

Peter Kardjilov<sup>1</sup>  
The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria

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## **CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND: THE ACTIVITIES OF SERBIAN OWNERS OF MOBILE CINEMATOGRAPHS AND FILM PRODUCERS IN BULGARIA DURING THE PERIOD OF EARLY CINEMA (1897–1914)**

### ***Abstract***

*The connections between cinematographic activities in Bulgaria and Serbia, during the period of early cinema (1897–1914), have been little studied and are thus relatively unknown even to cinema historians. It is known, for example, that the visit of King Aleksandar I Obrenovic to Sofia in 1897 produced one of the first cinema newsreels shot in Belgrade; that Konstantin Drandarsky, the “first Serbian owner of a cinematograph”, acquired his projection apparatus in Russe (Bulgaria); that John Mackenzie, a Scot, in the spring of 1905, filmed in both Serbia and Bulgaria, during the “Expedition of the Urban Bioscope” through the Balkan Peninsula... However, it is not known that most of the travelling cinematographs who visited the Principality of Bulgaria between 1897 and 1900 came from Serbia. Almost nothing is known about the projections of the “First Serbian Cinematographer”, Stojan Nanic, in Bulgaria in 1901; or the visit by the travelling Electro Bioscope of the Lifka brothers in Sofia, in 1904; or the secret identity of the Serb, Joseph Djordjic, director of the “Modern Theatre” in Sofia; or his compatriot, Aleksandar A. Gavrilovic, founder and director of the “First Bulgarian cinematographic syndicate for the supply and distribution of films (1914)... The Sofia periodical press refers also to the activities of the “first Serbian film producer”, Svetozar Botoric, who in 1912 was the “main representative for Bulgaria and Serbia of Pathé Frères-Paris cinematic pictures and apparatus”. Little is known also about the activities of Nikola Spasic and his company “Nikola Spasic and Co.–Sofia” (1912–1914); or the initiatives of Louis Pitrolf de Beery who in 1913–1915 was the “main representative” of Pathé Frères in Bulgaria; or his “Serbian connection” in the birth of the idea for the creation of the first Bulgarian feature film...*

1 kardjilov@sofia.bg

**Key words**

*history of early cinema, cinema advertising, film magazines, first film screenings, first films – chronicles and documentaries, Balkan Peninsula, Serbia, Bulgaria*

**The history of a transborder cinema crime**

On August 28, 1897 Johann Fischer arrives in Russe (or Rustchuk), a Bulgarian town on the River Danube – he is a 45-year-old orchestra conductor, citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who registers at the local Central Hotel, where he shows “several performances” with his “cinematograph”<sup>2</sup>. Ten days later, Herr Fischer has to hurry back to Vienna. This is the reason to borrow 160 lev from a local man called Tvrutko Drandarov, with whom he had already met, leaving in storage all his possessions at his shop. At the end of September, Johann Fischer returns to Russe only to find that Drandarov had left town taking along all the six cases left in storage containing the above mentioned “cinematograph”, one Edison phonograph and musical instruments (violin and trichter) – total value 4000 golden lev<sup>3</sup>.

Johann Fischer lodges a complaint with the court, an inquest is initiated, interrogations get started and it turns out that the thief Tvrutko Drandarov – a “monogram printer” by profession, about 40 years of age, is tall, with black hair and most probably – “a Serbian from Austria”<sup>4</sup>. It also turns out that after taking Fischer’s property, Drandarov “has left for the unknown” and his tracks are lost. At the beginning of 1899, it finally transpires that the culprit lives in neighbouring Serbia – using the names Lala Dudarsky or Konstantin Drandarsky<sup>5</sup>. As a result of the persistent efforts on the part of the Bulgarian authorities – court, police and the diplomatic service, Drandarsky is finally located, detained by the police department in Nish and in February 1901 extradited to Austria-Hungary – Zemun (Knežević 1992: 132, 133, 251, 252). During all this time – from 1897 till 1900, he puts the cinematograph stolen in Russe to good use, organizing numerous screenings in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These very activities give ground to prof. Dejan Kosanovic to characterize him as “The first Serbian owner of a cinematograph”

2 ЦДА, ф. 315к, оп. 1, а. е. 25, л. 24, 25

3 ЦДА, ф. 315к, оп. 1, а. е. 25, л. 20, 21

4 Пак там, л. 22, 22г, 23, 23г

5 Пак там, л. 1–3, 3г, 14–18г, 19, 19г

(Kosanović 2000: 58, 59). This is how a criminal act gets recorded in the cinema history books of both Bulgaria and Serbia!

In November 1900, Tvrutko Drandarov sells the notorious cinematograph for 750 dinar to Stojan Nanic of Zaicar. This is how a onetime illusionist turns into a travelling picture-showman and starts to entertain both children and adults with his “First Serbian Cinematograph”. During one of his visits to Belgrade (at the end of 1900) the local press indentifies the origin of the stolen “machine”, which turns out to be a “Lumiere” (Knežević 1992: 178). With his cinematograph Stojan Nanic organizes screenings in Bulgaria too (Kosanović 2000: 155). This only proves the principle that the criminal (in this case – the object of the crime) always returns to the scene of the crime...

### The tours of Stojan Nanic

On March 31, 1901 (Holy Saturday) a short message in “Plovdiv” newspaper tells the readers that “A CINEMATOGRAPH arrived in town, which gives performances at the pub opposite the Holy Virgin Church. Plovdiv’s audiences must take the chance to see beautiful things. This cinematograph is an improved model and the pictures are a pleasure to watch. There is also a phonograph, which plays some tunes”<sup>6</sup>.

Twenty days later an announcement ,in Sofia’s “Bulgarian Commercial Newspaper” reads: “For several days now, in Alabinska Street, opposite the National Bank, there is a show of quite an interesting performance, with a cinematograph arriving from Paris, which works with no hitches. The cinematograph has 42 interesting live pictures in 3 series. 1<sup>st</sup> range – 50 stotinki, 2<sup>nd</sup> range – 30 stotinki, admission fee for students and soldiers – 20 stotinki. The performances are very amusing and enjoyable and are more than recommended”<sup>7</sup>. The moving cinema remains on this location for more than two weeks, which the same paper reports again on May 2: “The cinematograph on 60 Alabinska Street was restocked with a new picture series. Screenings in Sofia are scheduled for only 4-5 days more before closing”<sup>8</sup>.

6 Хроника. – Пловдив (Пловдив), № 1102, 31.III.1901, с. 2

7 *Кинематограф*. Дневни новини. – Български търговски вестник, г. IX, № 84, 20.IV.1901, с. 4.

8 *Кинематограф*. Дневни новини. – Български търговски вестник, г. IX, № 93, 2.V.1901, с. 3.

According to prof. Kosanovic, the travelling cinematograph of Stojan Nanic was in Bulgaria for a period in 1900–1901 (Kosanović 1995: 156–157; Kosanović 2000: 155). Dr. Srdjan Knezevic referring to archive documents<sup>9</sup> even succeeds to point out precisely one of the visits of this cinema-traveller to our country – in April 1901, stressing that after May 20<sup>th</sup> Nanic was already back to Kragujevac (Knežević 1992: 181). This information gives me a reason to assume that the screenings in Plovdiv – the second largest Bulgarian city and in the capital Sofia, were not those of “Paris cinematograph arrived”, but Stojan Nanic’s, who decided to make a trip to Bulgaria during the Easter holidays. This hypothesis also pinpoints the Edison’s phonograph – stolen from Fischer in Russe, and later becoming Nanic’s property, which impressed the people of Plovdiv by playing “some tunes”.

### From Belgrade to Sofia

**Stojan Nanic** is the first Serbian who crossed the border of Serbia and Bulgaria with his cinematograph, but he is not the first owner of a travelling cinema to do it. Dozens of his colleagues made the trip from Belgrade to Sofia – the cities were connected by railway since 1888. Among them are the names of some popular Austro-Hungarian itinerant exhibitors...

**Franz/Ferenz Joseph Oeser** (1 July 1866, Pilsen, Bohemia – 30 June 1936, Opava, Silesia) crowned even in his lifetime as “The King of the Cinematograph”. The only testimony mentioning Bulgaria as his destination is in a memoir (Geni) – which travelled to our times thanks to Arthur Geni (son of the itinerant projectionist Louis Geni). But the Serbian cinema historians have managed to follow the “advertising” trail which Oeser leaves over a great part of the Balkan Peninsula. According to dr. Knezevic, he reached Belgrade (Knežević 1992: 150–151), according prof. Kosanovic he visited Rumania (Kosanović 2000: 67). In February 1899, the showman performed in Zemun (a district of the Serbian capital today, but at the time in Austro-Hungary) and Belgrade (Knežević 1992: 150–151). In May he was “spotted” in Celje (now in Slovenia), then his track is lost until 6 November, after which he is “captured” paying a fee of 5 gulden to the authorities in Ljubljana for permission to use a part of the local park Tivoli (Knežević 1992: 152). It is right in this mysterious time span (on 19 June 1899) that “Plovdivski Glas” (*Plovdiv Voice*) newspaper advises the local citizenship: “In the King Simeon garden there will be a show

9 Архив Србије, Фонд: Краљевско Српско Министарство просвете и црквених послова – Просветно Одељење, 6695/1901 (ф. XVII-45-1961)

tonight: I – The famous American Biograph with live pictures; II – Songs and dance by the three Violeta sisters and III – Vilkis and Buldik (negro comedians). A well stacked orchestra accompanies the songs and plays between (*sic*) the intermissions. Starts at 9 ½”<sup>10</sup>. It is the very name of the screening device “**famous American Biograph**” that gave me the grounds to ascribe the shows mentioned to Ferenz Oeser (Kardjilov 2009: 55–60).

**Mor Benkö**, who in October 1899 provoked the citizens of Sofia with “gingery pictures only for adult men”<sup>11</sup> and in November was on a tour to Russe, where the local newspaper “Slavianin” (Slavic) announced him as a “professor”, “showing some performances in Austria, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria”<sup>12</sup>;

**František/Franz Proházka** – his name failed to appear in the Bulgarian press, but it is mentioned in memoirs (Gendov 1943: 1; Gendov 1949: 8, 11). The scarce data about this Czech person (born ca. 1845 in the small town of Sluhy, Central Bohemia, not far from Prague) the cinema history owes most of all to his grandson Rudi/Radivoje Proházka (born in 1899), who was interviewed in 1961 by Stefan Jovičić, on the staff of the Yugoslav Kinoteka in Belgrade, where the recorded tape is preserved to this day. I managed to acquire this priceless recording thanks to my colleagues Radoslav Zelenovic (long-term director of the institution) and Aleksandar Saša Erdeljanovic (head of the archive department). It is heard very clearly how Rudi Proházka distinctly pronounces the toponym Bulgaria, placing our country at the head of a line of names of countries visited beyond any doubt by the Bioscope of his grandfather, covering Greece, Turkey (Istanbul and Skopje are expressly mentioned), “entire Czech land”, Austria, Serbia (Belgrade but also the most nondescript corners of the country) and Russia (Odessa). The only thing that remains unclear is when he came to our country and the concrete names of the places he visited.

One of the **Lifka Brothers** – **Aleksandar** (20 May 1880, Brasov, Austro-Hungary – 12 November 1952, Subotica, Yugoslavia) or **Karel**, in April and May 1904 visited with their “Elektro-bioskopsko gledališče” Ljubljana<sup>13</sup> (Traven 1985: 81; Kosanović 1985: 179), in July and August Belgrade (Slijepčević 1982: 24), finally established their “Electro-Bioscope” in September in Sofia,

10 Театр. – Пловдивски глас (Пловдив), № 23, 19.VI.1899, с. 3

11 Хроника. – Нов век, г. I, № 97, 25.X.1899, с. 3

12 Славянин (Русе), г. XIV, № 57, 27.XI.1899, с. 3

13 Slovenski narod (Ljubljana), № 75, 2.IV.1904

where tens of films were being screened for one month<sup>14</sup>, among them “The murder of King Aleksandar and Queen Draga” (“The murder of the royal family of Serbia”)<sup>15</sup>, previously shown in the summer of 1903 in Plovdiv (only two months after its premier), unfortunately by an itinerant merchant of celluloid dreams who even now remains anonymous<sup>16</sup>.

**Antal Janzen** – “the German from Voivodina”, a real “star” in his craft, made a series of cinema screenings in the Sofia Circus-theater “Bulgaria”, in October 1904<sup>17</sup>. Later he appealed at the Belgrade hotel “Takovo” (Slijepčević 1982: 25) – one of the rare exceptions in the steady traffic of films from Belgrade to Sofia. The wanderings of Antal Janzen end after World War One, when he settles in Belgrade, opening a glass shop on Terasia Square (Slijepčević 1982: 25).

In the first half of April 1905, “**Delonov’s Orfeum**” – a travelling troupe visited Belgrade. Their “variety program” also included a showing of “cinematographic live pictures” (Slijepčević 1982: 26). About ten days later, “The fantastic theatre” of **Delon and Benita** arrived in Sofia, and between 23<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of April amazed Sofia citizens with spiritual sessions, telepathic experiments and magic, but also cinematograph “pictures”, screened from an “American Bioscope”<sup>18</sup>.

14 Дневник, г. III, № 809, 4.IX.1904, с. 4; № 810, 5.IX.1904, с. 4; № 811, 6.IX.1904, с. 4; № 812, 7.IX.1904, с. 4; № 814, 9.IX.1904, с. 4; № 815, 10.IX.1904, с. 4; № 817, 12.IX.1904, с. 4; № 818, 13.IX.1904, с. 4; № 819, 14.IX.1904, с. 4; № 820, 15.IX.1904, с. 4; № 821, 16.IX.1904, с. 4; Вечерна поща, г. V, № 1138, 24.IX.1904, с. 4; № 1140, 26.IX.1904, с. 4; № 1142, 29.IX.1904, с. 4; № 1144, 1.X.1904, с. 4

15 Български търговски вестник, г. XII, № 198, 10.IX.1904, с. 4; № 201, 14.IX.1904, с. 4; № 202, 16.IX.1904, с. 4; № 203, 17.IX.1904, с. 4

16 Хроника. *Приятно развлечение*. – Пловдивска поща (Пловдив), г. I, № 7, 10.VIII.1903, с. 3

17 *Кинематограф в столицата*. – Вечерна поща, г. V, № 1144, 1.X.1904, с. 3; *Кинематограф*. – Ден, г. I, № 295, 1.X.1904, с. 3; *Кинематографа на г. Янзек*. – Ден, г. I, № 296, 2.X.1904, с. 3; *Кинематограф*. – Вечерна поща, г. V, № 1158, 15.X.1904, с. 3; *Цирк „България“*. – Вечерна поща, г. V, № 1163, 20.X.1904, с. 3

18 *Фантастическо представление*. – Дневник, г. IV, № 1020, 22.IV.1905, с. 2; Хроника. *Фантастически театър*. – Ден, г. II, № 476, 22.IV.1905, с. 3; Хроника. *Г-н Делонне за жен. бл. д-во*. – Вечерна поща, г. VI, № 1333, 25.IV.1905, с. 3; *Представленията на г. Делоне*. – Дневник, г. IV, № 1022, 25.IV.1905, с. 2; Хроника. *Фантастически театър с благотворителна цел*. – Ден, г. II, № 480, 26.IV.1905, с. 3; Хроника. *Г-н Делонне за Ж. Бл. Д-во*. – Вечерна поща, г. VI, № 1334, 26.IV.1905, с. 3; *Последно представление на г. Делоне*. – Дневник, г. IV, № 1023, 26.IV.1905, с. 2

From Belgrade again someone invited **Geza Engelman** to arrive to Sofia<sup>19</sup>. In October 1905, in “Slavianska Beseda” Social Club hall, he made a series of “bioscope performances”, one of which was “for men only”<sup>20</sup>...

Not only films were exchanged between the two capitals, but technical equipment too. In 1907, the Bulgarian Vladimir Petkov (1875–1921) “buys a new screening machine from Belgrade” (Bakalov 2010: 15). In January 1908, a Sofia optical shop offers the latest American invention “Teatrophone” – the most precise cinematograph connected to a gramophone”, and the owner – Jacques Chpetter advertises himself as a “representative for Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Turkey”<sup>21</sup>.

### West European press accounts

In the summer of 1911, the Paris newspaper *Cine-Journal* informs that the owners of Sofia cinema “Modern Theatre” Aladar Ottai-Oesterreicher and Sigmund Szilagyi are “exclusive representatives” (“Concessionnaires Exclusifs”) and “general representatives” of the companies Ambrosio, Aquila, Éclair, Itala, Raleigh & Robert for Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia<sup>22</sup>.

Identical part-page adverts appear with enviable persistency in 25 more issues of the magazine (in a period of all of 7 months!) through 4/17 February 1912, when the last text appears reduced to four lines<sup>23</sup>. In 1912 “Modern Theatre” opens its office branch “for film sell and rent” in Belgrade<sup>24</sup>...

In the summer of 1910, “Der Kinematograph” magazine (Düsseldorf) sends to the Balkans their young reporter Alfred Rosenthal, with the task to write an article on the status of the cinematograph in the Orient. In it the author states his impressions from Constantinople (Istanbul), Edirne (Odrin, Adrianople), Plovdiv, Sofia and Belgrade. “In the Serbian capital” – Rosenthal notes briefly – “there are only two small cinema theatres, which means that for an enterprising spirit the doors are widely open” (Rosenthal 1910: 89).

19 Хроника. – Лични. Мир, г. XI, № 1664, 29.IX.1905, с. 3

20 По вкуса на публиката. – Дневник, г. IV, № 1201, 29.X.1905, с. 2; Скандалиозна експлоатация. – Вечерна поща (Шангова), г. VI, № 1514, 30.X.1905, с. 3

21 Балканска трибуна, г. II, № 387, 11.I.1908, с. 3

22 Cine-Journal, г. IV, № 152, 22.VII.1911, p. 34

23 Cine-Journal, г. V, № 182, 17.II.1912, p. 41

24 Хроника. България. Акц. д-во „Модерен театър”–София. – Банков преглед (Revue de Banque), г. VI, № 8, 28.V.–10.VI.1914, с. 185; Нашите кинотеатри. – Нашето кино, № 30, 26.XII.1924, с. 4

## The Serbian celluloid invasion of Sofia

At the beginning of 1912, the Serbian cinema owner, distributor and producer Svetozar Botoric (1857–1916) announces in *Sofia Evening Post* newspaper that he is “chief representative for Bulgaria and Serbia of cinematographic pictures and machines “Pathé Frères – Paris”, and that “all matters in the Bulgarian Kingdom” will be dealt with in his trust by Sofia architect Naum Torbov”<sup>25</sup>.

In September 1913, the Belgrade merchant Mr. Testa arrives in Sofia as “part of the company Nikola Spasic and Co., representative for the Balkan Peninsula of Gaumont, Éclair and Savoia. Mr. Testa arrived in order to improve the repertoire of the cinematograph and to check the conditions for successful work”<sup>26</sup>. Nikola Spasic – “the famous Belgrade merchant and millionaire” (called The Serbian Nobel), appears in person in November most probably to put the office in order. “As his representative in the capital –the *Cinema Journal* informs again – Mr. Spasic leaves the attractive and energetic merchant Aleksandar Gavrilovic”<sup>27</sup>. It is an interesting detail that in 1914 the same Gavrilovic is elected Director of the First Bulgarian Cinematographic Syndicate for supply and distribution of films (Mindov 1965: 9)! The Serbian Joseph Djordjic is no less enigmatic – but he occupied the top post of “Modern Theatre” in Sofia at the beginning of 1914 (Gendov 1943: 2; Gendov 1949: 48–51).

The relations between The Kingdom of Serbia and The Principality of Bulgaria and especially the visit of the twenty-year-old King Aleksandar I Obrenovic (Alexander I of Serbia, 1876–1903) in Sofia in February 1897 is the reason the French Andre Carre to film the chronicle “The Return of the King from Sofia” in Belgrade.

The next Serbian Monarch – Peter I Karadorđević (1844–1921), visits Russia in March 1910, and then, travelling through Romania and Bulgaria, reaches Turkey. The same summer the Danish cinema company “Nordisk” announces the production of the chronicle “The Journey of the Serbian King in Turkey”, along with the reportage reels “Sofia” and “Bulgarian Village Life” in *Cine-*

25 Софийска вечерна поща, г. I, № 47, 8.II.1912, с. 2; № 49, 10.II.1912, с. 2; № 51, 12.II.1912, с. 2; № 53, 14.II.1912, с. 2; № 55, 16.II.1912, с. 2; № 56, 17.II.1912, с. 2; № 59, 20.II.1912, с. 2; № 61, 22.II.1912, с. 2; № 64, 24.II.1912, с. 2; № 66, 26.II.1912, с. 2

26 *Кинематографическо тържество*. – Киножурнал, г. I, № 6, 1913, с. 3

27 *Хроника. Лични*. – Киножурнал, г. I, № 14, 1913, с. 2

*Journal*<sup>28</sup>. It is quite possible that all of the three films were filmed by the same cameraman of “Nordisk” who accompanied the Serbian King.

At the beginning of 1912, the Bulgarian Crown Heir Prince Boris Turnovsky (the future King Boris III) turned 18 and his coming of age was celebrated nationally. The Serbian Prince Aleksandar (the future King Aleksandar I Karađorđević/Alexander I of Yugoslavia, 1888–1934) arrived in Sofia as an official guest. The event attracted the attention not only of the “Modern Theatre” cinema, which created a two-part film on the occasion, but also of the Serbian producers Pera, Boža and Svetolik Savić. They hired the cameraman Louis Pitrolf De Beery who filmed a reportage reel of 120 meters titled “The Celebrations in Sofia”, which premiered on February 6, 1912 in Belgrade (most probably at the Savić Brothers’ “Modern Bioscope” cinema). “These films must be recorded – says the Serbian cinema historian Bosa Slijepčević – in the history of our cinema as the first films created by a Serbian film producer abroad” (Slijepčević 1982: 155).

### “The Serbian lead” on the road to the first Bulgarian feature film

In February 1912, in both newspaper “Sofia Evening Post” and magazine “Theatre” a surprising announcement appears: “The big Paris cinematographic company Pathé Frères has asked, through their Sofia representative Mr Naum Torbov, architect, the National Poet Ivan Vazov to give his nice works to be filmed on cinematographic stock. The poet embraced the idea with admiration and gave his consent for the reproduction of his plays “To the Abyss”, “Borislav”, “Under the Yoke”, etc. The production of the plays will be carried out next summer by home and foreign artists. By this Bulgaria will present its art visually to the whole world. We congratulate the poet on his decision and the French company for their excellent idea”<sup>29</sup>.

The news was confirmed by the identical content of more than 70 newspaper part-page adverts printed in “Sofia Evening Post” in the period 9 March<sup>30</sup> – 14 June 1912<sup>31</sup>, confirming that “Pathé Frères in Bulgaria, represented by architect N. Torbov, Sofia... supplies program which include the original and famous

28 *Nouveautés cinématographiques*. – Cine-Journal, г. III, № 92, 28.V.1910, p. 28

29 Театр и искусство. *Произведенията на Вазова и кинематографа*. – Софийска вечерна поща, г. I, № 53, 14.II.1912, с. 3; *Произведенията на Вазова и кинематографа*. – Театър, г. I, № 23–24, 1912, с. 20

30 Софийска вечерна поща, г. I, № 78, 9.III.1912, с. 2

31 Софийска вечерна поща, г. I, № 170, 14.VI.1912, с. 3

pictures of Pathé Frères, as well as the pictures monopolized by the same house from the most famous Italian, Copenhagen, Russian, American and other artists, and in the nearest future the pictures made by Bulgarian actresses and actors of Pathé Frères, presenting Bulgarian life and history by the National Poet Ivan Vazov – “To the Abyss”, “Borislav”, “Under the Yoke”, etc.”

It turned out that the ambitions of both Pathé Frères (locally) and architect Naum Torbov (1880–1952) exceeded the narrow frame of the film distribution, the sale of “cinematographic appliances” and the assembly of “whole installations” by quite a lot, so that they could step into “the twilight zone” of film production! But it’s hardly the French and the Bulgarian architect backing this aggressively ambitious program. The project should have been the idea of Svetozar Botic. Apart from building the cinema theatre in Belgrade (“Grand Bioscop”), Botic is “the first Serbian film producer” to organize and finance, in 1911, the production of the two earliest Serbian (and Balkan) feature films: “Život i dela besmrtnog vožda Karađorđa” (“The Life and Deeds of the Immortal Vožd Karađorđe”) and “Ulrich Celjski I Vladislav Hunjadi”, engaging as their director of photography Louis Pitrolf De Beery – artistic pseudonym used by the Hungarian cinematographer Lajoš Zoltan Arpad Pitrolf.

“In The Balkan War – the forefather of Bulgarian cinema Vasil Gendov (1891–1970) declares on 25 March 1960 at the presidium of the Bulgarian Filmmakers Union – only De Beery starting filming again and in 1913 invited me and Nevena Milosheva to participate. This was the beginning of the production of the film “Lilyana”. But I declined...”<sup>32</sup>.

Being familiar with this information, one would not be surprised by the three short announcements with almost identical content published at the end of February and the beginning of March 1914 pertaining to the forthcoming screen adaptation of “Under the Yoke”. “The cinematographic company “Pathé Frères” – “Pryaporets” (*Banner*) newspaper asserts, has negotiated with Mr. Vazov to present as a cinematographic picture his drama “Under the Yoke”<sup>33</sup>. “The popular and famous house for cinematographic films “Pathé Frères” has asked for permission Mr. Vazov to film in pictures his drama “Under the Yoke” – joins in “Narodni Prava” (*People’s Rights*)<sup>34</sup> newspaper, backed

32 ЦДА, ф. 486, оп. 2, а. е. 1, л. 75 (Протокол № 5, 25.ІІІ.1960, с. 3)

33 „Под игото” на кинематографическата сцена. – Пряпорец, г., № 47, 28.ІІ.1914, с. 3

34 „Под игото” на кинематографическата сцена. – Народни права, г. ХХІV, № 48, 28.ІІ.1914, с.

by “Dnevnik” (*Diary*) with: “A cinematographic society has entered an agreement with Mr. Vazov to produce as a film his drama “Under the Yoke” in English translation”<sup>35</sup>.

Although sparingly announced in Sofia’s papers, the idea of filming the drama in which the patriarch of Bulgarian literature Ivan Vazov (1850–1921) has turned his novel of the same name, is quite daring for its time. That is why I assume that it is the brainchild of Louis Pitrolf De Beery. In two of the announcements it is strongly underlined that the initiative belongs to “the cinematographic company “Pathé Frères” or “the popular and famous house for cinematographic films “Pathé Frères”, which means – to their representative in Bulgaria. The choice of “Under the Yoke” also points in the direction of the Hungarian. The first Bulgarian novel (published in 1894) is not only a must for the Bulgarian readership, recreating the life and struggle of our people for national independence during the Revival Period, but a kind of historic epic as much as the two feature films shot by De Beery’s camera in Belgrade. It is quite possible that the experience acquired there, making the screen adaptation of similar “legendary” plots relating to the past of Serbia (in the first case) and Hungary (in the second), to have directed his preferences to an identical “script material” in the Bulgarian case too (“Under the Yoke”).

Unfortunately, De Beery did not succeed to produce a feature film in Bulgaria, the way he did twice in Serbia. But, his daring idea provoked, activated, mobilized those willing to make films in our country; it filled them with confidence that their dream could come true... With his very presence in our country, with his professional engagements, with his dignified behaviour and last but not least through the announcement of the intentions of “Pathé Frères”, this alien contributed to the preparation of the fat land on which the first Bulgarian feature film “Bulgarian is Gallant” came to fruition. Produced (surely not by chance) only a couple of months later – in the turbulent summer of 1914!

The “close encounters of the third kind” between Serbs and Bulgarians that followed not only prove the long-lasting relations between the two countries in the specific field of the Seventh Art, but stresses the civilization choice they made for their common European future.

(Translated from the Bulgarian language Harry Anichkin)

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35 „Под игото” в кинематографическа филма. – Дневник, г. XIII, № 4134, 1.III.1914, с. 3

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## BLISKI SUSRETI TREĆE VRSTE: AKTIVNOSTI SRPSKIH VLASNIKA MOBILNIH KINEMATOGRAFA I FILMSKIH PRODUCENATA U BUGARSKOJ TOKOM PERIODA RANOG FILMA (1897–1914)

### *Apstrakt*

*Veze između kinematografske delatnosti u Bugarskoj i one u Srbiji, tokom perioda „ranog filma” (1897-1914), do sada su nedovoljno proučavane, i samim tim ostale relativno nepoznate čak i istoričarima filma. Poznato je, na primer, da je poseta kralja Aleksandra Karađorđevića Prvog gradu Sofiji, 1897. godine, proizvela snimanje prvog filmskog žurnala u Beogradu; da je Konstantin Drandarski (Konstantin Drandarsky) prvi srpski posednik kinematorafa, nabavio svoj projektor u gradu Ruse (Bugarska); da je Džon Mekenzi, Škotlanđanin, u proleće 1905, snimao i u Srbiji i u Bugarskoj tokom „ekpedicije urbanog bioskopa” kroz Balkansko poluostrvo... Međutim, nije poznato to da je većina putujućih kinematografa koji su gostovali u Kneževini Bugarskoj, u periodu između 1897. i 1900, dolazili upravo iz Srbije. Gotovo ništa nije poznato o projekcijama „prvog srpskog kinematografa”, Stojana Nanića u Bugarskoj 1901; ili posetama putujućeg „elektrobioskopa” braće Lifka (Aleksandar, Karl i Rudolf Lifka) u Sofiji, 1904; ili tajnog identiteta Srbina Jozefa Đorđića, direktora Modernog teatra u Sofiji; i njegovog sunarodnika, Aleksandra A. Gavrilovića, osnivača i direktora prvog Bugarskog kinematografskog sindikata za produkciju i distribuciju filmova (1914). Periodična štampa u Sofiji takođe referiše o aktivnostima „prvog srpskog filmskog producenta”, Svetozara Botorića, koji je 1912. godine bio „glavni predstavnik, za Bugarsku i Srbiju, filmova i aparata firme braće Pate (Pathe Frères)”. Malo su poznate aktivnosti Nikole Spasića i njegovog društva „Nikola Spasic and Co.–Sofia” (1912–1914); ili inicijativa Luja Pitrolfa de Berija (Louis Pitrolf de Beery) koji je, u periodu od 1913. do 1915, bio „glavni predstavnik” preduzeća braće Pate u Bugarskoj; takođe je malo poznata njegova „srpska veza”, kad je u pitanju rađanje ideje za stvaranje prvog bugarskog igranog filma...*

### *Ključne reči*

*istorija ranog filma, filmski advertajzing, filmski časopisi, prve filmske projekcije, prvi filmovi – hronike i dokumentarni filmovi, Balkansko poluostrvo, Srbija, Bugarska.*