ANTARCTIC RESEARCH AND IMPERIAL AMBITION: ASSESSING THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL CONGRESS

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This research examines the 7th International Geographical Congress of 1899. It argues that, though animated by a spirit of international scientific cooperation, the congress energized imperial rivalries, in turn setting off a period of scientific research (1901-1904) in Antarctica motivated by competition. Historians of Antarctica seldom look beyond the 6th International Geographical Congress held in London in 1895 to locate the origins of the late-nineteenth-century renewal of interest in the Antarctic, often paying near-exclusive attention to Resolution 3 of that congress, which identified the exploration of Antarctica as “the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken.” Yet, though far-less-often analyzed, it fell to the subsequent congress, held in Berlin in 1899, to coordinate the independent national expeditions proposing to set for the Far South. To this end, the 1899 congress participants formulated an Antarctic research program structured around a strict demarcation of national zones of activity. This work will suggest that this partitioning of Antarctic space, though oft-recognized as a scheme representative of the widely-felt desire for international collaboration, betrays, instead, deeper imperial priorities and ambitions. These will be investigated primarily by looking at the efforts of British geographer Sir Clements R. Markham as well as the British reception of, and the German response to, Markham’s proposal.