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CHRONICLE

The celebration of the Centennial of the *Belgica* Antarctic Expedition: a tribute to the pioneers

The Centennial of the *Belgica* Expedition, which was the first multinational Antarctic expedition of a purely scientific nature and which overwintered in the southern seas for the first time in history, was successfully celebrated in several places around the World, including of course in Belgium, home base of the *Belgica*. Surely none of the brave polar explorers who embarked on this nearly 34 m-long ship for this memorable expedition would have imagined that 100 years later so many events would take place in celebration of their achievements! Indeed an impressive number of celebrations were organised on local, national, and international levels. A short chronological overview of these different events and an extensive list of publications generated by the *Belgica* centennial are presented hereafter.

Events around the World (and beyond!)

Antarctica

- 27 October 1997 to February 1998: The “South through the Pole” Expedition, sponsored by the Compaq Company, took place. Two Belgians, Alain Hubert and Dixie Dansercoer, crossed the Antarctic Continent by foot at its longest diameter (4000 km) and almost in total autonomy. They kept contact by satellite with the “The Last Continent” exhibition.
- December 1997 – January 1998: the Mount Vinson Expedition was organised. A team of 1 Swissman, 2 Frenchmen and 7 Belgians, among whom Henri de Gerlache, great-grandson of Adrien de Gerlache, climbed the Mount Vinson, the highest Antarctic summit (4.897 m) and made the film “Nuit Blanche”.
- Antarctic Peninsula, February 1997, January 1998 and February 1999: Three *Belgica* commemorative cruises in the Antarctic Peninsula were organised by a Belgian tour operator (Asteria Travel) to follow the tracks of the *Belgica*. Adrien de Gerlache’s son, Gaston de Gerlache, was invited to participate in the 1998 cruise and exactly 100 years later visited some of the places discovered by his father.

Argentina

- Ushuaia, January 2000: Inauguration of a permanent exhibition devoted to the *Belgica* expedition at the Museo Marítimo de Ushuaia, Argentina, (with the support of Asteria Travel, and the Belgian National Committee on Antarctic Research).

Poland

- Szczecin, 2 October 1997: An exhibition “Poles in polar expeditions – 100 years following the *Belgica* cruise” was inaugurated.

- The Polish Post Office (August 1998) issued a series of *Belgica* commemorative stamps.
- A *Belgica* commemorative medal was released in 1998.
- Warsaw, 16–17 September 1998: The XXV International Polar Symposium, devoted to the Polish participants in the *Belgica* Expedition, was organised in Warsaw by the Committee on Polar Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, with participants from Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Ukraine and United States.

Portugal

- Lisbon, June 1998: At the World Exhibition “EXPO-98”, the Minister-President of the Flemish Region, Belgium, presented, aboard the oceanographic ship *Belgica*, the book: “Roald Amundsen’s *Belgica* Diary. The first scientific expedition to the Antarctic” by Hugo Declair.

Romania

- The Romanian Post Office issued in August 1997 and March 1998 two series of commemorative stamps and postcards commemorating the *Belgica*.
- Bucharest, 5 November 1997: An Academic Symposium on the Centennial of the *Belgica* was organised by the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (including, among others, representatives from Belgium and Poland).
- A *Belgica* commemorative medal was released in 1999.

U.S.A.

- Columbus, Ohio, 5–6 September 1997: A symposium on the Centennial of the *Belgica* Antarctic Expedition, with over 100 participants, was organised by the Byrd Polar Research Center, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, and the Frederick A. Cook Society.

The Moon

- In 1997, Donald Campbell & Jean-Luc Margot, from Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. discovered several unknown craters close to the South Pole of the Moon. They proposed to the International Astronomical Union to name the largest crater after Adrien de Gerlache to honour the *Belgica* achievements (Fig. 1).

Events in Belgium

- 16 August 1997 (100th anniversary of the departure of *Belgica*): The RV *Arctowski*, a hydrographic ship of the Polish Navy, paid a courtesy visit in Antwerp with a delegation of the Polish Academy of Sciences aboard. She was welcomed on the Scheldt river by the Belgian oceanographic ship *Belgica*. An Academic Session and several receptions were organised by the City of Antwerp, The Royal Zoological Society, the National Maritime Museum and the Royal Yacht Club of Belgium.
- August 1997: A small *Belgica* exhibition was presented at the “Librairie de marine” in Redu, the “Village of the Book”.
- 1997: The Belgacom company distributed telephone cards bearing the image of the *Belgica*.
- The Monnaie Royale de Belgique devoted its 1997 medal set to *Belgica* with a special “Adrien de Gerlache” medal.
- Hasselt: An exhibition about the *Belgica* expedition and Adrien de Gerlache took place in Hasselt, the city where Adrien de Gerlache was born. On 1 March 1998, the City of Hasselt unveiled a monument devoted to Adrien de Gerlache created by the sculptor Gérard Moonen.
- 22 September 1997: the Belgian Post Office issued a commemorative *Belgica* stamp drawn by François Schuiten. On this occasion, several exhibitions on Polar philately were held in Braine L’Alleud, Ghent, and Tervuren.

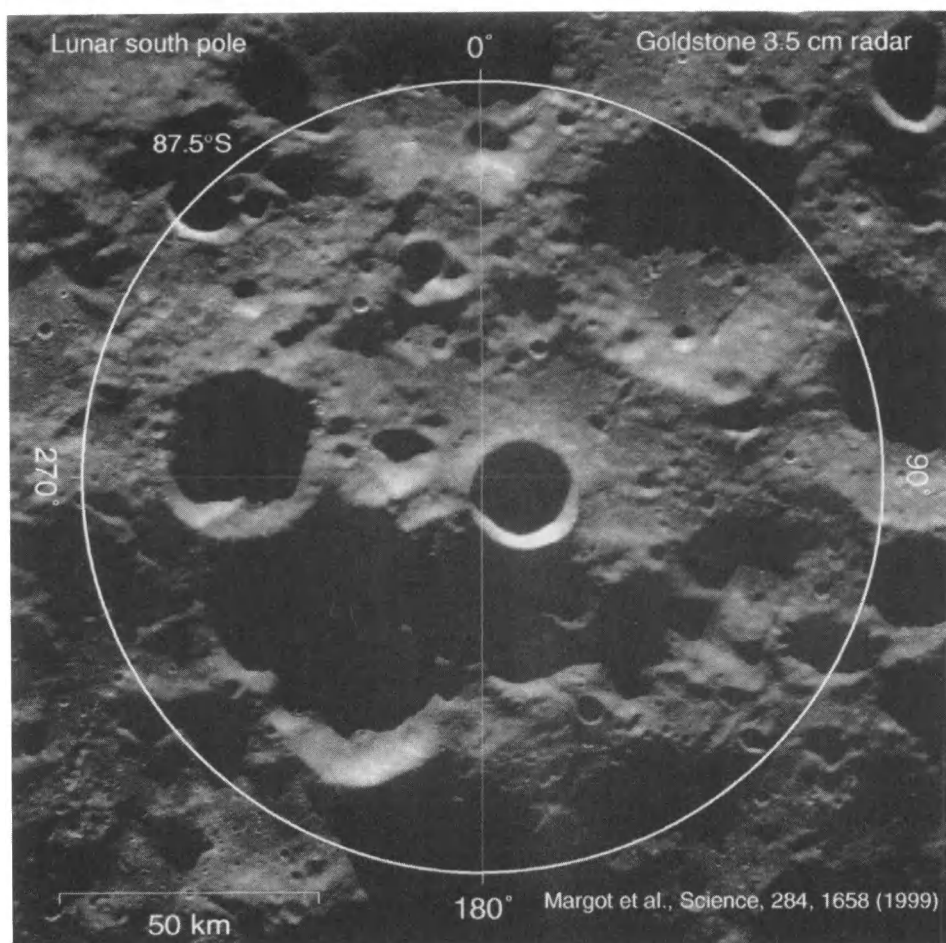


Fig. 1. The Adrien de Gerlache crater is located at 88.5° S and 273° E at about 40 km of the South Pole of the Moon, close to the already known Shackleton and Amundsen craters. The crater has a diameter of 32 kilometres and a probable depth of 3 kilometres.

- 24 October 1997 to 4 January 1999: An important exhibition “The Last Continent” was organised by Euro Culture in the museum complex of the “Cinquantenaire” in Brussels with the scientific support of the BNCAR. It attracted 270,000 visitors.
- 21 November 1997 to 16 May 1998: An exhibition entitled “Racovitza, naturalist of the *Belgica* expedition” was held at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels in collaboration with the Museum of Natural History “Grigore Antipa” of Bucharest and the support of the BNCAR.
- February 1998: An exhibition about Ghent Island, discovered by the *Belgica* expedition, took place in Ghent, organised by the Post Office, The City of Ghent, and the University of Ghent.
- 4 to 8 May 1998: The 30th “International Liège Colloquium on Ocean Hydrodynamics” was organised by the University of Liège and devoted to: “Hydrodynamical and ecosystem processes in ice-covered seas of the southern and northern hemispheres”.
- 14, 15, 16 May 1998: A *Belgica* Centennial Symposium was organised by the BNCAR at the “Palace of the Academies” in Brussels, under the High Patronage of His Majesty The King

- Albert II. Over 190 participants from 12 countries attended the meeting. The Symposium dealt with the historical, social, economic, and scientific aspects of the Belgian Antarctic Expedition 1897–1899 and its scientific results and presented the current state of Belgian Antarctic Research in collaboration with the Office for Scientific, Technological and Cultural Affairs (OSTC) of The Prime Minister's Services. During the Academic Session closing the Symposium, the *Belgica* Medal was awarded by H.R.H. The Prince Laurent to Prof. Andrew Clarke of the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge.
- November 1998 to December 2000: An exhibition on the Belgian Antarctic Programme "ANTAR IV 1996–2000" of the OSTC was held at the Museum of Natural Sciences, in Brussels.
 - July 1999 to September 1999: An exhibition about the *Belgica*, the Gerlache family, and the Antarctic took place at the Tourist Office of the City of Virton.
 - 5 November 1999: (anniversary of the return of the *Belgica*): An Academic Session at the "Havenhuis" and a visit of the oceanographic ship *Belgica* were organized in Antwerp by the City of Antwerp, the Friends of the National Maritime Museum, the Belgian Navy, and the BNCAR.

Media and movies

Numerous papers about the *Belgica* Centennial were published in the daily and weekly press in Belgium and elsewhere and many reports appeared on TV. Among the many Belgian TV programs and movies emitted on this occasion, it's worth mentioning:

- The RTBF evening news of 23 October 1997 was broadcast live during the opening of the exhibition "The Last Continent". It reached the highest TV news audience in Belgium in 1997.
- A scientific programme concerning Antarctica was broadcast by the RTBF on 9 December 1997 in collaboration with the BNCAR.
- The RTBF ("Cellule Nature") made two 52-minutes movies concerning Antarctica in collaboration with the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences: "Antarctique. Au pays des manchots" and "Antarctique. Au pays des albatros".

List of publications related to the celebration of the *Belgica* Centennial

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- hopeless Sea of Ice: The course of the Belgica expedition and its impact on the Heroic Era*, by T.H. Baughman).
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- DECLAIR H. and De Broyer C. (eds) [in press]. *The Belgica Expedition Centennial: Perspectives on Antarctic Science and History*. — Proceedings of the Belgica Centennial Symposium (14–16 May 1998).
- GERLACHE DE GOMERY A., de 1997. *Quinze mois dans l'Antarctique*. — Babel, Labor, Bruxelles, 378 pp (new edition in paperback format).
- GERLACHE DE GOMERY A., de 1998. *Fifteen months in the Antarctic*. — Erskine Press, Banham, & Bluntisham Books, Bluntisham, England, 202 pp. (first edition in English, translated by M. Raraty, with a foreword by Baron G. de Gerlache de Gomery).
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