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An empire of water, islands of fire: Perspectives on 18th-century geology

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In remarks on how half a century of scholarship has changed and refined our understanding of the period when geological science emerged as a recognized field, emphasis is placed on the sustained dominance in 18th-century geological thinking of water's role as a formative agent, notwithstanding unexpected developments opening the way toward a greater appreciation of igneous operations. Also featured is a shifting away from the triumphalism fostered by 19th-century historiography, and increased effort to see past developments as they were viewed by the historical characters themselves.

