

Julia Bock. Csapody, Tamás. *Bori Munkaszolgálatosok: Fejezetek a Bori Munkaszolgálat Történetéből*. [The Forced Laborers of Bor: Chapters from the History of the Forced Laborers of Bor]. Budapest, Vince Kiadó, 2011. Pp 647, illus. AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 (2012): <http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>

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Reviewed by Julia Bock, Long Island University, Brooklyn

This book describes the fate of six thousand forced laborers at the Bor labor camp during the Second World War. Bor, one of the most infamous scenes of the Hungarian Holocaust, located in Serbia, was particularly important, as it supplied 50% of the copper for the German army's needs. Forced laborers were assigned to the mines and to deliver the copper the German plans called for the expanding the railroad network through this mountainous region. Relatively late in the history of the War, in 1943, the desperate German army requested additional workers for Bor from Hungary and these arrived as forced laborers, 93% of whom were Jewish, but included Jehovah Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists as well, because of the latter two groups refusal to bear arms.

Germany had started to build camps after the occupation of Yugoslavia, in 1941, and the first inmates were mainly "Yugoslavs", with the first three thousand Hungarians forced laborers arriving to Bor only in July 1943. These men were already serving in various forced labor battalions within Hungary. A second transport arrived following a new contract between the two allies, Hungary and Germany, in May 1944, and also contained three thousand laborers. After Romania's August 1944 breakaway from the Axis powers, Germany decided to evacuate the Balkans, meaning to terminate the mining operations and to stop building the railway that carried the output of the mines.

The evacuation of Bor was organized to occur in two stages. This first group of 3,600 inmates selected mostly from those who had been among the earliest to arrive left on September 17, 1944. This march passed close to Belgrade and stopped in Zimony for a few days, where along the way there were mass escapes; especially successful were the Nazarenes, whose co-religionists in Serbia arranged their rescue (there were only 9 Nazarenes in Bor). After Pancsova, [Pančevo], Titel, Ujvidék [Novi Sad] the march arrived at Cservedenka [Crvenka], where 700-1000 Jewish forced laborer were killed. The survivors of the Cservedenka massacre were divided into three groups, with one going to Mohács, the second to Baja, (some of this group also had a chance to escape with local assistance), and the third group was taken by the Germans by train through Szentgotthárd to Austria. Of this group of 3,600 that left Bor, 1,500 were murdered along the road, 1,500 ended up in various German concentration camps (of whom less than 500 survived), and the rest escaped. The second group containing two thousand laborers that left in September 29, 1944 was luckier than the first, as the advancing Russian troops made the Serbian partisans more aggressive and after two days marching this group of inmates were liberated by them. Returning to Hungary was not without danger for these liberated inmates because of German counter-attacks at Kucevo. Most of the forced laborers decided to return to Hungary through Arad and Temesvár [Timișoara] in Romania.

A special chapter of the *Bor labor battalion* deals with doctors, who had double identities in the camp, first as laborers but also as healers. The working conditions of these doctors are examined in all the different Bor sub-camps called the Berlin, München, Vorarlberg, Rhön,

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Westfalen, Heidenau, and Innsbruck, as well as Laznica[Laznița], where they treated partisans, and finally in the *Stráflager* where they worked alongside the correctional staff, but still as inmates. (The sub-camps were named after the Austrian and German towns, areas from where the first inmates came from.)

A chapter is devoted to the Social Democrat Pál Jusztus, survived Bor, only to be arrested in 1949 and accused of “participating in the Rajk lead Titoist conspiracy,” imprisoned and freed only in 1955. Although his accusers did not “use his stay in Yugoslavia” against him, information about life in Bor was included in the court documents. Another chapter deals with camp commander, Ede Marányi, who was never captured and escaped being held responsible for his crimes. Although he lived in Austria and Germany under an assumed false name and died in 1985, the Hungarian authorities, who knew a lot about him never made any effort to extradite him.

Csapódy dedicates the final chapters of the book to the history of aftermath of the war: the calling to account of the officials of the camp and the exhumation of the mass-grave in Abda, the well-known site where the poet, Miklós Radnóti was killed. Miklós Radnóti’s case is frequently discussed in different chapters as we follow the history and dissolution of the camp. The absence of the official reports of the exhumation and other negligence during the aftermath period from the new Hungarian Government made the later investigation difficult. The whole question of responsibility and the process of autopsy and burial became a kind of political issue that, according to the author, did not help to uncover the truth.

We should also mention the special value of the closing chapters that contains the bibliography, the maps and photos, which make the text more accessible and complete. The book brings together different aspects of the history of Bor and creates a multidisciplinary method when discussing the final chapter of the poet Miklós Radnóti’s life that was part of literary history before, while the subject itself had been mostly covered by political history. In providing information on the doctors’ situation and the level of treatments, the book gives an important account of the history of medicine under these special circumstances. It also offers detailed sociological observation, as well as a legal opinion on the trials after the war.

Further value should be recognized in the evaluative way of the treatment of sources. As the author displays contradictions between different sources, he also selects the most authoritative ones. He does it by finding still available eyewitnesses and compares their accounts to the texts and the geography of all the camps as well as the routes of the forced marches he visited personally.

As we read the volume, we are witnessing a constant loss in the number of the once six thousand group of forced laborers, as the numbers of the living constantly diminished, with 1500 due to the conditions in the camp, the mass murders during the marches that were part of the annihilation process, so that ultimately from the first group of 3500 only a few hundred survived the extermination camps. The second group of 2000 forced laborers had a better survival rate as they were liberated by Serbian partisans, with the doctors offered positions as military doctors in their company. Those who were captured had a chance to survive, even though some managed to return to Hungary much later.. After the war, almost all of the survivors became part of the leading forces of Hungarian academic and cultural life.

The selection of sources not only includes archival collections, printed material, memoirs but also interviews conducted by the author, who also revisited the camps and evacuation routes.

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The author's treatment of this complex subject recreates the historical reality and provides not only the details, but the character of the Bor experience.

The author gives a highly negative mark to the legal system for not bringing the responsible persons to justice. He argues that the whole procedure was questionable: among 18 persons that were investigated, five were executed, eight charges were dropped, and eight received reduced punishments.

Although the book deals with certain aspects of the history of Bor, it does not claim to offer an exhaustive overview, it does, it provides far the most complete and up to date information on the subject to date.