

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

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By

Peter Ivanov Kardjilov

Translated from Bulgarian by Ivelina Petrova

Cambridge
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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE HISTORY OF THE FILMS THAT HAVE PRESERVED HISTORY

1903: Where and When Did Noble Shoot His Films?

№ 1161: Lovely pictures of the batteries' activities near Samokov

‘We have been informed from Samokov,’ on 20 October 1903, the *Vecherna Poshta* announced in its article ‘Minister of War on a Tour of Inspection’, ‘that Minister of War Colonel Savov arrived on the 14th accompanied by his staff, consisting of Major Nerezov and Major Stoyanov, Cavalry Captain Ganchev, three officers of the retinue of HRH the Prince, Colonel Vazov, the personal aide-de-camp of the Minister of War, Captain Chervenyakov [Chervenakov], Lieutenant Colonel Radulov’s squadron and the correspondent of the English illustrated newspaper *Black and White*, Mr. Noble. On the 15th, the Minister of War inspected the mountain battery and asked the soldiers about their lives in the barracks, the food, the clothes and their military spirit. After the inspection, an alert signal was given and the soldiers soon had their guns ready for fighting. A short drill followed and Lieutenant Colonel Karahordiev was ordered to attack Dospay Hill with his three batteries. The guns were placed on the hill shortly after that and opened fire. On their way back, the batteries marched before the Minister of War, who saluted them with “excellent”, praised them for their orderly manner and, on behalf of HRH the Prince, thanked them for their good service ending with the words “**Long live our Lord – Hurrah**”. With his cinematograph, Mr. Noble, took lovely pictures of the batteries’ activities, in particular, of the alert. In the evening, the Minister of War threw a dinner party for all officers in order to show his satisfaction with the Samokov battery. As for the soldiers, he ordered a holiday leave to be given to the soldiers on the 16th.’¹

По инспекционната обиколка на военния министър.

Отъ Самоковъ ни съобщава, че на 14 т. м., претегна въ военния министър г-нъ полковникъ Савовъ, придруженъ отъ свитата си, състояща отъ майоритъ Нерезовъ и Степановъ, ротмистръ Гавчевъ тримата отъ свитата на Н. Ц. В. Княза, полковникъ Визовъ, личния адютантъ на военния министър капитанъ Червеняковъ, ескадрона на подполковникъ Радуловъ и кореспондента на австрийския илюстриранъ вѣстникъ „Black and white“ г. Noble. На 15 того, г. военния министъръ направилъ инспекционенъ прѣгледъ на казартруещото таиъ планинско отдѣление, при което с рвангналъ войницитѣ за живота имъ въ казармитѣ, храната, обмѣното и, подробно измѣрвалъ тѣхния войнствено духъ. Следъ прѣгледа, по трѣтата, въ едно едно време войницитѣ съзновѣтъ си били готови за бой, и като се напознано едно малко учение, дадена била заподѣ на подполковника Карабормеъ да нападне, и да атакува Дюсоевския баиръ отъ свититѣ три батареи. Топарекѣ били покачени въ едно време на баира и отворили рѣсье. На вращащо батареитѣ минали перемонилеъ маршъ, подравени отъ военния министъръ съ „отлично“, похвалилъ войницитѣ за тѣхното стройно държанне, поблагодарилъ отъ страна на Н. Ц. В. Княза за добрата имъ служба и завършилъ съ думитѣ „Да живѣе нашия Господаръ — ура“.

Г. Noble съ кинематографически апаратъ, снелъ много хубави картини отъ дѣйствието на батареитѣ, особено отъ трѣтата.

Вечерта военния министъръ е далъ вечеря на всички офицери, въ знакъ на своето задоволство отъ Самоковската войска, а на войницитѣ заповѣдалъ да се даде пазлъ почивка на 16, като празникъ.

Those few lines cannot have impressed Sofians at that time. However, today they are of great value for film history researchers. Because they are the earliest (known so far) direct evidence of filmmaking in Bulgaria. They were found and mentioned for the first time by Kostadin Kostov.² However, the full version of the article had been unpublished for a long time, and it was the only 1903 Bulgarian press publication ‘uttering’ (twice, besides) Mr. Noble’s name in connection with some actual filmmaking he had carried out in Bulgaria. It not only informed about the name of the cameraman, who had filmed ‘the batteries’ activities’, but also mentioned his occupation, ‘correspondent’, and even his nationality, English. It sounds paradoxical, but the Sofia newspaper, the *Vecherna Poshta*, gave information about some ‘lovely pictures’, which Mr. Noble had taken near Samokov (Bulgaria), 18 days before the specialized London magazine, *The Music Hall and Theatre Review*, wrote the following: ‘Another operator has gone to Bulgaria...’³ And 19 days before the British press, represented by *The Era*, announced for the first time the name of the anonymous until that time ‘another operator’, who finally turned out to be Mr. C. Rider Noble⁴...

It also turns out that the newcomer was the cinematographer, who had made (in October and November 1903) the earliest series of living pictures in Bulgaria. Thanks to him, the age of regular filmmaking commenced in this country. Besides, his ‘cinematograms’ were the first ‘animated pictures’ of Bulgarian lands shown abroad – at the Alhambra Theatre in London in January 1904 (which, in present-day terms, equals BBC prime time broadcast).

The quoted text is invaluable not only because it pointed out the exact time and place of the film activity – 15 October 1903, Dospey Hill near Samokov (Dospey Mountain is part of the Lakatishka Rila Mountains, the northernmost part of Rila), but also because it named the main characters of the ‘action film’: the then Minister of War, Mihail Savov; his personal aide-de-camp, Captain Ivan Chervenakov (1865–1943); the commander of the 2nd Pioneer Unit, Colonel Georgi Vazov (1860–1934); three officers of Ferdinand I’s retinue – Major Stefan Nerezov (1867–1925), aide-de-camp of ‘HRH the Prince’, Major Aleksy Stoyanov (1868–?) and Cavalry Captain Petar Ganchev (1874–1950); Lieutenant Colonel Radulov and his squadron; soldiers from the 2nd Mountain Artillery Division near Samokov, which was moved to Vratsa in April 1904.⁵



Подполковникъ Михайль П. Савовъ
 Министръ на Войната.

Colonel Mihail Savov, the Minister of War of Bulgaria

The great surprise, however, comes after comparing the unique information provided by the *Vecherna Poshta* and the annotation of the war actuality film *Bulgarian Mountain Infantry in the Balkans* (№ 1161), whose title was included in the section ‘**Macedonia and Bulgaria**’ in *The Forming Supplement № 1* (1904). Its 125 feet showed viewers ‘a troop of Mountain Infantry unloading guns and carriages from pack-horses, assembling and firing same’. The Sofia newspaper also mentioned ‘a mountain battery’, which, however, was not infantry, but artillery – the 2nd Mountain Artillery Division. It was given the ‘alert signal’, the guns of three of its batteries ‘were placed on the [Dospay] hill shortly after that’, where they ‘opened fire’. It is true that the Bulgarian text did not mention ‘pack-horses’, probably because it was a well-known fact that mainly those horses were used by the artillery. The rest is the same... ‘These men are noted for the expeditious manner in which they perform their duties,’ the catalogue of the Charles Urban Trading Company, Ltd. assured its readers. ‘In the evening, the Minister of War threw a dinner party for all officers in order to show his satisfaction with the Samokov battery,’ the *Vecherna Poshta* wrote in Bulgarian, of course.

‘The last section shows a squad of Frontier Patrol descending steep defile,’ the annotation ended⁶, going beyond the limits of the topic. The final scene might have been filmed somewhere else at a different time and later ‘added’ to the first two by means of montage. However, it is also possible that ‘Lieutenant Colonel Radulov’s squadron’, mentioned in the newspaper report, became ‘a squad of Frontier Patrol’. This is quite likely to have happened, because Minister Savov’s retinue included two cavalymen – Lieutenant Colonel Radulov and Cavalry Captain Petar Ganchev, who was both assistant officer at the Army Staff and part of the Life Guard Cavalry Squadron. The military unit, renamed Life Guard Cavalry Squadron in late 1903, was established in 1878. Its task was to guard the Prince’s Palace, to accompany and guard the Head of State (in fact, it was personal escort), to protect the ruler’s integrity (in this sense, the guards were escort and bodyguards), to take part in special ceremonies. Some of those more than 150 young and perfectly-trained men (together with their horses) were part of ‘Lieutenant Colonel Radulov’s squadron’. Their exact number is unknown, but it must have been enough so that the cavalymen could perform in front of the camera operator the dramatic ‘frontier’ scene building up ‘the last section’ of the actuality film, which may turn out to be ‘reenacted’ after all.



Die Offiziere der fürstlichen Leibgardekadron. In der Mitte der Kommandeur, Flügeladjutant Oberst Otto Markow (>).

‘Bulgarian Life Guard Cavalry Squadron Officers, 1903’ (The Vinkhuijzen collection, New York Public Library)

Although both the Bulgarian and the English texts were short, the coincidences in them are so obvious sometimes that they lead to the conclusion that the actuality Charles Rider Noble filmed on 15 October 1903 near Samokov, depicting the activities of the ‘mountain battery’, later became (the entire or part of) *Bulgarian Mountain Infantry in the Balkans*⁷.

№ 1160: Minister of War Mihail Savov, his staff and bodyguard

It is very likely that part of the same film was ‘at the root’ of the 150-foot actuality *H.E. Minister of War, M. Savoff, of Bulgaria, His Staff and Bodyguard* (№ 1160). The place where it was shot was not mentioned in the catalogue. The short description of the ‘picture’ and its title assured that its initial scenes depicted ‘M. Savoff, the Minister of War, cheerfully chatting with his Staff Officers’, ‘His Staff and Bodyguard’. The fact was also confirmed by the Bulgarian press: Colonel Mihail Savov took part in the event (besides, he played the leading part), ‘accompanied by his staff’, his ‘personal aide-de-camp’, Army Staff officers and Life Guard (‘Bodyguard’) Cavalry Squadron officers. The second scene ‘shows a regiment of Bulgarian troops lined up for inspection’. The *Vecherna Poshta* also wrote about an ‘inspection’. According to the English text, the last section depicted ‘the march past of the bodyguard’, and, according to the Bulgarian one, after the Dospey Hill attack, the batteries went back to the barracks marching ‘before the Minister of War who saluted them with “excellent”.’ Mihail Savov praised the soldiers ‘for their orderly manner and, on behalf of HRH the Prince, thanked them for their good service’. He ‘ordered a holiday leave to be given’ to them on the following day... Life Guard Cavalrymen (‘the bodyguard’) must have taken part in the march in question, because they were ‘ceremony professionals’ – ‘a squad of men of fine physique and training, carrying the conviction of high military training’, the authors of the annotation wrote. This ‘picture’ must have been quite impressive, as it was defined as ‘*Special*’ in *The Forming Supplement № 1!*



Officers of the Life Guard Cavalry Squadron – the escort accompanying and guarding the Bulgarian Head of State

Two days before the catalogue was published, however, *The Era* presented (on 2 January 1904) the same film, revealing its contents in detail: ‘The first section shows a fine portrait picture of M. Savoff, and his staff, chatting and smoking. The next picture was secured in the Barracks inclosure [enclosure] at Doubnitsa [Dupnitsa], and depicts the regiment of Bulgarian Troops lined up for inspection, while the Minister of War and his Staff Officers are seen issuing orders to the Commanders. The troops swearing loyalty to their country. The last section shows the march past of the Body Guard, a squad of men of great physique and fine bearing, carrying the conviction of well-drilled soldiers.’⁸ It is obvious that *The Era* described the film in a detailed and different way. Not only because the minister and his staff were ‘chatting’ and ‘smoking’ – within the ‘fine portrait picture’, not only because the last sentence was not changed, but because it turned out that the ‘inspection’ was carried out not on an ordinary military ground in Samokov, but ‘in the Barracks inclosure [enclosure] at Doubnitsa!’ A totally new detail appeared (most unexpectedly) – ‘The troops swearing loyalty to their country’!

Not less surprising is the curious information that Frederic Moore dedicated an entire paragraph of his book, *The Balkan Trail*, to the Samokov ‘mountain squadron’, which the *Vecherna Poshta* had mentioned: ‘The entire Bulgarian Army is in sympathy with the work of the insurgents, and not the least enthusiastic with ‘the cause’ is the little mountain battery at Samakov [Samokov]. It is proud of the short cannon, carried in three parts on the backs of pack-ponies, and it is proud of its proficiency at handling them. The entire battery got out one morning and took us up into the mountains to show us how the guns worked. The Bulgarian Army has been preparing for many years to fight the Turks.’⁹

Moore convinced himself in the proficiency of ‘the little mountain battery’ nearly half a year before Charles Noble. What he wrote shows that the interest in the battery of Minister Mihail Savov, who brought his important retinue and even an English cameraman with himself, was probably not just because of the military inspection. The reason for the visit could be the already mentioned ‘sympathy with the work of the insurgents’, which concerned the Palace, the government and the Supreme Army Command. That benevolent attitude, which often expressed itself in providing actual material support, must have made Colonel Savov **ask ‘the soldiers** about their lives in the barracks, the food, the clothes and **their military spirit’!**?



Bulgarian cavalry uniforms

Reginald Wyon also happened to visit some of the barracks of ‘the mountain batteries stationed in Samakov [Samokov]’ – a few days before Noble. The special correspondent of the *Daily Mail* and *The Sphere* described his stay there in a skilful way in the chapter ‘The Lighter Side’ of his book, *The Balkans from within*. I am going to take the liberty of presenting the entire text here, because I guess Charles Noble had the same experience. ‘Huge bare room,’ Reginald Wyon started his story, ‘two

or three martial pictures on the wall, and sitting round a long table set out for a meal, a score of Bulgarian officers. It is the mess of the mountain batteries stationed in Samakov. Trim, well-set-up young fellows they are, smart in their dark blue double-breasted tunics and black velvet facings, springing smartly to their feet as the Major ushers us into their midst. There are a few other guests, a staff captain, one or two infantrymen and a dragoon subaltern, all tanned to a deep red by the fierce sun and biting wind from the mountains. We are greeted warmly with a hearty handshake and installed at the head of the table, whilst an artillery subaltern remonstrates with his major that he did not warn them.

“He is always doing this,” he remarks apologetically to us in French.

A gigantic gunner, the mess waiter (he must have been 6 feet 6 inches), sets food before us, and when we have eaten our fill and the wine flagons have been more than once emptied, those officers who speak foreign languages congregate around us. There is one battery commandant, a bearded captain, who speaks German, and a subaltern who has studied in Vienna, one who speaks French, and another Italian, whilst the Major puzzles us in English. There were others too trying us in Russian, Hungarian, and other uncouth languages. In this babel of tongues we can scarce hold our own, but we are very happy. A man can travel far before he can meet a more congenial company than the Bulgar[ian] officers.

The French-speaking subaltern sings us a song with a rousing chorus. He has a fine baritone, and gives us “Dio possente” as an encore. Jimmy [most probably, that is Captain Lionel James, *The Times* war correspondent] basely betrays me, and I give them “The Midshipmite,” but my revenge soon comes, and Jimmy must make a speech, impassioned and fiery, and he thunders at the admiring circle sentiments of liberty, and the glory of a soldier’s life. If Jimmy cannot sing, he can make a speech, and, not to be confined to this one kind of entertainment, he gives us an exhibition of the British cavalry sword exercise, amidst a scene of wild enthusiasm, with the sabre of the dragoon.

The Major follows on the mandolin, which he plays really well, and in a series of most eloquent speeches we drink to the health of the King – God bless him – Prince Ferdinand, the Bulgarian and the British armies; even the British correspondents are not forgotten. The mess waiter solemnly presents us with postcards, duly addressed, stamped and postmarked, bearing views of the batteries at drill, which an officer has secretly dispatched to the local post office during dinner, and Jimmy makes a speech in French. Ye gods, how hard to keep one’s face at such a trying moment, when to laugh would be to give the show away. Up gets the table, round after round of vociferous cheering, and before we know

where we are we form part of the ring dancing the “Horo” most vigorously. It is a trying dance, and breathlessly we drop out, whilst these men of iron dance on to a state of frenzy.

“Auld lang syne,” right foot on the table and linked hands (to the astonishment and delight of the Bulgars – they soon caught the melody), and home to our inn, with promises to meet outside the town in the morning.



Colonel Mihail Savov (on the right), the sitting man is Prince Ferdinand I

The tap of drums, hoarse commands and bugle calls awake us next morning. The square below our windows is full of grey-coated infantrymen, two thousand of them, drawn up in quarter columns of companies. We remember our promise to start an hour or two earlier on our long drive to the railway, see the garrison at drill, and be photographed. The sound of singing is coming down the road, the slow, measured, marching song of the Bulgarian Army, and a mountain battery swings up – a few minutes later and the second arrives. Our comrades of last night salute us, and soon the garrison has marched off to await us on the downs outside.

Half an hour later, and our carriage, four horses yoked abreast, is bowling after them. We find the sward a mass of grey, the infantry battalions have piled arms, the artillery have unlimbered. A table covered with a white cloth and spread with every variety of tinned foods, flanked by huge bottles of raki [*rakija* – brandy, most often produced from grapes

or plums], is placed at the side of the road, and here the Major awaits us with a cheery “Good morning.” The trumpeter sounds “the officers’ call,” and from all directions troop the officers of the garrison. A group of artillerymen start the “Horo,” a subaltern leading off, and we eat sardines and quaff raki to the jig of the Bulgarian bagpipes. Meanwhile the Major, an ardent amateur photographer, is arranging his picture. A pile of ammunition boxes are our seats, flanked with a couple of mountain guns, and when we are “arranged” the Major solemnly takes us. Then more breakfast and informal toasts, a few hundred burly soldiers forming a respectful but obviously admiring audience, and we go to our carriage.

“Next spring, may we meet again,” is our last toast. A rumble of ill-suppressed applause shows that the men have heard and understood. A soldier cries “Macedonia,” and a roar of cheering goes up. Hand grips are exchanged, and while with limp arms we enter the carriage, 2,500 men are lining the road. The driver lashes the horses and the Major raises his cap and shouts, “Now!”

Two thousand five hundred deep-chested men respond, and in a state of frenzied intoxication we rise to that magnificent crash of sound. Till the bend of the road hides the scene that roar of farewell cleaves the very skies.

“By Jove! What a grand send-off,” I articulate weakly.

“If there is only war next year,” piously responds Jimmy.’¹⁰



DANCING THE “HORO.”

The military *horo*, with which Reginald Wyon and Jimmy were seen off

The most surprising fact is that the ‘picture’ was shown in Germany under the title *Seine Exzellenz Kriegsminister M. Savoff mit den Stabsoffizieren* (1903). The Charles Urban Trading Company, Ltd. distributed 170 films in Germany. Seven of them (4.1 %) turned out to be made by Charles Noble in Bulgaria in 1903. According to the leading site, *The German Early Cinema Database* (GECDB), which contains information on 45,000 films projected in German cinemas from 1895 to 1920, the name of the company that produced the ‘Bulgarian actuality film’ (‘Produktionsfirma’) was ‘Urban, Charles, Trading; Urban-Smith (s.a. Warwek) {uk} (Großbritannien)’. It was a documentary (‘Nicht-fiktional’), its length was 100 feet (according to *The Forming Supplement № 1*, it was 150 feet), its catalogue number was 1156 (instead of 1160), and it was listed in the website as number 13018. It also turns out that the film was part of a series, titled ‘**Die Revolution in Macedonien**’, that ‘M. Savoff [Savov]’ was part of the cast, and that the source of the information in question was the advertisement in *Kostüme, Kulissen* (№ 977, 1903).¹¹

The above periodical also announced the actuality film (№ 977) *Kavallerie im Gebirge* (№ 7545), whose information in the GECDB was the same as that of *Seine Exzellenz Kriegsminister M. Savoff mit den Stabsoffizieren*. Only Mihail Savov’s name was missing and the length of the film was reduced from 125 to 100 feet. There was also a mistake in the catalogue number – 1154. In spite of all that, it can be said that *Bulgarian Mountain Infantry in the Balkans* (1161) seems to be hiding behind the German title *Kavallerie im Gebirge*¹².

Inspection ‘at the Kyustendil border’

‘The weather in the capital has been bad for two or three days,’ the *Vecherna Poshta* informed its readers on 8 October 1903. ‘It snowed in Vitosha [the city of Sofia is situated at the foot of Vitosha Mountain] two days ago, and, today, it is snowing in the capital for the first time.’¹³ At 6 pm, on the same day, Mihail Savov reported to Prince Ferdinand. The topic of their conversation is unknown. However, the colonel is known to have left for Kyustendil on the following day.¹⁴ ‘Kustendil [Kyustendil] is the chief Bulgarian town and military post on the South-western frontier,’ John M. MacDonald wrote for *The Daily News* in May 1903. ‘Here, the frontier force entrusted with the duty of preventing the transportation of rifles and ammunition into Macedonia has its headquarters.’¹⁵



A view of Kyustendil (Aug. 1903)

Located 100 km away from Sofia, 35 km away from the town of Dupnitsa and 15 km away from the then Bulgarian-Turkish frontier, Kyustendil (whose population was 13,000 people at that time, but is 40,000 nowadays) was the centre of the 1st Frontier Regiment. The 13th Rila Infantry Regiment, two infantry reserve divisions with a couple of batteries and the entire 2nd Cavalry Regiment were sent there after the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising had started. Colonel Vasil Kutinchev (1859–1941) was appointed as a commander of those military units. He established his headquarters in Dupnitsa, but constantly travelled all over the demarcation area taking the necessary measures for its protection. The relations between Sofia and the Sublime Porte had worsened, so his aim was to keep the peace at the border, to avoid ‘surprises’, and to stop any possible invasion of regular Turkish troops or irregular Turkish military forces...

That is why, as early as in mid-August, more than 1,200 soldiers were quartered in Kyustendil. According to *The Times*¹⁶, a month later, the number of the reservists there rose to 5,000, which made both the Prince and Colonel Savov be very interested in the situation in the region. The Minister of War even began a tour of inspection in Kyustendil, where he arrived on 9 October, in the evening. Early on the following day, he ‘reviewed all types of troops’¹⁷. ‘In connection with the inspection of our frontier troops, carried out by the Minister of War, we have received the following message from Kyustendil dated 10 October,’ the *Vecherna Poshta* clarified the situation. ‘Last night at 7 [9 October, 19.00], the

Minister of War, Colonel Savov, accompanied by the commander of the frontier forces, Colonel Kutinchev, arrived in the town from Sofia. The Minister was met in front of the Dragoman Hotel by guard of honour playing music, led by the commander of the local regiment, Colonel Minkov [Dimitar Minkov was Commander of the 13th Rila Infantry Regiment from 12 January 1903 to 10 January 1904].

‘Today [10 October],’ the article continued, ‘as early as at 6 am, the 13th Rila Regiment, the 1st Reserve Regiment, 3 cavalry squadrons and two batteries, together with a pioneer unit, drew up in a line near the town at the Bosilegradsko Road ready for the troop review by the Minister of War. Mr. Savov arrived at 7.30 pm, greeted the brave soldiers and, after the command ‘at ease’, walked among the soldiers asking them questions [...] At that time, Colonel Kutinchev gathered the two regiment commanders and the senior officers and assigned them the manoeuvre task: to take Konyavski Pass by storm. The march started at 9 o’clock and will continue until the evening. The soldiers’ tidiness and their readiness for war were the most noticeable things.’¹⁸

At that point, the correspondent of the *Vecherna Poshta* interrupted his story. However, the *Nov Vek* informed about the ‘manoeuvres, which took place in Kyustendil on the 10th and the 11th’¹⁹... During the following two days, 12 and 13 October, the press seemed to have lost sight of Minister Savov, who re-appeared on the 14th in Samokov, where, on the 15th, he inspected the mountain division residing there and held ‘a small military drill’ – the attack on Dospey Hill, covered by Charles Noble... ‘Last night [16 October], Minister of War, Colonel Savov, returned here [in Sofia] from the frontier,’ the *Nov Vek* announced on 17 October, ‘where he went 10 or 12 days ago in order to inspect the troops.’²⁰ ‘Minister of War, Colonel Savov, came back yesterday [16 October] from Samokov,’ the *Vecherna Poshta* confirmed.²¹ Thus, the ‘tour of inspection’ was over and the circle is closed...

Charles Noble might have joined the Minister of War’s ‘retinue’ at the very beginning of the high-level inspection, when Colonel Savov left Sofia early on 9 October 1903. The Englishman might have attended Kyustendil manoeuvres, carried out on 10 and 11 October. He might have even filmed them – the opportunity of ‘having at their disposal’ all kinds of troops gathered in the same place is not given to every cameraman or every day: ‘two batteries’, ‘three cavalry squadrons’, infantry and ‘a pioneer unit’ (civil engineering troops)... Besides, they were sent to operate in an exceptionally picturesque (especially at that time of the year) border area – Konyavska Mountain. The above-mentioned Konyavski Pass, which is on the road connecting Radomir and Kyustendil (44 km), is there. At that

time, the minister, who was coming from Sofia, could get to Radomir only by train. There was a road from there to Kyustendil – most often carriages were used (the railway line between Radomir and Kyustendil was opened in the summer of 1909).



Soldiers and officers from the Thirteenth Infantry Regiment of Rila located near Kyustendil after the uprising broke out (The Sphere, October 1903)

Reginald Wyon provided the proof how that had happened in his book *The Balkans from within*: ‘The next batch I saw was when on my way to Koestendil [Kyustendil], a border town. I had travelled down by train as far as Radomir, and it chanced that the Minister of Justice [Nikola Genadiev (1868–1923) was Minister of Justice from 6 May 1903 to 30 January 1904. He was a Bulgarian journalist and politician of the People’s Liberal Party] was on board, in a royal saloon carriage. When he heard that I was on the train he had me introduced, and I travelled most luxuriously in the saloon, drinking coffee and smoking excellent cigarettes in truly Oriental fashion. At Radomir we took carriages – it is very pleasant travelling in carriages in Bulgaria; four horses are yoked abreast and go at a tremendous pace – and about halfway to Koestendil we met a band of about forty men, disarmed and under escort of two gendarmes. They were resting at a wayside han.’²² In the same book, but obviously in a sudden ‘gush of tenderness’, the Englishman called the border town ‘pretty little Koestendil’²³.



Dimitar Dechev and Boris Sarafov’s *cheta* in front of Marko Sekulichki’s house in Kyustendil on the eve of Ilinden Uprising (1903)

Unfortunately, the toponym ‘Kyustendil’ was not mentioned in any of the CUTC catalogues! On the other hand, (according to *The Charles Urban Trading Co., Ltd. Catalogue, February 1905*) ‘the officers of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment’ were the main actors in the actuality *Bulgarian Cavalry Descending the Mountain Side and Forging a Mountain Stream* (№ 1365), most probably filmed in the summer of 1904. Formed in 1883, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment’s patron from 1897 was Prince Ferdinand I’s first wife – Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma (1870–1899), Princess-

consort of Bulgaria. Even though the military unit, whose commander from May 1902 to July 1904 was Lieutenant Colonel Stoyan Danailov, had its permanent residence in the town of Lom, the cavalrymen spent the entire summer of 1903 in Kyustendil, in order to strengthen the south-western frontier.

№ 1159: A pastoral scene in a military environment

The toponym 'Kyustendil' is not mentioned in any of the catalogues of the CUTC, but the name of the village of 'Crapits [Krapets]', which at that time (1903–1904) was said to belong to 'the Province of Kyustendil', appeared in *The Forming Supplement № 1*. Situated at the upstream part of the Struma River, the village existed as early as during the Roman Occupation of the Balkans (from the 1st to the 4th century). Its name derives from the Slavic word 'krapa' meaning 'a cave formation'. There are lots of caves near the village. During the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, Krapets was a gathering point where some of the *cheti* were formed and trained. They were also armed there before being sent to the border. After the Second World War, the village was included in the Province of Pernik. The inhabitants of Krapets were forcibly removed from their homes in 1953, when their lands were flooded so that Studena Dam could be constructed.

There is no information how Charles Rider Noble arrived in that small village. I guess it was not easy for him to get there because the road was terrible. This is proved by the following few lines, titled 'Krapets-Dupnitsa Road': 'We have been informed from the village of Krapets that this road is in such bad condition that it is impossible to travel along it; there are no bridges which makes crossing the river improbable. Our contributor is asking the Ministry of Roads and Communications to take interest in this road and repair it, so that people could have easier connections.'²⁴

The Briton not only went along that road, which was 'impossible to travel along'; he not only visited the village, but he also left it with a 75-foot film, *A Tobacco Farm at Crapits* (№1159). 'This shows,' its annotation informed, 'the tobacco leaf strung in long garlands being shaken during the process of drying by the farmer or grower and his sons, while the other members of the family are all occupied in spinning carding wool, &e., convincing in itself that the Bulgarian peasant makes the best use of his or her time.'²⁵



Harvesting and stringing tobacco leaves

The following has already been mentioned, but I am going to repeat it: in Bulgaria, Charles Noble filmed not only insurgent and revolutionary, military and patriotic, or refugee actualities, but also films that can certainly be described as ethnographic. Because they tried to show the lifestyle, customs, traditions, culture, architecture, and family relations; because, by means of light, they depicted holiday ceremonies, national dances, musical instruments, some trade subtleties, farming tools, means of transport, even humble Bulgarian clothing... And there are many ethnographic elements in the ‘pastoral scene’, called *A Tobacco Farm at Crapits*, even though its length is only 23 m (1 min and 15 sec). It is notable that the few lines of the annotation (on top of that, written by a foreigner) described very accurately not only part of the ‘tobacco processing cycle’ but also the patriarchal society in the Bulgarian village at that time, the division of labour (as well as the attitude towards it), the family hierarchy, and the idyllic social and cultural environment...

№ 1158: A typical street in a typical town

Kyustendil, Dupnitsa and Samokov are Bulgarian towns situated near the border with the Ottoman Empire, which was then few kilometres away from Musala Peak (2,925 m) – the highest peak both in the Rila Mountains and in the entire Balkan Peninsula. That is way, throughout the centuries, they grew mostly as industrial and commercial centres, where ideas (including revolutionary ones), people, goods (often smuggled), and arms were exchanged. Being border settlements, they were of strategic importance – various types of military units carrying out different tasks were positioned there. Thus, those towns became garrison centres.

Vasil Kutinchev established his headquarters in Dupnitsa (nowadays, its population is 40,000 people) in the summer of 1903. He was then a colonel, but, on 1 January 1904 became Major General, commander of the

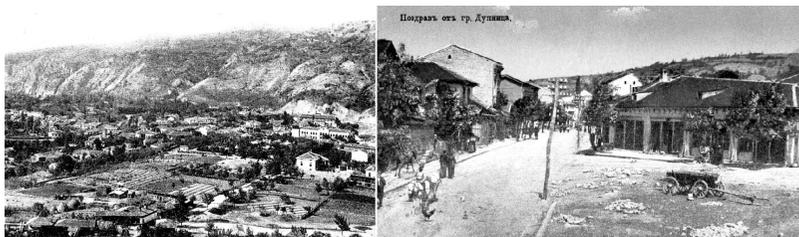
military units at the Bulgarian-Turkish frontier between Deve Hill (near Kyustendil) and Demir Kapia (near Samokov), whose aim was to strengthen its guarding and protection. The 7th Rila Infantry Division was formed in 1904. Its headquarters was also in Dupnitsa (the HQ of its 1st Brigade was in Kyustendil, and that of the Second was in Samokov). A military hospital was built in Dupnitsa shortly after that - one of the oldest in Bulgaria.

Even *The Times* got wind of the ‘militarization’ of the town, located in the north-western foothills of Rila Mountain. Their correspondent sent the following telegram from Dupnitsa to London on 20 September 1903: ‘About 2,000 Reservists have arrived here. The men, who are all from 32 to 37 years of age, are robust and vigorous, and present an admirable appearance.’²⁶

The reason why the robust men arrived there became clear on the next day, 21 September, when the head of the First Border Area, Colonel Kutinchev, declared martial law, issuing Order № 7 in Dupnitsa. On 26 September, Notice № 4926 of Dupnitsa municipal administration went up all over town saying the following: ‘Under a ministerial order, the Provinces of Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, Karnobat, Peshtera, Kazal-Agach [Elhovo] and Burgas are to be controlled by the military units that will guard the frontier and maintain the order in the settlements in these provinces. Action, as described in the provisional martial law regulations published in the *State Gazette* № 122 of 1900, will be taken against infringers from these provinces, as well as any *cheti*.’ ‘Apart from the above,’ the mayor of Dupnitsa, Hristo Yankov (1862–1922), informed the citizens, ‘the following should be taken into account [...]: 3) It is the military commanders and their assistants’ duty to ensure order and peace in the settlements under their control and not to allow any gatherings of armed or unarmed *cheti*. Any loitering and loafing people, no matter what their social status is, have to be sent into the interior of the Principality; 7) After receiving the present order, the commandants must immediately give their instructions for maintaining the order and peace in their areas and, within a five-day period, **intern in the interior of the Principality all armed and unarmed *cheti***, as well as all loitering people, whom administrative and police authorities are obliged to designate.’

That is why it was quite possible that Dupnitsa was one of the garrisons, whose barracks Colonel Mihail Savov visited during his tour of inspection. On 10 and 11 October, he was in Kyustendil, and on 14 and 15 - in Samokov. Dupnitsa is situated in the middle of the shortest road between those two towns, so the Minister of War must have spent there the two in-between days unaccounted for by the press – 12 and 13

October. It is quite possible that Charles Noble was among his travelling companions and that he filmed the scene of the actuality *H.E. Minister of War, M. Savoff, of Bulgaria, His Staff and Bodyguard*, which only *The Era* described: ‘The next picture was secured in the Barracks inclosure [enclosure] at **Doubnitsa**, and depicts the regiment of Bulgarian Troops lined up for inspection, while the Minister of War and his Staff Officers are seen issuing orders to the Commanders. The troops swearing loyalty to their country.’



The town of Dupnitsa in the early 20th century

Macedonian revolutionaries were also most active in Kyustendil, Dupnitsa and Samokov. IMARO frontier posts were set up there. They were used to transfer guns, cartridges, money, newspapers, books, and propaganda. Volunteers were recruited there and *cheta* were formed and infiltrated in Macedonia, the Rhodope Mountains and even in the Adrianople Region. Gotse Delchev himself organized the first posts in Dupnitsa (in 1896) and Kyustendil (in 1895), where he established his headquarters (from 1895 to 1903). Post commanders (originally in Kyustendil, until 1902, that was Nikola Zografov²⁷, and Nikola Maleshevski was in charge of Dupnitsa) built warehouses, collected arms and equipment, sewed uniforms, supplied gunpowder and dynamite, and made ammunition and bombs. IMARO bombs were made also in Samokov and in the Kyustendil village of Sablyar. Post commanders were even responsible for taking photographs – each *cheta* member was photographed by photographers close to the organization before being sent to Macedonia. One of them was Anastas Novev, a relative of Marko Sekulichki, who was head of the Kyustendil frontier post for many years (1902–1905).²⁸

‘Kustendil [Kyustendil] is not a favourite place of refuge,’ Frederic Moore wrote in his book, *The Balkan Trail*, ‘and there were few fugitives here; but the town suits the purposes of the insurgents, and rightly has a bad name among the Turks for breeding “brigands”. The mountains in this district are wooded and rugged, and an infinitely larger and more vigilant