

The Cinematographic
Activities of
Charles Rider Noble
and John Mackenzie
in the Balkans
(Volume One)

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By

Peter Kardjilov

Translated from Bulgarian by Ivelina Petrova

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Volume One

Acknowledgements	ix
Chapter One	1
A Little Bit of History	
A Few Explanations	7
The Hectic Holidays of the Tumultuous 1903	10
Chapter Two	16
The Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising (the Summer of 1903)	
The Beginning and the End of The Epic Struggle	16
Chapter Three	23
The Echo in the United Kingdom	
The Balkan Committee	23
British Correspondents	26
Under Social Pressure	43
The Photochronicle of the Rebellion	48
Illustrated Weekly Periodicals	49
Books	62
Private Audiences and Public Events	73
Chapter Four	79
The Life and Times of Charles Urban: The Beginning	
Young and Innocent	79
The Detroit Prince of the Phonographs	82
Kinetoscopes	82
Open Screen – Large Audience	85
Maguire & Baucus	88
The Warwick Trading Company	91
The Urban Bioscope	94
The Boer War: Films	98
New Ideas – New People	111
The Outcome	117
The Charles Urban Trading Company	122
The Unseen World	126
We Put the World Before You	127

Chapter Five.....	135
Who Are You, Mr. Noble?	
2008: an Email Odyssey.....	136
Origins.....	139
A Man of the Theatre.....	140
Sir Walter Gibbons.....	142
1900: Noble in South Africa.....	144
In Morocco (1901–3).....	150
 Chapter Six.....	 163
Screenings in London (January 1904)	
Introduction.....	163
In the Beginning was <i>The Music Hall</i>	164
The Macedonian Atrocities.....	169
With an Insurgent Band in Macedonia.....	171
The Premiere.....	179
The First Reviews.....	183
The Show Must Go On – But For How Long?.....	188
February Projections – But Where?.....	193
1904 Press Comments in the 1905 CUTC Catalogue.....	196
Comments on the Press Comments.....	199
 Chapter Seven.....	 207
1904: The Forming Supplement No. 1 to the Charles Urban Trading Co. Ltd. General Catalogue Issue	
MACEDONIA AND BULGARIA.....	207
WITH THE INSURGENT BANDS OF MACEDONIA....	213
Ivancho Gevgelijsky.....	219
General Ivan Tsonchev.....	221
The Initiation.....	223
One of the Most Striking Pictures.....	225
The Illustrations.....	227
The Photographs of Dilber (Good-looking) Ivancho.....	228
General Tsonchev’s Photographs.....	233
Photographs of Colonel Anastas Yankov.....	242
Photographs of Lieutenant Konstantin (Kocho) Nastev.....	245
Photographs of Lieutenant Ilia Baltov.....	250
Macedonian Insurgent Leaders.....	253

Chapter Eight.....	259
Screenings in Sofia (February to March 1904)	
Charles Rider Noble's Return.....	259
English Correspondents in Sofia.....	261
The First Picture Show.....	263
At the Military Club.....	265
Sofia Officers' Assembly.....	267
An Extensive Advertising Campaign, a Crowded Hall, and Some Extra Profit.....	270
The Slavyanska Beseda.....	274
Official Documents Mentioning Noble's Name.....	276
At the Request of the Audience.....	278
The Bulgaria Circus Theatre.....	279
The Well-known Stranger.....	282
The Content of the "Cinematograms".....	284
"Ownership," Patents, and "Copyright".....	288
Ticket Prices.....	291
Reviews Provoking no Responses.....	296
Chapter Nine.....	299
Noble's Screenings in the Provinces (March to June 1904)	299
The Itinerary.....	299
In Vratsa.....	300
Visiting Vidin.....	302
<i>The Sea Battle of Port Arthur</i> in Plovdiv.....	308
In the City Under the Tepes.....	314
Chapter Ten.....	324
Re-enacting the Unification: The Key to Unriddling Noble's Ilinden "Cinematograms"	
One of the Oldest Continuously Inhabited Cities in the World.....	326
The Five Insurgent Films.....	330
The Time the Action Took Place.....	333
The Location Where the Action Took Place.....	335
Doubts: Well-founded or Unfounded.....	343
Film Historians Have the Floor.....	348
Reconstructed Actuality: the Pathé Genre.....	351
The Assassination of the Serbian Royal Family.....	353

Turkish Atrocities in Macedonia.....	355
The Silence of the Catalogues.....	357
Was a Feature Film Made in Bulgaria in 1903?.....	359
The “Golden Key” to Charles Noble’s Inner Self.....	363
Chapter Eleven.....	367
Back in Sofia (July to August 1904): Screenings and Cinemas	
The Arrival.....	367
The Bulgaria Hotel.....	368
Far East War Pictures at the Military Club.....	370
The Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) Cinematographed.....	374
The Last Picture Show.....	379
Filming Near Sofia.....	381
The Spectacular Military Parade of Sofia’s Garrison.....	387
Chapter Twelve.....	393
February 1905: The New Charles Urban Trading Co., Ltd.	
Catalogue	
New Edition – Old Films.....	394
The Surprises in the New Catalogue.....	397
The Bottom Line.....	400
Index of Proper Names.....	406
Film Titles Index.....	413
Contents of Volume Two.....	420

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CHAPTER ONE

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY ...

Bulgaria has existed as a sovereign and officially recognized state (having the same name and occupying the same territories) since 681. Conquered by Ottoman Turks at the end of the fourteenth century, the country stopped functioning as a social and political entity for almost five hundred years, and its territory became part of the Exalted Ottoman State (historically known in Western Europe as the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Empire, or simply Turkey). However, Bulgarian people stayed in their homes, their place of origin, the lands they had inhabited for more than a thousand years. Even though, under the tyranny of the conquerors – who felt alien in not only their way of life, but also their language and religion (Muslim) – the Bulgarians managed to preserve their traditions, Slavic language, and Christian faith, and lived to see the day their kingdom was restored after the Russo-Turkish War (1877–8) by virtue of the preliminary (initial) peace treaty, signed in the village of San Stefano (near Istanbul) on February 19, 1878.¹ Nowadays, that day – actually March 3 in the Gregorian Calendar – is celebrated by the country's citizens as a national holiday – the Liberation Day.

The provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano, which delimited the boundaries of the new “autonomous tributary principality” – temporarily, yet matching as closely as possible the borders of the Bulgarian ethnicity – were soon revised at the Congress of Berlin. After deliberating for exactly a month, that diplomatic forum of authorized representatives of the Great Powers (the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria-Hungary, France, Italy,

¹ All the events mentioned in the book that took place in the Balkans (including Bulgaria) are dated according to the calendar currently used in the country – the Julian Calendar (the so-called Old Style – OS), which was in force until March 31, 1916; whereas the dates related to events in the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and the United States (including dates mentioned in periodicals from those countries) are in the Gregorian Calendar (the so-called New Style – NS). The difference between the two calendars in the nineteenth century was twelve days, and in the twentieth century thirteen.

and Russia) and Turkey ended its work on July 13, 1878 (NS) by signing the Treaty of Berlin, which divided the newly “liberated Balkan region” inhabited by a predominantly Bulgarian population (as stated in the official Turkish records) into five parts: the Vassal Principality of Bulgaria, the Autonomous Province of Eastern Rumelia, the lands within the territory retained by Turkey (Macedonia, Eastern and Western/Aegean Thrace), Northern Dobruja (awarded to Romania), and Pomoravie (given to Serbia).



Map of Southeastern Europe after the Congress of Berlin (1878)

It was a real slap in the face for the Bulgarians, who had just tasted freedom, but they learned their lesson. Therefore, the more alert of them continued the struggle by setting up committees, publishing newspapers, and writing unification programmes. In general, they started preparing themselves for a revolt, having realized that freedom would not come without a price. As early as October 5, 1878 the Kresna–Razlog Uprising broke out – a desperate and abortive protest against the unfair (according to Bulgarians) decisions of the Congress of Berlin.

The Unification – the union of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia into one single state – took place on September 6, 1885. However, that daring political act, carried out against the will of the Great

Powers, affected neither Macedonia nor Adrianople Thrace, which remained under the Sultan's rule. Thus, on October 23, 1893, in the hall of residence of Sts. Cyril and Methodius Bulgarian Men's High School in Thessaloniki (1880–1913) (within the borders of Turkey at that time), six young educated Bulgarians – Damyan Gruev, Dr. Hristo Tatarchev, Ivan Hadzhinikolov, Hristo Batandzhiev, Petar Pop-Arsov, and Andon Dimitrov – laid the foundation of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO). In the course of time, the organization changed its name several times. In 1896 it became Bulgarian Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committees (BMARC), whose member (according to Art. 3 of the statute) “can be any Bulgarian, independent of gender,” having the goal (Art. 1) “to secure full political autonomy for the Macedonia and Adrianople regions”²; in 1902, the name was changed to the Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (SMARO); at the Rila Congress in 1905, from “secret” it became “internal” (IMARO – this abbreviation is used by most modern historians), and, in 1919, the organization split into the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) and the ITRO (Internal Thracian Revolutionary Organization).

What was meant by “secret” hardly needs detailed explanation. The meaning of “internal” is also clear – the organization was created by those Bulgarians who continued living “within” the borders of the Ottoman Empire. That was another reason why its headquarters remained in Thessaloniki during its existence, in spite of some of its leaders' intentions to relocate it periodically, and its representatives in Sofia (the capital of Bulgaria) were called “external.” The following were some of the most prominent figures and leaders of the IMARO (members of the Central Committee [CC]) throughout the years: Damyan (Dame) Gruev (1871–1906), Georgi (Gotse) Delchev (1872–1903) – “the gem of Macedonia,”³ as Andon Lazov Yanev-Kyoseto called him in his memoirs – Yane Sandanski (1872–1915), Georgi (Gyorche) Petrov (1865–1921), Ivan Garvanov (1869–1907), Petar (Pere) Toshev (1865–1912), Hristo Chernopeev (1868–1915), Dimo Hadzhidimov, Krastyo Asenov, Aleksandar Protogerov, Todor Aleksandrov, and Ivan (Vanche) Mihaylov.

² The Statute of BMARC, August 15, 1898, <http://www.anamnesis.info/node/715>.

³ I. Burilkova, and Tsocho Bilyarski (eds.), *Македония в пламъци (Освободителните борби на българите от Македония в спомени на дейци на Вътрешната македоно-одринска революционна организация)* [*Macedonia in Flames (Bulgarians' Liberation Fighting in Macedonia in IMARO Activists' Memoirs)*] (Sofia: Sineva Publishing House, 2003), 47.

Refugees from Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace also founded organizations in Bulgaria in the early 1890s. “Over twenty-five thousand of the seventy thousand inhabitants of Sofia are Macedonians,” the *London Daily News*⁴ wrote at the beginning of 1903. By “Macedonians” the newspaper meant immigrants from the geographical region of Macedonia (in 1900 the population of Sofia was 67,789 people, in 1906 81,921). Those (youth, student, women’s, charitable) societies, unions, committees, clubs, parties, and brotherhoods gathered at the First Macedonian Congress held March 19–28, 1895. They united and established their common governing body as the Macedonian Committee (MC). Trayko Kitanchev was elected its first president. However, he died of a heart attack on August 1, 1895 and in that very year was succeeded in his position by General Danail Nikolaev (1852–1942), who was elected President not of the MC, however, but the SMC (Supreme Macedonian Committee) during the Second Macedonian Congress (December 3–16, 1895).



The Bulgarian Men’s High School (1880–1913) in Thessaloniki, where the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) was established on October 23, 1893

⁴ Z. Nikolova (ed.), *Английският печат за Илинденско-Преображенското въстание 1903 г.* [English Press of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising 1903] (Sofia: Macedonian Scientific Institute of Sofia, 1998), 35.

On June 17, 1897, seven junior officers from the garrison in Veliko Tarnovo founded a “brotherhood” that soon expanded into a network of brotherships (almost every garrison had one), a secret organization of active Bulgarian Army officers known as BLBs (Bulgarian Liberation Brotherhoods). Those worthy men happened to be “the only force that was able to spearhead and unite the Macedonian-Adrianople movement in Bulgaria.”⁵ Evidence of their growing influence is the fact that, at the beginning of May 1899, a few officers became members of the new board of the SMC, and Lieutenant Boris Petrov Sarafov (1872–1907) was elected president. The brother of the great Bulgarian actor Krastyo Sarafov was actively engaged in making the organization more popular, more united, and stronger. His efforts were rewarded in 1900 when, at the Seventh Congress (held from July 30 to August 5), Thracian immigrants joined the organization. That resulted in changing its name to the Macedonian-Adrianople Organization (MAO). Its governing body was also given a new name – the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee (SMAC). However, what is more important is the fact that the organization consisted almost entirely of military personnel (including senior Bulgarian Army officers) who, “with very few exceptions,”⁶ came from Macedonia only.

Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, there were two powerful (parallel) organizations – the IMARO and the MAO (SMAC). In the beginning, the relations between “centralists” and “supremists”⁷ were normal. What was more, “the military” worked in close collaboration and mutual understanding with the “civilian” leaders of the IMARO. This is shown by the fact that, at the Sixth Macedonian Congress (held May 1–5, 1899), Sarafov was nominated for president and Gotse Delchev and Gyorche Petrov, external representatives of the “secret ones,” were elected full-right members of the SMC. However, disagreements gradually arose between the two structures. It was initially described as “tactical” – the aim of the IMARO was to set up a network of revolutionary committees in each town and village in order to strengthen the internal organization,

⁵ *Алманах на българските национални движения след 1878 г.* [Almanac on Bulgarian National Movements after 1878] (Sofia: Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House [Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Historical Studies], 2005), 161.

⁶ D. Atanasov, *Войводи с нагони* [Voivodi with Shoulder Straps] (Sofia: Macedonia Press, 2003), 52.

⁷ The terms “centralists” and “supremists” referring to members of both organizations came from the names of their governing bodies (committees) – Central (of the first) and Supreme (of the second).

whereas the SMAC preferred “armed bands tactics” based on infiltrating illegal armed bands (*cheti*) in certain (particular) regions in order to oppose the official Turkish authorities. Over the years, the contradictions grew deeper and led to quarrels and squabbles, shoot outs, and bloody clashes that degenerated into fratricide and brutal terror, and were directed against those members who thought differently rather than against the oppressors.

At first, the opposition resulted in changes within the SMAC: the writer Stoyan Mihaylovski (1856–1927) was elected president, and General Ivan Tsonchev (1859–1910) vice-president. Subsequently, it split into two factions (during the Tenth Congress held from July 28 to August 3, 1902). Thus, two committees saw the light of day. The president of the first (sharing IMARO ideas) was Engineer Hristo Stanishev (1864–1952), and its vice-president was Toma Karayovov. The other was led by Mihaylovski and Tsonchev in tandem.

Being as energetic as any Bulgarian officer at that time, General Tsonchev set a course towards immediate preparation for armed struggle, accelerated the liberation processes, and, in spite of the split, in the autumn of 1902 he managed to organize the Gorna Dzhumaya uprising that broke out and spread throughout the Pirin region of Macedonia. The general’s name will be repeatedly mentioned in the book, but, at this point, I shall take the liberty of pointing out that, even though he was appointed “just” vice-president of the SMAC, he was in fact the frontman of the organization, and its real leader.

On the other hand, the organization itself had its own official organ – the newspaper *Reformi* (*Les Reformes*) [*The Reforms*], which appeared on January 9, 1899. Its editor and founder was Andrey Lyapchev who, five years later, was called by the same newspaper “the phylloxera of the Macedonian cause.”⁸ From the beginning of 1900 to the beginning of 1903 the weekly newspaper had the following subtitle: “Organ of the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee.” After the organization split, a separate newspaper appeared (under the same name); however, not a single copy has survived.

Thus, SMAC infighting continued, as did the fight between supremists and the Secret Organization, of which Boris Sarafov suddenly became a supporter. The bone of contention was still the *cheti*, the weapon which General Tsonchev and his fellow fighters preferred. It was the infiltration of those paramilitary forces from Bulgaria into Turkey that worried the IMARO, which “kept” the Bulgarians in Macedonia but would not act. At

⁸ *Reformi*, vol. VI, no. 30 (1904).

the same time, SMAC paramilitaries would raise spirits, give hope, and enjoy a good popularity among their fellow Bulgarians.

A Few Explanations



The seal of the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee (SMAC)

Although the words “Macedonian,” “Thracian,” “Adrianople,” “secret,” “exile,” “supreme,” and “central” appeared in the names of the abovementioned entities, they were all Bulgarian organizations, associations of people who identified themselves as ethnic Bulgarians. Macedonia, Thrace, and Adrianople are geographical regions which belonged for as many as two thousand years to three empires: Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman. The latter (successively) ruled over vast territories of the Balkan Peninsula during that period; except for a few centuries in the Middle Ages, when Macedonia, Thrace, and the Adrianople Region were annexed to the Bulgarian Kingdom (in the ninth to tenth centuries and in the thirteenth century), and when Macedonia became part of the Serbian Kingdom (in the fourteenth century). That was the reason why, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Macedonia, Thrace, and the Adrianople Region were inhabited by a multi-ethnic population. In Macedonia,

in particular, at that time there lived Turks, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, Vlachs,⁹ Gypsies, Armenians, Jews, Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims). Cities and bigger villages were 'multinational', but usually divided into neighbourhoods (quarters) – Turkish, Bulgarian, Greek, etc. However, there were also ethnically "clean" villages: Turkish, Bulgarian, Greek, Vlach, etc.

"I am calling the Christian Macedonians, who speak the same language, Bulgarians, for that is what they call themselves," wrote Frederick Moore in the *Daily Express* on April 16, 1903. "Turks and Albanians born in the province are Macedonians. There is no difference between the Bulgarians on either side of the border, except that one is as free as the English villager and as happy, other than in his suffering for his brother, whereas the other is cowed, humble, and in abject despair, or desperate to the extreme. It is no wonder that Bulgaria opened her gates to the Christian Macedonians and aided and abetted them."¹⁰

All of the IMARO leaders mentioned so far, who are nowadays admired as national heroes in both Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia, graduated from Bulgarian class schools opened in the Ottoman Empire by the Bulgarian Exarchate after its official establishment in 1870 by Sultan Abdul Asis's ferman (1830–76). There they were taught literary Bulgarian. The majority of the revolutionaries worked as teachers at those schools: Damyan Gruev in Monastir (Bitola), Smilevo, and Prilep; Ivan Hadzhinikolov in Voden, Kukush, Lerin, and Thessaloniki; Hristo Batandzhiev at the Bulgarian Men's High School in Thessaloniki, where he was also secretary of the Bulgarian Bishopric; Petar Pop-Arsov in Skopje, Thessaloniki, Veles, Prilep, and Shtip; Andon Dimitrov in Monastir and Thessaloniki, where he taught Turkish at the Bulgarian Men's High School and Bulgarian at the Turkish High School – in 1903 he became principal of the Bulgarian schools in Prilep; Gotse Delchev in Shtip and Bansko; Gyorche Petrov in Shtip, Skopje (the Bulgarian Pedagogical School), Monastir (the Bulgarian Secondary School), and Thessaloniki (the Bulgarian Men's High School); Ivan Garvanov was a physics teacher at the Bulgarian Men's High School in Thessaloniki; Pere

⁹ Descendants of the Romanized ancient population of the Balkan Peninsula (Thracians, Dacians Illyrians), speaking a language similar to Romanian. They were also called Kutsovlachs, Karavlahs, Karakachans, Aromanians, Armani, and Cincari. They were mostly nomadic shepherds who travelled from place to place pasturing their flocks according to the seasons.

¹⁰ Z. Nikolova (ed.), *Англиският печат за Илинденско-Преображенското въстание 1903* [English Press of the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising 1903] (Sofia: Macedonian Scientific Institute of Sofia, 1998), 49–50.

Toshev in Prilep, Skopje, Monastir, and Thessaloniki, where he was also a school inspector; Dimo Hadzhidimov in Dupnitsa; and Doctor Hristo Tatarchev was “just” a doctor at the Bulgarian Men’s High School in Thessaloniki.

The Hectic Holidays of the Tumultuous 1903

The year 1903 was really troublesome. At its very beginning, the revolutionary leaders did not stay too long at the Christmas and New Year’s tables, but dashed off to deal with committee matters. From January 2–4, 1903, “in one of the rooms of the Men’s High School [in Thessaloniki]¹¹”¹² or “in the physics study room of the Thessaloniki High School”¹³ a congress of the IMARO was convoked under the chairmanship of Ivan Garvanov, “President of the Central Committee.”¹⁴ Major issues were discussed, even though many of the leaders of the organization were missing among the delegates: Dame Gruev (exiled in Asia Minor), Gotse Delchev, Gyorche Petrov, and Pere Toshev (one of the creators of the rules for the armed bands); its external representatives at that time Hristo Tatarchev and Hristo Matov, and the armed band commanders (called *voivodi*) Yane Sandanski, Hristo Chernopeev, and Mihail Gerdzhikov. In spite of that, the Thessaloniki Congress adopted important resolutions. The most crucial of them was the plan for a “general and strategic”¹⁵ uprising in Macedonia and the Adrianople Region. But when? – it was not fixed, although there was an idea of staging it on St. George’s Day (the minutes of the “historic congress” state the encouraging, but indefinite and vague, “in the spring” or “in the near future of the present year”¹⁶).

The Bulgarian government also took its own decisions at the beginning of 1903. On January 30 it adopted a decree, pursuant to which the offices

¹¹ All ‘the writer’s notes’ in the present book will be enclosed in square brackets [...]

¹² H. Silyanov, *Освободителните борби на Македония* [*The Liberation Struggles of Macedonia*] (Sofia, 1933), http://www.promacedonia.org/obm1/5_1.html.

¹³ L. Panayotov and Yordan Shopov (eds.), *Илинденско-Преображенското въстание 1903 (Хронология)* [*The Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising in 1903 (Chronology)*] (Sofia: Dr. Petar Beron, 1983), 42.

¹⁴ H. Silyanov, *Освободителните борби на Македония* [*The Liberation Struggles of Macedonia*] (Sofia, 1933), http://www.promacedonia.org/obm1/5_1.html.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

of both SMACs were locked down, their archives were seized by the police, and their members were arrested and exiled to the countryside – Hristo Stanishev and Colonel Anastas Yankov (1860–1906) to Balchik, and General Tsonchev to Dryanovo.¹⁷ Macedonian-Adrianople societies in the country shared the same plight.¹⁸ The “suggestion” for that police action was claimed to have come from the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamsdorff, who was a fierce opponent of the Bulgarian national liberation movement and paid an imperial visit to Sofia in December 1902.

It was the Resurrection of Christ (April 6, according to the Orthodox calendar), but it did not bring the revolutionaries their feast day. Ten days after Easter, the leaders of the Second Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary District convoked the next IMARO congress in the village of Smilevo in the Monastir Region. Delegates from Monastir and the surrounding villages flocked there from April 17–24. Dame Gruev (born in Smilevo), who had already been given amnesty, as well as Boris Sarafov and Dimitar Dechev were the envoys of the Central Committee. In the midst of dramatic sessions, the alarming news came about the Thessaloniki bombings,¹⁹ followed by the terrible news of Gotse Delchev’s death (killed by a Turkish posse on April 21, 1903 near the village of Banitsa, located about 15 km north of the town of Siar – the present-day Serres in Greece).²⁰

Those tense moments had an impact on the way the Smilevo Congress was carried out. Several resolutions were eventually adopted (on April 24) and meticulously recorded in Vasil Chekalarov’s diary (1874–1913): “The districts must be ready for an uprising by the end of May at the latest. The

¹⁷ I. Burilkova and Tsocho Bilyarski (eds.), *От София до Костур (Спомени) [From Sofia to Kostur (Memoirs)]* (Sofia: Sineva, 2003), 75.

¹⁸ *Алманах на българските национални движения след 1878 г. [Almanac on Bulgarian National Movements after 1878]* (Sofia: Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House [Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Historical Studies], 2005), 163–4.

¹⁹ A series of terrorist acts, such as the Ottoman Bank fire, the explosion aboard the French vessel *Guadalquivir*, bombing the Alhambra Open Air Theatre, bombs outside the Noia Café and the Grand Hotel, and blowing up the water and gas pipelines in the city, carried out April 15–17, 1903 in Thessaloniki by a group of students of the local Bulgarian Men’s High School, most of whom died during or immediately after the actions.

²⁰ *Илинденско-Преображенското въстание от 1903 г. Военна подготовка и провеждане [The Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising in 1903. Military Preparation and Execution]* (Sofia: Military Publishing House, 1992), 72.

representative of the General Staff is to set the date of the uprising in view of the above circumstances.”²¹



December 1902 – Russian Foreign Minister Count Vladimir Nikolaevich Lambsdorff in Sofia

At the beginning of May, Bulgaria was shaken by a few days' cabinet crisis, after which an “interim administration” was appointed. The government led by Doctor Stoyan Danev was replaced by that of General Racho Petrov (1861–1942), who was considered to be personally close to Prince Ferdinand I (1861–1948), and had already served once as Prime Minister in 1901 (this time, however, he returned to the post for a longer period, from May 6, 1903 to October 22, 1906). In fact, the cabinet was formed by the People's Liberal Party, founded by Stefan Stambolov, which is the reason why some historians call it the “Second Stambolov Government.” This political crisis also had its impact on the events that followed.

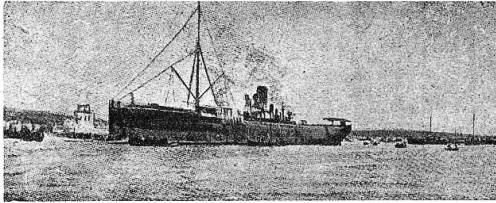
And they were more than turbulent! The outbreak of Turkish repression after the Thessaloniki bombings triggered the corresponding response – the *cheti* in Macedonia and the Adrianople Region were mobilized, fighting began (eighty-six battles during the first half of 1903 alone), “reprisals” were carried out, and streams of refugees began to flow into Bulgaria, mostly from Thrace initially.

²¹ V. Chekalarov, *Дневник 1901–1903* c [Diary 1901–1903], edited by Iva Burilkova and Tsocho Bilyarski (Sofia: Sineva, 2001), 229.

Албумъ „Македония“

1903 год.

СОЛУНСКИТЪ АТЕНТАТИ



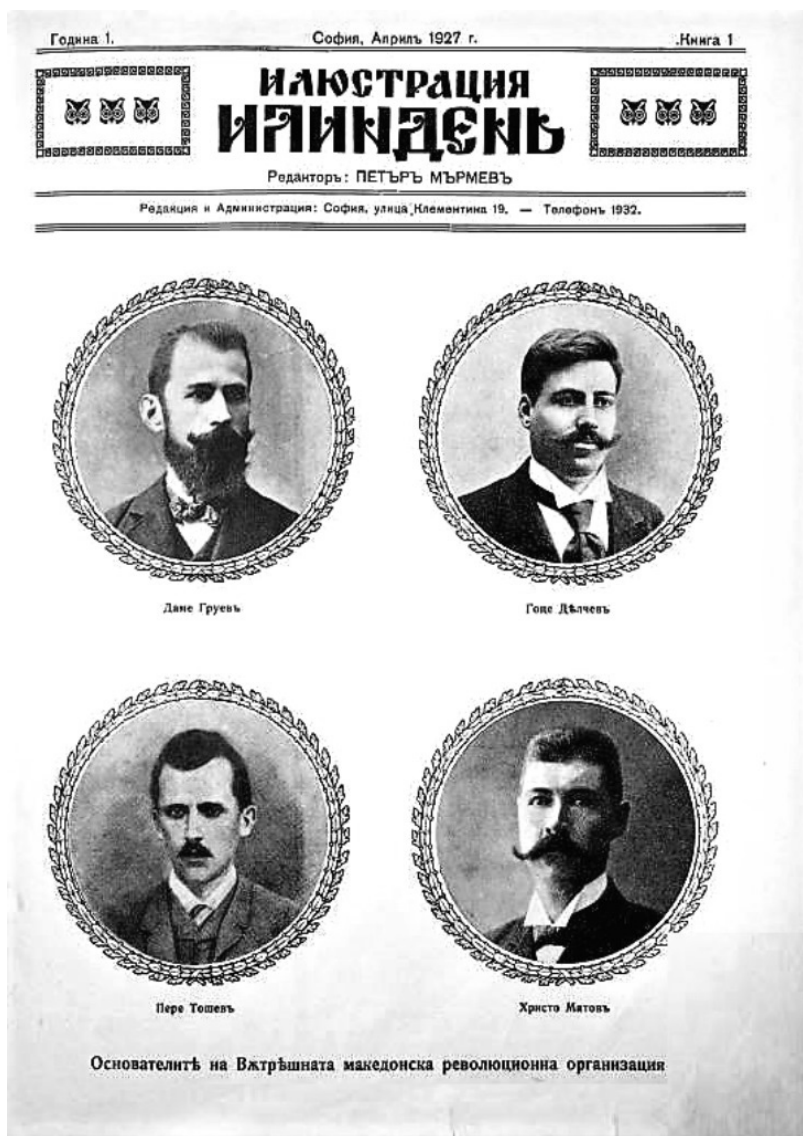
105



106

105. Параходътъ „Гвадилквивиръ“ — Vapeur „Gvadilkvivir“ 106. Отоманската Банка
въ гр. Солунъ — Banque Ottomane de Salonique

A page from *Macedonia Album-Almanac*, illustrated with photographs of the French vessel *Guadalquivir* and the surviving façade of the Ottoman Bank



The IMARO leaders

On and June 28, 29 (St. Peter's Day), and 30, the Congress of the Adrianople Revolutionary District was held in the Petrova Niva area (in the foothills of the Strandzha mountain). A day after it ended, on July 1, 1903, part of the general staff of the Second Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary District (Monastir) met near the village of Buf (in the Monastir Region). Dame Gruev and Boris Sarafov were also there. It was decided to launch the uprising on July 20. The Central Committee in Thessaloniki and the Exile Office (EO) in Sofia were notified of the *voivodi*'s will. A ciphered message was sent to all regional committees, and two weeks later similar letters were written, as well as a short appeal to the people,²² which was supposed to be read on the appointed day.

"Due to the rapid course of the events in Macedonia and the risk that the preparations for the uprising in the Adrianople Revolutionary District might be uncovered,"²³ its "main governing body" met on July 19 in the village of Megalovo (Turkish, both now and then), and decided officially to launch the uprising in that region on August 5, before August 6. That closed the preparations. The Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising started, named after the two Christian holidays that marked its beginning, on June 20 (Ilinden – Prophet Elijah's day) in Macedonia and August 6 (the Transfiguration of Jesus) in the lands between Adrianople and Istanbul.

²² L. Panayotov and Yordan Shopov (eds.), *Илинденско-Преображенското въстание 1903 (Хронология)* [*The Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising in 1903 (Chronology)*] (Sofia: Dr. Petar Beron, 1983), 74.

²³ *Ibid.*, 79.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ILINDEN–PREOBRAZHENIE UPRISING (THE SUMMER OF 1903)

The Beginning and the End of The Epic Struggle

On July 20, 1903, at dusk, in a clearing at the Bigla mountain rising over the village of Smilevo (at that time Turkish, but now in the Republic of Macedonia), the members of the General Staff of the Monastir Revolutionary District, Dame Gruev, Boris Sarafov and Anastas Lozanchev (1870–1945), met with members of the *cheti* and peasants from the neighbouring villages. The flag of the General Staff was consecrated, and a signal was given for the uprising to begin. The Ilinden Uprising was large scale only in the Monastir Region, where all districts rose up simultaneously. Thus, the greatest success was achieved there – for a few days, they liberated the mountain villages in the *kazi* (districts) of Monastir, Lerin (where the famous St. Elijah Monastery is located), Kostur, Ohrid, Prilep, and Kicevo. A few villages (Neveska, Klisura, Smilevo) and a town, Krushovo (also known as Krushevo), were taken under control.

On July 21 the rebels took over the *hüküma* (the town council building), severed telegraph lines, and took all registers and tax documents out of the building and burned them. While the bells of the churches were ringing over the liberated town, a provisional government was formed. It comprised representatives of the three Christian communities – Bulgarian, Greek, and Vlach. The political entity that was proclaimed under the name of the Krushevo Republic existed for only ten days.



The document announcing the beginning of the Ilinden Uprising



Съединенитѣ кочушкини чети на войводитѣ: Василъ Чекаларовъ, Иванъ Поповъ, Пандо Кляшевъ, Никола Анареевъ (Алаи-бей) и Манолъ Розовъ, сѣдѣть президиането на гр. Кисура

The united *cheti* that took control of the village of Klisura

MACEDONIAN CRISIS.

GENERAL RISING IMMINENT.

OVER 12,000 INSURGENTS IN ARMS.

Sofia, Monday.

Refugees coming into Bulgaria from Malko Tirnovo state that on August 19th, 20th, and 21st, the Turkish garrison fired upon the Bulgarian part of the town with the object of creating an impression that a revolutionary attack was in progress. On August 21st, the Prefect of the town summoned the Bulgarian notables, and endeavoured to force them to sign a petition addressed to the Governor of Losengrad, stating that the insurgents had fired upon their houses. The notables declined to sign such a document. The first man who had courage enough to refuse was hanged on the following day.

Nine hundred refugees from Malko Tirnovo and the surrounding villages are now at Urumko, across the Bulgarian frontier.

A private despatch received at the frontier town of Rila states that a great number of insurgents, divided into small parties, are crossing into Macedonia. The Turkish troops on the frontier maintain an incessant fire from ambuscades. The insurgents avoid fighting.

The proclamation of a general rising in Northern Macedonia is imminent. The Macedonian leaders assert that 2,000 men have crossed the frontier during the past ten days. They state that General Zontcheff and Colonel Jankoff are now in Macedonia; and that the insurgents under arms in Macedonia and Adrianople number between 12,000 and 15,000. It is expected that a general insurrection will be proclaimed this week.—Press Association Foreign Special.

One of the thousands of British newspaper reports dedicated to the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising (September 1903)

There were also bloody clashes with the Turks in the regions that had not risen up massively, such as Yenidje-Vardar (the Lower Vardar River area), Boymitsa, Goumenissa near Kocani, and Kratovo.

The rebel actions in the Adrianople Region of Thrace started on August 6. The Black Sea towns of Vasiliko (Tsarevo) and Ahtopol (both now Bulgarian), as well as several villages around the Strandzha mountain, were liberated and the Strandzha Republic was proclaimed (it existed for only twenty days).

On September 14 (the Holy Cross Day – the Elevation of the Holy Cross), the Bulgarians in almost the entire Serres Revolutionary District (the town of Serres being its centre) also rebelled. Even though they did not proclaim a liberated territory in the region, historians describe their operations as an uprising in the full sense of the word, calling it the Holy Cross Day Uprising. On the eve of the insurrection, a *voivodi*'s council was summoned, during which the old opponents Yane Sandanski (leader of the Melnik Revolutionary District of the IMARO) and General Ivan Tsonchev (SMAC) were reconciled, shaking hands and embracing each other. The result of the truce was that “supremist” *cheti*, which were led by Colonel Anastas Yankov and Captain Yordan Stoyanov (1869–1910), took part in the battles together with Sandanski's supporters.

In the end, the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising (badly planned and poorly organized) was violently suppressed when nearly three hundred thousand regular troops were sent against the slaves who had dared to break their chains. The rebels faced the modern armaments and artillery of the Turkish Army with their old rifles, worthless pistols, knives, axes, and scythes. All the time, “civilized Europe” was dawdling, gripped by the drowsiness allegedly typical of the Orient, calling it, in diplomatic terms, “the conflicting interests of the Great Powers in the Balkans.”

In spite of that, the rebels, among whom were women, children, and old people, fought with unprecedented heroism and self-sacrifice, performing countless acts of legendary courage. The outcome was pitiful, however. “Of course, nothing special was done,” was how Anastas Lozanchev summarized the situation, clear-headedly. “No miracles were performed, but none had been expected anyway, because we could not crush the Turkish Empire, nor did we intend to. But on the whole, what had been planned happened.”¹

¹ I. Burilkova, and Tsocho Bilyarski (eds.), *Македония в пламъци (Освободителните борби на българите от Македония в спомени на дейци на Вътрешната македоно-одринска революционна организация)* [*Macedonia in Flames (Bulgarians' Liberation Fighting in Macedonia in IMARO activists' Memoirs)*] (Sofia: Sineva Publishing House, 2003), 107.



The insurgents' flag with the words "For Macedonia! For Adrianople!" on it

In spite of their bravery, heroism, and selflessness, the rebels gradually ran out of vigour. Turkey took that into consideration and carried out a clever diplomatic demarche in August, announcing that the bloodshed would cease if the Great Powers forced Bulgaria to stop supporting the insurrection. Slow, long, and fruitless negotiations followed.