

The Forgetting of a Hero: The Antarctic Explorer Shirase Nobu

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the life and times of Lieutenant Shirase Nobu, in order to identify some of the factors responsible for the fact that his is a name that was once famous throughout Japan and yet is now almost entirely forgotten. For some explorers, fame has endured, and the glory that was theirs in their own time has lasted long after their deaths. For others, however, it has been an ephemeral status that soon faded. It is argued in this thesis that heroes are a product of the historical *milieu* in which they lived, as much as they are a product of their own deeds, and that changes in society can eclipse heroic status even within the lifetime of the hero.

The historical period known as the Heroic Era of Antarctic exploration, which occurred from the end of the nineteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth, has become a topic of growing fascination for layperson and scholar alike. Despite this interest, Shirase Nobu, a Heroic Era Antarctic explorer once celebrated in Japan and whose name was known around the world, was forgotten even in his homeland almost as soon as his expedition was over, and his story still remains largely unknown even in that country.

Although Shirase's story is a fascinating one, it is not the purpose of this thesis to rehabilitate a forgotten Japanese historical figure. Nor does this thesis investigate the "waves and troughs" in Shirase's fame over the past century, or attempt to explain why they have occurred, or are now occurring. Instead, this thesis is restricted to an investigation of factors that made Shirase famous, and, more specifically, the factors that swiftly put an end to that fame.

At the same time, it is hoped that this thesis may function as a first stage in integrating into the wider field of Antarctic historical studies an event which has to date largely been ignored, and thereby serve as one small step towards giving the East a more eloquent role on the Anglo-centric stage of Antarctic exploratory history as it now exists.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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