

OVERVIEW: ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT – NATURAL PHILOSOPHER

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Already during his lifetime Alexander von Humboldt was an icon. Still today his name is used to support political standpoints, scientific concepts etc. In my paper I would like to outline Humboldt's life and works in the light of our experiences in editing his correspondence and journals.

Here is what I am planning to touch upon:

Family background of the brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt.

Education in Berlin in salons (e.g. Marcus Herz and his wife Henriette; Rahel Levin).

Studies: Frankfurt on the Oder; Göttingen (friendship with Georg Forster), Hamburg (School of Commerce), Freiberg in Saxony (Mining Academy).

Career in the Prussian Department of Industry and Mining.

Friendship with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Preparations for the great American expedition; the scientific aims as Humboldt saw them.

The expedition (Teneriffe, Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, United States).

Examples of outstanding achievements (collections of plants unknown in Europe, plant geography and plant physiognomy, mapmaking, ancient monuments; navigation on the Orinoco and Casiquiare; climbing Chimborazo).

The publication of the works on the expedition in cooperation with outstanding scientist and artists in Paris.

Publishing "Ansichten der Natur" ("Aspects of Nature") in 1808.

The publication of Humboldt's travel journals.

The Berlin years (1827-1859):

The Russian Expedition of 1829: extending Humboldt's geological studies.

Humboldt's program to help develop Berlin into a center of the sciences.

Work on "Kosmos" and the literary influence of that work.

Humboldt as chamberlain to two Prussian kings;

Humboldt's correspondence and its publishing program.

von Humboldt, natural philosophy

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