

P.N. KRASNOV'S JOURNEY TO ETHIOPIA: A NOTE

Petr Nikolaevich Krasnov (1869-1947) is a figure well-known to students of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. A staunch monarchist, skilled publicist, and a man of great obstinacy, he was in command of the Third Cavalry Corps of the Russian Army at the time of the Kornilov affair in August 1917, and in October tried with Kerensky's connivance to march against the Red Guards in St. Petersburg. In May 1918 he was elected Ataman of the Free Don Cossacks, and fought against the Bolsheviks at Tsaritsyn. After the Civil War he fled to Germany, where he remained active in right-wing emigré politics, and continued to publish fiction, memoirs, and historical works in large numbers. In the Second World War he worked for the Germans, organising a Cossack force in the Italian mountains, but was captured by the British and handed over to the Russians. He was executed in 1947.⁽¹⁾

Throughout his career Krasnov was an enthusiastic and observant traveller, and a prolific author⁽²⁾. He visited and wrote about Siberia, Manchuria, China, Japan, Indochina, India, and the Middle East, as well as Europe. His book *On Asia* is an account of his travels in East and South Asia from September 1901 to March 1902⁽³⁾. Much less widely known among Africanists, and particularly Ethiopians, is that Krasnov visited Ethiopia in 1897 and 1898, and wrote a book of his impressions which is of interest even today⁽⁴⁾.

The background of Russia's late nineteenth century enthusiasm for and activity in Ethiopia has been discussed at length by three Western writers; of these, the still-unpublished doctoral dissertation by Rollins remains the most interesting⁽⁵⁾. Yet Russian literature on Ethiopia remains little used. Krasnov was appointed commander of the Cossack escort to the diplomatic mission sent by the Tsar to Emperor Menelik in 1897, and travelled with it from the capital to the Black Sea, across the Mediterranean to Egypt, and down the Red Sea from Port Said to Djibouti. The mission then proceeded via Ambouilli to Harrar, a town which made a strong impression on Krasnov. The travellers were the guests of Ras Mekwennin, before moving

(1) *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, 1st ed. (hereafter BSE¹) s.v. «Krasnov, Petr Nikolaevich». See also similar articles in BSE², BSE³, *Sovetskaia Istoricheskaia Entsiklopediia*, and also RICHARD LUCKETT, *The White Generals*, London 1972.

(2) The list of his works occupies 14 columns in Mansell's NUC: *Pre-1956 Imprints*.

(3) P. KRASNOV, *Po Azii: putevye ocherki Manchzhurii, Dal'niago Vostoka, Kitaia, Iaponii i Indii* (On Asia: travel notes on Manchuria, the Far East, China, Japan and India), St. Petersburg, Isidor Gol'dberg, 1903. p. 616, illus., maps.

(4) In late 1974 there were no works by Krasnov in the Library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa.

(5) CZESLAW JESMAN, *The Russians in Ethiopia: an essay in futility*, London 1958; PATRICK J. ROLLINS, «Russia's Ethiopian adventure, 1888-1905», Syracuse University, Ph. D. dissertation, 1967; CARLO ZAGHI, *I russi in Ethiopia*, 2 vols., Naples 1972-1973.

on through Chercher to Awash and thence to Addis Ababa.

In the book he subsequently wrote about his journey, *The Cossacks in Africa*, Krasnov devotes a chapter each to the mission's audience with Menelik, and to a description of the Gibbi, going into some detail about various personalities and their political relationships⁽⁶⁾. The last three chapters continue with descriptions of life in Addis Ababa and of Russian assistance in drilling Menilek's bodyguard. The book includes a very detailed itinerary of the caravan movements of the mission between 19 December 1897 (7 December O.S.) when it left Djibouti until 17 February 1898 (5 February O.S.) when it reached Addis Ababa. It includes a day-by-day record of hours travelled, distance covered, temperatures, and other details. This is of considerable use in verifying and dating statements made in the text.

But Krasnov was not finished with Ethiopia. *The Cossacks* must have sold well, for it went into two more editions, with the more specific title *The Cossacks in Abyssinia*⁽⁷⁾. Although he apparently published nothing more on his return, he was to draw on his Ethiopian experience again during the hardship of the first years of exile after the Russian Civil War. In 1921 he published in Berlin two *povesti*, or short novels, with Ethiopian themes⁽⁸⁾, which he had written as early as 1898 and 1900. Both have a slightly didactic air, with footnotes to explain such terms as «Ato», «shamma», and «tej». He also used Ethiopia as the setting for a children's story⁽⁹⁾.

Although the fiction is of only curiosity value, the travel book on Ethiopia is still a useful piece of first-hand testimony, not least because we know from later events and other sources what kind of man, and observer, Krasnov was. None of the many other Russian visitors to Ethiopia in the 1890s — Arnol'di, Leont'ev, Bulatovich, Efrem, and the others — achieved Krasnov's notoriety⁽¹⁰⁾. Denikin judged him to be «either too astute or too unprincipled». History's verdict may well be that he was both.

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(6) P.N. KRASNOV, *Kazaki v Afrike: dnevnik nachal'nika konvoia Rossiiskoi Imperatorskoi missii v Abissiniiu v 1897/98 godu* (The Cossacks in Africa: the diary of the commander of the escort to the Russian Imperial Mission to Abyssinia in 1897-1898), St. Petersburg, Tipografia Glavnogo Upravleniia Udelov, 1899, p. 242. First printed in *Voennyi Sbornik* (Military Miscellany), 1898.

(7) P.N. KRASNOV, *Kazaki v Abissinii: dnevnik nachal'nika konvoia Rossiiskoi imperatorskoi missii v Abissinii*, 1st ed., St. Petersburg 1900, vi, p. 472, illus.; 2nd ed., St. Petersburg, tip. «Russkaia Skoropechatniiia», 1909, vi, p. 472, 51 illus., maps.

(8) P. KRASNOV, *Terunesb. Aska Mariam: povesti* (Turunesh, and, Aska[le] Mariam: novellas), Berlin, «Literatura», [1921], p. 104.

(9) P.N. KRASNOV, *Mantyk, cacciatore di leoni*, Florence, A. Salani, 1931, p. 364. illus. I was unable to trace a Russian edition of this work, a copy of which is in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence.

(10) I am presently compiling a bibliography of Russian language works on Ethiopia (Forthcoming).