

Call for Papers



Expeditions in the Long 19th Century

Discovering – Surveying – Ordering

Chair of Eastern European History

Conference at Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg, November 17-19, 2021

Today more than ever, we are fascinated by distant journeys. As covid-related travel bans are implemented throughout the world, people dream of faraway places, they rush to unknown beaches in their thoughts, they find themselves in untouched areas — taking note, rather casually, of the first images and sounds from Mars. It seems as if the familiar distance is more appealing than the unpredictable, the almost unattainable.

In the long 19th century, the European sciences experienced their second revolution through both government-led and individual expeditions. The white spots of the earth were to be explored, all things foreign could be appropriated and categorized in the private studies and academies of Europe. Life on the peripheries was documented, evaluated, exploited. Languages, head forms, rituals, art, dances and much more had to be recorded, classified and catalogued. Entire disciplines formed and defined themselves around the urge to travel far away. Artifacts, illustrations, and adventure narratives offered self-perception for a European world in search of itself and its origins.

This European self-discovery is neither complete today, nor have the traces of the past disappeared. In the museums, the overflowing

ethnographical depots are a reminder of the past craze for collection, which often enough manifested itself violently. Nevertheless, the pursuit of faraway places had different reasons, ranging from economic and scientific ambitions to the adventurous spirit of private travelers.

Well-organized expeditions led through unknown regions, traversed for the first time by Europeans and their native helpers: For the European conquest of the unknown world would have been impossible without native knowledges. But what were the ideas with which the travelers headed out for the most distant places on earth? Which native concepts of order did the Europeans adopt and what did they leave behind in the countries they had traveled? What is reported about the expeditions and for what reasons are they carried out? Who finances them and with what expectations?

For an online conference to be held at HSU in November 2021 we invite papers that openly inquire about practices of social order, the development of scientific disciplines in contact with various expeditions, native knowledges and companions, artistic adaptations, and ultimately the imagination of (armchair) travelers.

We ask for initial short proposals of no more than one page and a brief biographical outline by May 9, 2021. Please send your proposals to expeditionen@hsu-hh.de.

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