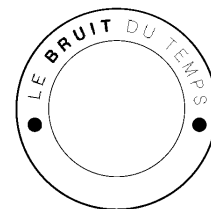


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**Julius Margolin**

### *Путешествие в страну Зэ-Ка [Journey to the land of the Ze-Ka]*

A New Edition, Revised and Augmented in accordance with the Original Manuscript.

French translation from the Russian by Nina Berberova and Mina Journot, revised and completed by Luba Jurgenson.

paperback : 135 x 205 cm, with an illustrated dust-jacket

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*« By the breadth of its sources and the rigour of its construction ; by its epic scope and the richness of its emotional colour ; by the force of its irony and above all by the light it casts on this de-humanized sub-stratum of our planet, The Gulag Archipelago has become the classic of its kind. But it was far from being the first work to reveal the existence of the Soviet concentration camps. Before Solzhenitsyn, others had done so. From about forty, to choose but one : the moving and authentic Journey to the Land of the Ze-Ka by Julius Margolin, written in 1947. »*

Georges Nivat, « Le Cri et l'avalanche », 2005

The Ze-Ka or Zeks (written z/k, from the Russian words « zaklioutchonny kanaloarmeets ») designates the « fighter-detainees of the canal » ; these were the slave-workers on one of the greatest Soviet building projects from the beginning of the 1930's, the White Sea-Baltic Canal. Later the term came to be applied to any prisoner of the Gulag. As Julius Margolin writes : « The Land of the Ze-Ka appears on no Soviet map and can be found in no atlas. It is the only country in the world where there is no discussion about the USSR, where there are no illusions and no deviations. »

Now published in its entirety and under its original title, for the first time in the world, *Journey to the Land of the Ze-Ka* is one of the most overwhelming witness-accounts ever penned about the Gulag. The book first appeared in France in 1949, in an abridged version, under the title *La Condition inhumaine*, long before the master-pieces of Solzhenitsyn and Chalamov. This staggering account of five years spent in the Soviet camps is in no way inferior to its more famous successors, either in its literary quality, or in its intelligence (the author was formerly doctor in philosophy) or in the strenuous attempt made by the writer to think through what was happening to him, as he describes experiences which at times reach the limits of what humankind can bear.

Luba Jurgenson, editor of this new and unabridged version of the text, writes : « Margolin bears witness to an episode in our history that should be better known – the Soviet repression of the thousands of Polish citizens who fled from the West after the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, and more generally the ethnic cleansing practised in the territories annexed at the start of the Soviet occupation and destined to become integral parts of the USSR. These purges, perpetrated to ensure the Russianization of populations, in the first instance targeted the elites and the democratic institutions – a stage that had already been accomplished in every other part of the Soviet Union. Within the vast corpus of accounts relating to the Gulag, the originality of Margolin's book resides in the fact that his is a first-hand account from a non-Soviet. Witness of this kind occupies a place apart in the literary documentation of the Gulag : prior to their being arrested, these writers had

never been subject to ideological brain-washing, nor had they internalized the constraints of Soviet society or lived in fear of its repressive regime. In a word, they benefited from a rare liberty of thought and feeling. It is for this reason that their accounts possess an extremely rich anthropological and narrative dimension. That said, Margolin is not entirely a « foreigner ». His account is written in Russian, and his own multicultural background enables him give a properly prominent place to Russian culture, which is the context in which he approaches the world and the events confronting him. As such he possesses all the keys necessary to interpret the world of the Gulag, and the pertinence of his observations will serve as a precious tool for the historian.

Further to this, Margolin's Zionist convictions, the fact that he settled in Palestine, and above all his profound understanding of the world of East European Jewry are all elements that underpin his authoritative observations on the traumas suffered by the Jewish population close to the Polish border, before the Shoah and the Sovietization of the former « Pale of Settlement ». He provides precious insights into this vanished Judaic world, destined to be dissolved into Stalin's empire in a painful process of assimilation about which a great deal remains to be uncovered. »

### **Julius Margolin**

Born in Pinsk (Belorussia) into a Jewish family, Julius Margolin (1900-1971) received a Russian and Polish education. He completed his philosophical studies in Berlin in 1923. By 1936 he was already established in Palestine, but was on a trip to Lodz when Poland was invaded in 1939. He fled to his native town in the East of the country, and it was there that he was arrested on June 19 by the Soviets.

He survived, miraculously, five years captivity in the Gulag. Freed in 1945, he wrote his Journey as soon as he got home to Tel Aviv, and was faced with international incredulity, for the USSR was still basking in the glow afforded it by its contribution to the defeat of Nazism. He visited Paris in 1950, called as a witness in the trial of David Rousset against Les Lettres francaises. Right up until his death in 1971, he campaigned ceaselessly for the liberation of the Ze-Ka, the prisoners in the camps, and especially for the return of Jews in the USSR to Israel.

### **Luba Jurgenson**

Luba Jurgenson is Associate Professor in Russian Literature at the University Paris IV-Sorbonne. A writer and a translator, she has written *L'expérience concentrationnaire est-elle indicible ?* published by Editions du Rocher, 2003, and *Création et tyrannie*, published by Éditions Sulliver, 2009.

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