuzco are represented in a way that shows, how "mapmakers chose indicators of civility rather than elements of idolatry, sodomy and human sacrifice with which to emblemize these regions not only to limit confessional anxieties and the likelihood of censorship but also to offer new motifs that helped their viewers to tell distinguish these regions from Brazil, a place which had already been emblemized by cannibalism" (p. 21).

Finally, the eighth chapter, focusing on Dutch wall maps under the heading "New sources, new genres and America's place in the world, 1590-1645" elucidates how maps will increasingly focus on aesthetic aspects, giving greater attention to decorative elements than to an ethnographic contribution. Davies considers that abstaining from the strategy synthesizing (and simplifying) the travelers' views on the maps, the maps will no longer compete with the authority of ethnography texts.

Davies' book on the representations of Amerindians on maps is a major contribution to the history of European conceptions of what it meant to be human and how scholars and artisans were finding strategies and ways of shaping a new image of the world and its humanity. This is not only a fundamental study of texts and visual images of Renaissance Europe, but mainly about the discourse of knowledge in early modern times. With his comparative approach, Davies solid book shows how the maps synthesized in a unique medium an ethnographic conception which could be read as crucial "knowledge-bearing images" (page 22).

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