

Contents

1	The World Hidden Beneath Us—Structure and Composition of the Earth	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Xenoliths, Meteorites, Earthquakes: Witnesses of the Underground World	3
1.3	The Structure and Composition of the Earth	6
1.3.1	The Compositional Layering: Core, Mantle, and Crust	9
1.3.2	The Mechanical Layering: Inner Core, Outer Core, Convective Mantle, and Lithosphere	11
1.4	Summary	13
1.5	Box 1.1—Minerals and Rocks	15
	References	18
2	Air, Water, Earth—The Exogenic Geological Processes	19
2.1	Introduction	19
2.2	Rocks and Soils	20
2.3	The Atmosphere	21
2.4	The Hydrosphere	23
2.5	The Sedimentary Cycle: Air, Water and Earth at Work	28
2.5.1	Rocks Breakdown	28
2.5.2	Removal and Transportation of Weathering Products	29

2.5.3	Sediment Deposition	30
2.5.4	Diagenesis: Back to Rocks	31
2.6	The Remains of Mountains	31
2.7	The Fate of the Organic Matter	32
2.8	Summary	34
2.9	Box 2.1—Water–Air–Earth Interaction: Some Basic Geochemistry	35
2.10	Box 2.2—Limestone, a Most Meritorious Rock	38
	References	40
3	Fire—How Magmatism Shaped the Earth	41
3.1	Introduction	41
3.2	Magmas: What They Are, How They Form	42
3.3	Magmatism and the Structure of the Earth	43
3.3.1	From Chaos to Order	45
3.4	Volcanism	48
3.4.1	Types of Volcanic Eruptions	48
3.4.2	Volcanism and the Terrestrial Environment	49
3.4.3	Large Igneous Provinces and Mass Extinctions	50
3.5	Global Distribution of Magmatism	52
3.6	Summary	54
3.7	Box 3.1—Magmatism: How and Why	55
3.7.1	Main Types of Magma	57
3.7.2	Ascent, Diversification and Solidification of Magmas	58
3.8	Box 3.2—Heat Flow and Geothermal Energy	59
3.9	Box 3.3—Magmatism and Ore Deposits	61
	References	62
4	Geomagnetism—The Space Shield of the Planet Earth	63
4.1	Introduction	63
4.2	The Earth's Magnetic Field	65
4.3	Palaeomagnetism: The Magnetic Memory of Rocks	68
4.3.1	Magnetic Reversal	69
4.4	Palaeomagnetism, Continental Drift, and Ocean Floor Spreading	71
4.5	Summary	75
4.6	Box 4.1—Geomagnetism: A Historical Perspective	76
4.7	Box 4.2—Geomagnetism and the Biosphere	79
	References	81

5	Seismicity—The Breath of a Restless Earth	83
5.1	Introduction	83
5.2	Rock Failure, Earthquakes, and Faults	84
5.2.1	Stress and Rock Deformation	84
5.2.2	Earthquakes and Faults	85
5.3	Seismic Waves	88
5.4	Seismographs and Seismograms	90
5.5	Earthquake Magnitude, Intensity and Frequency	91
5.6	Global Distribution of Earthquakes	94
5.7	Summary	97
5.8	Box 5.1- Earthquake Effects, Prediction, Forecasting, and Mitigation	98
	Reference	102
6	Plate Tectonics—The Great Unifying Theory	103
6.1	Introduction	103
6.2	Fixism <i>Versus</i> Mobilism	105
6.2.1	The Theory of Continental Drift	105
6.2.2	From Continental Drift to Plate Tectonics	107
6.3	Plate Tectonics: The Framework	108
6.4	The Plate Boundaries	111
6.4.1	Divergent Boundaries	112
6.4.2	Convergent Boundaries	113
6.4.3	Transform Boundaries	117
6.5	Why Do Plates Move?	118
6.6	Where, When and Why Does Subduction Start	120
6.7	Summary	121
6.8	Box 6.1—Linear Volcanism and Hotspots	122
6.9	Box 6.2—The Continents	124
	References	127
7	Geochemical Cycles—The Circulatory System of Planet Earth	129
7.1	Introduction	129
7.2	Geochemical Cycles: Some Definitions	130
7.3	The Water Cycle	131
7.4	The Sodium Cycle	134
7.5	The Carbon Biogeochemical Cycle	135
7.6	The Phosphorus Biogeochemical Cycle	139
7.7	The Nitrogen Biogeochemical Cycle	140
7.8	The Oxygen Cycle	141

7.9	The Iron Cycle	142
7.10	The Geochemical Cycles of Lead and Arsenic	144
7.11	Summary	145
7.12	Box 7.1 The Rock Cycle	146
7.13	Box 7.2 The Geochemical Cycles and the Age of the Earth	148
	References	151
8	The Geochemical Cycles and the Environment—How Man is Changing the Earth	153
8.1	Introduction	153
8.2	Geochemical Cycles and Environmental Pollution	154
8.2.1	Toxic Elements	154
8.2.2	Phosphorus and Nitrogen Compounds	156
8.3	Environmental Aspects of the Carbon Cycle	158
8.3.1	CO ₂ and the Ocean Acidification	158
8.3.2	CO ₂ and the Greenhouse Effect	159
8.3.3	CO ₂ and Climatic Change: A Geological Perspective	161
8.3.4	A Lesson for the Future	168
8.4	Plastic Waste Pollution	170
8.5	Summary	172
8.6	Box 8.1—Stable Isotopes: Measuring the Temperature of the Past	172
8.6.1	Some Basics of Isotope Geochemistry	173
8.6.2	The <i>Delta</i> Notation	174
8.6.3	Oxygen-Hydrogen Isotope Geothermometry	175
8.7	Box 8.2—CO ₂ Sequestration: The message from <i>Decameron</i>	177
	References	180
9	From Hadean to Anthropocene—The Endless Story of a Lucky Planet	183
9.1	Introduction	183
9.2	From the Solar Nebula to the Formation of Planets	184
9.3	Hadean: The Hellish Aeon (~4600–4000 Ma)	185
9.4	Archaean (4000–2500 Ma): The Dawn of Life and the Start of Modern Plate Tectonics	187
9.5	Proterozoic (2500–541 Ma): Oxygen, Eukaryotes, Supercontinents	190

9.6	Phanerozoic: The explosion of Complex Organisms (541–0 Ma)	193
9.6.1	The Spread of Animals and Plants	195
9.7	Finally, The Anthropocene	197
9.8	The Gaia Hypothesis	198
9.9	Summary	200
9.10	Box 9.1—Geochronology: How Ages of Rocks, Fossils and Geologic Events Are Determined	201
9.10.1	Relative Age of Rocks and Fossils	202
9.10.2	Absolute Age	204
	References	205
10	Epilogue	207
10.1	The Earth Anomaly	207
10.2	The Best of All Possible Worlds	210
10.3	Historical Times, Geological Times	211
10.4	Technology, Natural Resources and Environmental Impact	212
10.5	<i>Natura, Non Nisi Parendo Vincitur</i>	213
	Correction to: Air, Water, Earth, Fire	C1
	Further Reading	215
	Index	217