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Research project

Elevated views: Sven Hedin's expeditions och the world from above 1900-1935

The modern era has seen an emergence of technologies for portraying the earth from above. Balloons, aircraft and satellites have literally produced pictures of the whole world. This project explores the emergence of such viewpoints. It investigates the Swedish geographer Sven Hedin's expeditions to Asia between 1900 and 1935, and contributes to knowledge about how current global visions of the earth from above – e.g. climate models or photographs of the whole planet – have a history preceding the late modern era of globalization. First, the project studies how Hedin constructed elevated views through texts and images. Second, it investigates how elevated views were mediated through techniques of display which portrayed far away places and how they shaped sensory experiences of the world from up high. Third, the aim is to understand the connections between elevated views and turn of the 20th century imperial power. Hedin harboured an imperialistic worldview, but how did that affect his efforts to create visions from above? The project analyzes Hedin's books, articles, photographs and drawings. It will consist of three case studies: the Mountain, the Panorama and the Aircraft. Taken together they indicate how Hedin climbed higher to create overviews of geographical patterns in nature. The project places the Swedish explorer in broader cultural and scientific currents, where elevated views of earth were pursued.