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Perspectives of Polar Research in Germany around 1900: The Turning Point from Vision (Neumayer) to Launching (Drygalski)

Kurzfassung

Die Perspektiven der Polarforschung vor 100 Jahren waren unter anderem geprägt von zwei organisatorischen Grundproblemen: der Schiffsfrage und der Routenplanung. In Bezug auf das erste Problem setzte sich Erich von Drygalski durch; hinsichtlich des zweiten war Georg von Neumayer richtungsweisend. Im Rückblick auf das Polarforschungs-Gedenkjahr 2001 skizziert dies der Beitrag am Beispiel eines Briefmarkenblocks der Deutschen Post und einer Ausstellung des Instituts für Länderkunde Leipzig/Deutschland.

Abstract

100 years ago polar research was determined by two fundamental aspects: vessels to be used and route planning. The decision about the research vessel was determined by Erich von Drygalski; route planning was mainly influenced by Georg von Neumayer. Emphasizing the polar research commemoration year in 2001 German Postal Service (Deutsche Post) issued two new stamps and the Institute of Regional Studies (Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig, Germany) organized an exhibition.

Résumé

Il y a 100 ans, l'exploration des régions polaires était entre autres déterminée sur le plan de l'organisation par deux aspects fondamentaux: celui des bateaux et celui de l'itinéraire. C'était Erich von Drygalski qui s'est imposé à propos du premier. Georg von Neumayer a ouvert la voie à l'itinéraire. En considérant l'année passée 2001 comme l'année commémorative de l'exploration des régions polaires, la poste allemande (Deutsche Post) a émis des timbres et l'institut de géographie et de civilisation (Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig/Allemagne) en a organisé une exposition.

Keywords

History of Polar Research, Erich von Drygalski, Georg von Neumayer

1. Introduction

The year 2001 was a special commemoration year for polar historical affairs. 175 years ago Georg von Neumayer, nestor of German polar research, was born. 100 years ago the first German South Polar Expedition was outward bound. It was led by Erich von Drygalski and reflected by Georg von Neumayer in his book "Auf zum Südpol".

Consequently, in 2001, the Institute for Regional Studies in Leipzig dedicated an exposition, called "Universitas Antarctica", to German Arctic research. Additionally German Postal Service (die Deutsche Post) issued two new stamps subjected to 100 years of German Antarctic research.

2. Commemoration Stamps

On November 6, 2001 German Postal Service issued two new stamps worth € 0.56 and 1.12 (Fig. 1). They show the research vessel "Gauss" (that carried Erich von Drygalski on his first German Arctic expedition from 1901 to 1903) and the modern vessel "Polarstern" (that has been in service for Alfred-Wegener-Institute and performing polar research and oceanography since 1982).

Icebergs in the background, Drygalski's route, Neumayer's name and his life dates are to be seen in the stamps. Both stamps remind of a hundred years of German Antarctic research. Moreover, the stamps illustrate important German contributions to the scientific unveiling of Antarctica as a "Terra incognita" around 1900 (see "contures" of Antarctica in Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Antarctic Research for hundred years – Commemoration stamps of German Postal Service (6 November 2001)

3. Universitas Antarctica

Since 1850 the geographical revelation of Antarctica was Georg von Neumayer's central matter of concern. In various lectures he propagated his ideas (see: NEUMAYER, KREMB). When finally the realisation of his ideas was at hand it nearly occurred without him.

Neumayer favoured a two-ship expedition. Drygalski, however, 40 years Neumayer's junior and famous for his Greenland expedition in 1892/93 preferred a one-ship voyage. The decision was made in February 1898: during the 6th meeting of the German Board of South Polar Research Drygalski was elected leader of the future South Polar Expedition. Neumayer who had presided the board since 1895 accepted Drygalski's plan after realizing that all board members including Ferdinand von Richthofen were supporting Drygalski's idea. Consequently the Leipzig exhibition juxtaposed Neumayer's and Drygalski's positions to emphasize the scientific generation gap (see: LÜDECKE 1990).

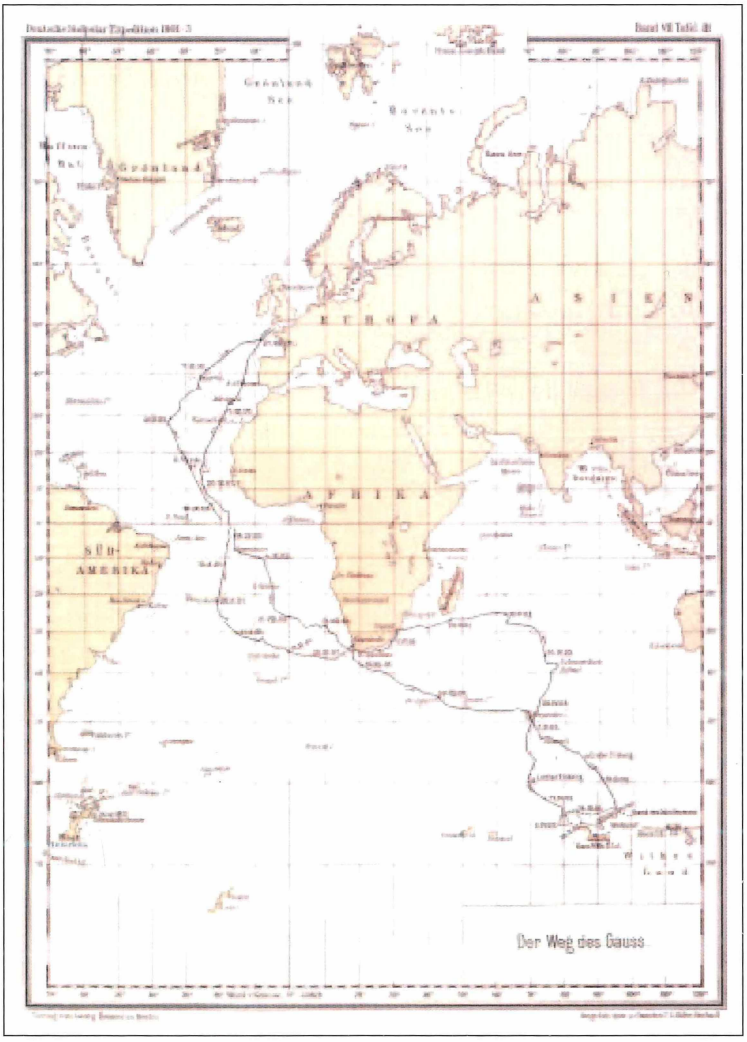


Fig. 2: Departure for "Terra incognita" – Erich von Drygalski's route (1901–1903)

However, Neumayer's route planning was accepted: "Terra Incognita" Antarctica should be reached via Kerguelen (Fig. 2). "Because of the decision to follow this route, Drygalski could not advance southwards as far as the English expedition under the leadership of Robert Falcon Scott at the same time. The consequence was a contempt for the 'Gauss-Expedition' by the German public and the Government of the German Empire which involved the selling of the first German research vessel." (LÜDECKE 1989: 103).

Both, the Leipzig exposition and Cornelia Lüdecke's analysis of research history qualify the evaluation of Georg von Neumayer's work in some substantial aspects. But they also depict his role as nestor of German polar research.

Moreover, the exposition invites to reread Neumayer's and Drygalski's Antarctic works (for example NEUMAYER 1901, DRYGALSKI 1904) with the focus on the "perspectives of polar research in Germany hundred years ago."

4. Acknowledgements

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