

Measuring the temperature at sea in the 18th century

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During the 18th century, new scientific disciplines were developed from the common tree of natural science. On the ships of the East India companies trading to the Far East, officers, supercargoes, ship's writers and priests, having during these long distance travels plenty of time for 'leisure' and being acquainted with recording data, showed interest for observations dealing with geography, oceanography, meteorology, botany and zoology, and even with the economics of the countries visited. Though basically not related to scientific expeditions at all, the results of the observations made during the voyages were put into the logbooks, the ship's journals of the East Indiamen and in diaries of all kind.

It seems that the first records of measuring systematically the temperature at sea appeared during the 18th century. This paper is dealing with values of temperature recorded on a ship of the Austrian East India Company, the so-called Ostend Company, and on several Swedish East Indiamen. These records are far from being unimportant, especially the Swedish ones, since there was a link with the Swedish *Royal Academy of Sciences* and the attempts at the *Uppsala University* in constructing thermometers by Anders Celsius and his fellows.

The data recorded and analysed are no samples, but continuous series built on daily observations at sea. If systematically noticed values of temperatures precisely are of great interest for scholars, there remain some fundamental questions unsolved as: how those sailing people were reading the temperature, by which instruments and of which calibration they were.

No doubt, the curiosity for the meteorological phenomenon of temperature emerged, but, as a matter of fact, mostly limited to recording the rough data. Of course, no links were put to other phenomena as air pressure and speed of the ship, e.g. But, in the end, the data were handed over to the scholars onshore.