



A. E. Nordenskiöld in Swedish memory: the origin and uses of Arctic heroism

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ABSTRACT

For Nordic nations scientific activities in the Polar Regions proved significant in defining national identities and shaping scientific profiles. Starting in the nineteenth century and continuing throughout the next century, polar research proved instrumental in inculcating national honour and expressing small-state colonial aspirations. It provided a source of heroes for forging collective memory and the fostering of youth by presenting the polar explorer as a model character. This study explores the ideological lineage of the nineteenth century polar hero by first relating this idol to historical archetypes of Western culture. It identifies the special traits of the Nordic polar hero and discusses how it was used for patriotic purposes. As a case in point the article looks at the career of the Finnish-Swedish mineralogist and Arctic expedition leader Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld and the ways he, with the help of others, successfully navigated not only the drift ice of polar seas but also the international republic of science, and the three national scenes of Sweden, Finland and Russia. In the process he was turned into a national hero both in Finland and Sweden, and presented as a patriotic role model for adolescents in the arts of postponing gratification and enduring hardship.

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Introduction

Long before the nineteenth century European explorers had travelled in search of trade routes to parts of the Earth that were unknown to them. Single entrepreneurial undertakings based on initiatives from cities of capital like London and Amsterdam were followed by the urge to expand the business of Royal monopolies like the Hudson Bay and Muscovy Companies. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars the British Navy embarked on polar exploration in which scientific observations were undertaken more systematically by on-board medics or as part of the routines of navy officers. In the second half of the nineteenth century the altruistic-idealistic motive to conduct Arctic exploration gained influence. Sharing new information, also that of potential strategic value, such as cartography, became more common as part of the output of a new set of geographical journals. These were published in Britain, Scotland and France, and especially German publishers, such as Justus Perthes' Geographischer Anstalt, set new standards in printing maps as

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part of articles in journals like *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* (Wråkberg 2015, 77–89).

Early nineteenth century polar exploration was dominated by the British navy. Putting at sea with manuals on the proper conduct of scientific observations, the British naval hero of the Napoleonic wars was handed a peace-time route to continued heroism. By sharing their nautical and geographic findings after protracted confrontations with Arctic seas, this heroism rested on the mastering of more abstract challenges than of war, and meant the exercise of altruistic virtues which were held in growing esteem in Europe (Leveré 2003).

The nineteenth century polar hero will be viewed in this article against a historical background of older hero models, and their nationalistic and didactic uses in the age of colonialism and European industrialization will be discussed.¹ As more nations joined the effort to explore the Polar Regions it became more common for scientists themselves to participate in expeditions. In some socio-economic settings, such as the Swedish one, scientists became leaders in planning, fund-raising, and in undertaking polar expeditions. They were also the ones who most often authored the travelogues aimed for a broader readership, not least the youth, which were published after their return home and, with time, in increasingly affordable editions (for one example of the latter, see Hagerman 1926). Swedish polar scientists, immersed of course in the values and ideas of their times, were instrumental in forming the heroic images of the Nordic polar explorer. Our main example of the latter will be the Swedish-Finnish expedition leader and mineralogist Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld (1832–1901) whom, after successfully organizing – and surviving – a considerable number of expeditions to Spitsbergen, Greenland and Arctic Asia, attained a respected position in international polar geography, along with the status of a Swedish-Finnish national and Arctic hero.

The instrumentality of his status in facilitating his career in a very costly line of research will be discussed in the following, as well as some of the discrepancies between Nordenskiöld's personal ambitions and the traits expected from a true polar hero. The lack of identity and control between the public role of the hero and the person behind it will be exemplified. Instances of appropriation by others of the glory of Nordenskiöld for uses alien, or even opposed, to his own personal goals, show that the polar hero was a collective construct rather than a status somehow earned and then owned by an individual.

The mythical genealogy of the polar hero

The classical model of the Hellenic and Roman hero was almost exclusively related to actions of bravery during wars. The heroic deed was typically made in the heat of a battle, as a sudden act of courage and gallant fight. By the sheer brutality of the action, often barbarian in the eyes of the nineteenth century European, and the fact that the hero of antiquity was a pagan, the formation of the Western military hero in the first half of the nineteenth century had to harmonize Christian values with military prowess. This was apparent, for example, in the British literary genre of naval hagiography at mid-century. It was not just a question of knowing and showing that a religious belief in God was possible to combine with great military ability, the Christians were firmly believed to have the unique moral, athletic and intellectual capacities to be the best soldiers of all mankind (Atkins 2015).

95 The cult of the scientific genius evolved during the nineteenth century as part of the
enthusiasm for the creative individual in the age of romanticism (Ellis 2017). In the
genre of obituaries of scientists can be found elements of idealistic struggle and solitude
in the pursuit of knowledge, along with the theme of self-sacrifice and even martyrdom (cf.
Brewster [1841] 1870). From this it is a short move to interpret the hardships of the travel-
ling field scientists, and their solitude and isolation during Arctic winterings, in terms of
heroic endurance (Lewis-Jones 2005). In eighteenth century Sweden some of the students
of the famous taxonomist Carl Linnaeus were charged by him with the task of travelling
100 globally to find new species for his *Systema Naturæ*. They were soon referred to as the dis-
ciples or apostles of Linnaeus, displaying religious connotations. Since their travels in many
cases had fatal ends they were regarded as heroic martyrs of science (Sörlin 2006).

105 The polar hero needed a field upon which to earn glory and this was the Arctic and Ant-
arctic wilderness (Lenz 1995; David 2000). Wild and un-cultivated nature had been
regarded simply as a potentially dangerous wasteland in older Christian philosophy. It
was re-evaluated during the era of romanticism and was seen to offer possibilities to con-
template the greatness of the unaltered outcome of God's creative spirit. The Alpine land-
scape and later the Arctic wilderness were described in terms of the sublime, which was a
new use of this aesthetic category, now applied on nature and in landscape paintings
beside the classic motifs of the pastoral and the picturesque countryside (Nicolson
1997; Colley 2010). The sublime in wild nature had both a positive mind expanding and
110 transcendent quality and a threatening side, especially so in the case of the Polar
Regions. The dark side of the Arctic sublime presented a challenge to the stoicism and civi-
lized spirit of the polar hero.

115 The Arctic wilderness represented a worthy field on which to harvest glory. Planned and
un-planned winterings of expeditions, the ships of which had been frozen in and immobi-
lized by the ice, often entailed prolonged periods of absolute isolation. These were com-
bined with exposure to danger beyond the range of rescue and communication. Long
marches over ice fields towards geographical records or in search of new land meant hard-
ships and increased the risk for scurvy. Mental and social strain during extended periods
120 away from home added to a protracted erosion of discipline and cultural values. This all
had to be counteracted by the manliness, skill and co-operation of all members of the
expedition and the knowledge, planning and leadership of its commander. These were
not traits that scientists had previously been known for, but represented new opportu-
nities for heroism and fame, which some of them at mid-nineteenth century saw
125 benefits to seize before a wide public and a growing set of colonially minded private spon-
sors of polar exploration (Wilson 2003; Robinson 2015).

130 Scientists were hailed in eulogies and at memorial ceremonies, which were especially
popular at the new academies established outside the universities in the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries, as heroes worthy of acclaim equal with the self-sacrificing mis-
sionary and the naval hero. During the second half of the nineteenth century this arche-
typal hero-genius received new ideological meanings from Social Darwinism, building not
only on various social and historical interpretations of Darwin's theories of evolution but
also on the ideas of Jean Lamarck, Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton. According to
them, struggle with nature and competition among individuals and nations were part
135 of a natural order; this developed into the main strand of thinking in Western colonialism
and geopolitics (Gissis 2018).

The heroic Arctic explorer could be an officer or a scientist, but at the time of the final race to the poles in the early twentieth century, the explorer's scientific merits were surpassed in importance by his abilities as a fund raiser and logistical expert (Riffenburgh 1993; Robinson 2015). The importance of what several expedition leaders had learnt by then from the indigenous peoples of the north was seldom acknowledged. The stoic endurance needed for travels in the high north was something different from the bursts of bravery demonstrated by the classical war hero. Nevertheless, the traditional phases in the forming of the Homeric hero-traveller could often be read into the reality of nineteenth century polar exploration (cf. Campbell [1949] 2008).

The first step in the making of the hero was the early personal awareness of being destined for a higher cause. This was often pointed out by biographers and testified to in memoirs of successful polar explorers. The second phase in the forming of the hero, in which the hero is being stigmatized and isolated from society, could be identified with the criticism that established institutions and authorities on polar research often addressed towards inventive plans for new expeditions. Among the many examples of this we find the criticism which met Fridtjof Nansen's innovative plan of crossing the unknown central Arctic by drifting across it in a ship deliberately frozen into the pack ice (Nansen 1893). This concept of polar travel was regarded at the time by most as contrary to all Arctic experience, but Nansen's drift in the ship *Fram* in 1893–1896 proved a very successful enterprise that earned him status as international polar hero (Drivenes and Jølle 2006, 73–117).

The third phase in the making of the hero that entailed isolation, tribulation and reliance on personal resources, was well illustrated in several nineteenth century polar expeditions; especially so the ones that became beset in ice or marooned and were forced to winter, before making new attempts to reach open sea or populated regions the following spring. Any polar wintering was dangerous before the coming of consensus on the causes and remedies of scurvy. The successful homecoming, the witness by the public of the hardships that had been suffered, and the delivery of the tribute to society of new geographical knowledge, finally earned the voyagers and their leaders acclaim and elevation into the hall of fame of polar exploration (Wråkberg 2001, 191–196; Schimanski and Spring 2015).

The Arctic explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld led his second polar expedition to Spitsbergen in 1868. In the following year Nordenskiöld and the commander of the ship of the expedition, the ice-strengthened postal steamer *Sofia*, naval officer Fredrik Wilhelm von Otter, who later served as Prime Minister of Sweden, were elected honorary members of the Royal Geographical Society. Its secretary, Roderick Murchison stated in his annual address to the society that it was: "a great honour to the Swedish nation, though not a rich nation, that they have accomplished so much" (quoted from Mead and Wadel 1961–1962, 110). Considering the difficulties of raising support for new polar expeditions in Britain, after the series of rescue missions sent in vain looking for John Franklin's lost Northwest Passage expedition of 1845, Murchison added: "our Northern friends are still persevering in the same cause, from the carrying out of which richer and more powerful maritime nations have, alas! shrunk" (Murchison 1868–1869, 256). At this time Sweden was on the brink of industrialization but still among the most rural and backward countries in Europe. International recognition was of interest if for no other reason than by its sheer novelty. Thore M. Fries, botanist and participant in the expedition of 1868, noticed this

acclaim with characteristic chauvinist joy in a review commenting on the publication of a set of popular accounts of the Swedish polar expeditions made in the 1860s:

185 we could confidently [...] argue (or rather, we do no more than quote the unanimous opinion of the Germans, French and the British), that in the competition amongst the civilized nations of winning profound and reliable knowledge on the lands and nature of the Arctic Sea to the North of Europe, Sweden now plays the role of the Eagle. [...] Honour and thanks then is due to those patrons whom have generously taken the initiative to this year's expedition; honour and thanks to the government that by its powerful support to the same also in this regard has shown its concern to maintain the glory of Sweden!² (Fries 1868, 216–217)

190 The polar hero as role model

The polar hero became of use as a role model in nineteenth century schools. The harsh social conditions in British schools of the Victorian period were, according to some, not a problem but a functional state of affairs in that they hardened youth for the coming reality of life and society. In a letter to the editor of the *Saturday Review* one participant in the British school debates of the 1860s argued:

200 To the boy or the community alike, the constant reliance upon another for aid in difficulties, guidance in perplexities, shelter from temptations, fatally weakens the fibre of the character. Boys, like nations, can only attain to the genuine stout self-reliance which is true manliness by battling for themselves against their difficulties, and forming their own characters by the light of their own blunders and their own troubles. [...] The object of the public school is to introduce a boy early to the world, that he may be trained in due time for the struggle that lies before him. (quoted after Mangan 2012, ch. 4)

205 In this perspective the polar hero seemed a most suitable model character for the young boy, since the stories of the deeds of the Arctic explorer emphasized the value of being able to cope with troubles, far away from any helping hands, by making the most out of one's own resources. This provides some of the reason for the many school editions of polar travelogues, written for young readers, that were published in Europe from the second half of the nineteenth century and onwards. It coincided with the international propagation of Baden Powell's Scout movement, and the coming of modern school athletics. The polar hero functioned as a didactic role model in this context, embodying a self-confident, clear-thinking and muscular outdoor masculinity (Wråkberg 1999b, 91; Park 2007). The pioneer in combining intellectual and sport achievements in mountaineering and the cartography and its history on Spitsbergen was the much read British traveller and author Martin Conway (Ryall 2015).

215 The cult of athletic and self-supportive manliness was first combined with Christian values, later it became imbued by sociobiological ideas. As such it gained lasting influence and expanded across cultural and gender borders. The original "muscular Christianity" of the Victorian era went through periods of disillusionment, especially after the two World Wars, and it is revealing but somewhat anachronistic at this point in this article, to quote the observations made in 1949 by the Canadian Arctic explorer and ethnologist, Vilhjalmur Stefansson:

225 There are histories of northern exploration where the author's criticism, when applied, is obviously perverted, for instance by nationalism. Perhaps worse are those where the bias is prevailing moral or moralizing. Sometimes the author tells you in the preface, and in

other cases he might as well have told you, that the purpose is neither historical nor scientific, but to mold character. By holding up before our youth the glorious example of “heroes who conquered the Frozen North”, these writers expect to fit the rising generation for the Waterloos of peace and war. They seem to feel that a reading of biased narratives, more deceptive than fiction through being partly true, will stiffen moral fiber and lead to a variety of good results. (Stefansson 1949, vii)

The Swedish nineteenth century version of the polar hero had some specific traits that seem to follow from the national self-understanding of the day. The early sports movement in Sweden was modelled after the British one, but given a more collectivist ethos. This was believed, by its early theorists, to be more in line with traditional Swedish values and attitudes (Sandblad 1985, 180–198). The polar hero was also seen less as an athletic creative genius standing alone in the midst of a wild Arctic landscape, than as a leader of a group. In official narratives on Swedish polar exploration the importance of good communication between the scientific staff, naval commanders and often Norwegian ice pilots, was mentioned as a success factor. Scientific performance was presented as the result of good team-work, along with praise for the leadership exercised by the head of the expedition (see e.g. Forsstrand 1905). But these narratives were often far from reality, being official ideals, filtered to be useful as didactic models (cf. historiographic revisions made in Odelberg 1992; Lewander 2002; Wråkberg 2012, 44–60).

Another theme, presented as characteristic of Swedish Arctic exploration, was the idealistic spirit it was claimed to embody by its pursuit of pure science for the common good of mankind (Nathorst 1902b, 11–12). This line of reasoning was trying to draw on the prestige and influence in Swedish nineteenth century society of idealistic academic philosophy. Idealistic thinking had a strong position in Swedish society in the aftermath of early nineteenth century romanticism. In contrast, scientific research and education was then coming out of a recession, between the hey-days of eighteenth century Linnaean science and the days of enthusiasm for science and technology as the basis for modern industrial growth (Liedman 1987).

Unlike the great European powers of the times, Sweden as a small and industrially less resourceful country could play no significant role in the imperialistic competition in Europe and for overseas colonies. The cartographic work and inventories of natural resources in foreign territories made during Swedish polar expeditions were less likely to be instrumental for any Swedish colonial undertakings, even though precisely this was attempted once in the 1870s when the Swedish foreign office, on the initiative of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, tried to seize the *terra communis* of Spitsbergen under the Swedish-Norwegian Crown – a diplomatic initiative that was abrogated by Russian disapproval (Mathisen 1954, 20–30; Wråkberg 1999b, 149–163). Consequently, Swedish polar research came to have what may have looked like a “pure” scientific character in international comparison, and this was then elevated by some commentators into an altruistic virtue of these activities. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in the following, striving for economic gain from trade and raw-material extraction remained a driver of polar research and its supporters also in Sweden.

Vikings of science

When Nordenskiöld presented his plan for a wintering expedition to Spitsbergen in 1872–1873, Henry C. Rawlinson, the successor of Roderick Murchison at the Royal Geographical Society stated:

Professor Nordenskiöld is a veteran, for this is his sixth Arctic voyage; and he has proved himself to be an able and resolute explorer. His companions have been carefully selected, so that very important results may be confidently anticipated from the labours of these hardy Northmen. The old heroic literature of Scandinavia is closely connected with Arctic research; and we cannot fail to rejoice at the place which the descendants of Othar and of Eirec Raude are so worthily taking among the explorers of North Polar regions. (Rawlinson 1871–1872, 363)

Since before the coming of modern science in the seventeenth century, the study of the features of northern nature was believed by Nordic scientists to be their particular duty. They possessed familiarity with the climate and had the benefit of geographical proximity to study phenomena like auroras and glaciers. In the worldview of romanticism nature carried deep meanings. Nordenskiöld, who was among the initiators of the national park movement in Finland and Sweden (Niemi 2018), stated, as one of his reasons for pre-serving reserves of Fennoscandian old growth forests, that visits to these would enable future generations to:

get a full picture of the nature with which our forefathers had to fight their first battle, a nature that has nourished the Northerner's never conquered love of freedom and fostered our bold armies, which has formed that extensive museum where all our scientists and artists began their studies, and which is the basic harmony in the songs of our poets, in the worldview and philosophy of our ancestors and ourselves. (Nordenskiöld, quoted in Grönberg 1911, 16)

The duty of exploring the north could be related to the contemporary racist worldview. Among northwest European geographers one finds the idea that polar exploration was the "natural" task of the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic peoples. In a speech before the assembled faculties and students at an academic convocation of the Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität in Straßburg in 1897, Georg Gerland made an overview of the goals and results of international polar research and noticed:

Thus, Arctic research is almost exclusively the work of Germanic nations, since also the leaders of Russian northern expeditions were mostly Germanic and indeed of German descent. The seafaring peoples of the Mediterranean, no less able to master high seas, have stayed far away from the North Pole.³ (Gerland 1897, 10)

By this time certain aspects of Social Darwinism and colonial geography amplified the old ideas of the Nordic's hereditary mission to explore and migrate into the high north (cf. Livingstone 2000, 7). Still in 1927 the Scottish geographer Robert Rudmose Brown stated, in a review article on polar research presented to the ninety-fifth meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science:

Certainly no other race from temperate climates is likely to try to colonise the Arctic, since the Nordics alone show that distaste for gregariousness and that capacity for enduring solitude which are essential for the task. We may even grant them a greater measure of physical enterprise and love of wandering than other people. (Brown 1927, 95–96)

The influence of geo-determinism in geography and in racial thinking at this time made the geosciences take on ideological meanings. The character of the Nordic and Fennic peoples was believed to be causally related to the landscape and nature of Fennoscandia. Thus, doing research within geology, exploring the glaciological processes that had formed the mountains and lakes of northernmost Europe during the last ice age by studying active glaciers on e.g. Spitsbergen, was a way of finding the origin of the landscape which had formed Nordic and Fennic national characters.

In 1895, while presenting his innovative plan of flying to the North Pole by means of a hydrogen balloon, August Andrée, in what was by then the Swedish standard rhetoric on the topic, commented on why this initiative was now taken in Sweden and not left to citizens of more resourceful nations:

And who are more close to making such an attempt than we Swedes? As a highly civilized people, since ages distinguished by the most fearless courage, living in the vicinity of the polar region, familiar with its climatic peculiarities, and by nature itself trained to endure the same, we could hardly fully dispense ourselves with a certain feeling of obligation in this regard. We could do so even less considering that we are to uphold the most beautiful traditions in science in general, and not least so in polar research, and have amongst us both old and experienced men, who have performed great deeds up there and a whole crowd of young and resolute men who have already lived and done research there and among whom it will cost small labour to secure members for such a voyage. Are we not then before other nations called upon and suited to accomplish the great task? And if I am not mistaken in presuming that in the same manner as we hope for and await that the central and south European people will explore Africa, they expect from us that we will explore the white continent?⁴ (Andrée 1906, 132)

Here we find most of the nineteenth century ideas of the Swedish polar hero. Some of these were just echoes of parallel statements made at academies and fundraising events for polar expeditions elsewhere in Europe and America. At the turn of the century Andrée could refer to the inspiration, or burden, of some forty years of small scale polar exploration in Sweden, with only a handful of lost lives and one shipwreck, that of Johan Alfred Björling and Evald Kallstenius on north-western Greenland in 1892. Andrée's own ill-fated balloon expedition towards the North Pole in 1897 came to mark the end of this suite of expeditions. His balloon was lost in northern mists, crashed a few days after lift-off on the drift-ice of the Arctic Ocean. The final camp of the expedition was found on White Island, the eastern outpost of Spitsbergen, only in 1930. The burial of the remains of its three participants in Stockholm the same year took place in a new technological time in which athletic manliness and a "distaste for gregariousness and capacity for enduring solitude", were no longer sufficient grounds for any claim to polar heroism (Sörlin 1999; Wråkberg 1999a; Rydén 2003).

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld and the northeast passage

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld became world famous after his completion of the Northeast Passage in 1878–1880. In making the first well-recorded crossing ever of the Northeast Passage between the Atlantic and the Pacific, Nordenskiöld, his scientific staff and the ship's crew, under the command of navy officer Louis Palander, almost managed the journey in just one season. The voyage commenced on 22 June 1878 at the naval port of Karlskrona in Sweden. The expedition was based on an ice-strengthened steam

barque named *Vega*, employed before and after the passage in whaling on the North Atlantic. It sailed eastward along the north coast of Europe and Asia towards the Bering Strait. At the end of September 1878 its progress was blocked by a combination of drift-ice and fresh ice on the north coast of eastern Siberia, only about 120 nautical miles away from the Bering Strait (Nordenskiöld 1885).

On July 18 the following year, the ice surrounding the ship finally broke up and the expedition could continue its voyage after a scientifically rewarding wintering. No member got stricken by scurvy or lost in other ways. This was due not least to the bartering the expedition could do with the Chukchi indigenous people of the Bering Region. The expedition reached Stockholm in April 1880, having returned by way of Japan, the Indian Ocean and the then recently opened Suez Canal, completing a circumnavigation of the continents of Europe and Asia. Celebratory calls were made at several ports, including Hong Kong, Singapore, Cairo, Naples, and London (Wråkberg 2001, 181–196). The first modern harbour the *Vega*-expedition reached after leaving Arctic waters was Yokohama in Japan. Here Nordenskiöld could send telegrams telling that the expedition was all well, addressed first to the Swedish King Oscar II, the next to his main sponsor the Swedish industrialist Oscar Dickson and the third to his wife and children in Stockholm (Wråkberg and Lindberg-Wada 2002).

The news of the successful cruise of the *Vega* was greeted as a heroic feat. The Swedish poet Carl Snoilsky, a frequent contributor to school books with fostering “free” readings for Swedish youth, later interpreted the moment: [UNDEFINED TAG]

But suddenly through uncertainty bursts
 Word-of-mouth, by electricity a thousand times amplified
 News of victory from the Pacific Ocean:
 «Hail NORDENSKIÖLD! He broke the bonds of the cold,
 Which blocked the road to fabulous Cathay:
 Now into Yokohama sails *Vega*
 Saluted by cannons and flying blue–yellow pennants!»⁵ (Snoilsky 1893, 40)

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld was of a Finnish noble family with a tradition of following careers as military officers, state officials and scientists. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Finland was seized by Russia, after war with Sweden, and turned into a grand duchy of the empire of the czars. During his education as mineralogist and geographer at Helsinki University, Nordenskiöld’s outspoken liberalism brought him into conflict with the Russian administration of his country. He was blocked from holding any position at Helsinki University and chose to leave Finland shortly after his graduation (the two main biographies on Nordenskiöld are Hedin 1926; Kish 1973).

He moved to Sweden and Stockholm, where he was greeted by many as an exiled Finnish national hero. He was introduced in scientific and liberal circles and already by 1858 Nordenskiöld was appointed professor and head of the division of mineralogy of the Swedish National Museum of Natural History, embarking on a successful career in his new country of residence. The same year he became a member of the first of the ship-based Arctic expeditions dispatched from Stockholm or Gothenburg during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1864 he was entrusted the leadership of an expedition destined to northern and eastern Spitsbergen to pursue a scientific programme

of natural history and geology. Nordenskiöld served as scientific leader on most of the following polar expeditions that were launched from Sweden, lobbied for by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and later the Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography. The undertakings were financed, often jointly, by the Swedish state, private patrons and King Oscar II. Nordenskiöld's system of polar exploration involved contracting logistic experts to the teams (Kish 1968, 495–496). Ice pilots and masters of Arctic survival were found among north Norwegian seal hunters, Kven and Sami indigenous hunters and skiers of northern Sweden. Military officers were recruited not only from Sweden but also from Denmark, Italy and Finland.

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld – the nineteenth century polar hero – became a social “institution” run by many more persons and organizations in contemporary Sweden than Nordenskiöld himself. As stated already, reports and popular accounts of his expeditions were written mainly by the scientists who had participated in them, while some accounts were written or edited by staff of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences but published under Nordenskiöld's name. Anna Hierta-Retzius, close friend to Nordenskiöld, stated in 1920 in a candid handwritten note on the inside of the flyleaf of the bound volume of her husband Gustaf Retzius' copy of the official account of the *Vega*-expedition, that the book had in fact been written by E. W. Dahlgren, head librarian of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. This exemplar of Nordenskiöld (1880–1881) is today owned by the Academy.⁶ Nordenskiöld's status as polar hero facilitated further funding for following undertakings. Looking back in 1905 on Nordenskiöld's fund-raising campaign for the *Vega*-expedition, Carl Forsstrand observed:

When Nordenskiöld presented his new plan for an expedition, he was met by a more lively interest in favour of its realization than had often been the case on earlier occasions. This did probably not just depend on his reputation, acquired already at this time, of being the foremost authority on polar research of the age, but was also due to the fact that his new plan appealed to the Swedish national pride, and bringing the plan to fruition was rightly seen in wide and influential circles as an achievement, very much suited to bring honour upon Sweden. The considerable sums needed for the project were granted in a short time.⁷ (Forsstrand 1905, 290)

Regarded by some as a rather stiff person later in life (Nathorst 1902a), Nordenskiöld stands out in his writings as a geographer, focussed logistical expert and a *relatively* modest polar explorer. In an article published in 1885 in the *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* he denounced the hunt for geographical records in polar exploration, as well as the competition for the right to name newly discovered territory in the Arctic. This has been attributed to his liberal political views, his complex Finnish-Swedish identity and familiarity with Russian culture and society. Despite being well integrated in Swedish nineteenth century society, he and his likewise Finnish-Swedish wife still had a background as Finnish refugees and therefore never could or wanted to identify fully with narrow Swedish national interests, as they were often expressed in the writings of his Swedish colleagues (Hestmark 1991, 188). His role of polar celebrity was the product of actions of an individual immersed in a social context of colleagues, sponsors and promoters who held ideas that were sometimes alien to the idol, but instrumental in furthering various social, national and economic goals.

To Nordenskiöld and his business sponsors, the last mentioned was a strong incentive. After Nordenskiöld was declared *persona non grata* in Finland, he and his wife Anna

Mannerheim Nordenskiöld lost access to their families' Finnish estates. In his wife's case this was a considerable loss since her family was the wealthiest in Finland at the time (Kish 1973, 56–60). As noted already, Nordenskiöld ventured to establish mining on Spitsbergen in the 1870s along with exploring the potential of forestry in Greenland for his
 455 main sponsor the Gothenburg timber magnate Oscar Dickson (Nordenskiöld 1883; Wråkberg 1999b, 160–163).

Nordenskiöld developed good personal relations with many Russian scientists and businessmen during the main part of his career. The circumnavigation of Asia was a scientifically productive achievement carried through not only with Russian approval but with
 460 major economic support from the Russian businessman Alexander Sibiryakov. The interest joining all was to open shipping along a northern sea route from Western Europe, past northern Scandinavia, and southward into Siberia through the northern estuaries of the rivers Ob, Yenisei and Lena. This was the main driver behind the northeast passage of the *Vega*-expedition and its harbinger expeditions arranged in the preceding summers
 465 to the estuary of the Yenisei. Nevertheless, a few years later the interest for international commerce in this potential sea-river trade-route to the interior of Siberia was partly offset by the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway (Martens 1878; Kish 1973, 122–132, 139–140).

Considering the peaceful aspirations that Nordenskiöld and his sponsors had with their
 470 Siberian expeditions, there is irony in the fact that the image of Nordenskiöld the polar hero was captured by Swedish-Finnish political reactionaries on his triumphant return in Stockholm in 1880 and used in Russophobic agitation. The following complimentary poem was written to celebrate the *Vega*-expedition by Emil von Quanten, a member of anti-Russian circles in Sweden in the 1880s. In the symbolism read into the wintering of
 475 the *Vega*-expedition on the coast of eastern Siberia, the poem alludes to several historical circumstances familiar to the Swedish educated public from the patriotic understanding of its apparently war-ridden history with Russia. The symbolism opens in its first stanza by an analogy between the name of the ship and the star *Vega*. It goes on to refer to (among
 480 much else) the prisoners of war who were deported to Siberia after Sweden and Finland's unsuccessful wars with Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. [UNDE-

FINED TAG]

Like a star fallen from the heights of heaven,
 With light and life from another world,
 485 She rests on her bold voyage
 The Swedish *Vega* at the Russian rampart.

[UNDEFINED TAG]

And all the dark waves of the Arctic Ocean
 490 Rages in vain at her hull
 With bergs of ice: she takes not the smallest of leak
 But wakes through the long winter night.

[UNDEFINED TAG]

495 There fights behind her strong armour
 Not tyrant nor slave;

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld 69 years of age, resting his left hand on a copy of the "*Voyage of the Vega round Asia and Europe*". Painting by Axel Jungstedt in 1902 (posthumous). By permission of the Center for History of Science, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Stockholm.

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Notes

1. This article is an expanded and revised version in English of some of the matters I discussed in Wråkberg (1999b).

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2. The present author is responsible for all translations in this article.

"tryggt kunna vi [...] påstå (eller, rättare sagt, vi citera blott tyskars, fransmäns, engelsmäns enhälliga omdömen), att uti de civiliserade nationernas täflan att om det ofvan Europa belägna Ishafvets länder och naturförhållanden vinna grundlig och tillförlitlig kännedom, Sverige för närvarande spelar örnens rol [---] Åra och tack derföre åt de mæcenater, som frukostigt tagit initiativet till innevarande års svenska polar-expedition; åra och tack åt en regering, som genom sitt kraftiga understöd till densamma äfven i detta afseende visat sig så mån att häfda det svenska namnets heder!"

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3. "So ist die Nordpolforschung fast ausschließlich das Werk germanischer Nationen, denn auch die Führer der Russen waren meist germanischer und zwar deutscher Abstammung. Die Romanen, durchaus nicht minder seetüchtig, haben sich vom Nordpol ganz fern gehalten".

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4. "Och vilka äro väl närmare till att göra ett sådant försök än vi svenskar? Såsom ett högt civiliseradt folk, som af ålder kännetecknats af det mest oförfäradе mod, boende i polarregionens närhet, förtrogna med dess klimatiska egendomligheter och af själfva naturen tränade till att uthärda dessa senare, kunna vi knappast fullständigt frigöra oss från en viss känsla af förpliktelse i nämnda hänseende. Vi kunna det så mycket mindre, som vi hafva att upprätthålla de vackraste traditioner inom naturforskningen i allmänhet, och ej minst inom polarforskningen, samt hafva midt ibland oss både gamla erfarna män, som gjort storverk där uppe, och en hel flock af unga och beslutsamma män, hvilka redan lefvat och forskat där och bland hvilka det skall kosta ringa möda att värfva deltagare för en sådan färd. Äro icke vi då framför andra nationer kallade och lämpade att utföra det stora värfvet? Och männe jag misstager mig däri, att liksom vi hoppas och vänta, att de mellan- och sydeuropeiska folken skola genomforska Afrika, så vänta de af oss, att vi skola genomforska den hvita världsdelen?"

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5.

"Men plötsligt genom ovissheten skär
Ett rykte, som elektriskt tusendubblat
Från Stilla hafvet segerbudskap bär:
»Hell NORDENSKIÖLD! Han brutit köldens regler,
Som spärrat väg till fabelstort Chatay:
Nu in till Yokohama Vega seglar
Vid festsalut och blågult vimpelsvaj!"

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6. The note reads in Swedish: "Denna bok är skriven af Bibliotekarien Erik Dahlgren, som hjälpte Nordenskiöld med alla hans resebeskrifningar. N-d. kom in i Svenska Akademien för dem — men inte Erik Dahlgren. N-d. kunde inte skriva svenska. Anteckning af Anna Retzius, Juni 1920, som var god vän med dem båda."

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7. "Då Nordenskiöld framlade sin nya expeditionsplan, möttes han af ett lifligare intresse, ett större tillmötesgående för dess förverkligande, än som ofta tillförene visats honom. Detta berodde nog icke blott på hans redan nu förvärfvade anseende som samtidens förnämsta auktoritet inom polarforskningen utan äfven därpå att hans nya plan tilltalade den svenska

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nationalstoltheten, och att dess utförande i vida och inflytelserika kretsar med rätta tolkades som en bedrift, i hög grad ägnad att sprida ära öfver Sverige. Det betydliga kostnader, företaget skulle kräfvä, blefvo inom kort garanterade.”

8.

590	<p>”En stjärna lik, från höga himlen fallen, Med ljus och lif ifrån en annan värld, Hon hvilar sig uppå sin djerfva färd Den svenska Vega vid den ryska vallen. Der kämpa bakom hennes starka pansar Ej herskare och heller icke träl; Der hålla vakt för mensklighetens väl Friborne män med tankens skarpa lansar.</p>	Och hela Nordpolshafvets mörka vatten Förgäfves stormar löst mot hennes däck Med berg af is: hon tar ej minsta läck, Men vakar ut den långa vinternatten Sibiriens arme son på öde tundra Och den förviste, mera arm ändå, Som hit i tunga bojor nöddes gå, Mot Vega skåda upp i stum beundran.
595	<p>Men från de grafvar, der de slumrat kalla Ett sekel ren och mer i trofast lag, De tappre från Pultavas olycksdag, Högtidligt hörs ett »lefve Sverige!» skalla.”</p>	

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Disclosure statement

Q2 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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