Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (1857): colonial identity and the geographical imagination


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Abstract

Rupprecht’s contribution to this interdisciplinary reappraisal of imperial history recognises her previous research in the field. Bringing together leading international scholars from a variety of intellectual and disciplinary backgrounds, the book offers new ways of constructing, interpreting and analysing the history of the British Empire. The essays challenge many of the conventional approaches and efficacy of such constructs as ‘metropole’ and ‘colony’, establishing a historical discourse from more recently identified thematics, highlighting issues of methodology and research - the biographies included in the volume cross both continents and archives. Rupprecht interrogates the autobiography of ‘Crimean heroine’ Mary Seacole, who travelled from Kingston to Panama, then to Britain, to volunteer her services in the Crimean War. The research engages in both historical contextualisation and close textual analysis of Seacole’s narrative, analysing the formation and representation of her colonial subjectivity. It focuses on the connected issues of autobiography, place, subjectivity and mobility in relation to the material conditions of her route across the globe. The analysis highlights the imperial military networks that structured a large part of her trajectory, arguing that Seacole’s self-representation cannot be fully understood without taking into account the precariousness of historically and geographically contingent places to which she travelled and her sense of her reading audience. Part of this interdisciplinary project, encompassing historical and cultural geography, imperial history and life history, Rupprecht’s text contributes to a fast-developing field of ‘new imperial history’. The research reflects contemporary critical focus on issues of transnationalism, mobility and cross-cultural subject formation, challenging nationally oriented historical paradigms and developing a ‘networked’ conception of imperial spatiality. The focus on the interconnectedness of imperial spaces and projects reconfigures an understanding of place in terms of materially structured trajectories and imagined possibilities.

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Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands. By Mary Seacole. Bristol: Falling Wall, 9–45. Google Scholar. Baggett Paul. 2000: “Caught between Homes: Mary Seacole and the Question of Cultural Identity.” MaComère 3 45–56. Google Scholar. Robinson Amy. 1994: “Authority and the Public Display of Identity: Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands.” Feminist Studies 20.3 537–57. Google Scholar. Seacole Mary. 1988. Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. New York: Oxford UP. Mary Seacole. I should have thought that no preface would have been required to introduce Mrs. Seacole to the British public, or to recommend a book which must, from the circumstances in which the subject of it was placed, be unique in literature. If singleness of heart, true charity, and Christian works; if trials and sufferings, dangers and perils, encountered boldly by a helpless woman on her errand of mercy in the camp and in the battle-field, can excite sympathy or move curiosity, Mary Seacole will have many friends and many readers. She is no Anna Comnena, who presents us with a verbose