

—報告—

Report

## The Japanese Antarctic Expedition in 1912: a summary of lectures given at the Norway-Japan Society and the Mariners Society in Oslo, 2012

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1912年の日本による南極探検について

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**要旨:** 1912年の白瀬(しらせのぶ)日本南極探検の100周年記念プロジェクトとして2012年2月に東京で国際講演会が開催された。白瀬の業績は海外ではほとんど知られていないが、白瀬隊の公式報告である「南極記」(1913年刊行)がヒラリー・柴田とララ・ダグネルにより英訳され、2011年に出版された(Shibata and Dagnell, 2011)。著者は上記講演会においてアムンセン隊の南極探検についての招待講演を行い、続いて秋田県の白瀬の出生地へ足を運び、白瀬南極探検隊記念館を訪れた。本報告では英訳「南極記」をもとに、100年前の日本人が南極地域でなした探検をヨーロッパ人に簡単に紹介する。

編集委員会 注

著者スーザン・バル女史は、ノルウェー文化遺産局にて極域部門の顧問を担当しており、1979年より極地の歴史、文化遺産の保護に携わってきた。またこれらに関する本や記事等も執筆している。

本報告は、著者が2012年10月12日と19日に、オスロにあるフリチョフ・ナンセンの旧宅で開催された日本・ノルウェー協会の秋の例会及びオスロ船員クラブの会合でそれぞれ行った白瀬南極探検に関する講演内容である。講演会に出席された太田昌秀博士が、これを英訳して日本人たちに紹介したいとの思いから本編集委員会に照会された。原文はノルウェー語で、バル女史が英訳をしたものである。太田博士の意図は、敢えて日本語にせず、外国では白瀬隊がどんな風に描かれているかを知ってもらうことである。

著者、スーザン・バル女史は、2月に東京で開かれた白瀬南極探検100周年記念シンポジウムに出席してアムンセン隊の南極点探検を紹介し、その後秋田県にかほ市の白瀬記念館を訪問した折に、白瀬隊の偉業に深い感銘を受けたとのことで、本報告に記されているような講演をノルウェーで行った。

なお、この講演内容はノルウェー極地クラブの会誌(ノルウェー語)に印刷された(Barr, 2012)。

**Abstract:** Nobu Shirase's Antarctic expedition in January 1912 is not well known outside Japan. On the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the expedition in Japan, Hilary Shibata's and Lara Dagnell's translation of the expedition report, "Nankyokuki Tanken (Antarctic Expedition)" from 1913 was published (Shibata and Dagnell, 2011). In

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addition this author was invited to a large Shirase conference in Tokyo in February 2012 to present Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition, and in that connection was able to visit Shirase's birthplace and museum in northwest Japan. In this summary of her lectures, she gives an outline of Shirase's expedition based on the expedition report, in order to introduce to Europeans what the Japanese undertook a hundred years ago in the Antarctic Continent.

Note by the Editorial Committee

Dr. Susan Barr is a Senior Advisor in polar matters at the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage. She has worked on polar history and the protection of polar cultural heritage since 1979 and has published books and articles on those themes.

This report is a summary of two lectures given by the author, Susan Barr, one at the Norway-Japan Society autumn meeting at Polhøgda, near Oslo, former home of F. Nansen, on October 12th, 2012, and the other at the membership meeting of the Sjømannsforening (Mariners Society), in Oslo on October 19th, 2012. The report was brought in to the Editorial Committee by Dr. Yoshihide Ohta to introduce Susan Barr's lectures to Japanese researchers, so this report is not an academic study. The lectures were originally given in Norwegian, and have been translated to English by Barr, not to Japanese. Dr. Ohta's idea was to show Japanese researchers how Nobu Shirase is described and understood overseas.

Barr attended the international conference in Tokyo on January 28th, 2012 that marked the centenary of the expedition, and visited the Shirase Antarctic Expedition Memorial Museum in Akita. She was deeply fascinated and the experience inspired her to give these lectures.

The lectures were published in Norwegian in the Journal of the Norwegian Polar Club (Barr, 2012).

## 1. Introduction

There have been many celebrations and events connected with the centenaries of the famous Antarctic expeditions of Roald Amundsen and Robert F. Scott, who reached the South Pole in December 1911 and January 1912 respectively. Far less known outside Japan is Nobu Shirase's expedition, which met the *Fram* in the Bay of Whales in January 1912 and which is said to have carried out the fastest sledge journey ever on the Ross Barrier during the so-called "Dash Patrol" south from the Bay of Whales to 80°S.

There are two reasons why this expedition has been so little known outside Japan. Firstly it was completely eclipsed by the drama around Amundsen and Scott — the South Pole had been attained and Scott and his men died and left an heroic legend. Shirase and his men achieved little other than to prove that Japanese could also operate in the Antarctic, which of course was important at home, but not internationally. However, the main reason is that the expedition report has up to now been almost inaccessible for the non-Japanese reading public. It must be mentioned that Ivar Hamre, a Norwegian business man who knew Japanese, published an article about the expedition in 1933 in the *Geographical Journal* (Hamre, 1933), but it is not probable that many people today are acquainted with this.

On the occasion of the centenary celebrations in Japan, the Shirase Antarctic Expedition Supporters' Association was able to publish Hilary Shibata's and Lara Dagnell's translation of the expedition report "*Nankyokuki Tanken* (Antarctic Expedition)" from 1913 (Shibata and Dagnell, 2011).



Fig. 1. Lieutenant Nobu Shirase (Photo: National Institute of Polar Research).

It was a formidable task to work through the original text from the early 20th century. The translators explain that the text contained many Chinese characters which were taken out of use in 1946 when the Japanese Ministry of Education reduced the number of characters in written Japanese from 4000 to 1850. In addition place and person names that the expedition members heard on their journey were often misunderstood and reproduced in the way the Japanese thought they had heard them.

This article has used the translation as the main source. In addition this author was invited to a large Shirase conference in Tokyo in February 2012, to present Amundsen's South Pole expedition, and in that connection was able to visit Shirase's birthplace and museum in northwest Japan.

## 2. Lt. Nobu Shirase (1861–1946) — A Japanese polar hero

Even though the results cannot quite be compared, there are several parallels between Shirase's polar ambitions and those of Amundsen. When he was 15 years old Amundsen became deeply inspired by the tales of British naval explorer John Franklin's heroic

sufferings in northern Canada. Shirase was 10 years old when he was inspired in the same way. Both men decided there and then that they would become polar explorers and both staked a lot to attain their goal.

Nobu Shirase was born on 13 June 1861 in the family Jorenji temple in Akita, on the northwest coast of Japan's main island of Honshu. He was intended for a life as a Buddhist monk, but chose instead to join the army. With an expedition to the North Pole in his plans, he participated on Captain Shigetada Gunji's expedition in 1893 to explore the Kuril Islands, the long island chain between Japan and the Kamchatka Peninsula. The expedition wintered in a cave under very bad conditions and ten of the members died. Despite this Shirase chose to stay an extra year, together with five new participants, and three of these died of scurvy before the remainder were relieved in August 1895.

It was not this rather negative experience that made Shirase give up his North Pole plans. As with Amundsen it was the news in 1909 that Americans Frederick Cook and Robert E. Peary claimed to have reached the North Pole that turned Shirase's ambitions from north to south. (The information above is taken from the Shirase Antarctic Expedition Memorial Museum, 2010).

### 3. Planning the South Pole expedition

Early in 1910 Shirase was working on finding sponsors for his South Pole expedition. In Japan at the time there was a feeling that the nation was regarded in the West as inferior. Shirase played on this feeling in his application to the Government for economic support. His expedition would contribute to Japan being able to "... expand the nation's territories and become a rich and powerful nation". The parliament granted funds, but the government refused to pay them out. Shirase then had to turn to private sources and this led to the establishment of the supporting organisation "Shirase Antarctic Expedition Supporters' Association". Problems with support and finance delayed the expedition, and it was not before the middle of September that a suitable ship was obtained: the *Daini Hoko-maru*, which had been launched earlier the same year as a service ship for the northern fisheries. The ship had a net weight of 204 tons (the *Fram* was originally 402 tons which was increased to 510 tons after modifications before the 2nd and 3rd voyages), and was renamed *Kainan maru* (*kai* = open, *nan* = south, *maru* in such a context = ship. This has been variously translated to English as *Boat to open the south*, or *Southern Pioneer*).

Shirase had hoped to take several scientists on the expedition. However, despite hundreds of applications there were only two with a scientific background and one of these pulled out at the last minute. Terutaro Takeda was left, and given the title of chief scientist. Shirase had also planned to take horses, as Ernest Shackleton had done a couple of years previously. Ten Manchurian ponies were bought, but there was no room for them on the small *Kainan maru* and dogs were taken instead, together with men who knew the art of dog-sled driving. The Ainu are an indigenous people in northern Japan and the Sakhalin Peninsula for whom hunting with dogs is a traditional way of life. The two Ainu Yasunosuke Yamabe and Shinkinchi Hanamori were given the responsibility for transporting the dogs to Tokyo, where they arrived only a few days before the expedition was to leave. They then joined the expedition themselves as dog experts.



Fig. 2. Nobu Shirase's grave (Photo: Susan Barr).

Altogether there were 27 men on the ship. Four of these would leave the expedition in Sydney after the first stage owing to bad health, but they were then replaced by four new men. Of the 27 only the secretary, the two dog drivers and the scientist were not ship's officers or crew.

When the *Kainan maru* finally sailed from Tokyo harbour on 29 November 1910 they left not only enthusiastic “*banzai*” cries from what was said to be more than 50000 spectators, but also a debt of 10000 yen of an estimated expedition budget of 20–40000 yen. The Supporters' Association was given the responsibility for collecting more sponsor money while the expedition was away. Both the expenses and the debt grew during the expedition and it took Shirase right up to 1935 to pay back the last 40000 yen. Income from innumerable lectures went towards this, while the family lived in relative poverty.

#### 4. To the Antarctic the first time: the Expedition 1910–11

Owing to the late departure from Japan the expedition came to be divided into two separate phases, of which the first was a hopeless attempt to sail through the Antarctic drift ice to the continent far too late in the summer.

On 8 February, the *Kainan maru* sailed into Wellington harbour in New Zealand after having had to wait outside since the 3rd due to stormy weather. There water, coal and other supplies were topped up while in the same period there were many visits and festivities. Late in the day of the 11th they were on their way again, and the expedition report describes

plenty of bad weather and a hard voyage for the men on the little ship. On 12 March, they reached 74°16'S in the Ross Sea by Coleman Island and the most southerly position it was possible for them to reach so late in the season. They had to turn around and begin the long voyage back.

The expedition had taken 30 Karafuto dogs along from Japan. These came from northern Japan and Sakhalin and were used to the cold. However, they were kept in small cages during the voyage and only a dozen were still alive when the ship reached Wellington. When they arrived in the Ross Sea there was only one dog left. In addition to the terrible conditions the dogs were kept under, it is also probable that they were infested with tapeworms before leaving Japan.

The *Kainan maru* was sailed north to Sydney, Australia where the expedition was to winter and be ready for a new attempt to reach the Antarctic the following year. They arrived on 1 May 1911 and were after a while allowed to establish a camp on private property in a wooded area. Their prefabricated 10×4.5 m light-weight cabin was erected together with two storage tents and a washing hut. The local population was obviously sceptical to begin with, but became used to the exotic group and both children and adults visited the camp many times. When a passenger ship arrived in Sydney there could be as many as 300 visitors in one day. In addition the Japanese expedition members also went out on visits.

When the camp was safely established, Captain Naokichi Nomura and the expedition secretary Keiichi Tada travelled back to Japan to report to the Supporters' Association. It was decided that the plan of reaching the South Pole would have to be given up. It was known that both Scott and Amundsen had established themselves in Antarctica and, realistically enough, the Japanese reckoned that it was impossible for them to beat these two to the Pole. It was instead decided that they would carry out exploration in two groups, one on the west side of the Ross Barrier and the other in King Edward VII Land. This was more or less the same plan that the British and Norwegian expeditions had, in addition to the Pole itself.

While the Japanese were in Sydney they received important assistance from geology professor Tannatt W. Edgeworth David, who had been a member of Shackleton's expedition 1908–09 and had led the first expedition to the magnetic south pole in 1909. David also helped with the plans for the *Kainan maru*'s next attempt to reach Antarctica. On 19 November 1911, the expedition sailed out from Sydney harbour on its way south.

## 5. To the Antarctica the second time: the Expedition 1911–12

A deputy chief scientist, Masakichi Ikeda, was among the new expedition members with, in addition, a film-camera man, Yasunao Taizumi. From the raw film of the expedition a 15 minute documentary was made and entitled "The Japanese exploration of Antarctica". This film, with Japanese commentary, is now to be found in the Waseda University Library Rare Material Collections.

Also this time 30 Karafuto dogs were taken along. In light of the unfortunate experience the first time the dogs had been tested for tapeworms before leaving, which they had, and they were regularly dosed with medicine so that all arrived alive in Antarctica.

Again they were kept in small cages during the voyage, but they were let out three times a day for food and water, and “toilet visits” all over the deck.

The expedition report does not ooze the same bright enthusiasm and boyish joviality that we see in Amundsen’s. It makes no attempt to hide the fact of the difficult conditions during the voyage. On the other hand it tells of pride and a willingness to suffer amongst the members and how “our hearts danced and we shouted for joy and with three loud *banzais* for our Emperor” (from Shibata and Dagnell, 2011, p. 116–117) when they achieved a goal, in this case the first glimpse of the Antarctic Continent.

On 16 January they entered a bay in the Ross Barrier front and lowered a boat to start the explorations. One of the first actions was to kill a seal on the ice. The description is not nice. The four men beat the seal again and again with their long poles and used 30 minutes to kill it. In the end “all the combatants [were] covered in blood and soaked in sweat”. They left the seal on the ice while they clambered up the Ross Barrier and 40 minutes later they could hoist the Japanese flag on the top. The joy over this achievement was somewhat dampened when the men on the ship saw the bloody seal suddenly rise up, crawl towards the ice edge and disappear into the sea (Shibata and Dagnell, 2011, p. 133–134). The bay was named Kainan Bay (originally Yonin Hyoga), but this was not recognised outside Japan before 1933. The exploring group which had been on top of the Ross Barrier reported that it was not possible to accomplish the planned Dash Patrol over the crevassed ice surface they found there.

It was now decided to divide the group into two. The Dash Patrol would be put ashore at a more suitable spot and would drive the dogsleds as far south as possible. While they were away the *Kainan maru* would take the other group westwards to explore King Edward VII Land. They therefore continued to sail westwards until they suddenly saw another ship about 40 km ahead of them. There was panic on board since the foreign ship was first reported to be pirates, but as they sailed nearer they could see it was the *Fram*. The *Kainan maru* was then anchored about 3 km east of the *Fram* in the Bay of Whales. While Shirase and his men were busy finding a suitable path up to the top of the Ross Barrier and getting the dogs and sledges up, Captain Nomura was sent over the ice to visit the *Fram*, together with 2nd mate Yukihiro Miyake as his interpreter. They came back with very positive descriptions of the fine ship and the brave and dedicated men on board. Neither the Japanese nor the Norwegians had particularly good language skills and there was no chance of an extended conversation. Nomura and Miyake were probably the first people outside the Norwegian group to hear that Amundsen and his men had reached the South Pole, but they do not seem to have grasped this important news.

The descriptions the Norwegians noted in their diaries were not so flattering (Johansen; Nilsen; Prestrud; diaries, The Fram Museum, 2011). It was particularly the barbaric treatment of seals that was noted. First mate Kristian Prestrud and Captain Nilsen wrote in their diaries about how they had made a return visit to the *Kainan maru* after Captain Nomura’s visit to the *Fram*. This was in the evening of 17 January and both Shirase and Nomura had apparently gone to bed. Perhaps that was the reason that the visit was not noted in the Japanese report. Prestrud found the crew they met to be friendly, but conversations were limited. Nilsen, on the other hand, was more negative. The ship was dirty, the men did not seem to know what they were doing, they tortured and beat seals half to death and left them on the ice, they apparently ate only vegetables and they were

“seemingly pretty wild”. Neither he nor Hjalmar Johansen could understand what they were doing in Antarctica – possibly a rather nationalistic point of view !

On 20 January, Shirase and four others drove off southwards with two sledges and 28 dogs. Nine days later, at midnight 28 January, they had travelled about 280 km and were at 80°05'S. Their food was running out and they found the temperatures of down to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  to be rather too cold. It was a long way on to the South Pole and they decided they had reached far enough to be able to make an honourable end point where they were. The Japanese flag was raised on a bamboo pole and a copper box containing the names of all the sponsors was placed in a hole in the snow. The area was named Yamato Snow Plain (Yamato Yukihara) and declared Japanese territory, and shouts of *banzai* broke the stillness. Then they turned north and reached back to their main camp on 31 January, minus two of the dogs.



Fig. 3. From the Shirase Museum (Photo: Susan Barr).

The *Kainan maru* had meanwhile sailed further to the west for the exploration of King Edward VII Land. They did not know at this point that Prestrud, Johansen and Jørgen Stubberud from Amundsen's expedition had already been there and fetched the first rocks from the area. Three of the Japanese managed to clamber up from the sea ice to the top of the Ross Barrier, and Genzo Nishikawa and Chikasaburo Watanabe continued south with very little food and equipment in order to attempt to reach the distant mountains (the Alexandra Mountains). Fourteen hours and 18.5 km from the ship they were approaching the first nunatak, but a large crevasse prevented them from getting all the way there. They had to resort to taking photographs and erecting a memorial post in the snow. They had walked much too far with too little food and were in a very bad state when they finally

reached the ship again and were helped the last leg of the way by the others. They had walked 60 km in 30 hours. In the meantime the crew of the ship had found six large Emperor penguins and beaten them half to death with poles, and dragged them with ropes under their wings over the ice to the ship.

Satisfied with the explorations they had done, the expedition sailed east again and fetched the Dash Patrol group before starting back north from the Bay of Whales on 4 February. The *Fram* had left on 30 January. On 20 June the *Kainan maru* arrived at Tokyo after having been away for 19 months. They were naturally enough given a hero's welcome. The two records they thought they had achieved: sailing furthest south with the ship and being the first on King Edward VII Land, were already taken by Amundsen's expedition. However, they were the first Japanese to carry out an expedition to Antarctica and all the men returned home in good health.

## 6. Postscript

The name *Shirase* is perhaps best known within polar circles today as the name of the Japanese Antarctic Research Expeditions' ice-breaker from 1981 and its successor from 2009. Place names in the Antarctic associated with the expedition include Shirase Coast, Kainan Bay and Okuma Bay.\*

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\*In addition, "Yamato Yukihara" was officially accepted by Japanese Antarctic Place Name Committee in 2012. (Editorial Committee)

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