

Authorship ESSAD BEY AND ALI & NINO

by Betty Blair

Seven Reasons Why It Just Ain't So - As Core Author

1 Too young

The Bolsheviks seized power in Baku in 1920 when Lev Nussimbaum (Essad Bey) was only 14 years old. The novel *Ali & Nino* most likely was written in the years soon afterwards when the pain was so deep. Could such a young person have written such a mature book?

4 Too many identities

Depending on whichever book Essad Bey was peddling, he took on that identity. When he wrote Stalin, he claimed he was Georgian, Nicholas II (Russian), Mohammed (Muslim), about Persian divorce (Persian), a short autobiography (German). And he told his wife that he was really an Arabian prince!

2 Too little exposure to Azeri society

When Essad Bey left Baku in 1920, he had only attended the equivalent of about two years of high school because of illness and political turmoil. Also, his father never allowed him to go out without bodyguards, so how could he have fathomed the deepest issues in Azerbaijani society?

5 Too close to Armenians

Essad Bey shows close ties to Armenians in his works; for example, he describes Shusha from an Armenian point of view: Armenian ashugs, Armenian heroes, Armenian horses, Armenian ancient lands, Armenian names of places. Could the core author of *Ali & Nino*, whose main hero is skeptical about Armenians, have supported their point of view?



Essad Bey, wearing traditional Caucasus mountain warrior dress, in a photo used to promote the English edition of his second book, *Secrets of the Caucasus* (New York, Viking, 1931).

3 Too prolific. Did Essad Bey really write 16 books in 8 years?

In his eight-year literary career of writing books (1929-1936), 16 books—not counting Kurban Said's two books—*Ali & Nino* and *Girl from the Golden Horn*—appeared under his name, including “biographies” about major political leaders such as Stalin, Nicholas II, Lenin, Reza Shah, and Mohammed the Prophet. But a closer look would suggest that many of these books were not initially written by him.

6 He was a Monarchist

Essad Bey boasted that he was a Monarchist, and that Monarchy was the best form of government. He admired Czar Nicholas II and wrote his biography. But the novel does not support the Russian domination of Azerbaijan. In fact, Ali Khan refuses to fight for the Czar.

7 Not very concerned if Azerbaijan survived as a nation

Essad Bey's description of how he fled Azerbaijan shows how thrilled he was to have closed that chapter of his life. “The old East is dead!” he declared in triumph. But in *Ali & Nino*, the hero dies for his country, symbolizing the death of his dreams, and the tone of the final chapter is tragically sad. Could the author who was so jubilant about leaving Azerbaijan really have been the core writer of *Ali & Nino*?

And on & on & on & on & on...