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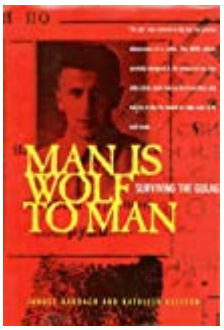

Janusz Bardach, Kathleen Gleeson. *Man is Wolf to Man: Surviving the Gulag.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. xvi + 392 pp. $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-22152-9; $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-21352-4.

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A Life in the Gulag: Janusz Bardach and the Complexities of a Gulag "Society"

The survivor's story of life in the Soviet Gulag is one long familiar to us from the works of Evgeniia Ginzburg, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov, and literally hundreds of lesser-known but no-less-important memoirists. Janusz Bardach's tale of his own Gulag experience resembles all these predecessors–a powerfully written account of an innocent individual, caught up in the teeth of Stalin's terror machine, who somehow survived despite subjection to almost indescribable brutality. On closer inspection, Bardach's tale paints a picture of Gulag life more complex than many earlier memoirists. These complexities should draw serious attention in future historical studies of the Gulag.

Born on July 28, 1919, Janusz Bardach would become a plastic surgery specialist in congenital facial deformities at the University of Iowa Medical School after the conclusion of his life in the Gulag. But his tale begins on September 1, 1939, when he was a young Polish Jew in Wlodzimierz-Wolynski, a town just on the Soviet side of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line. From an intellectual family, Bardach sympathized with the ideals of social justice espoused by the Communist Party and the Soviet Union during his interwar adolescence. The arrests and deportations which accompanied the arrival of Soviet rule in Wlodzimierz-Wolynski quickly disillusioned young Bardach, especially after an overnight experience, described in horrifying detail, of forced service to NKVD agents as a witness to brutal arrests and expropriations.

In July 1940, Bardach was ordered to enlist in the Soviet army. He became a tank driver; his military and political education began immediately. As a resident of the newly-annexed territories–heretofore unsovietized–Bardach "was still considered foreign and therefore suspected of political illiteracy and unreliability" (p. 62). In this atmosphere of suspicion, intensified by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, an accident in which Bardach's tank became stuck in a river proved a crucial mistake. In July 1941, Janusz Bardach was court-martialed and sentenced to death. In the most poignant scene, opening the book, he describes how he was forced to dig his own grave in the forest only to have his execution forestalled by a sympathetic NKVD official who knew some of Bardach's family in Odessa. His sentence was commuted to ten years in camps; Bardach had narrowly

avoided death for the first of many times.

Bardach's lengthy trip from the Belarussian front to Kolyma, like that of many others, was filled with stinking cattle cars, overcrowded transit camps, filthy ship hulls, tattooed criminals, hunger, disease, and death. Throughout his trip and after his arrival in Kolyma, Bardach escaped death again and again. He survived a torturous beating following an unsuccessful escape attempt from a train car, apparently because the officer in charge of the guard did not want to fill out the necessary reports should a prisoner die on his watch. In Buchta Nakhodka, the last stop before boarding the steamer to Kolyma, Bardach was able to escape heavy labor, working in the camp medical establishment. Here, he gained valuable experience that would allow him to hold a similar position in Kolyma, a post that again allowed him to escape heavy labor just when he seemed nearly overcome by the rigors of outdoor labor. Bardach narrowly survived a knife attack while boarding the steamer from the Vladivostok area to Kolyma. Even work in the hospital was not without its dangers, as Bardach caught a near fatal case of tuberculosis.

Finally, Bardach gained his release from the Gulag with some intervention by his brother through the Polish Army. He was released from the Gulag in August 1945. Bardach survived time and again by his wits and by well-placed contacts with the right prisoners, but he also survived by luck and a strong constitution. While his tale is certainly one of survival through action, again and again, he reveals the uncertainty and random nature of survival in the Gulag, where even the most privileged of positions carried only a modicum of safety.

So much of Bardach's tale is familiar. Yet, somehow he evokes the stench and brutality of the Gulag environment with a power few others can match. Writing in 1990s America, Bardach exhibits no reticence relating graphic descriptions of the foul language of the criminal elements, hetero- and homosexual rape and homosexual relations in the Gulag–topics often mentioned only vaguely or briefly in early memoirs. After a scene of homosexual rape in a shower Bardach relates the titular phrase taught to him by his mother *chelovek cheloveku volk*–"man is wolf to man." Only obliquely does Bardach make reference to whether he was personally a victim of homosexual rape (p. 125).

Furthermore, Bardach (and many other memoirists, for that matter) touch upon many aspects of Gulag life with which scholars of the Gulag have rarely grappled. From the ritual of roll call to the ever-present political propaganda, from the organization of labor to the control of food rations, clothing and medical treatment, Bardach's memoir, used creatively and intensively by the historian, provides rich data on the daily life of the Gulag.

Just one example, and perhaps the most interesting, is the evidence Bardach supplies on the formation of identity and social hierarchy in the Gulag. Both memoirists and the Soviet authorities understood a distinction and hierarchical relationship between those arrested under Article 58 (counter-revolutionaries in official Soviet terminology, political prisoners in the terms of the memoirists) and common criminals (the "socially friendly" element to Soviet officials, the inhuman thieves to the memoirists).

Bardach, however, existed at the margins of such a rigid classification. His intellectual background and the nature of his offense seem to qualify him for political prisoner status, yet he was technically sentenced not under Article 58 but under Article 193.1.b for wartime military treason. As such, he was a military criminal, but his background left him uncomfortable in the company of other veterans. Furthermore, Bardach himself did not observe the political prisoner-common criminal boundary, frequently befriending elements in criminal gangs as their storyteller, as their source of information about the "capitalist" world, or as their health care provider. Bardach entered the criminal world with a mastery of the criminal language, the use of which distinguished him from the "mama's boys" in the eyes of the criminal world (p. 183). His ties with the criminal community were very useful, expanding his survival network in the Gulag. Not only did he earn their protection from attacks by other criminals, but he frequently earned access to additional (often, stolen) food, space, clothing, and other material items which allowed him to maintain his bodily strength.

Man is Wolf to Man makes equally compelling and significant contributions in many other areas worthy of intense study. The memoir awaits dissection on the issues of national identity, gender relations, medical care, and many other aspects of Gulag life. Clearly, millions died in the Gulag, but millions also survived. In order to understand the nature of the Soviet polity, the life of these millions must be explored more deeply.

In sum, Janusz Bardach provides a highly emotional, revealing tale of life and death in the Gulag. The book would work well in a variety of undergraduate courses either as an introduction to life in the Soviet Gulag or as a primary source revealing the complexities of Gulag society. For scholars, the work provides rich fodder and must

not be ignored. Memoirs are, of course, a troublesome source for the historian. Early historical studies of the Gulag, faced with the impossibility of accessing archival sources, were forced to rely almost exclusively on the often inextricable mixture of fact, rumor, and memory that comprised memoir literature. Bardach's tale exhibits these problems with the memoir, especially his extremely detailed memory of events more than a half-century old. Nonetheless, newly-emerging archival histories of the Gulag would ignore memoir sources like Bardach to their detriment. Bardach and other memoirist reveal detail which will never find its way into a bureaucrat's report and provide significant insights to the ways in which prisoners lived the Gulag.

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