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V. N. Weber's Diary on the Work of the Russian-Swedish Grade Measurement Expedition to the
Svalbard Archipelago in 1901

Abstract

The article concentrates on the study of historical experience of the Russian science in the development of the Arctic and the northern territories. The object of its analysis is the travel

diary of the geologist, Doctor of Geological and Mineralogical Sciences (1937), employee of the Geological Committee of Russia, Valerian Nikolaevich Weber (1871–1940), a participant of the Russian-Swedish expedition on grade measurement on the Svalbard archipelago in 1901, stored in fond no. 58 “The Geological Committee of the Mining Department” of the Russian State Historical Archive. The Russian-Swedish grade measurement expedition to the Svalbard archipelago was carried out in 1899-1901 and became one of the major international scientific projects for studying the Arctic space at the turn of the 20th century. The results of this expedition went down in the history of the Arctic studies, and its results laid the foundations for the modern study of polar territories. The travel diary of V.N. Weber covers the period from May 27, 1901 to August 18, 1901 and describes the activities of the Russian researchers on board of the icebreaker Yermak in 1901. This documentary source is a unique historic monument, not only revealing the history of the expedition research, but also showing all its events in assessment and interpretation of a participant. In Soviet historiography such sources were considered supplementary, but modern trends in of historical scholarship allow us to analyze such documents as independent subjects of study. Travel diaries are kept in order to preserve the memory and for practical purposes of the expedition. Such sources usually have rich information potential, representing various aspects of the expedition's activities; regular travel notes reflect, as a rule, a consistent course of events, providing valuable retrospective information for research. The diary of V.N. Weber details the route of the research party, the living conditions and daily life of the expedition participants, their scientific activities and the research results. Analysis of the diary demonstrates what efforts won great results for the Russian scientific community in the development of the Arctic territory in the early 20th century. This document, being a valuable source for scientific study and comprehension of the Arctic, helps the modern generation to understand this unique historical experience.

Keywords

V. N. Weber's diary, Arctic, Svalbard, personal perception, history of science, expedition, scientist, personal provenance source.

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