

Polar Expeditions: National Heroism, Scientific Knowledge and Geographical Discovery in the Long 19th Century

In the 19th century, many expeditions from Europe and North America embarked on often year-long journeys to the unknown regions of the Arctic and later Antarctic. Their aims were scientific (gaining more knowledge about the world) and economic (finding passages through the East and the West for transport). As a result of increasing nationalism and nation building-processes, they also served national interests. Scientific knowledge was considered a major symbol of a nation's progress, while it at the same time was held up as a universal and supranational good. Nansen's expeditions and the race for the South Pole, to mention just two examples, have to be seen in this context.

While research on polar expeditions, their aims, social composition and course of events has met with increasing interest in the last decade, there is still need for more knowledge on their scientific, political and cultural relevance. In particular the time before their departure and after their return needs more attention in order to understand scientific, political, economic and cultural structures and the relationship between growing nationalism and supranational science in Europe and North America before the First World War.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- The relationship between nation building-processes and specific polar expeditions
- The role of science on polar expeditions
- The historiography of polar expeditions: How are they represented in school and university text books?