'Empire as Assemblage': John Green and the Smuggling of an Army During the Indian Uprising, 1857
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20 February, 5:30pm

Using a case study of the innovations required to convey British troops to India during the Uprising of 1857, this article advocates a conception of British imperial governance as assemblage. The analysis has its focal points in London, the Red Sea and the Isthmus of Suez, rather than India itself. With the figure of the military diplomat John Green at its centre, it highlights the complex alignments of human and non-human entities, everywhere and all at once, which enabled the transmission of information about the Uprising in one direction, from India to Britain, and the passage of troops in the other direction. Among the human entities brought into alignment were the East India Company Court of Directors, the Board of Control, the Foreign Office and the War Office in London, the Ottoman authorities in Turkey, the Egyptian authorities in Cairo, and Green himself in Alexandria. Among the non-human entities were steam ships, telegraphic messages, lighthouses, railway carriages and vans which looked like Brighton bathing houses. To arrange for their agency in concert, Green and others mobilized bureaucratic precedents, diplomatic overtures, and political and military directives. The resulting alignments enabled the British Empire’s considerable capacity for violence to be inflicted upon Indian rebels as swiftly and as overpoweringly as possible. We suggest that a focus on simultaneity and a conceptualization of large scale historical projects such as that of imperial governance as assemblages which operate everywhere and all at once can enrich notions of networks, structures and discourses that are currently used by historians in general.