



Science and Empire in the Nineteenth Century

Catherine Delmas, Christine Vandamme and Donna Spalding Andréolle

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The issue at stake in this volume is the role of science as a way to fulfil a quest for knowledge, a tool in the exploration of foreign lands, a central paradigm in the discourse on and representations of otherness. The interweaving of scientific and ideological discourses is not limited to the geopolitical frame of the British empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but extends to the rise of the American empire as well. The fields of research tackled are human and social sciences (anthropology, ethnography, cartography, phrenology), which thrived during the period of imperial expansion, racial theories couched in pseudo-scientific discourse, natural sciences, as they are presented in specialised or popularised works, in the press, in travel narratives at the crossroads of science and literature, in essays, but also in literary texts.

Contributors examine such issues as the plurality of scientific discourses, their historicity, the alienating dangers of reduction, fragmentation and reification of the Other, the interaction between scientific discourse and literary discourse, the way certain texts use scientific discourse to serve their imperialist views or, conversely, deconstruct and question them. Such approaches allow for the analysis of the link between knowledge and power as well as of the paradox of a scientific discourse which claims to seek the truth while at the same time both masking and revealing the political and economic stakes of Anglo-saxon imperialism. The analysis of various types of discourse and/or representation highlights the tension between science and ideology, between scientific 'objectivity' and propaganda, and stresses the limits of an imperialist epistemology which has sometimes been questioned in more ambiguous or subversive texts.

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