

ANNOUNCEMENT - REQUEST FOR HELP

We are trying to raise funds for the translation into English of the book - "Macedonia My Anchor" by Krum Monev. Anyone who is willing to and capable of helping this cause should transfer donations to the account of Ivan Krumov Monev in Eurobank Bulgaria AD, BIC BPBIBGSF, IBAN BG84BPBI79224014692202, or call Ivan Monev at +359 896516155. Thank you to all who will help! The introduction to the book is attached. Please share.

Part One

The Initial Lessons (Knowledge) from the Earthly Hell

Introduction

To our readers' audience, hence, we present the extraordinary memoirs of a man from Pirin Macedonia who was to be enslaved (to spend) about 16 years in the prisons of then socialist Bulgaria. These memoirs are a harsh, shocking and exalted to Heaven cruel human story of an honest Macedonian who, with his whole life, goes to fight against the, according to all visible signs, numerous evils of the despotic, corrupt, totalitarian, deceitful and fully inhumane leading public regime which socialism was in Bulgaria. The overall volume of the prison memoirs of Krum Monev is about 1500 pages divided into four (4) parts.

The first part of these extensive memoirs of Krum Monev entitled "Macedonia My Anchor" describes the events of the two-and-a-half months long participation of the author in the illegal partisan group (Cheta) of Gerasim Todorov in the Pirin Mountains in the beginning of 1948. Well depicted are the fearsome blockade the authorities made in the spring of 1948 on the territory of almost the whole of Pirin Macedonia, while greatest attention is paid to the several-months long stay in Pirin prisons of the large number of people arrested during the blockade and afterwards, until the investigation was on, as well as the trial against the accused in the town of Sveti Vrach (today's Sandanski).

Of course, this part of the memoirs has not omitted the harsh and unhappy childhood of the author. In this first part of his memoirs, Monev has tried to clarify to a great extent the reasons that led to the illegality of Gerasim Todorov and his group, as well as his own reasons. It is clearly evident from the first part of the memoirs that the illegal group around Gerasim Todorov finding refuge in the legendary Pirin Mountains mostly owed its position to the ideological disagreement with the new socialist regime and the 'people's authorities' in particular. But these illegals were also showing their discontent with the overall fate of Macedonia after the end of the Second World War. Here we see a whole gallery of faces described as they were, without the author adding to or taking from their kindness or evilness. We meet colourful and interesting persons while the author is wandering around the Pirin Mountains, as well as while he is lingering in the awful underground cells of the prison in the town of Sveti Vrach or the old Turkish prison in Gorna Dzhumaya Town (today's Blagoevgrad).

The memoirs of Krum Monev are very well structured so that the reader gets the impression that the action is flowing as if in a novel, like a river, as some literary critics or other experts

might say. Monev is not a person with high education but his enormous prison experience (knowledge) and his long years of fraternizing with the books from the prison libraries have helped him along the way of self-education to gather solid information which later played a crucial role for the writing of his extensive memoirs. When someone reads the memoirs of Monev, s/he gets the impression that there is a skillful and experienced author and not a most ordinary amateur in the writing profession with only a few classes of regular education. At the same time, even the start of the memoirs demonstrates that the author is working towards an interesting book. This is illustrated by Monev in the most pliable (best possible) way through the description of the prison greyness and the most inhumane conditions there; through the masterful descriptions of the wonderful natural beauties of the Pirin Mountains or through the truthful and intelligent portrait of the soulless totalitarian communist regime. If we are to formulate an overall evaluation of the memoir prison notes of Krum Monev, then without any exaggeration we might say that we are speaking about a really remarkable sample of this specific literature genre. The first part of Krum Monev's memoirs, and maybe even more so the other three parts, present a unique book in modern memoir writing which can be read as a most exciting thriller, while we are yet about to hear, speak and write a lot about its literary and other values from now on, as it contains global assets (values).

Vancho Meandzhiyski

Second Part

Years Terrifyingly Lived

Introduction

This time (in the second part), we see his Golgotha in the prisons of Bulgaria and his indescribable sufferings that can be compared only to those of the Biblical Hell which we remember from descriptions in Old-Testament books, from oral tales of our grandparents, and most objectively – from the famous Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri and more specifically the part entitled Inferno. We could say without exaggeration that the author is speaking of a life passed in infernal conditions or, more precisely, of years terrifyingly lived. The examples of the countless sufferings of Monev can be found from the first to the last page of the second part of his memoirs. He calls the post-war Bulgarian prisons black homes, cruel torturings, tombs for sentenced souls, kingdoms of omnifarious immorality, centers of varied experience for the bosses (chiefs) with unlimited rights over the prisoners, stinky holes where unseen filth and famine, contagious diseases and worst human vices rule.

On the top of everything is the dictator's regime in prisons, the unlimited power of State Security (SS) and the practically untouchable rulers in these specific state institutions – the almighty chiefs. This is what the global picture of post-war Bulgarian prison would more or less look like, where Monev spent a total of 16 years. These were the conditions (time) when Monev would waste part of his best youthful years of life, subject to ferocious torture, beating with all available means and tools, constant famine, isolation in special-regime cells and various other maltreatments and terrorism.

The tragic prison odyssey of Monev described in that part of the book starts at the end of

August 1948 in the Second Central Prison of the town of Sliven. Here Monev began his sufferings in his long martyrdom in prisons. In the Sliven prison, Monev would feel himself the terrible harshness of the most hated guards in this ‘black home’ – the monsters (as he names them) Racho and Dzhundzharov who have many times “caressed” him with their guerilla fists or the whips they carried along at all times. Monev would also feel in a very precise way the well-known cruelty and brutality of the almighty director of the prison – the sadist Ivan Mandev. In the meantime, the Sliven prison would also leave deep marks on Monev in the positive sense as it is here where he would start his true spiritual uplift.

It is here where Monev, with the hearty help of several high intellectuals and politicians of bourgeoisie Bulgaria, would start seriously to study and then learn the French language. These Bulgarian intellectuals and politicians would help him not only with the language but with his political and intellectual development. In his memoirs from prison, Monev is giving his warm (hearty) gratitude to all who have helped him with his personal spiritual uplifting. Of great interest and importance is also the fact that Monev, with all his intellectual powers (as modest as they might be) and everywhere he might find himself in prison, keeps defending without hesitation his Macedonian cause and national identity – in the ‘normal cells’, in the special regime wards, during yard walks and during his ‘close encounters’ with representatives of the prison authorities and also his opponents, the Bulgarian nationalists.

By various circumstances, Monev also spent some time among criminal prisoners where he got the chance to learn closely about their specific psychology. The five years during which Monev is ‘processing’ in the Second Part of his extensive memoirs are actually not only about the Sliven prison due to the simple fact that not all of them were spent there but also about the Central Sofia Prison and the prison of the town of Shumen. The author has left shocking evidence about his stay in both places.

In the Sofia prison, he was transferred to work as a shoe-maker in some of the numerous workshops existing in the perimeter of the torturing establishment. But the prison was not only a punishment institution but also a ‘re-educational school’ as cynically called by the then communist rulers. Very shortly after his arrival at the Sofia prison, he would most explicitly and sharply oppose the Bolshevik re-education of prisoners, fanatically practiced by the prison authorities. This opposition would bring him the first severe punishments. In the beginning, Monev was given two weeks in the isolator for opposing the education for the cultural and literacy uplift of prisoners. He endured this punishment but continued with his resistance against the ‘education’ organized by the communists. The strong ‘arguments’ of the educators did not help and Monev was sent back to the isolator, this time with serious preliminary physical ‘processing’.

No persuasion, torture or the unbearable conditions in isolators and special regime wards could change the hard-headed Monev. So, paying an extremely high price, he defended his grounds. The price of the stubborn standing on his positions and beliefs was a seven-month stay in isolators and the special regime wards at the ice-cold and stinky dungeons of Sofia Central Prison, resulting in serious impacts on his health. In the Bastille of Sofia, Monev by the way spent two weeks at the Shanghai ward – one of the most gruesome and immoral wards of this huge prison. The author’s memoirs offer a glimpse of a small and quite insignificant part of the terrifying things, the twisted and unacceptable for a normal human being immorality and sodomy reigning over the poor sinful God’s children exiled there.

The last and practically final stage of the nearly five-year period of Monev's prison life described in the Second Part of these unique memoirs is his stay at the new prison in the town of Shumen. We have to accept that the time spent in the Shumen prison, taking the intensity of events and the heavy consequences, is probably the most dramatic and shocking part of this book. The author will write that only the first three-four months of that stay can be considered acceptable and bearable for the prisoners. The rest of the time was filled with unseen terror including physical and all other kinds of torture. Monev himself was again a permanent target of the representatives of prison authorities of various categories, and the ones especially aggressive and heartless (ruthless) were the representatives of the SS at the prison. He would pay for his unwavering and stoic to the extent of madness defense of his personal ideals and beliefs by a nine-month stay in the isolators and special regime wards. During this lasting and destructive 'therapy', Monev showed incredible physical and spiritual strength but he suffered heavy traumas and was brought to the verge of physical survival.

The Shumen period of Krum Monev's prison years is important not only because the reader can see in an extremely interesting way the dramatic life and sufferings he has been through but because of the impressive depiction of the drama of many other prison inhabitants. In the first place, it is about the established dragon-like prison regime injuring anyone behind the walls, and the real terror and dictatorship imposed on all convicts. The drama and attractiveness for all who are curious is added undoubtedly by the shocking descriptions of midnight executions at the prison. These shocking descriptions witnessed numbly by Monev from his cell will remain in every reader's conscience forever. These then living images and true events are here and now quite well and convincingly depicted in terms of literature and imagery. That is why this book will be read as a good and interesting novel and not as pure memoirs. If someone complains about the poignancy of the book, it would only be because of the fact that its author has really passed through a harsh and dramatic life Golgotha and this is not easily forgotten or beautified.

Vancho Meandzhiyski

Part Three

Notes from the Earthly Circles of Hell

Introduction

Cruel to a final limit and most of all tragic according to all experience, the prison stories of Krum Monev continue. Even more, at some points they become intensively destructive and lead our narrator who is also a toy subject and a witness of events to an ecstatic, psychologically unstable position, with many elements of real insanity. In this third final chapter of prison memoirs, our reader will again come upon dramatic events which the author has succeeded to turn into very interesting and exciting material. Even in the beginning we must say that the third, largest and most dramatic of the books covers the period from 1953 to the summer of 1964. Technically, the book is divided into two parts (third and fourth). In the third part, the author describes his three and a half years of suffering in the worst concentration camp with the most fearsome image in socialist Bulgaria which was located on the island of Persin-Belene in the Danube River. The fourth part describes the sick and

gruesome events that would leave deep and unforgettable scars in his memories from the time spent in several Bulgarian prisons.

Part Three of the memoirs covers the heaviest and most awful years of the 16-year old odyssey of this unwavering fighter for his ideals. The notes in this part are such a shocking picture of the things happening on this evil island–concentration camp that there would hardly be a soul untouched by its contents. Exhaustive to the verge of unconsciousness and madness daily labour, cruel and constant control on the part of the visible and invisible (hiding) guards, dragon-like regime and the unseen dictator’s attitude on behalf of the camp authorities to the prisoners, daily killings without reason and justification – this is the general picture presented to us by Monev about the Persin Island Death Camp. The view we get from reading the shocking memories of Monev about Persin Island camp is truly gruesome and terrifying. And it could not be otherwise because it is how the camp authorities wanted it to be, and our narrator has not thought about or wanted to make it prettier.

The life in Persin prison camp is presented in its entirety. This includes the strict and unbearable regime ruling the camp and the inventory of the premises (sheds) where prisoners lived; the beastly behavior of wards towards prisoners and the portraits of characters from the huge prisoners’ mass or the camp authorities. It is neither accidental nor strange that the author has dedicated a whole chapter (about 300 pages) from this third and largest book to the experience at the Death Camp. It is not by chance that the Persin prison is constantly called the Camp of Death by the author. All the daily episodes characterizing life in the concentration camp confirm this name with scaring accuracy and justification. No other name can be given to a place where prisoners (campers) are killed like flies or, as the author calls it – “We were killed like pests”.

In the same line (as a confirmation of the author’s evaluation) go the undisputable facts about the unbearable physical burden put on the prisoners by the totally unjustified daily work norms. The unbearable labour had turned the Persin campers into living skeletons moving only on unbeaten human will and survival instincts. This slave labour was accompanied daily by cruel and unjustified beatings of the exhausted prisoners done by the wardens, guards or the senior representatives of camp authorities themselves. Isolators and special regime wards were ‘designated’ as special places for torturing prisoners; they were placed in special barracks most famous among which was the one called the Opera.

A separate ‘decoration’ of the concentration camp were the Baikals – special police forces spread over the territory of Persin Island. Their task was to shoot at will the prisoners who dared to break the ‘strict Persin laws’, for example to gather a semi-dried blackberry or to catch a fish from the numerous small marsh ponds on the island. These ruthless killers are called the Enichari of the communist regime by the author. This is only a part (maybe the most characteristic) of the Persin prison Golgotha of the author but it is true that Persin Island was for a long time the home of the most sinister concentration camp for political prisoners (during the stay of Monev on the island, there were about 13,000 people), and the scene of many awful things.

The Persin prison circle of Krum Monev was closed on July 26, 1956 when he was released due to the ending of his sentence. Monev left the Camp of Death after about eight and a half years of cruel maltreatment in Bulgarian prisons. But freedom did not bring him peace and

calmness, as he was constantly followed by the militia and – not least – by poverty. Monev was to enjoy freedom, though partially, only for a few months, and then he was back in prison. Several months after leaving the institutions, he was sent to the army, in Labour Force Troops, which was something like a Penalty Squad of the Bulgarian Army.

All these events, plus many later ones, will find a place in the final Part Four of the memoirs. Monev would go to service in the Labour Force Troops where he would spend several months. During all the time he was there, he was making a plan to desert and to escape outside Bulgaria. He succeeded in leaving the army and even passing illegally the border between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, but unfortunately the ending was tragic. Shortly after passing the border, he and his friend were captured by Yugoslavian border police. After a short interrogation, Monev was sent to the Idrizovo Prison in the town of Skopje. There he spent a month of unseen psychological torture on the part of the investigators. The result of this idiotic police cruelty was a total psychological breakdown and an attempt to commit suicide by hanging on the barrack door where he was locked using his bed sheet. He was saved by his roommate who alarmed the police.

The main reason for Monev to try and take his own life was the totally unacceptable decision of the Macedonian police to send him back to Bulgaria and turn him over to Bulgarian border authorities. The faithful, loyal and totally blinded guardians of Tito's Yugoslavia did deliver Monev to the Bulgarian border police a few days after the suicidal attempt, thus putting an end to all his plans. With his passing over the Bulgarian border, his sufferings started again and he was reinstated as an inhabitant of Bulgarian prisons, for many years to come.

After several months of investigation, his case was closed, followed by a short orchestrated trial where the verdict was read. The 'clever' judges gave Monev another 8 years of prison. Almost all of the sentence would be served under indescribable torture and grief in the sinister prisons of the towns of Pazardzhik, Pleven and Stara Zagora. Thus his total experience as a prisoner would climb to 16 years. Yes, a whole 16 years dedicated to the blinded and lost guardians of socialism in Bulgaria who were also no less blinded nationalists and chauvinists. This is both an exceptional human achievement and a tragic loss, as well as a defeat for humaneness. The third book of Krum Monev's memoirs is at the same time cruel evidence of a sinister time and a twisted social system. First and above all, these memoirs remain as indestructible and lasting notes on human suffering inflicted by humans in those disgusting places invented also by men and called Prisons. The prison memoirs of Krum Monev are most of all records of the monstrous Earthly Hell and its earthly circles.

Vancho Meandzhiyski