



The Synagogue of the Gypsies

Ben Pastor

Another novel by **Ben Pastor**, the Italian-American writer who publishes her war novels with Sellerio (2021), dedicated to her serial character, the young major of the Wehrmacht Martin Von Bora. In this newly published book, *The synagogue of the gypsies*, as always impeccably translated by Luigi Sanvito, we are in the summer of 1942 on the eastern front. Operation Barbarossa has now started, the Sixth Army of the German army has arrived near Stalingrad and Bora, at the head of a division, is ready to do his duty, that is to besiege the city on the Volga, at any price. .

But while operations are in preparation, the major is given a new assignment by the Abwehr, the German secret service. There was a mysterious crime: a couple of Romanian scientists, Nicolae Tincu and Bianca Costin, were traveling by plane to the German command of General von Paulus, perhaps to deliver top-secret documents. The plane breaks down, the two set off alone in the Russian steppe, are intercepted and killed.

What did Tincu's briefcase contain, Costin's handbag?

Bora arrives at the scene of the crime together with the Italian officer Amerigo Galvani, also with the Alpine troops of the allied contingent on the war theater. The mystery is becoming more and more dense, and Ben Pastor, starting from the murder of the two

scientists, perhaps in possession of a formula that could have changed the outcome of the war, enters, with the eyes of Martin Bora, into the meanders of the siege of Stalingrad, on which certainly an immense memorialism has flourished, but which is relived here day by day with the eyes and sensitivity of an unusual soldier.

Bora is a twenty-eight-year-old man, he has already played in the Spanish war where he had very difficult experiences, and now he finds himself in a trap, the Sacca in which thousands of men are crammed, who besiege and are besieged by a cold to minus thirty degrees, which makes men mad and desperate. The details of the horrible life of men who cannot take a step back, as Hitler commands, is narrated with the sensitivity of Bora, who in the hell of ice and death manages to put his emotions on paper, regret for the beautiful Dikta, his wife who awaits him in Leipzig, his mother Nina, who married General Von Sickingen, who raised Martin and his brother Peter, a Luftwaffe pilot.

In dreams, in the delusions of alcohol, Bora reviews his past, the death of his father, a distinguished musician who had lived for a long time in Russia, so much so as to compose a highly suggestive piece of music, *The synagogue of the gypsies*.

“The Master wrote from Moscow that the idea of the synagogue owed a lot to Russian mythology and echoed the lost city of Kitez... Kitez, for those who believe it, was a mythical city on the Volga submerged by the waves during the siege of Genghis Khan. Maybe it really existed, maybe it didn't. The site is unknown or forgotten... ..My father did not leave any written explanation of the reason for the title, which remains as uncertain as the lost city. “

So a piece of music that becomes the metaphor of the lost city, Stalingrad, which led to the death of an endless number of Germans and Russians, in one of the most famous defeats in the history of the twentieth century. The novel is very long and detailed, sometimes we get lost in the descriptions of the places, of the fights, of the hand-to-hand that engaged the besiegers and besieged, in the midst of the cold and the mystery

that will be revealed with an unexpected twist only at the end. of the more than 650 pages of the book.

The saga of Von Bora, polyglot, noble, elegant, divided between loyalty to the German homeland and the rationality of the philosopher, describes with the pen of Ben Pastor another piece in the reconstruction of the disastrous history of the Germans in the Second World War. With due critical sense.