

Duccio Colombo

Abstract

Carrying the Red Man's Burden: Pavel Luknitskii, or Kipling in the Soviet Pamir

Kipling's work in the Soviet Union was heavily criticized as an expression of imperialism; yet, it was widely read and translated – it was clearly more acceptable than that of Nikolai Gumilev, “the Kipling from Tsarskoe Selo”, a purported counter-revolutionary whose name itself was forbidden.

This explains the apparent contradictions in the image of Pavel Luknitskii – from one side, a scholar of Gumilev, from the other, an official Soviet writer. His novel *Nisso* (1946), based on his travels in the Pamir, is a classic of Soviet literature about the Asian republics.

The novel's plot is built around a classic Colonial triangle, mixed with a typical Soviet collectivization story. The setting purportedly reconstructs the Shugnan region that the author described in his travelogues; many traits in the depiction, however, appear to be highly arguable and expose Luknitskii's colonialist attitude. The border between Soviet Tajikistan and Afghanistan, carrying the novel's fundamental symbolic weight, in particular, is nothing but the border between the respective spheres of influence the Russian and the British Empires agreed upon in 1895. The Soviet writers thus needed to construct the Shugnans as a nationality in order to find a place for them inside the Soviet family.

Keywords: Luknitskii, Kipling, Pamir, Colonialism, Soviet literature.