



Geographies of Mars: Seeing and Knowing the Red Planet

K. Maria D. Lane

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One of the first maps of Mars, published by an Italian astronomer in 1877, with its pattern of canals, fueled belief in intelligent life forms on the distant red planet—a hope that continued into the 1960s. Although the Martian canals have long since been dismissed as a famous error in the history of science, K. Maria D. Lane argues that there was nothing accidental about these early interpretations. Indeed, she argues, the construction of Mars as an incomprehensibly complex and engineered world both reflected and challenged dominant geopolitical themes during a time of major cultural, intellectual, political, and economic transition in the Western world.

Geographies of Mars telescopes in on a critical period in the development of the geographical imagination, when European imperialism was at its zenith and American expansionism had begun in earnest. Astronomers working in the new observatories of the American Southwest or in the remote heights of the South American Andes were inspired, Lane finds, by their own physical surroundings and used representations of the Earth's arid landscapes to establish credibility for their observations of Mars. With this simple shift to the geographer's point of view, Lane deftly explains some of the most perplexing stances on Mars taken by familiar protagonists such as Percival Lowell, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Lester Frank Ward.

A highly original exploration of geography's spatial dimensions at the beginning of the twentieth century, *Geographies of Mars* offers a new view of the mapping of far-off worlds.



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