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Title: Larisa Reisner in Afghanistan: Revolutionary, Writer, and Diplomat

Abstract:

In her short life, Larisa Mikhailovna Reisner (1895-1926) was a Russian revolutionary, journalist, poet, writer, and diplomat. After the 1917 Revolution, Reisner joined the Bolshevik Party and applied the full range of her skills in support of the cause: she wrote for Maxim Gorky's paper *Novaia zhizn'* and the newspapers *Izvestiia* and *Krasnaia zvezda*; she worked at the Smolny Institute cataloguing art treasures and on Trotsky's Commission for the Improvement of Industrial Products; and she served as a soldier, political commissar, and chief of an intelligence section during the Civil War. Reisner moved in the highest literary and political circles of her time, alongside Vladimir Lenin, Lev Trotsky, Maxim Gorky, Leonid Andreev, Vsevolod Rozhdestvenskii, and Boris Pasternak.

Although there is much in Reisner's biography that merits further attention from today's scholars, this paper will address her work in Afghanistan, where, from 1921 to 1923, Reisner and her husband served as diplomats from the soon-to-be-established Soviet Union. In modern memory, Soviet and Afghan relations are overshadowed by the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-89). In fact, the two nations began on especially warm terms. In 1919 the Bolsheviks were the first foreign leaders in the world to recognize Afghanistan's sovereignty from Great Britain; and, in 1923, Afghanistan was among the very first to establish diplomatic ties with the newly established Soviet Union. While Reisner was in Afghanistan, she contributed to the formalization of the first Afghan-Soviet nonaggression pact. Meanwhile, based on her observations of the country, she wrote a book titled *Afganistan: Moia Aziia i Aziia po tu storony granitsy*, which was published in Afghanistan as well as the Soviet Union. As such, it is a document that shows how Afghan life was portrayed to Soviet readers at the time, as well as a cultural relic of the first "red migration" to Afghanistan.