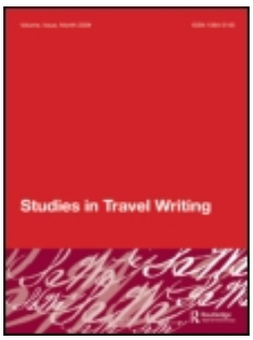

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That undisclosed world: Eric Shipton's *Mountains of Tartary* (1950)

Jonathan Westaway*

Mountains of Tartary (1950) recounts Eric Shipton's mountaineering and travels in Xinjiang during his two postings as British Consul-General in Kashgar in the 1940s. An accomplished Himalayan mountaineer of the 1930s, Shipton was a successful author of mountaineering travel books. During the 1930s his work with the Survey of India saw him increasingly drawn into the workings of the imperial security state in the geopolitically sensitive border regions of the Karakoram. Shipton's proven ability to travel in arduous mountain terrain and gather geographical intelligence led to his posting to Kashgar. Details of his diplomatic work are almost entirely absent from *Mountains of Tartary* and only became known in outline in 1969, with the publication of his autobiography. With unparalleled knowledge of the geo-political situation in Xinjiang in the 1940s, Shipton was prevented from publishing anything that revealed the details of his role in Great Game politics in 1950, not least by the fact that he still held a consular position in Kunming, Yunnan. Thus at the heart of *Mountains of Tartary* is an occlusion. This paper will examine the rhetorical strategies Shipton employed in writing a book in which so much had to remain undisclosed. He was aware that the roles he played, as mountaineer, explorer and traveller, had multiple meanings on the borders of British India, that to situate his narrative within an Orientalist and Great Game tradition risked unwanted disclosure. The essential unreliability of the narrative emerges as a consequence of writing under such constraints. Intentionally aporetic, the text is riven by chronological and biographical voids, unintentionally revealing the strain of inhabiting multiple personas and keeping track of the competing demands of different audiences. Shipton's failure of self-censorship erupts in transgressive revelations, concealed messages to certain sections of his readership able to read between the lines, revealing *Mountains of Tartary* to be a steganographic text, one that needs not just decoding but looking beyond, to what is undisclosed and unsaid.

Keywords: Xinjiang; Karakoram; Kashgar; India; Eric Shipton; mountaineering literature; intelligence

In the summer of 1937, the British mountaineer Eric Shipton conducted a survey of the remote Shaksgam Valley, north of the main Karakoram watershed. Funded by the Royal Geographical Society, the Survey of India and the Royal Society, the survey covered 500 square miles, "carrying an accurate system of heights throughout the entire region, and including 75 square miles on the unknown northern side of the Asiatic watershed" (Perrin 2013, 319). Accurate surveys of the Hispar, Biafo, Panmah and Braldu glacier systems were undertaken, involving extensive glacier travel and the crossing of seven major passes. To the north and east of these glacier systems lay the Shaksgam Valley. First visited by Sir Francis Younghusband on his journey from Peking to India

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in 1887, the Shaksgam Valley was the cause of considerable anxiety to British geographers and colonial administrators. Writing about "The Problem of the Shaksgam" in 1926, Younghusband recounted that he was one of only two westerners that were known to have visited the valley. On his second visit to the Shaksgam in 1889, Younghusband was clear about his intentions: "My main object on both occasions was military – to explore the passes leading from the north towards India" (Younghusband 1888, 1926, 226–227). The vast unmapped territories of the Shaksgam became increasingly problematised by the British authorities in the 1920s. Uninhabited and unfrequented by the main caravan routes to Central Asia from Chitral, Gilgit and Leh in Kashmir, the Shaksgam offered access to the Aghil Pass, cutting through the Kunlun Shan to link up with the Yarkand River and the southern oases of the Tarim Basin in Chinese Xinjiang (Kreutzmann 1998, 289–327). The British surveyor and geographer Kenneth Mason had surveyed the Shaksgam Valley for the Survey of India in 1926, but the remoteness of the region and the ruggedness of the terrain had meant that the work there was far from complete (Close et al. 1927; Mason 1927a, 1927b; Younghusband, Clifford, Wood 1927). Mason had failed to fully descend the Shaksgam, but had explored the Aghil range and discovered the valley of the Zug Shaksgam further to the east. In the 1930s, growing Soviet influence in Xinjiang and increasing nationalist unrest in British India made the Government of India uneasy about its lack of accurate mapping in the region (Intelligence Bureau 1935, 46–58).

Shipton's book about the 1937 surveys in the Karakoram, *Blank on the Map* ([1938] 1990), gives little away about the growing geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the region, and is couched firmly in the tradition of mountaineering literature and expedition accounts. His stated rationale for the journey was that "there still remained vast regions of unknown country of absorbing interest to the mountaineer and to the geographer" (Shipton [1938] 1990, 163). The aims of the expedition included finding the lower reaches of the Zug Shaksgam River and fixing the position of the Aghil Pass. Shipton noted that "as 1937 was the 50th anniversary of Sir Francis Younghusband's famous journey, we had additional incentive to visit the pass" (Shipton [1938] 1990, 164). Younghusband's account of his first view south from the Aghil Pass and his subsequent views of K2 and the crossing of the Mustagh Pass had by then become part of mountaineering and exploration legend. Leaving Chinese Central Asia behind, Younghusband's imperial gaze had traversed a region unknown to Western travellers

> Beyond was the fulfilment of every dream I had had three years ago. There, arrayed before me across the valley, was a glistening line of splendid peaks, all radiant in the sunshine, their summits white with purest snow, their flanks stupendous cliffs … Where I had reached no white man had ever reached before. (French 1995, 55)

Younghusband's account of the Shaksgam, with its potent mix of imperial masculinity, exploration in uncharted territory, high adventure and the aesthetics of the mountain sublime sparked a wave of romantic longing amongst British mountaineers, explorers and geographers, something that Shipton exploited in the opening pages of *Mountains of Tartary*. Very early on in that text, Shipton established both a rationale for and the origins of his desire to travel to Xinjiang. Nostalgically recalling his time in the Karakoram in 1937, he outlined how this romantic longing overcame him as he stood and surveyed the mountains of Central Asia

> As I look at it now I can recall vividly the feelings with which, during the whole of that summer, I gazed northward to the barren mountains of the Kuen Lun, which for us represented an impossible barrier to an intriguing and very desirable land … We could not have travelled beyond the uninhabited region of the Aghil Range without the certainty of being captured and thrown into a Chinese prison. For at that time Sinkiang was more inaccessible to the Western traveller than it had been for half a century, more inaccessible than Tibet, and scarcely less so than Outer Mongolia. And it seemed,

> by the way affairs were shaping in Central Asia, the Iron Curtain had been dropped beyond the Karakoram finally and for ever. Like small boys gazing over a fence into a forbidden park, this rigid political barrier greatly enhanced the enchantment of the remote country … I came to regard Sinkiang as one of those places where I could travel only in my imagination. (Shipton [1950] 1990, 463–464)

Shipton frames this narrative within the well-worn literary tropes of romantic selfhood and the poetics of space: forbidden lands traversed only in the imagination "dramatize the distance and difference between what is close to and what is far away" (Said [1978] 2003, 55), establishing the topography of desire, serving to confirm travel as the "very condition of a modern consciousness, of a modern view of the world – the acting out of longing" (Elsner and Rubies 1999, 5). It would have been apparent to Shipton's readers that the geographical specificity of this vision of Central Asia clearly referenced Younghusband, establishing Shipton's links with a long tradition of Central Asian exploration and with a heroic imperial past. The passage exemplifies the thrill of extraterritoriality, of being neither here, nor there (Said [2000] 2012, 99). To stand in these uncharted borderlands and to look north also linked geographical fact with rhetorical intent in the construction of a hierophanous site, a place of revelation (Boyle 1989, 23–51). In these places imagination and mensuration could fuse in a

> releasing dream in which the individual suspended his natural tendency to take himself as the measure of the world and turned into a disincarnated eye capable of sizing things as they actually were. This was the eye of cartography and precise reckoning. (Carillo 1999, 73)

Scott Russell, botanist on the 1939 Karakoram survey with Shipton, prefaced his chapter on "The Karakoram Himalaya" in his autobiography *Mountain Prospect* (1946) with a quotation from the *Manchester Guardian* leader writer and novelist C. E. Montague's essay "When the Map is in Tune" (Montague 1924, 37):

> Unless you are a mountaineer, an engineer, or a surveyor, the odds are that the great illumination will escape you, all your life; you may return to the grave without having ever known what it is like when the contour lines begin to sing together, like the Biblical stars. (Russell 1946, 145)

Engaged in an imperial survey, Shipton must have been doubly aware of the privileged viewpoints mountain summits afforded and the transcendent possibilities cartography entailed. The promontory view (Pratt 1994, 199–221) not only enabled the extensive mapping of remote uncharted regions through the application of modern survey techniques such as stereophotogrammetry that could carry lines of sight across distances of 70 miles in the clear mountain atmosphere; it was also symbolic of the imperial desire for knowledge, surveillance and control. The summit position (Hansen 2013) so representative of modern, individuated selfhood, implicated British mountaineers in wider imperial meta-narratives, something Shipton felt increasingly ill at ease about as the years wore on. Shipton, as both romantic traveller and imperial surveyor, was engaged in a complex process of sensing and representing absence (Elsner and Rubies 1999, 7). As a writer he was aware that the construction of his narrative around absence fuelled desire in his readers and at the same time satisfied their expectations. Orientalist conventions of imagined geographies and the absent "other" had traditionally framed Western ways of looking at Central Asia (Stewart 2009, 2; Said [2000] 2012, 198–215). The conventions of the mid-Victorian literature of exploration had allegorised geographical discovery as the conquest of truth, undertaken by protagonists skilled in ways of "reading the unknown" (Elsner and Rubies 1999, 54). Representing blanks on the map, uninhabited regions and forbidden lands enabled absence to be incorporated into the narrative as a literary device, habituating the reader to the presence of absence in the text. It also served to direct the

reader's gaze elsewhere. Central to our understanding of Shipton's construction of the narrative in *Mountains of Tartary* is an aporia, where absence is deployed as a literary device, serving to obscure a far greater occlusion at the heart of the book.

Shipton's account of his view of the Kunlun Shan in 1937 reported in *Mountains of Tartary* omits much more than it says and serves, quite deliberately, to mislead. Written in parts whilst Shipton was Consul General in Kashgar, Xinjiang, between August 1940 to October 1942, and again from August 1946 to October 1948, the rest of the text was written "in moments of ennui and nostalgic recollection, some time later in Yunnan" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 463). Indeed, it was published whilst he was Consul General in Kunming, Yunnan, a post he held from July 1949 until he was expelled by the Chinese Communist forces in April 1951 (Shipton 1969, 120–182). Under these circumstances, a degree of self-censorship was required. It is clear from his earlier account published in *Blank on the Map* ([1938] 1990) that in 1937 Shipton's party had crossed the Aghil Pass, the surveyor John Auden descending the Surukwat River to the gravel river banks of the Yarkand River, whilst Shipton and Bill Tilman descended the Zug Shaksgam near to its junction with the Yarkand (Shipton [1938] 1990, Chapters 9 and 10). Whether or not the Yarkand River formed the northern boundary of the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir's territory had long been contested (Kirk 1962, 151), some commentators noting that since the "Forsyth Mission (1874) it has been taken for granted that between the Yarkand River and the Afghan frontier the boundary between British India and Sinkiang ran on the Karakoram watershed" (Todd and Cobb 1951). Shipton's Karakoram surveys certainly contributed to British cartographic assertiveness in the area, leading to the "flood-tide mark of British imperialist cartography" in the region, the GSGS Hind 1050 1:5 m 1946 map which included extensive territories north of the Karakoram in Ladakh (Kirk 1962, 145). After 1950, Chinese Communist maps advanced the southern boundary of Xinjiang further south into Ladakh (Kirk 1962, 142), commencing a process that would see the Chinese take control of the Aksai Chin and the ceding by Pakistan of the Shaksgam Valley to China.

In 1950, repeating the fact that Shipton and his party had surveyed down to the Yarkand River would have undoubtedly antagonised the Chinese Communist authorities and jeopardised Shipton's position in Yunnan. Similarly, Shipton's characterisation of a "rigid political barrier" and "Iron Curtain" obscures the fact that the "Shaksgam river lies somewhere on the un-demarcated frontiers of Chinese Turkestan, Hunza and Kashmir" (Shipton [1938] 1990, 162). Shipton's very presence conducting surveys in the Karakoram in 1937 and 1939 was precisely because the border between the Gilgit Agency, Kashmir and Chinese Xinjiang was un-demarcated, a contested zone in which the Government of India was keen to adopt a more forward and vigilant policy regarding Central Asia. In *Blank on the Map*, Shipton devoted a single sentence to this crucial point of explication. In 1950, with unparalleled knowledge of the geopolitical situation in Xinjiang, Shipton would have been prevented by his role as a British diplomat in China from publishing anything that revealed details of his role in Great Game politics or the full extent to which he was an agent of the state involved in diplomacy, intelligence gathering and imperial surveillance. Shipton would have been aware that the roles he played, as mountaineer, explorer and traveller, had multiple meanings on the borders of British India, that to situate his narrative within a Great Game tradition risked unwanted disclosure. Writing mountaineering literature enabled Shipton to direct public attention elsewhere, to satisfy his readership and to supplement his income. British mountaineering travel literature was perfectly adapted to the task. Its prevailing register was light-hearted, understated, self-deprecating and ironic, conforming to the conventions of imperial masculinity. Its focus was on the ludic domain and as a literature it consistently ignored the geopolitical realities of mountain regions. The conventions, tropes and rhetorical devices of mountaineering travel literature provided a plausible justification for much of Shipton's extensive travels in Xinjiang and serve to distract from the silences and voids of the

book, its aporetic structure, narrative and text. As befitted a diplomat familiar with enciphered communication, *Mountains of Tartary* is a steganographic text, its message hidden between the words, smuggled past the censors, directed at certain sections of an audience practised at reading between the lines. Shipton's *Mountains of Tartary* cannot therefore be understood outside of this geopolitical context or without due attention to how Shipton came to be in Kashgar and the chronology of the book's production and publication.

Shipton's presence on the northern borders of British India began in 1931 when he joined Frank Smythe, a successful mountaineering author (Calvert 1985), in the successful ascent of Kamet in the Garhwal, the first summit in the world over 25,000 ft to be climbed, representing a huge patriotic boost to British mountaineering aspirations. In 1933, Shipton got the call to take part in the Ruttledge expedition to Everest, a full-on Himalayan *bandobast* that did much to form Shipton's loathing of large-scale military-style assaults on mountains. In 1934 Shipton and Bill Tilman succeeded in finding a way through the Rishi Ganga gorge, entering the Nanda Devi Sanctuary and surveying it for the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), a feat described by Hugh Ruttledge in *The Times* as "one of the finest exploits of mountainous exploration ever performed" (Perrin 2013, 240). Despite his growing preference for lightweight, small-scale expeditions that lived off the land and focussed on exploration and mountain travel rather than summit objectives, Shipton took part in all the British reconnaissance missions and climbing assaults on Everest in 1935, 1936 and 1938. Modelling himself to some degree on Frank Smythe, Shipton produced his first book, *Nanda Devi*, in 1936. It achieved a degree of acclaim and his facility at surveying in remote regions began to see him drawn more closely into the orbit of the agencies of imperial surveillance. The External Affairs Department of the Government of India began to keep a file on Shipton from October 1936, as it did on all travellers in the border regions (India Office Records 1936–1944). In that year he took part in the pre-monsoon Everest expedition and accompanied Major Osmaston of the Survey of India on a survey of Nanda Devi, missing out on his chance to accompany Bill Tilman on his successful ascent of Nanda Devi with Houston's British-American Himalayan Expedition (Perrin 2013, 280–282). Back in England between expeditions, his mother's flat at 100a Lexham Gardens, London W8 was a short distance from the RGS in Kensington Gore and Shipton would have had access to the imperial administration in India via his growing involvement in RGS networks (Perrin 2013, 167). In the 1930s, the RGS was increasingly exercised by two pressing problems in the Himalaya and the Karakoram: the on-going failure of British mountaineers to climb Everest was a long running saga played out against a background of nationalist unrest in India, bringing into play a complex of largely unvoiced anxieties around legitimacy of rule, racial fitness and imperial masculinity. The other problem was the un-demarcated border with Chinese Xinjiang. Shipton was well aware of the "problematized" Shaksgam and its importance to Sir Francis Younghusband and Sir Arthur Hinks at the RGS. Kenneth Mason also retained a strong interest in the Karakoram surveys. Mason had been the Assistant Surveyor General of the Survey of India from 1927, as well as the founder of the Himalaya Club and the first editor of the *Himalayan Journal.* From May 1932, he occupied the first Chair of Geography at Oxford, his inaugural lecture being on the application of geography to current affairs (Goudie 1998, 67–72). An honorary member of the Alpine Club, he was Vice President of the RGS in 1937 and he maintained a strong research interest in trade and communication between India and Central Asia (Mason 1936; Braham 1977). In the inter-war period, the influence of H. J. Mackinder was maintained by the Oxford School of Geography, Mason perpetuating Mackinder's interest in Central Asia as the "pivot of history" (Goudie 1998, 67). Sir Francis Younghusband and Kenneth Mason were both present when Shipton and Scott Russell presented an expedition report on the 1939 Karakoram surveys to the RGS on 4 March 1940, contributing to the post-lecture discussion (Shipton and Russell 1940, 409–424). Michael Spender made the point that the "fascinating

problem" of the Aghil pass and the "large area of country still to be spied out and put on the map" (Chetwode et al. 1940, 427) remained a key objective for Shipton on the 1939 survey.

RGS connections partially explain the rapid approval of Shipton's plans to survey north of the Karakoram watershed. He made the initial request to the Government of India in Simla in July 1936 and received approval from the Surveyor General (Perrin 2013, 289). He also had to persuade the External Affairs Department of the Government of India "that there was little risk of my party being captured in the Shaksgam valleys and some benefit to be derived from better knowledge of the frontier region" (Shipton 1969, 101). Clearly, "the desire to map is never innocent" (Elsner and Rubies 1999, 2), scientific and technological empiricism often enabling and legitimating imperial claims, cartography and cadastral survey providing the information required by the archive state (Hevia 1998, 2012). April 1937 saw Shipton staying at Government House, Rawalpindi, attending consultative meetings and briefings prior to the expedition, causing his most recent biographer to infer that "this was a diplomat in the making" and that Shipton was "positioning himself as a player in a current phase of the Great Game" (Perrin 2013, 290, 301). This meeting seems to imply that Shipton had a growing degree of privileged access to imperial centres of power. With the Government of India Act, August 1935, the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India had been reorganised to create the External Affairs Department, "under the direct charge of the Viceroy" (Tripodi 2011, 39). Shipton certainly fitted the profile of the frontier "political", the civilian Political Agents that ran the frontier agencies (Tripodi 2011, 27). The role of the Frontier Political Agent was to exercise the policies of the Government of India in the tribal agencies, functioning as a low-level intelligence gathering asset on the frontier with "periods spent circulating on foot among the clans of his particular constituency, an often gruelling undertaking considering the climactic conditions and mountainous terrain" (Tripodi 2011, 33). The External Affairs Department also managed the consular service in Chinese Xinjiang, which reported to the Government of India, not to the British embassy in eastern China. As such, the service attracted its fair share of romantically inclined candidates. Referring to one "political" candidate in July 1936, Foreign Secretary Olaf Caroe noted: "I gather Kashgar was his Mecca" (Tripodi 2011, 42–43). We may infer that, at the very least, Shipton was carefully evaluated for his suitability to operate in the border regions by the External Affairs Department. RGS contacts almost certainly played a part in Shipton subsequently being offered the post as Consul General in Kashgar in August 1940. Mason's role in wartime intelligence had begun in February 1940, when he was asked by Rear Admiral J. H. Godfrey, Director of Naval Intelligence, to prepare intelligence reports for foreign operations. From early in 1941, Mason headed up Naval Intelligence Division 5 at Oxford, preparing the 58 volumes of *Admiralty Geographical Handbooks* covering the main theatres of the war, reprising in many ways the relationship between the RGS and Naval Intelligence in the First World War (Balchin 1987, 169–171; Heffernan 1996; Clout and Gosme 2003.) Mason's career, linking British and Indian geographical and cartographical networks, reminds us of the significant role that "disciplining space" played in both waging war and in the workings of the imperial security state (Hevia 2012).

The Government of India Act also led to increased territorial consolidation and a concern for securing India's borders, driven by a growing fear of a British loss of control. In March 1935, the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, expanded the Gilgit Agency by leasing the Gilgit Wazarat from the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir for a period of 60 years. This ended the system of diarchy in Gilgit where power was split between the British Political Agent and the Kashmir government Wazir-i-Wazarat (Bangash 2010, 122). Kashmiri troops were withdrawn, the remaining military power being confined to the Gilgit Scouts, a native paramilitary force raised and commanded by the Political Agent (Haines 2004, 554). These moves were almost entirely driven by British alarm at Soviet activity in Xinjiang and the fear that vital lines of communication between Kashgar, Srinagar and Simla would be broken. Since Younghusband's and George Macartney's time in

Kashgar (Hopkirk 1990, 447–464) the British Consulate in Kashgar had acted like an early-warning station in Central Asia, monitoring Russian expansion, facilitating access to British goods, representing British interests, maintaining a system of informants in the oases of the Tarim Basin, ensuring the flow of information back to British India (Hopkirk 1980, 190; Everest-Phillips 1991). As such the consulate in Kashgar "involved the consuls in much more than usual consular work" (Everest-Phillips 1991, 20). Sir Halford Mackinder's "heartland thesis" still governed British geopolitical thinking on the region. If the "pivot region of the world's politics" (Mackinder 1904, 434) was the Eurasian steppe and the heartlands of Central Asia, then for the British administration in India, Kashgar was the pivot point. Kashgar effectively controlled the region where the trigonometrical surveys of Russia and India met. It sat astride east-west routes across the Pamirs between China and Russia as well as north-south lines of communication. Access to Kashgar required that extended lines of communication and routes to Central Asia be maintained and these ran via the Gilgit Agency. As Haines has persuasively argued, British policy in the region consistently tried to reorient Gilgit and Hunza away from China politically, whilst recognising a fundamental fact: that mountains do not represent barriers to mountain peoples. The Mir of Hunza's tributary relationship with China and grazing rights in the Taghdumbash Pamir and Sarikol, combined with the poorly defined and "borderless" frontier zone (Kirk 1962, 164) enabled the British at various times to legitimate the extension of British power deep into Central Asia (Haines 2004, 536).

To the West of Gilgit, the borders were mapped, internationally agreed to and policed. The Durand Line had demarcated the border with Afghanistan from 1893. In 1895 the Anglo-Russian Joint Pamir Commission had mapped the Wakhan Corridor, inserting an Afghan buffer between the borders of the British and Russia empires. To the east, the McMahon Line, established by the Simla Accord of 1914, largely followed the Himalayan watershed. A proposal from the British in 1899 to the Qing court to fix the boundary between British India's client frontier and the Chinese Empire went unanswered, as did the famous 1905 "Curzon Note" to the government of China, suggesting a border on the Karakoram watershed. Ultimately, the "China/Xinjiang-Hunza/Gilgit Agency/Jammu and Kashmir/British India border was not clearly mapped, never internationally agreed to, and loosely regulated" (Alder 1963, 280–283; Haines 2004, 547). It is clear, however, from former Gilgit Political Agents Sir Herbert Todd (1927–1931) and Colonel E. H. Cobb (1943–1946) that for practical purposes, the de-facto "border" of the Gilgit Agency was the Kilik-Mintaka-Karakoram watershed, and that "nowhere did India's and Russia's frontiers meet", maintaining the integrity of the tri-junction border in the region as that between Afghanistan, China and the Gilgit Agency, and that the Taghdumbash valley "belonged to China" (Todd and Cobb 1951, 79). From the Chinese perspective, whilst not recognised as an inner dependency or vassal under the high Qing, "Hunza was gradually re-conceptualised by the Qing court as a historical tributary protectorate, and then in the republican and nationalist eras became known as a 'lost territory' ripe for restoration" (Lin 2009, 491). The Mir of Hunza continued on and off to maintain grazing rights in the Taghdumbash Pamir and pay an annual tribute to the post-Qing Chinese authorities in Kashgar up until 1935, when "in the face of growing anti-British Xinjiang Government dominated by Sheng Shicai, the Mir of Hunza was instructed by the British Government of India not to have any connections with the Sovietized Xinjiang authorities" (Lin 2009, 503). By 1936 cross-border trade had largely collapsed and British authorities had a great deal of trouble keeping "the mail going once a week between Misgar and Tashkurgan" (Todd and Cobb 1951, 80; Kreutzmann 1998, 318).

In chapter two of *Mountains of Tartary* entitled "Hunza-Kashgar-Tashkent", Eric Shipton tells us that he entered this hostile frontier zone in August 1940, crossing the Mintaka Pass to journey on to Kashgar to present himself as His Britannic Majesty's Consul General. The Consulate "had for the past couple of years suffered frequent and prolonged boycott" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 464)

and his reception was decidedly hostile. At a fort in Dafdar in the Sarikol "as I approached the great mud walls and the large, six pointed red star painted over the entrance, three soldiers appeared on top of the parapet and waved me back". His party was then put under armed escort and marched to Tashkurgan, where he was locked into a filthy serai for three days, his baggage repeatedly searched (Shipton [1950] 1990, 465–466). Oriental despotism alerts the reader to the fact that modern travel writing is also a literature of disappointment and exile, bathos the inevitable corollary of romantic longings and mythopoeic fancies. Similarly, chapter one, "Introduction", disabuses the reader of any expectations of the traditional chorographic treatment expected in travel narratives

> It was not my intention to discuss the history, the social and economic life, or the political problems of the country. I have, however, with some misgivings, included one short chapter designed to explain the political background to my experiences. To those, who, like myself, are profoundly bored with the politics of a remote land, I recommend skipping that chapter. (Shipton [1950] 1990, 463)

Profound boredom with politics reassures the censors that "there were of course, other aspects of my life during the four years that I spent there; but this book is not concerned with these" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 462). It is a form of literary self-representation all too familiar from adventure fiction, perhaps a defining feature in the idiolect of the "man of action" and the "amateur English gentleman" (Forsdick 2009, 296) reinforced by the complicity of the instruction to the reader to skip the chapter on politics. For Shipton was, as we now know, engaged in writing monthly secret intelligence reports that were carried by the Hunza mail runners back to his political superiors in in the External Affairs Department in India (Steele 1998, 131). Affecting this indifference was a rather transparent attempt to sidestep the whole issue of the nature of his role in Xinjiang, a position he maintained throughout the book. It inevitably calls into question the authenticity of almost everything he wrote, alerting us to the textual and structural voids in *Mountains of Tartary.*

Shipton also set out to lower his readers' expectations of his descriptive powers and the nature of the subject matter of the book. Whilst "there is much to be said for the simple mountain journey, whose object, unencumbered with the burden of detailed map-making or scientific observation, is just to get from one place to another", Shipton draws his readers' attention to his mountain climbing activities, noting that simple mountain journeys,

> however rewarding in themselves, are much harder to describe than quests of discovery or conquest. For, in the absence of any climax or special adventure, unless the writer happens to be a Stevenson or a Doughty, a monotonous repetition of scenic eulogy is apt to result from his efforts to convey his enjoyment, or long, boring descriptions of topographical detail from the necessity of presenting some sort of coherent narrative. (Shipton [1950] 1990, 462)

The summit quest, Shipton seems to suggest, delivers ready-made plots, well defined story arcs, and plenty of incident, obviating the need for capturing "topographical detail", the very thing Shipton was trained to do in his surveying and cartographic work. In one of his rare references to previous Central Asian explorers, he notes that much of what he will narrate is ground already covered by "Stein and Hedin and other travellers" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 462). The almost complete absence of inter-textual and indeed "inter-viatic reference" (Forsdick 2009, 298) in *Mountains of Tartary* can in part be explained by Shipton's lack of access to research materials for most of the period between 1946 and 1951, a point he makes explicitly in his account of the Karakoram Pass caravan routes (Shipton [1950] 1990, 501). But if "Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors" (Said [1978] 2003, 23) then *Mountains of Tartary* does not conform to an obviously Orientalist agenda, a fact perhaps best explained by

Shipton's desire to distance his text from being closely associated with the imperialist exploration and cartographic endeavour in Central Asia. Written whilst in transit or whilst in diplomatic hardship postings, *Mountains of Tartary* lacks a coherent narrative and compares badly with parallel accounts of Shipton's time in Xinjiang by his mountaineering partner Bill Tilman and by his wife, Diana Shipton. Diana Shipton's *That Antique Land* (1950) is a far more ethnographic book, attuned to the sensitivities of intercultural contact, even containing chapters on domestic life in the consulate at Kashgar. H. W. "Bill" Tilman's *Two Mountains and a River* (1949) addresses both politics and the demands that travel writing places on topographic description and historical research, his account of the approach via Gilgit alert to the sectarian violence of partition India in 1947. By directing his readers' attention upward towards the summits in the *Mountains of Tartary*, or towards "unexplored country", Shipton largely avoids the need to look at people, places or politics in any great detail. In a further attempt to frame the narrative and manage his readers' expectations, he was at pains to point out that "these climbing ventures were unsuccessful" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 463). For much of the time between 1940 and 1942 he was unable to travel and under virtual house arrest, gazing "month after month at mountains with little or no prospect of reaching them … There were times when the craving to reach the mountains was almost intolerable. For in those days in Kashgar I was living in a police state" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 478–479). Cameras were strictly forbidden and consequently he had no pictures from this period ([1950] 1990, 483). Shipton admits that "the boycotts and the general frustration were at times hard to bear" ([1950] 1990, 471). The prevailing register of these opening chapters is one of alienation, the literary topos that of *xeniteia*, a pervasive sense of homelessness and strangeness in the world. Remembering his exile from the mountains, the autobiographical examination of the "self by the self" seemed to induce in Shipton a profound writerly melancholia.

The Soviet entry on the Allied side in the War in the summer of 1941 and the Allied-Soviet invasion of Persia led to a thaw in British relations with Xinjiang. China's entry into the War on the Allied side and General Sheng Shicai's going over to the Kuomintang also saw Soviet influence gradually purged from Xinjiang. The final part of chapter two recounts Shipton's travel from Kashgar via Tashkent, Soviet Turkestan and Persia, to Quetta in October 1942. Shipton's account of the journey from Tashkent to Ashkabad by train, passing a dozen oil trains a day, clearly indicates he was travelling down the Persian Corridor, the vital supply line that kept the oil flowing from Iraq and Persia towards the Red Army. In Meshed, Persia, he tells us he intended to meet the Consul General C. P. Skrine, his predecessor in Kashgar and a noted expert on Chinese Central Asia (Skrine 1926). Skrine was away but Shipton was "able to indulge in the very rare luxury for a returning traveller – unlimited talk with a sympathetic audience" ([1950] 1990, 476) in the form of Mrs Skrine, who was able to regale him with tales of Kashgar in the early 1920s. What *Mountains of Tartary* fails to mention was Shipton's subsequent two year posting to Persia. His autobiography of 1969, *That Untravelled World*, dealt with the whole period from October 1942 to May 1946 in nine lines, which covered his marriage, the birth of his son, his deployment in Persia, Hungary and with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Vienna (Shipton 1969, 137–138). His biographer Peter Steele described the period 1943–1946 as an enigma, citing diplomatic sources who advanced the opinion that Shipton might have been "'double hatting', a euphemism […] for gathering intelligence" (Steele 1998, 120).

Having left Xinjiang in chapter two, chapter three "Bostan Terek – A Glissade", jumps the reader back to an earlier trip late in 1942 to the mountains close to Kashgar and the Swedish Missionary hill resort of Bostan Terek, north of the Kongur-Chakragil Massif. Pleased at being able to escape from his restrictions, Shipton subsequently realised that his ability to travel more freely had been enabled by the political changes afoot in Urumchi. It contains an account of some dangerous solo mountaineering without the benefit of axes and crampons and some brooding reflections of the motivations of mountaineers, with the despondent admission that "I appear to

have lost a good deal of my interest in climbing mountains. Not entirely; but much of the rapturous enthusiasm seems to have gone" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 477). These chronological reversals appear throughout the book and contribute to the lack of narrative coherence. Chronology is clearly subservient to geography in *Mountains of Tartary*. Chapter nine, "Urumchi and the Heavenly Pool", for instance, recounts a trip to Urumchi in 1942 and two weeks of meetings with the provincial government and with Michel Gillet, his successor as Consul-General (Ford 1971, 431), prior to Shipton's departure for Soviet Central Asia. The 1942 trip to Urumchi is followed by two chapters covering his mountaineering exploits on Bogdo Ola near Urumchi with Bill Tilman in the summer of 1948.

Despite Shipton's stated indifference to politics, it proved impossible to exclude entirely from *Mountains of Tartary*, largely because the dramatic political events in Xinjiang determined where you could and could not travel. Chapter four, "Political Background", gives a serviceable but highly truncated four-page account of political developments, inserted only because they provide the essential context for understanding why Shipton chose to enter Xinjiang via the Karakoram Pass in the summer of 1946. It outlines Sheng Shicai's Soviet domination of Xinjiang from 1933 to 1942, his placing himself under the orders of the Kuomintang in 1942 and his removal in 1944. The outbreak of the Ili Rebellion in November 1944 "quickly spread to the two northern districts of Chugachack and Altai", Shipton noting that "the rebels received considerable help from outside" ([1950] 1990, 487; Forbes 1986; Benson 1990; Lin 2007, 115–135). A measure of peace was negotiated in January 1946, through Soviet mediation. The autumn of 1947 saw a complete rift between the Chinese and the Ili rebels controlling the Three Areas (Ili, Chuguchak and Altai), cutting them off from the rest of Xinjiang. As late as the summer of 1948, Shipton still expressed the hope of travelling to Ili, "but this was politically impossible" ([1950] 1990, 554). Support from "across the border" also saw the Kirghiz and Tadjik uprising in the south of Xinjiang known as the Sarikol Rebellion in the autumn of 1945. The rebels "threatened Kashgar, captured Kaghilik and invested Yarkand". Further north Aksu was attacked and "portions of the Urumchi-Kashgar highway occupied" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 488).

Chapter five, "Karakoram Journey", begins in Midsummer 1946, the India Office having informed Shipton that the Sarikol rebels had cut off the approach from India, even as far east as the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh and there was no courier service between Gilgit and Kashgar. Michael Gillett, the last Consul-General, had been forced to leave his posting via Central China. The Soviets would not issue visas for the Tashkent route, and in India the Calcutta riots were at their worst. Rather than travel in via China, Shipton and his wife Diana decided to join a group of Turki traders heading from Leh to Khotan over the Karakoram Pass. In all, the journey from Leh to the first oasis in the Tarim Basin took the best part of a month, involving numerous river crossings with pack animals and the crossing of the Khardung Pass (18,200 ft) and the Saser Pass (17,480 ft). Shipton noted that "the crossing of the Saser Pass is, in many ways, the most exacting part of the whole journey", coming near the end of the journey when the animals were weak

> in the valley leading up to the Pass we first encountered the dismal line of corpses, bleached skeletons and heaps of bones which formed a continuous trail for hundreds of miles until we reached the first oasis beyond the ranges. ([1950] 1990, 502)

The account describes the following 10 days of travelling, the crossing of the Depsang plateau at an altitude of 17,000 ft, and on 6 October, the crossing of the Karakoram Pass (18,250 ft) and the journey on down the valley of the Yarkand River, over the Yangi Dawan (16,500 ft) to enter the Tarim Basin. Reflecting on this arduous month of travel, Shipton paraphrased Ruskin on the importance of the journey in shaping the experience of a new land: "I believe that in travel our

feeling for places is influenced very largely by the means of approach" and that slow progress enables both adjustment and the "understanding of the geographical implications of the intervening distance" ([1950] 1990, 491).

Shipton's account downplays the risk of both the Kirghiz rebels and the trigger happy Chinese units sent to hunt them down, as well as the physical challenges of such an arduous mountain caravan route, conforming to the conventions of self-deprecation and de-dramatisation that Paul Fussell has noted were such a feature of British interwar travel writing (cited in Forsdick 2009, 296). Shipton concluded the chapter by noting that

> There had been no great hardship, for we had plenty of food, and were adequately clothed and equipped against the cold. Indeed, once we had accepted the conditions of travel, the time and the distance involved, we had found in the simplicity of our daily routine feelings of peace and of well-being such as perhaps no other form of travel can give. ([1950] 1990, 507)

Shipton's account of the crossing of the Karakoram Pass is the most vivid and satisfying piece of writing in the whole of *Mountains of Tartary*, conveying a deep sense of the author's harmony with his rugged environment and confirming Michael Spender's assessment of Shipton's motivations: "Shipton likes going to new country; he likes exploration" (Chetwode et al. 1940; Mott 1950). In a telling passage Shipton informs the reader that

> I had repeatedly to remind myself that I was not on an expedition engaged in a desperate attempt to get pack-transport to a high base camp on a mountain or into a piece of unexplored country, but that I was performing a necessary journey along a regular trade-route to take up a government appointment. ([1950] 1990, 502)

That government service in Xinjiang required arduous mountain travel was deeply appealing to Eric Shipton. His ability to "rough it" in remote places enabled him to take the posting and fulfil his duties but there is also a sense in which his reputation as a mountaineer overlapped with his official role, his multiple identities offering a number of plausible reasons for his interest in remote ranges and valleys in Xinjiang. In chapter seven, "Mustagh Ata", recounting a failed attempt on the mountain with Bill Tilman in the summer of 1947, Shipton was cheerily open about these overlapping allegiances

> In Sinkiang a consul is still in the happy position of having to tour much of his district on horseback; even a short tour takes several weeks to complete, so that a few days spent wandering off route is neither here nor there. It is easy to combine a modicum of business with a great deal of pleasure. ([1950] 1990, 517)

On this occasion what that business consisted of seemed to be a trip to visit the supervisor of the British diplomatic courier service in Tashkurghan, followed by a long journey by pony west of the Mustagh Ata-Chakragill massif via the Little Kara Kul lakes and the Chinese military post at Bulun-kul, intending to return via the Gez Defile to Kashgar. Throughout this account Shipton refers to the map he is carrying, "the 1925 edition of the Survey of India map No. 42 N. which was compiled in this area from Stein's survey" ([1950] 1990, 527). In Shipton's account his surveyor's eye is finely attuned to discontinuities between the map and the landscape and habitually vigilant of his surroundings. In 1923, Kenneth Mason, as Officiating Deputy Superintendent of the Survey of India was responsible for regulating Stein's triangulation of Xinjiang (Stein 1923), and it is hard not to conclude that Shipton's journey was in part intended to provide updated geographical intelligence about the region. What Shipton also fails to mention is that this journey was through the strategically sensitive Sarikol region that had, until recently,

been in open rebellion against the Chinese nationalist authorities in Xinjiang, his route following the Pamir section of the border with the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic.

In *Mountains of Tartary* Shipton becomes quite candid about his interest in the passes that lead to Soviet territory and the length he went to avoid Chinese interference in the trips he undertook near them. In February 1948, he headed towards the Irkestam Pass, to explore the Uch Tash Valley

> Any journey in that direction meant approaching the Soviet frontier and, although they never said as much, the local authorities were not very happy about our going there lest we should run into any trouble. I had assiduously cultivated a reputation for being a keen huntsman, which provided a plausible reason for our otherwise inexplicable passion for travelling in these wild places. ([1950] 1990, 530)

In March 1948, he went further north and visited the Torugart Pass: "It was a splendid view point and we sat there for a long time while the Kirghiz explained the local topography, pointing out the routes to the passes leading over to Toyan and Karakchi and to another which led across the Soviet frontier" (Shipton [1950] 1990, 533). His second visit to the Uch Tash valley in May 1948 saw him tracked down by a local Chinese cavalry unit, narrowly escaping being accidentally shot, the local Kirghiz assuming him to be Russian. In familiarising himself with the two most important passes through the Tien Shan from Xinjiang to the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic, Shipton was clearly engaged in purposive infringement into sensitive border regions, admitting at one point that "there was a danger of our straying across the frontier, which would almost certainly have led to disastrous consequences" ([1950] 1990, 539). With a respectful nod to the efficiency of the Chinese and Kirghiz in tracking him down, chapter eight, entitled "Uch Tash", ends with a great deal of comic aplomb with the arrival of a young officer on the scene. Shipton noted that he "was now able to produce my passport and Chinese visiting card. The young officer examined these, blushed and said, 'I am very solly', which I soon found was the extent of his English" ([1950] 1990, 541). The whole incident resulted in a mild ticking off from the Chinese military commander at Kizil Oi and a couple of nights spent teaching him English "from a couple of very bad phrase books" as reparation ([1950] 1990, 543). Comedy, stereotype and bathos all serve to de-dramatise the encounter, to introduce a comforting element of amateurism and of everyday transactions into what was clearly a dangerous incident. Travel writing as a federated genre enables these rapid changes of register and focus, a narrative legerdemain that misleads the eye by drawing its attention elsewhere.

How can we explain this mixture of both candour and reticence about these mountain journeys in *Mountains of Tartary*? Shipton seems willing to describe his evasions and assumed personas but is unforthcoming about his day to day diplomatic activities or the wider geopolitical context that required his presence in Xinjiang. His writing is perhaps symptomatic of both the pressures of self-censorship and the alienation experienced in a remote imperial diplomatic posting. Whilst Shipton was contractually bound to maintain the confidences associated with the post of Consul General, he was not a career diplomat. Money was always a pressing issue and he had a growing readership to satisfy, eager for stories of mountain adventure and exploration. A professional writer, much of his output was in the form of secret reports, now part of the India Office Records in the British Library. Lacking mnemonic sources such as photographs for the period 1940–1942, Shipton was forced to reconstruct the period partly from memory, the privations of the period tingeing the early chapters of the book with a retrospective melancholia. In his second period in Xinjiang, he was accompanied for the most part by his wife, Diana, and was freer to undertake mountaineering forays with Bill Tilman. The bulk of the chapters in *Mountains of Tartary* come from this second period, describing events between 1946 and 1948. This

establishes a certain duality in the narrative, with two contrasting periods, the former darker, the latter freer, lighter. This duality is exacerbated by the multiple personas Shipton inhabited in Xinjiang, some of them fully owned, some of them assumed, others suppressed in the narrative: diplomat, mountaineer, huntsman, explorer, traveller, surveyor, cartographer, author, husband, father, Englishman. That autobiography demands a cast of characters, all of them the self, becomes problematic when you are leading a double life. The act of writing a book governed by secrets presents both the writer and the reader with an aporia, a puzzle, a contradiction. How do you write a book where there is so much you cannot say? How do you structure a narrative that contains within it large chronological voids? Informed by psychoanalytical readings and under the influence of Derrida's *hantologie*, literary criticism has become alert to secrets as "the structural enigma which inaugurates the scene of writing" (Davis 2005, 379). Most criticism within this tradition holds that works are "in distress" because they are "harbouring secrets of which they are unaware" (Davis 2005, 375). *Mountains of Tartary* presents us with a steganographic text, where secrets, intentional and inadvertent, present new and complex interrelationships for critical analysis to explore at the intersection of travel writing, politics and diplomacy.

Shipton's chosen method to deal with this aporia was a series of loosely connected mountaineering and travel essays but this only served to present him with another problem: that human spatiality in geopolitically contested regions is always political, that "space and distance are not neutral elements – they have political, social and ideological significance" (Fagan 1990, 388), drawing the readers' attention back to the unvoiced aspects of his diplomatic career. The pressures of writing under these constraints manifest themselves throughout the book, in its chaotic structure and the deployment of the aporetic rhetoric of doubt and dismay. The alienation of the Imperial diplomatic experience and the psychological habit of detachment and reserve developed in response was always tempered by a strong dose of anarchic resilience and humour in Shipton (Perrin 2013, 364–389) as witnessed by his account of the cat-and-mouse games on the Irkestam Pass, which would have elicited a transgressive thrill in certain sections of his readership. Shipton retained a deep ambivalence about imperial shibboleths, whilst at the same time being strongly implicated in the workings of the agencies of the imperial surveillance state, his conflicted position leading to his notorious de-selection as expedition leader on Everest in 1953. It is possible to read this deeply conflicted attitude in *Mountains of Tartary*, which seems at times to tend towards a much older journeying literature, that of epideictic rhetoric. Used in religious allegory to express both praise and blame, in this form of rhetoric

> facts may be selected or rejected, exaggerated or understated, even wholly fabricated […]. This rhetorical rule differs from the psychological factor of modern criticism on autobiography, which is preoccupied with slippage of memory and distortion of self. It sanctions falsification because it is not invented about truth and falsehood but about good and evil, for praise and blame. (Boyle 1989, 27)

This seems to approach a deeper truth about *Mountains of Tartary*, which oscillates precariously between "Mountain Gloom" and "Mountain Glory" (Nicholson 1997), the aesthetics of the mountain sublime and the literature of disenchantment, the metaphorical power of mountains perhaps inviting recourse to deeper, metaphysical resources on the part of the author. It must be remembered that *Mountains of Tartary* was written in the immediate post-colonial world. Shipton's subsequent role in Kunming saw him involved in the West's last anti-Communist bridgehead in China. Issues surrounding who or what was to blame for the collapse of empire and the triumph of Chinese Communism were inescapable. Ultimately, under pressure, the book unravels, just as the British Empire in India was unravelling. Shipton remained in post until his contract expired in July 1948, when "the Kashgar Consulate-General was then to be handed over to the Governments of India and Pakistan" ([1950] 1990, 553). He left Kasghar on 10 October 1948,

handing over the Consulate "to his Vice-Consul and Medical Officer, Allen Mersh, an Anglo-Indian who had opted for Pakistani citizenship" (Everest-Phillips 1991, 33). Shipton recorded that "my sorrow at leaving Kashgar was softened by the prospect of another six weeks" trek through the Pamirs'. On his return journey, violence in Kashmir prevented him from attempting some of the remoter crossing into Ladakh. He noted that he was "anxious to visit the Mir of Hunza, with whom I had various matters to discuss" ([1950] 1990, 585) but nowhere mentions that the Mir had fled partition violence in Gilgit and Hunza to Misgar, close by the Chinese border and that the Taghdumbash Valley had seen a flood of refugees fleeing north across the Karakoram passes (Lin 2009, 505). Approaching a new, post-colonial world, Shipton returned the way he had initially entered Xinjiang, over the un-demarcated border at the Mintaka Pass. A former employee of a British Indian empire that no longer existed, in *Mountains of Tartary*, Eric Shipton left behind tantalising glimpses of a largely undisclosed world, maintaining his secrets to the end.

Ultimately, *Mountains of Tartary* raises a much larger question: how are we to address a travel literature so bound up with the keeping of secrets? One solution is to be attentive to the relationship between power, voicelessness and silence, not just of subject peoples in a colonial context but of all subjects in an imperial context. The text of *Mountains of Tartary* signals the gradual realisation by Shipton that exile and archive are intimately associated in the imperial project. Shipton's global vagabondage in the 1930s was characterised by his incessant travelling between Britain and the Himalaya. A wanderer between two worlds, Shipton's travels exemplified the pioneering life as a state of exile. Exile, Edward Said reminds us, "is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal" ([2000] 2012, 186). The effect of exile on writers is that they become "unhoused and wanderers across language" (Said [2000] 2012, 174). The pioneer and *émigré* are themselves powerful allegorical figures available for interpretation by autobiography "as symbolic outcasts drifting between and across imaginary and symbolic registers" (Lane 1995, 63–64, citing Porter 1991). Exile demands the crossing of boundaries, "experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms", or indeed "other ways of telling" (Said [2000] 2012, 315). If extraterritoriality is indeed at the heart of Western Literature then literary *errance* is underscored by the harsh truth that exile is always characterised by "the loss of something left behind forever" (Said [2000] 2012, 173), most terrible to experience when this involves a loss of homeland. Shipton's writings of the 1930s and 1940s all signal his growing alienation from the imperial metropole, carving out a decentred life of exploration and travel within the global imperium in which every foreign country became a homeland to him, the homeland a remote and increasingly foreign country. His move into Central Asia in 1940 rendered him about as physically remote as it was possible to be from the population centres of Europe and Empire, but embedded him deeply within the Government of India's regional security apparatus, involving him in the deployment of new knowledge practices designed to regulate the space of Asia. These included

> reconnaissance that would collect military statistics and information about land routes across Asia, the gathering of data from a network of correspondents located at legations, consulates and strategic outposts in various parts of Asia, trigonometric mapping, and the systematic organization and differentiation of relevant materials into libraries and archives. (Hevia 2012, 14)

Shipton's contract with the Imperial security state meant that he could not disclose many aspects of his life and work in his mountaineering books and travel writing. Much of what he wrote about Xinjiang was in the form of monthly intelligence reports that remained both secret and unavailable to him when he later came to write about his time in Kashgar. The efficient working of the archive state demanded of its subjects silence and self-censorship, suggesting that what was lost

and "left behind forever" in this context were opportunities to pursue "certain ways of telling". For Shipton, language itself became exilic. That the archive and exile are connected seems at first contradictory: "archive seems to suggest a kind of connectedness – biographical, generational, narratological – and exile, a relinquishment of the security of a known past and of the knowability of what is to come" (Dubow, Steadman-Jones, and Babbage 2013, 1). What *Mountains of Tartary* teaches us is that, in seeking to make Asia legible, the Imperial security state rendered so many of its subjects illegible. Shipton's writing reveals the archive to be a form of exile from which only coded forms of expression could be tolerated. Under such constraints, both travel writing and language itself become steganographic projects.

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