

THE TOBACCO FORTRESS:

“ASENOVGRAD KREPOST” AND THE POLITICS OF TOBACCO IN INTERWAR BULGARIA

An NCEEER Working Paper by

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Executive Summary

This paper explores the rise and (partial) fall of “Asenovgrad Krepost,” a tobacco cooperative in interwar Bulgaria. It focuses on tobacco production, and to a lesser extent commerce, as well as the broader politics of tobacco in politically tumultuous interwar Bulgaria. While “Asenovgrad Krepost” is the central strand in the narrative, I argue that tobacco was implicated in, and in many senses undergirded, a range of complex political and social struggles that unfolded in the period. Among other players, the Agrarian Party, Bulgarian communists, and Macedonian revolutionary refugee organizations were tied into, funded by, and worked within public and subterranean tobacco worlds.

Significantly, the story unfolds in a period when Bulgarian tobacco was commodified to an unprecedented degree, in reaction to ballooning local and global demand. Since Bulgaria supplied tobacco to the Central Powers during World War I, a lively tobacco trade with Central Europe in the interwar period made tobacco into “Bulgarian Gold”—which ultimately was both a boon and a liability to interwar economic and political stability.

Introduction

On a cool day in April 1922 thousands of people gathered in front of a cluster of tobacco warehouses that huddled at the entrance to the town of Stanimaka (re-named Asenovgrad in 1934). The strains of the Plovdiv military orchestra echoed through the valley, entertaining a variety of guests, from Sofia dignitaries to legions of villagers who gathered in the street between nine and ten that morning. After opening remarks by the Minister of Agriculture, Alexander Obov, the more prominent guests were led into the “salon” of one of the warehouses owned by the hosts of the event, the tobacco cooperative “Asenovgrad Krepost.” There they observed demonstrations of tobacco sorting and packing, a kind of performance for well-chosen spectators as part of the ritualistic celebration of the already ample achievements of “Asenovgrad Krepost.”

Stanimaka was the first stop on the tobacco trail that led from the dense tobacco warehouses and factories of nearby Plovdiv into the rugged Rhodope Mountains, where the soil and climate were ideal for tobacco cultivation. Nestled along the northern slopes of the craggy Rhodope peaks, it was an ideal location for a tobacco growers’ cooperative and processing center that served both the town and its environs as well as adjacent villages. Stanimaka’s proximity to Plovdiv assured a constant exchange, not just of raw and processed tobacco, but also of people, technologies, goods, and ideas, as daily coaches and later buses ran between the town and the much larger metropolis of Plovdiv.

On that morning in 1922, local and visiting dignitaries sampled and admired the high-quality tobaccos and then proceeded down the road along with the leaders of the “Asenovgrad Krepost” and a parade of cooperative members. Coming into town, orchestra and all, the parade crossed an iron bridge and suddenly “the majestic picture of the Stanimaka gorge” opened up before them, topped by cliff-like peaks and the ruins of the Asenovgrad Krepost (Asenovgrad

Fortress). The Asenovgrad Krepost, the namesake of the tobacco cooperative that organized the day's events, was the ruined fortress of the Medieval Slavic Tsar Asen who ruled from 1189-1196, and was best known for both defying and openly battling the Byzantine Empire. In direct reference to Asen, "Asenovgrad Krepost" quite literally claimed it was a "fortress" in which tobacco peasant-growers were protected against the predatory intrigues of speculators, merchants, and other "foreign" interests.

With the ruins of Asen's fortress still in view, the crowd preceded to the north side of town, where it gathered in the yard of the cause of the day's celebration, the soon-to-be-opened cooperative-owned cigarette factory, the first of its kind in interwar Bulgaria. The dedication ceremony was opened with prayers and good wishes by the local Orthodox clergy, a student chorus, and more speeches amidst the "acclamation and applause" of the thousands gathered. Finally guests were ushered into the factory, and with a rush of sound the cutting machines were started, state-of-the-art equipment recently purchased and shipped from Germany. The rest of the afternoon was spent celebrating at the cooperative restaurant and on the public square where food, music, drinks, toasts, dances, and a box of cigarettes for every guest made the event both lively and popular.¹ The fact that an agricultural cooperative was able to build a five-story, state-of-the-art cigarette factory in 1922 was a rather remarkable achievement, one of many that brought "Asenovgrad Krepost" into its own in the 1920s.

In its peak years (1919-1923) "Asenovgrad Krepost" ("AK") was an extraordinary paragon of tobacco-grower entrepreneurship and cooperative achievement. By 1923 "AK" brought together 2,466 members and not only built numerous tobacco processing facilities and a cigarette factory (that employed 1,500 people), but also its own hospital, fire station, restaurant, and two movie theaters. More importantly, "AK"—with the support of the Bulgarian Agrarian

National Union (BANU) that ruled Bulgaria from 1919-1923—beat local “capitalist middlemen” at their own game, conducting direct and highly profitable trade with global partners. High tobacco prices in the immediate post-war years brought remarkable “AK” success, which some criticized as excess, but also fiscal dependence on the revenues of “Bulgarian Gold.”

The meteoritic rise of Asenovgrad Krepost as an economic and social force represented both the potential of cooperative organization and tobacco to bring security and prosperity to wide segments of the Bulgarian population. But ultimately, “AK” successes and later failures were deeply embedded in the specific rhythms of the tobacco trade and the political landscape of interwar Bulgaria, which were both exceedingly and not coincidentally tumultuous. A detailed biography of “Asenovgrad Krepost” in fact reveals the close links between tobacco and politics in this period, especially within Bulgaria but also in terms of the international arena. The sudden appearance of a post-war tobacco “bubble” was arguably a critical factor in catalyzing the smoldering social and political tensions that made this one of the most turbulent periods in Bulgarian history.

Peasants in Power

As World War I came to a close, Bulgaria was caught up in the “revolutions on the left” that swept much of Europe, as it lay ruined and eviscerated by war. The war was particularly devastating for Bulgaria, which (if you include figures for the Balkan Wars of 1912-3) lost one in five men—the largest per capita loss in Europe—and was hard hit by shortages, hunger, and discontent by 1918.² But unlike communist-based movements in Russia, and (albeit less-successful) in Germany and Hungary, in Bulgaria it was the agrarian movement that prevailed.

As elsewhere in Europe, especially among the humiliated, defeated states, Bulgaria was threatened with a near-revolutionary situation as World War I came to a close. Within Bulgaria, communists and agrarians were rapidly emerging as “moral victors” with widespread support at the end of the war, since both were the only pre-war and war-time political forces that consistently opposed the war. Both movements were well-positioned to potentially ride the surge of the rather chaotic discontent that boiled over as the war came to a close. But both parties as well as the professional organizations they fostered—communist labor unions and agrarian growers’ cooperatives—had been decapitated during the war years, their leaders sent mainly to the front or put in prison. With this in mind, neither party was ready to fully harness the popular protest that threatened to topple the fragile monarchy of Tsar Ferdinand in 1918. But certainly the old regime was under severe pressure in the months that marked the end of the war as Bulgaria itself seemed ready to implode.

World War I has been clearly recognized as a watershed in European, American, and indeed world history because of the dramatic political, social, and geopolitical transformations that accompanied it. Significantly, all segments of affected societies were mobilized in a “total war” that had far reaching consequences for their post-war claims on political rights and social parity. In the history of global tobacco, the war was also a critical turning point. Both during and after WWI, tobacco production and consumption grew by an unprecedented measure as soldiers were provisioned with tobacco at the front and then returned as hardened smokers. At the same time, women were mobilized globally into home front workforces, including the tobacco industry, and increasing numbers had raised expectations for political and social rights, which for some translated into the adoption of the smoking habit in connection with their new found “emancipation.”³ Although Bulgarian women had already been prominent in the tobacco

industry before the war, they came to predominate in factories during the war but were increasingly disgruntled by war-time conditions, i.e., ever-lower rations and pay.⁴

Given mass inflation and shortages, thousands of deaths by starvation were reported in Bulgarian cities, and children begging for food at taverns and other establishments became a regular feature of late-war city life.⁵ By December of 1917, around ten thousand workers, including male and female tobacco workers from across Bulgaria, converged on Sofia, swarming the streets and calling for peace and revolution. At the same, anti-war protests were staged across the country and on the front there were mass desertions.⁶

But while a surge of women and worker protests wracked Bulgarian cities, a larger and more menacing tsunami of peasant protest moved rapidly toward Sofia. By September of 1918, Bulgaria had signed a belated armistice and some 15,000 peasant soldiers returning from the front were swept up in an uprising based in the hamlet of Radomir, approximately forty kilometers southeast of the Sofia. Fear of the peasant storm forced the reigning Tsar Ferdinand to release Alexander Stamboliski, the popular leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU), from prison where he was serving time for his anti-war stance. With a peasant mandate, Stamboliski essentially ruled Bulgaria from 1919-23 as a “peasant republic”, or as many have charged, a peasant “dictatorship”, albeit under a nominal monarch, the young Tsar Boris.⁷

Among a range of agrarian initiatives, Stamboliski’s regime gave an immediate and colossal lift to the agricultural cooperative movement, with unprecedented and unqualified governmental support. Agricultural cooperatives were by no means new to Bulgaria, and state support was far from a radical departure from past policy. Indeed, cooperatives as bases for credit, seeds, tools, and information for peasants had expanded across Bulgarian since the 1890s,

both as a result of grass-roots agrarian organization, namely BANU, and lines of government-subsidized credit.⁸

Cooperative organization took off especially after the 1903 establishment of the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank (BAB), whose explicit focus was the funding of cooperative credit and the coordinating of cooperative formation.⁹ Although the subject of some controversy, a wide range of Bulgarian thinkers saw cooperatives as an answer to poverty and “backwardness” connected to the onerous “peasant question” in the provinces.¹⁰ But they were also an answer to perceived ravages of capitalist speculation in the rural milieu. Indeed, the widespread resonance of the “cooperative idea” within Bulgaria can be explained as a “self-defensive” reaction of an impoverished and vulnerable peripheral economy to the perceived incursions of capitalism and the “West.”¹¹ With the steady rise of tobacco production since the run of the century, tobacco cooperatives had begun to appear in the environs of Haskovo and Dupnitsa by 1909.¹²

These tobacco cooperatives were formed with the same general rationale as other agrarian cooperatives: to protect the peasantry from “predatory” creditors and middlemen, many of them “foreign”. In the early years of the industry, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and other local “foreigners” were included in the ranks of the “exploitive” merchants, but Bulgarians too had quickly made a name for themselves in the tobacco trade, and in that sense agrarian goals were by no means Bulgarian nationalist- or ethnic-exclusionary. Indeed, among the ranks of most cooperatives, including “Asenovgrad Krepost”, were non-Bulgarians, primarily local Turkish or Pomak Muslims, as the local Greek population had largely emigrated by this time. Like BANU, the cooperative focus was primarily *social*, and indeed social or intra-ethnic tensions largely eclipsed ethnic ones in this period.

With an agrarian leader in power, creative answers to Bulgaria's rural plight were critical and the cooperative development was moved to front and center of state priorities. In Stanimaka, economic transformation since the turn of the century as well as specific post-war conditions provided fertile ground for the organization of a large scale tobacco cooperative.¹³ Though Stanimaka traditionally had a largely ethnically mixed population—primarily Turks, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Roma—the town and its surroundings were rapidly Bulgarianized by destitute and dislocated Macedonian and Thracian refugees in this period.

Many brought skills and seeds from their tobacco-rich villages and towns and immediately became involved in tobacco growing and processing. In the immediate post-war period tobacco—that is, the Oriental type of tobacco grown in Bulgaria—was a virtual savior to the state in its efforts to find livelihoods for the tens of thousands of refugee populations that settled in the Rhodope and Pirin regions, as it was labor- but not land-intensive. Tobacco, unlike other agricultural export crops, also required a great deal of processing before export, and so refugee and other landless and unemployed Bulgarian population could be engaged in the tobacco-processing towns of the region. With this in mind, the tobacco economy absorbed the refugee populations as well as occupied Bulgaria's own rural and urban proletariat (many of them also refugees from earlier waves of migration). Tobacco as a local cash crop had been on the gradual ascent since late in the century, when cultivation surged in response to the appearance of foreign buyers. But it was not until World War I, when Bulgaria became a primary supplier of tobacco to the Central Powers, that a mass market for its tobaccos emerged.

This market expanded astronomically in the immediate post-war years and provided an immediate impetus for “Asenovgrad Krepost” to build its “fortress” on the foundation of favorable post-war political, economic, and social conditions. Within a short period of time

tobacco was catapulted to a central place in the Bulgarian national economy, as it went from 0.9% of export earnings in 1912 to 79% in 1918!¹⁴ This, as well as tax revenues from internal tobacco consumption, were critical to post-war fiscal solvency. Bulgaria was saddled with reparations of 2.25 billion francs, or two times the total nation income of 1911.¹⁵ Tobacco revenues were tied directly to serving the debt caused by reparations and was Bulgaria's best collateral on the world market, since real gold was in short supply.¹⁶

With this in mind, the Stamboliski regime was intent upon promoting tobacco production in the provinces, and the cooperative structure was the perfect vehicle for mass organization and education of tobacco growers. Between 1918 and 1923 the number of tobacco cooperatives in Bulgaria grew from two to forty-one, while the kilograms of tobacco produced within cooperatives grew from 137,704 out of a total 20 million produced in Bulgaria, to 6,936,797, out of a total of 54 million kilograms produced.¹⁷ Not only did the amount of tobacco produced in these years nearly double, but the percentage grown within cooperatives dramatically increased.

“Asenovgrad Krepost” was very much at the forefront of the tobacco cooperative movement, which led the cooperative movement in general in Bulgaria. Tobacco cooperatives were a “flagship” by all accounts.¹⁸ Although decidedly a beacon of hope and enthusiasm, the “AK” leadership was far from naïve about its inherent vulnerability. Though the favorable tobacco market provided an enormous opportunity for the new cooperative, it also increased the mad scramble among merchant buyers in Bulgaria, a “gold rush” for control of the ever more valuable leaf. Indeed, the very concept of the “fortress” assumed an awareness of “enemies” and the pervasive defenselessness of the tobacco peasant. It also assumed the feasibility of building a fortress against Bulgarian and “foreign” middlemen.¹⁹ Indeed, “AK” was determined to “gather up the ripe fruit of our own labor” emboldened by the “moral and material support” of the

Stamboliski regime and the unprecedented credit lines made available by the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank.²⁰ As new tobacco firms and cooperatives mushroomed across Bulgaria, bitter struggles over the massive profits of “Bulgarian gold” seethed under the surface.

From the very beginning, however, the goal of “Asenovgrad Krepost” was to mitigate such struggles in favor of an almost utopian tobacco community in which the cooperative protected members from both speculation and risk. Early on, Asenovgrad Krepost’s leadership envisioned an almost transcendent messianism to their enterprise, which they thought could provide a blueprint for a “new future”, not just for the tobacco industry, but for Bulgaria as well. With Stefen Ivanov, a former local representative of the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank (BAB), at the helm as cooperative director, the cooperative rapidly expanded and soon emerged as by far the most enterprising, inventive, and extensive cooperative in Bulgarian history.

Support of the regime and the BAB allowed Ivanov and his cohort of BANU supporters to promise consistently good prices, two to four times higher than what was offered by merchants, as well as timely and generous advances on tobacco to growers.²¹ Ivanov used member land and projected tobacco harvests as collateral to borrow large sums of money from the state-subsidized BAB, which were promptly re-invested into the cooperative enterprise. Using this capital, along with enormous tobacco profits in the first several years, Ivanov presided over the building of a cooperative empire that by 1921 included a network of tobacco-drying facilities and processing warehouses, a fleet of cars and trucks, a member restaurant with its own orchestra, a “cultural center”, as well as summer and winter movie houses.

“Asenovgrad Krepost” also supplied free medical care to all of its members. It had doctors, nurses, and midwives on staff who visited members in the adjacent villages monthly, while holding regular hours in a small hospital in Stanimaka. “AK” cars were frequently used to

transport sick peasants into town or even to Plovdiv for issues that needed more intensive care. An “AK” legal section also offered members free legal advice and services, and, through a cooperative newspaper and field labs, experts offered advice on tobacco growing and processing.

“AK” also built its own cigarette factory in 1922, as mentioned above, to assure control of all stages of tobacco processing and maximize profits to the cooperative members. In addition, the cooperative bought a house in Sofia that served as a headquarters for trade deals, but also was open to all cooperative members as free lodging in the capital.²² Finally, unlike most cooperatives in Bulgaria in the period, “AK” was also a consumer cooperative, which meant that the cooperative purchased and offered members beans, wheat, flour, gasoline, leather, and textiles at wholesale rates.²³ It also gave financial support for members and communities to build houses, tobacco-drying structures, and schools, including even a Turkish school in 1922.²⁴ With the slew of benefits in mind, “AK” membership grew astronomically in its first few years of existence, from a mere 105 members in 1919 to 2,466 members in 1923!²⁵

In these initial years of phenomenal growth and achievement, “Asenovgrad Krepost” was sold to its members not just as a purely economic association, but as a way of life. The cooperative’s *Biuletin*, which by 1925 had evolved into a full blown newspaper with the title, *Asenovgrad krepost*, frequently laid out the privileges as well as the obligations of its members. Cooperative “discipline” was a common focus of *Biuletin* and *Asenovgrad krepost* articles that called for regular attendance of meetings, upholding decisions of governing bodies, the continued cultivation of tobacco, and its delivery to cooperative warehouses. In addition to such predictable demands, “AK” leadership also implored its members not to “gamble or be drunkards”, and to “smoke only cooperative cigarettes.”²⁶ Though “AK” saw drunkenness as a social issue among its members, it called for moderation, not prohibition.²⁷ The cooperative, in

fact, sold alcohol at its restaurant and served it at functions such as its annual New Year's Party that rewarded members with food, drink, a lottery, as well as music and dancing.²⁸

In addition, unlike other abstinence movements that were provoked by the interwar environment, the cooperative increased leisure consumption,²⁹ and "AK" actively encouraged smoking, albeit only of its own product.³⁰ With its oft-repeated slogan, "Cooperative members, smoke only Asenovgrad Krepost cigarettes!", the cooperative tried to inculcate a sense of corporate loyalty in return for benefits.³¹ Healthy and productive, as well as "disciplined" member bodies, were an underlying objective of the "AK" project, as is clear in frequent *Asenovgrad krepost* articles on everything from child-rearing and breast-feeding to productive use of "holiday time".³² One article, for example, suggested that, "instead of losing your free days in the cafe and tavern in useless conversations and undesirable squabbles", members should plant and tend fruit trees and vegetable gardens.³³ But as far as member discipline was concerned, "AK" leadership made it clear that it wanted its members to abide by such standards not out of fear, but out of *love* for the cooperative, with its pervasive motto, "all for one and one for all."³⁴

Along with member participation and loyalty, "AK" success in the early years can be attributed to massive influxes of capital, credits from the BAB, and profits that resulted in *direct* participation in global trade. "Asenovgrad Krepost" was one of the first ventures in the immediate post-war period to establish direct trade contacts with Germany, Austria, and many of the new East-Central European states. Although trade contacts with Central Europe and the attendant development of a taste for Oriental tobaccos were well developed during World War I, most commerce had been conducted by "foreign" firms and not local concerns. "Asenovgrad Krepost", along with a number of other Bulgarian merchants, took the opportunity to popularize

Bulgarian tobacco on the global market, and most notably Central Europe.³⁵ It was unusual, indeed unheard of, for a Bulgarian agrarian cooperative to send out representatives and conduct direct trade relations with foreign companies and even state monopolies, as “Asenovgrad Krepost” did in this period. After several years of ever-expanding commercial deals, by 1921 “AK” was loading whole ships of tobacco at the Black Sea port of Burgas headed up the Danube to Central Europe. “AK” even opened a trade office in Hamburg and later Vienna, conducting direct trade not just with Central Europe, but also the United States, the United Kingdom, Holland, China, and India.³⁶

Through engaging in trade without middlemen, “AK” was best able to foil its openly and oft-maligned number one enemy, Bulgarian merchants. This was indeed the very foundation of the “fortress”, the ability to forgo the dreaded local and large-scale traders and keep the profits in Stanimaka, in the hands and mouths of the producer. Most tobacco merchants returned the sentiment and saw tobacco cooperatives created in the Stamboliski period as “unnatural” and “impure” products of agrarian favoritism and political maneuvering.³⁷ Whatever its origins, *Asenovgrad krepost* claimed triumphantly that “in 2-3 years we have taken from the jaws of the speculator tobacco merchants 236 million leva and given it to the producers”.³⁸ Without a doubt, this was the pride of “AK”: its ability to keep or give back to producers the enormous tobacco profits that seemed to historically elude both growers and workers, while merchants made astronomical profits.

And to a large degree “AK” was an unmitigated success on a grand scale, attracting not just local and domestic but international acclaim in the decade after World War I. Articles in *Asenovgrad krepost* incessantly bragged about the constant trickle of international guests, seeming pilgrims ready to witness the unusually successful cooperative phenomenon.³⁹ Many of

these visitors were from international agrarian, cooperative, or labor organizations, but there was also a wide range of personages, including ambassadors, consuls, ministers, leaders of international organizations, and journalists from major “Western” newspapers like the *The New York Times*, *The London Times*, *Berliner Tageblatt*, etc.

At least until the late 1920s, “Asenovgrad Krepost” was a showcase not only for Bulgarian agrarian economic innovation, but also for refugee resettlement.⁴⁰ The itinerary of various visitors, as detailed in *Asenovgrad krepost*, was rather predictable: a tour of the factory and processing warehouses, lunch at the cooperative restaurant, and a visit with a group of Macedonian and Thracian refugees (sometimes in folk costume), who attested to the successes in their resettlement and integration under the tutelage of “Asenovgrad Krepost.”⁴¹ These visits were very much a part of the cooperative’s narrative of legitimacy and success, and they continued even after the fall of Stamboliski and in the relatively lean years from 1923-27, when the cooperative began to experience severe economic difficulties behind its still stable façade. The newspaper *Asenovgrad krepost* regularly detailed such visits and later printed letters received from visitors who marveled over “AK” successes. But in many respects the astonishing and thriving “Asenovgrad Krepost” of the 1920s was too good to be true; cracks in the fortress would soon appear.

Fortress under Siege

“Asenovgrad Krepost” was built on the profits and promise of tobacco in immediate post-war Bulgaria, but “AK”, as with other tobacco cooperatives, was ill-equipped to deal with the ground-shaking political and commercial changes that hit Bulgaria beginning in 1923. As tobacco prices soured from 1919-23, a scramble for control among various individuals and

constituencies was also underway. But particularly as tobacco prices entered the rollercoaster years of 1923-1934 so too did Bulgarian political clashes intensify, and to a large extent the plant became a critical epicenter for individual or group bids for power or resources.

As for “Asenovgrad Krepost”, new “enemies” emerged outside and within, and its walls were ultimately not impervious to the turmoil of the period. Arguably the presence, potential, or battle over tobacco profits spawned economic and political turf wars, as well as charging political movements among workers, peasants, and other bases of influence. Given struggles on the ground, changes in political power, and shifts in the global economy, it would have been a miracle if “Asenovgrad Krepost” had survived intact.

The events of the summer of 1923 were the first serious blow to the political foundations of “Asenovgrad Krepost.” In June of that year, the Stamboliski regime was ousted from power by a violent coup organized by the so-called *Naroden Sgovor* [People’s Accord], an alliance of anti-Stamboliski elements that included urban commercial, industrial, and military factions. In addition to tacit support from the palace, *Sgovor* leader Alexander Tsankov worked directly (though secretly) with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Committee (IMRO), a political organization based in Southwest Bulgaria. Since 1919, IMRO had been a serious liability to Stamboliski’s foreign policy objectives, which centered on establishing regional stability and cooperation.

IMRO openly organized political and paramilitary groups and staged raids—in which villagers that did not support its cause were robbed and killed—particularly across the border into Yugoslavia. Stamboliski, in an effort to reign in IMRO with its growing power base in Pirin Macedonia (part of Bulgaria since 1913), had signed the fateful 1923 Treaty of Niš, which made a commitment to controlling cross-border terrorism. With this in mind, it is no surprise that

IMRO willingly cooperated with the *Sgovor* coup in 1923 and even played a direct role in the assassination of Stamboliski. As of June 1923, the “peasants” were no longer in power.

With Stamboliski dead and his agrarian party in disarray, “Asenovgrad Krepost” faced a series of new challenges in 1923. In the short term, the *Svogor* government claimed to support the “AK” endeavor and the new Prime Minister Tsankov even visited the cooperative one month after the change in power.⁴² The cooperative movement was by no means buried or even theoretically inimical to ideology of the forces on the Bulgarian right, but it was reigned in by Tsankov. In fact, in parliamentary discussions of the issue, the “unnatural growth” of cooperatives under Stamboliski was hotly critiqued.⁴³ In language that very much echoed that of Bulgarian merchants, cooperatives *per se* were not the target of the post-1923 political leadership, but rather their rapid and excessive growth, with Stamboliski accused of overabundant favoritism.

The regime clearly saw the need for continued cooperative origination and productivity within the industry, prompting the need for merchant cooperative rapprochement. But part of this compromise was the curbing of cooperative “excess”, especially the huge subsidies granted via BAB credits. It is no surprise, then, that the post-1923 regime reigned in “Asenovgrad Krepost” in ways that would make its substance almost unrecognizable.⁴⁴ Critical state-subsidized loans that came to “AK” through the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank (BAB) were cut off that year by the bank as it conducted a two-year audit. Supporters of “AK” in the BAB were abruptly fired and the bank, according to cooperative spokesmen, fell under the influence “of tobacco capital.”⁴⁵

In the middle of this political and financial shake-up there was a severe drop in tobacco prices in 1923 and extreme volatility in the years that followed. In many respects “AK” weathered the storm of these years better than many tobacco cooperatives that folded and

tobacco merchants who went under.⁴⁶ The restaurant, medical facilities, movie houses, and most other extra functions of the cooperative continued until 1927. In the midst of economic instability and near-crisis that hit Bulgarians outside and especially inside the industry in these years, the continued success of “AK,” as illusory as it may have been, was enviable, and certainly a cause for resentment by the less fortunate. In part, the survival of the cooperative was a result of the fact that the *Sgovor* government needed a least a measure of peasant, and hence cooperative, support in the post-1923 years. The *Sgovor* regime rightly assumed that the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was a more threatening enemy. Indeed, such a view was solidified by the communist uprising that the BCP staged in the fall of 1923, with the goal of overthrowing the Bulgarian government.

Though the communists theoretically wanted an alliance of “worker and peasant,” in practice there was more tension than harmony between communists and agrarians, who often had conflicting interests. In the interwar period, tobacco workers were more organized and demanding than ever before, in part because of the rising value of tobacco but also because workers felt that they had “carried on their shoulders the big part of the burden of the war.”⁴⁷ Tobacco workers, like the Bulgarian proletariat in general, still lived and worked in horrific conditions in this period. In fact, according to workers’ publications, their conditions were worse. While merchant families in their same cities seemed to be living in the lap of luxury, workers—70% of them were women (and a large percentage were children)—worked long hours for miserable wages.⁴⁸ Strikes broke out in Bulgarian tobacco towns as early as 1919. Then, as in later strikes, the Stamboliski regime called on local authorities to restore order and crush the strikes.⁴⁹

This only added to the communist perception that the agrarians harbored “bourgeois” tendencies, and their cooperation with the agrarian party became increasingly limited to its rather meager “left wing.”⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) activists were unwilling to defend Stamboliski during the summer of 1923 “reactionary” coup. As a result of its misstep the Bulgarian communists were compelled to organize an ill-advised uprising against the regime in the fall of 1923 to prove its loyalty to the movement. The tobacco proletariat concentrated in Plovdiv and other tobacco depot cities was by this time the largest (over 40,000), most concentrated, and most mobilized by communist activists.

Tobacco workers, not surprisingly, were on the front lines of the September uprising, which ended in mass arrests, beatings, and even outright assassinations of BCP members. Plovdiv was literally blockaded, as the police descended with rifles and batons, and the prisons were rapidly filled with BCP members. Anticipating the plot, Tsankov’s regime had already declared martial law, and Sofia was largely kept under control. But a significant struggle was still registered in the tobacco-processing towns of the south, like Plovdiv and its organizational satellites like Stanimaka, where communist roundups and police brutality became carved into a growing narrative of government repression and communist martyrdom.⁵¹

Indeed, Stanimaka was an important center in the archipelago of tobacco-based communist labor organizations in this period, most closely tied to tobacco workers in Plovdiv, but also Khaskovo, Kirdzhali, Stara Zagora, and other proximate tobacco centers. For most of these workers, the abortive movement of 1923 was the culmination of years of bitter strikes waged since the war ended. In Asenovgrad, even more so than in larger cities, there was a considerable overlap between the categories of worker and peasant-grower. Most workers were either former peasants with families still living in nearby villages or were seasonal workers who

still worked the fields during the planting and harvesting.

At the same time, the urban proletariat in Asenovgrad, Plovdiv, and elsewhere was attracted to revolutionary circles, whose extreme views often came into conflict with rural interests and agrarian sensibilities. Within “Asenovgrad Krepost” the total organizational dominance of pro-agrarian growers and their advocates created tensions with workers who rightly assumed that most cooperative resources were spent on infrastructure and benefits for peasant-growers. As revealed in worker memoirs and newspapers from these years, tobacco strikes were staged at “Asenovgrad Krepost” on a regular basis even when times were “good”, such as in 1919 and 1922.⁵² As a result, “AK” sources looked at workers with suspicion, a continual thorn in the side of the cooperative. Even as early as July 1922, soon after the opening of the new factory, an article in *Asenovgrad Krepost* accused factory workers of “sabotage”, for putting nails and “garbage” in the tobacco, or the wrong number of cigarettes in cigarette packages.⁵³ The cooperative leadership was keenly aware that workers had divided loyalties because of their deep associational ties with the internationalist Communist Party, various labor organizations, and Macedonian or Thracian émigré associations.

In fact, though “AK” did consider itself a part of the larger struggle within Bulgaria between “labor and capital”, it also continually asserted its opposition to “Bolshevism” and its commitment to democracy.⁵⁴ Anti-Bolshevik rhetoric and open expressions of Bulgarian patriotism abounded, especially in the post-1923 period cooperative press.⁵⁵ “Asenovgrad Krepost” leaders cooperated with periodic searches, like a March 15, 1926 late-night blockade of the city, when all of the houses in town were searched for weapons, “conspiratorial archives”, and suspicious literature.⁵⁶ With this in mind “Asenovgrad Krepost” became a tacit partner against the communist left, cooperating with a range of post-1923 regimes that offered in

exchange relatively steady political and fiscal support.

For those regimes, “AK” and other agricultural cooperatives were the lesser of two evils. Nationwide, the 100,000-150,000 tobacco growers were more trustworthy and necessary as a constituency than the politically suspect 40,000 strong tobacco proletariat. Indeed, it was the BCP that became the primary target of the 1923 “Law on the Defense of the Government” that accompanied Bulgaria’s turn to the right. The BCP was gradually effectively driven underground, especially after their 1925 bombing, while Tsar Boris was in attendance, of the *Sveta Nedelia* church in central Sofia. Communists were in and out of prison in the years that followed, and between 1923 and 1925 some 5,000 communists were killed by Tsankov’s white terror.⁵⁷

Significantly, the 1923 shift in power that proved so important to the path of interwar Bulgarian politics was engineered, at least in part, by Bulgarian tobacco interests. In the words of Georgi Dimitrov, then head of the Comintern and later the BCP, “it was precisely the powerful interests of tobacco capital that framed and organized the fascist coup of 1923.” As argued in a 1929 article on tobacco labor, Dimitrov claimed that the “heroes”—or as he called them, “bloody murderers”—of 1923, like Tsankov, Vulkov, and Liapchev, were paid directly by tobacco capital that wanted to crush communist interference and rule their factories unfettered by communist-backed labor legislation.⁵⁸

Although Dimitrov surely overstated his case, Liapchev was known to have been “subsidized” by Krum Chaprashnikov, one of the most prominent and IMRO-connected tobacco merchants in Bulgaria, who was also a staunch enemy of Stamboliski.⁵⁹ Tsankov had also played a role in the tobacco trade before 1923 and was known to be well-connected to tobacco interests before and after 1923.⁶⁰ The more direct tobacco connection to 1923, however,

surprisingly unexplored by Dimitrov, is the IMRO one. Since the end of the war, IMRO, under Todor Aleksandrov, had been effectively building a state-within-a-state within the tobacco-rich Petrich District of Southwestern Bulgaria. Tobacco, in fact, was *the* critical revenue source for IMRO, which by 1923 had built a local paramilitary of 9,000 men, and an extensive local administration.⁶¹ With IMRO's cooperation, indeed its key role in 1923, the *Svogor* state was compelled to give an even more extensive de facto autonomy to the IMRO-Petrich state that effectively ruled Southwestern Bulgaria directly until 1934.

In many senses IMRO was a kind of mega-tobacco cooperative, or even a “state” tobacco monopoly, which to its great fiscal advantage tightly controlled the buying and selling of tobacco within the district. There were a number of “independent” tobacco cooperatives within Petrich itself in these years, though nothing as elaborate in membership or benefits as “Asenovgrad Krepost.” At the point of sale, though, *all* tobacco growers and cooperative structures were expected to pay to IMRO a four-five lev per kilogram tax on their tobacco (for which they got on average 14-45 lev per kilogram). In addition, a “patriotic tax” was levied on the more well-off inhabitants of the region, and tobacco merchants appear in IMRO registers as the largest “donors,” contributing as much as 300,000-500,000 lev a year *each* to IMRO coffers.⁶² This money was collected both to fund local IMRO administrative measures, as well as their behemoth paramilitary organization.

The ultimate goal of IMRO, however, and the stated rationale for the “patriotic tax”, was the reclaiming of Macedonian territories (also rich with tobacco) across the border in Greece and Yugoslavia. It was Stamboliski's obstruction of this greater Macedonian goal—through his diplomatic recognition of the inviolability of borders—and not his domestic agrarian agenda, that made him into a mortal enemy of IMRO. For IMRO, to a large degree, was much like

“Asenovgrad Krepost”—that is, an “excessive” cooperative—in its paternalistic policy toward the peasant grower. Much of the collected “tobacco tax” was put into the development of infrastructure, social security, and hygiene programs for local inhabitants, etc. As the volatile post-1923 market contributed to a perpetual scramble for growers to pay, IMRO operatives were concerned by considerable discontent in the villages, which both threatened stability in the region and their fiscal base. To a large extent, IMRO was willing to be exceedingly flexible with growers, even changing the four-five lev per kilo tax to a straight six percent of the sales price in 1926.⁶³ They also seemed to track and punish “immoral” and “illegal” behaviors on the part of merchants and on behalf of peasants who “sought protection from the organization.”⁶⁴ At the same time, IMRO needed its supporters among “well-off citizens,” and in the years of waning profits, “cashiers” were instructed to “use tact” and allow them an extra six months to pay off their “patriotic taxes.” They were also explicitly warned against taking “repressive measures” against them, implying that such measures were common fare among IMRO rank and file. Indeed, it is clear that a combination of persuasion and intimidation was used to keep the tobacco revenues coming in, in spite of requests for pardon.

In effect, IMRO was run on a tobacco engine, and refusals to fuel that engine were tantamount to treason. The organization seemed to focus its harshest discipline in such matters on its own members, whom the Central Committee accused of contributing to the “chaos” that was taking place in connection with the tobacco tax. One report, for example, complained of 6 million lev in unpaid tobacco taxes from 1923-4, while detailing rampant favoritism and pay-offs to IMRO “cashiers” who turned a blind eye.⁶⁵ This state of affairs was especially disturbing to the IMRO Central Committee, which warned that all of the guilty members of the organization would be “punished in the harshest way possible.”⁶⁶

But as it looked deeply within, “the Organization” —or “the Brotherhood” as it was often called—was faced with a range of “enemies”, whom it actively observed and punished in the five districts of Petrich. In addition to “tax evaders” and “smugglers”, many of these “enemies” came from rival IMRO splinter groups, which formed after the 1924 assassination of Todor Aleksandrov. Under the right-wing Ivan Mikhailov, the “Mikhailovists” faction of IMRO maintained power in the Petrich district and protected its turf through wanton terror against two rival organizations, both of which claimed to be the true heirs to IMRO. Most notably, the supporters of Alexander Protogerov and the communist-controlled IMRO-United were largely driven out of Petrich, and their members were gunned down both on the streets of Sofia, Plovdiv, and elsewhere in the provinces. IMRO sent death squads to cities across Bulgaria, assassinating rivals and sparking a cycle of retribution that was responsible for some 800 murders from 1924-1934.⁶⁷

But IMRO also reached deep into the tobacco warehouses and factories of the Petrich district to root out communism, whether or not it was of the IMRO variety. IMRO used not only assassination, but also “material and spiritual support,” creating youth associations and offering free excursions and literature on the Macedonian cause.⁶⁸ Although such tactics never brought all local activists under “Mikhailovist” IMRO control, they did keep strike activity and other communist-directed activism within Petrich to a minimum. At the same time, IMRO had elaborate networks of operatives outside of Petrich in Sofia, but also in tobacco growing and processing towns like Plovdiv and Stanimaka where there were large numbers of Macedonian refugees.

As previously mentioned, a large contingency of the tobacco workers who worked in the “Asenovgrad Krepost” cigarette factory and warehouses were communist sympathizers. The

Macedonian refugees among them were largely connected to IMRO-United, the communist rival of the Petrich-based IMRO. The more radical among them organized in underground communist cells and worked through local émigré organizations, which increasingly became a front for communist activities. Stanimaka's Sveti Georgi neighborhood, otherwise known as the "*Cherveni Kvartal*" (Red Quarter), became a hotbed of "anti-Fascist" activism and a stronghold of communist Macedonian (and Thracian) refugees.

In fact, Stanimaka communists, led by such figures as Kostadin Kichukov and Angel Ivanov, were *primarily* Macedonian and Thracian refugees, who were opposed to, or had broken with, the right-wing IMRO of Ivan Mikhailov.⁶⁹ As mentioned before, communist-worker tensions with "Asenovgrad Krepost" leadership had been brewing since the very founding of the cooperative. In the post-1923 years, they became even more acute, especially as workers began to implicate the "Asenovgrad Krepost" leadership in cooperating with the post-1923 regime and supposedly operating under "Mikhailovist" (right-wing) IMRO control.⁷⁰ Although a connection between "AK" and Petrich-based IMRO seems specious at best, "AK" leadership did do things like blacklist Communist Party members or truck in strike-breakers from surrounding villages.⁷¹ While this was certainly indicative of the tensions between "AK" and labor, if not workers and peasants, it was not an example of IMRO in-fighting.

As in the case of Plovdiv, Stanimika became an important base of operation for the Bulgarian Communist Party. The *Cherveni Kvartal* was IMRO-United turf in a sense, and operatives were relatively safe on a daily basis. It was there, in private homes, that Kosta Kichukov routinely hosted visits from Anton Yugov, Vladimir Poptomov, and other high-ranking Macedonians, who had always formed a critical core for the wider Bulgarian communist movement.⁷² The concentration of tobacco workers and refugees made Stanimaka a hotbed of

“revolutionary potential.”

With the “united front” policy in mind, Macedonian communists of the *Cherveni Kvartal* were explicitly ordered by Comintern operatives to remain in “Asenovgrad Krepost” in spite of tensions, and to infiltrate and advance influence within its ranks. According to local Party members, however, their main rival for local influence was not agrarians within the cooperative, but rather Mikhailovist influence. With this in mind, Macedonian (and Thracian) youth and refugee organizations became explicit targets for communist agitation and penetration in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁷³ Communist operatives routinely attended, disrupted, and even “took over” Macedonian and Thracian refugee association meetings and events, even when such groups were not necessarily “Mikhailovist”.

In some cases this was little more than members of IMRO-United heckling from the balcony, such as at the 1932 gathering of a “Thracian congress” in a “salon of Asenovgrad Krepost” or at a 1932 celebration of the anniversary of the 1903 IMRO-led Illinden Uprising.⁷⁴ The communist project was ironically abetted by the 1934 authoritarian coup by the *Zveno* military league in Sofia that finally crushed the IMRO stronghold in Petrich and sent the organization into disarray. True, the coup that took place during a mass tobacco workers’ strike in Plovdiv was also specifically focused on taming working class upheaval. But it also took down the rightist branch of IMRO, allowing (communist) IMRO-United to “fill the Macedonian club” in Stanimaka and establish a more dominating presence.⁷⁵

IMRO-United, of course, was also a target of the openly authoritarian Bulgarian regime in the post-1934 period, as it had been since 1923. Indeed, “order” was the primary goal of the *Zveno* (link) political configuration that took power that year and dissolved all political parties in Bulgaria. The leader of IMRO-United, Simeon Kabrakirov, was even assassinated in prison in

1934. Still, the organization continued to enjoy financial and organizational support from Moscow. For IMRO-United in Stanimaka the “fascist threat” was in many ways more manageable than the IMRO-Mikhailovist one and the movement continued to function within the parameters of “Asenovgrad Krepost” local refugee organizations and their *Cherveni Kvartal*.

These power struggles could not but help erode the solidarity and political efficacy of the “Asenovgrad Krepost” idea, in a period when political and economic changes had already weakened the cooperative organization. The loss of Stamboliski as a prime supporter coincided with a period in which there was an increased incidence of open attacks on “Asenovgrad Krepost” in Bulgarian newspapers, on the floor of parliament, and in public debate.⁷⁶ This heightened the siege mentality of cooperative leadership, and “AK” publications and documents were increasingly preoccupied with “enemy” attacks as well as internal breaches in discipline. As *Asenovgrad Krepost* decried, “our enemies are waging a ruthless struggle against our successes in tobacco production.”⁷⁷

At the same time, the cooperatives’ main credit source, the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank, conducted a detailed audit from 1924-6 that called into question the financial dealings of the cooperative, namely, a number of cooperative properties and member benefits.⁷⁸ The audit revealed huge salaries and “entertainment funds” for Ivanov and other high-ranking cooperative officials, which it openly censured as an irresponsible “expansion” in spending.⁷⁹ The cooperative newspaper *Asenovgrad Krepost* devoted considerable space on its meager pages to damage control and in particular to recurrent attacks on the leadership coming from Sofia. Numerous sources accused Stoian Ivanov of running the cooperative like a “dictator,”⁸⁰ who was squirreling away cooperative funds and planning to leave the country.⁸¹

In response to such accusations, the *Asenovgrad Krepost* challenged its detractors to “leave the noisy capital and come to Stanimaka to see that we “have not robbed but helped producers.” The four trucks and five cars that “AK” purchased, as one article explained, were not Ivanov’s but the cooperative’s, and his monthly salary was a modest 15,000 lev, not the 150,000 lev that was presumed.⁸² As for debt, a 1926 article admitted that “AK” owed 38 million lev to the bank, but also pointed out that with the coming year’s tobacco sales, the debt would be more than paid off.⁸³

Stoianov was accused of being something of a philanderer, but “AK” was also openly and erroneously labeled a “Bolshevik” or “communist”. To make matters worse, by the mid-1920s members were increasingly giving in to merchant advances, many of them leaving the cooperative for good. From the point of view of the “AK” leadership, such behavior was reprehensible, even traitorous. Growers who left the cooperative were likened to “Judas,” particularly as the cooperative had given advances and good prices to growers—at its own fiscal peril—even through times of crisis.⁸⁴ At its own peril, “Asenovgrad Krepost” had done its best to absorb risk and fiscal catastrophe and to save its peasant members from the rollercoaster prices of the post-1923 tobacco trade.

In addition to the press attacks and hemorrhaging membership, debt and even individual civil cases brought against the cooperative proved crippling. Finally, in 1927 Ivanov resigned, defeated and discouraged. The new director, Velio Georgiev, was far less ambitious and ultimately more pragmatic but never able to regain the momentum or sense of mission that had permeated “Asenovgrad Krepost” in its early years. As a result of a slew of draconian “recommendations” by the bank, the cooperative leadership announced 400 pages of changes to the cooperative administration at a meeting in 1927, including salary cuts and lay-offs for

workers and employees, the closing of the medical clinic and hospital, and the selling off of various cooperative properties. By 1931 “Asenovgrad Krepost” had only 657 members and by 1933 only 437.⁸⁵

Of course, while such numbers seem catastrophically low compared to the 2,466-strong membership of 1923, keep in mind that the average tobacco cooperative of the time had a mere 135 members. The fall, or perhaps more accurately the stumble, of “Asenovgrad Krepost” was in many ways inevitable, a product of the overall dependence of the Bulgarian economy on an exportable, luxury mono-crop—tobacco. The newly constructed global value of tobacco also tangled “Asenovgrad Krepost” in a complex web of domestic politics—most notably, Macedonian turf wars woven deeply into the tobacco world.

But remarkably, though rather changed in form, “Asenovgrad Krepost” survived the tumultuous period and political rivalries described. It and the cooperative form more generally, in fact, were given a second life as they came to play an important role in right-wing visions of a Bulgarian national order. Although a shadow of its former self, “Asenovgrad Krepost” survived and even thrived in the “fascist” environment of the 1930s and war-time Bulgaria. Though Bulgaria never had a truly mass fascist movement, the fascist model of governance was exceedingly attractive to a wide range of interwar Bulgarian politicians.

Conclusion

In many ways the story of “Asenovgrad Krepost” recreates the well-known narrative of interwar Bulgaria, or most of interwar Eastern Europe more generally. In particular, it follows the plot of post-war devastation bringing misery but also expectations and hope often framed and enacted through radical political experimentation or reform. In Bulgaria, the tobacco boom was a

major element in post-war hopes for a better future, as it had the potential to solve a range of social and fiscal problems. Not only did tobacco revenues enable the Bulgarian state to ameliorate post-war fiscal disaster and service the heavy reparations debt, but more importantly, made it possible to absorb the hundreds of thousands of refugees that had flooded the country from Thrace and Macedonia as a result of the Balkan Wars (1912-3), World War I (1914-8), and population exchange agreements of the post-war years.

In the case of “Asenovgrad Krepost”, tobacco literally financed the dreams of thousands of growers who pooled their resources, their time, and their hopes into a “fortress” against exploitation and poverty. For a number of years these dreams seemed to be realized in the environs of Stanimaka, and the rush of enthusiasm that surrounded “Asenovgrad Krepost” is still palpable in the documents of the period. By all accounts its achievements were amazing, even if a “fortress” built on tobacco alone was inherently unstable. By its very nature, as with Bulgaria’s more broadly, trade in a global commodity created dependency and vulnerability for “Asenovgrad Krepost”. Local and national struggles for power were catalyzed, often with dire consequences. In addition to local conflict, by the late 1930s the tobacco trade had brought Bulgaria into an ever closer alliance with Nazi Germany, arguably making cooperation and coalition during World War II inevitable.

Endnotes

¹ For a detailed description of the event see *Biuletin na Kooperativnoto Druzhestvo na Sdruzhenite Tiutiunoproizvoditeli ot Grad Stanimaka i Okoliyata*, April 10, 1922, 1. See also Angel Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost: Tiutiuneva Kooperatsiia Asenovgrad* (Asenovgrad: Izdatelska küshta “Belan”, 1994), 51.

² See Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 325. See also John Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 122.

³ See, for example, Allan Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 51-54.

⁴ Vangelov, *Tiutiunopabotnitsi*, 24.

⁵ For more on this late war period see Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2007), 211-214.

⁶ Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 215.

⁷ The rule of Stamboliski is extremely controversial in the historical literature because while popular among the peasant majority, he ruled as a benevolent dictator over competing (mostly urban) interest groups. For an overview see Bell, *Peasants in Power*. For a recent Bulgarian assessment see Rumén Daskalov, *Bülgarsko Obshetsvo, 1878-1939, Vol 1, Durzhava, Politika, Ikonomika* (Sofia: IK “Gutenberg”, 2005), 195.

⁸ Agrarian credit cooperatives actually trace back to the rural reforms of late Ottoman statesman Midhat Pasha in the Danube Region, that were replaced with a number of “native” credit institutions after 1878 that aimed to secure land, seeds, and other needs for the peasantry. See Bülgarska Zemledelska Banka, *The Agricultural Cooperative and the Agricultural Bank of Sofia* (Sofia: National Printing Office, 1924), 4-5.

⁹ Krüstev, *Asenovgrad Krepost*, 23. For an overview of the historical development of cooperatives in pre-Communist Bulgaria, see Boris Mateev, *Dvizhenieto za Kooperativno Zemedelie v Bülgariia pri Usloviyata na Kapitalizma* (Sofia: 1967, Izdatelstvo na Bülgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1967), 96-7.

¹⁰ See Rumén Avramov, *Stopanskiat XX Vek na Bülgariia* (Sofia: Tsentür za liberalni strategii, 2001), 27-8.

¹¹ For a tour-de-force on this subject see especially all of volume three, Rumén Avramov, *Komunalniat Kapitalizüm: Iz Bülgarskoto Stopansko Minalo* (Sofia Tsentür za liberalni strategii, 2007). While Avramov ultimately has a rather negative view of the substance and consequences of cooperatives for the Bulgarian economy this is by no means shared by all historians. See for example Daskalov, *Bülgarsko Obshetsvo, Vol 1*, 30.

¹² Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 6.

¹³ Stanimaka and its surroundings, like neighboring Plovdiv, had been part of autonomous Eastern Rumelia, a province separated both from the Ottomans but not given to the Bulgarians after the Russo-Turkish War of 1878. In 1885, however, Eastern Rumelia was unified with Bulgaria and remained in Bulgaria after independence was declared in 1908.

¹⁴ Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 35.

¹⁵ John Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁷ Aseov, *Tiutiun v Bŭlgarskoto Stopanstvo*, 202.

¹⁸ See Bŭlgarska Zemledelska Banka, *The Agricultural Cooperative*, 52. See also Avramov, *Komunalniiat Kapitalizŭm*, Vol 3. 43-4.

¹⁹ *Biuletin na Kooperativното Druzhestvo na Sdruzhenite Tiutiunoproizvoditeli ot grad Stanimaka i Okoliyata*, January 6, 1922, 1.

²⁰ *Biuletin na Kooperativното Druzhestvo na Sdruzhenite Tiutiunoproizvoditeli ot grad Stanimaka i Okoliyata*, January 1, 1922, 1.

²¹ Bŭlgarska Zemledelska Banka, *The Agricultural Cooperative*, 53. See also Angel Timov, Georgi Lazarov, and Metodi Veselinov, "Borbi po Putia na nasheto Tiutiunoproizvodstvo" (Plovdiv: Izdatelstvo "Khristo Danov", 1973), 55.

²² *Asenovgrad krepost*, April 1926, 7.

²³ Krŭstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 37.

²⁴ In 1923 alone, "Asenovgrad Krepost" helped build 382 houses and 1,242 tobacco-drying structures, and in 1922 it supplied 5,000 lev for the rebuilding of a Turkish school. *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-42.

²⁶ *Asenovgrad krepost*, January 24, 1925, 5-6.

²⁷ See for example *Biuletin na Kooperativното Druzhestvo na Sdruzhenite Tiutiunoproizvoditeli ot grad Stanimaka i Okoliyata*, January 28, 1922, and *Asenovgrad krepost*, February 15, 1926, 5.

²⁸ *Asenovgrad Krepost*, January 24, 1925, 8.

²⁹ Here I have in mind the more extreme communist and American-funded Protestant abstinence movements discussed. On Protestant efforts see James F. Clarke, *Temperance Work in Bulgaria: Its Successes* (Samokov, Bulgaria: Evangelical School Press, 1909, 3). On Communist abstinence movements see Kristo Stoianov, *Dvizhenie za Trezvenost v Razgradski Okrŭg* (Razgrad: Okrŭzhen komitet za trezvenost, 1983).

³⁰ *Asenovgrad krepost*, August, 1926, 3.

³¹ *Asenovgrad krepost*, January 24, 1925, 8, and *Asenovgrad krepost*, July, 1925, 8.

³² *Asenovgrad krepost*, July 23, 1926, 2.

³³ *Asenovgrad krepost*, January 1, 1925.

³⁴ *Asenovgrad krepost*, January 24, 1925, 6.

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- ³⁵ Vasil Kutsoglu was a private Bulgarian merchant who was also a pioneer in this respect. For a description of this period in his memoirs, see Vasil Kutsolgu, *Spomeni i Razmisli* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na otechesveniiia front, 1989), 14-18.
- ³⁶ Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 43-6; see also Plovdiv Okružhen Dürzhaven Arkhiv [hereafter PODA] (F-1648, O-1, E-3, L-22); on trade with India via British merchants see (F-96, O-1, E-93, L-23).
- ³⁷ See for example an article in the organ of tobacco merchants and factory owners *Tiutium*, June 1, 1923, 1.
- ³⁸ *Asenovgrad krepost*, September 30, 1926, 4.
- ³⁹ See for example *Asenovgrad krepost*, June 30, 1925, 1; *Asenovgrad krepost*, July, 1925, 1, 8; *Asenovgrad krepost*, October 31, 1925, 1, 8; and *Asenovgrad krepost*, December 5, 1926.
- ⁴⁰ See Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 71-73.
- ⁴¹ *Asenovgrad krepost*, January 24, 1925, 3.
- ⁴² Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 72.
- ⁴³ Avramov, *Komunalniiat Kapitalizüm*, Vol 3, 30.
- ⁴⁴ Some sources seem to agree with the official assessments of “Asenovgrad Krepost” as plagued by “bad governance”. See for example Avramov, *Komunalniiat Kapitalizüm*, Vol 3, 43-4. At the same time, Angel Krüstev in his recent book, *Asenovgrad Krepost: Tiutiuneva Kooperatsiia Asenovgrad*, presents Stoian Ivanov and the 1919-1924 years as the peak of successful cooperative activities and leadership.
- ⁴⁵ See *Asenovgrad Krepost*, March 15, 1925, 2.
- ⁴⁶ For example, their accumulated capital allowed them to purchase the tobacco factory of the local Greek owner Karamandi, whose business collapsed in 1924. Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 51-53.
- ⁴⁷ *Tiutiunopabotnik*, May 23, 1919, 1.
- ⁴⁸ See. For example, *Tiutiunopabotnik*, February 28, 1921, 3.
- ⁴⁹ See, for example Daskalov, *Bülgarskoto Obshtestvo*, Vol 1, 195.
- ⁵⁰ Boris Mateev, *Dvizhenieto za Kooperativno Zemedelie v Bülgariiia pri Usloviyata na Kapitalisma* (Sofia: Izdatestvo na Bülgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1967).
- ⁵¹ See, for example, Angel Ivanov, *Kogato Govorekha Pushkite: Spomeni* (Plovdiv: Izdatelstvo “Khristo Danov”, 1984), 6.
- ⁵² Stefan Abadzhiev, *Spomeni ot Izminatiiia Püt* (Sofia: Profizdat, 1982), 74, 99.
- ⁵³ *Biuletin na Kooperativnoto Druzhestvo na Sdruzhenite Tiutiunoproizvoditeli ot Grad Stanimaka i Okoliyata*, July 22, 1922, 2-3.

⁵⁴ See *Asenovgrad Krepost*, March 25, 1927, 1; and *Asenovgrad Krepost*, July, 1925, 1.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Asenovgrad Krepost*, June 25, 1926, 6.

⁵⁶ *Asenovgrad krepost*, May 15, 1925, 5.

⁵⁷ These numbers include the deaths by communists at the hands of IMRO paramilitaries. Tatiana Kostadinova, *Bulgaria 1879-1946: The Challenge of Choice* (Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1995), 62, as cited in James Frusetta, "Bulgaria's Macedonia: Nation-building and State-building, Centralization, and Autonomy in Pirin, Macedonia, 1903-1952" (PhD Diss, University of Maryland, College Park, 2006), 192.

⁵⁸ As cited in Abadzhiev, *Spomeni*, 117.

⁵⁹ Ekaterina Ivanova, *Iz Realniia Sviat na Romana "Tiutiun": Otlomki ot Minoloto* (Sofia: Firma "Pandora-prim", 1994), 110.

⁶⁰ PODA (F-1648, O-1, E-3, L-1). He also published articles in the organ of tobacco merchants and factory owners *Tiutiun*. See, for example, his article on the industry in *Tiutiun*, Sept 21, 1921.

⁶¹ For an extensive treatment of these developments see Frusetta, "Bulgaria's Macedonia." For this exact figure see page 167.

⁶² TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-17, L-162).

⁶³ TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-17, L-48-50).

⁶⁴ TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-17, L-256). See also TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-17, L-26).

⁶⁵ TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-17, L-181, 193).

⁶⁶ TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-17, L-195).

⁶⁷ Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 238.

⁶⁸ TSDA (F-396k, O-2, E-39, L-124).

⁶⁹ See the unpublished memoir of Kosta Kichukov PODA (F-1943, O-2, E-1, L-19, 47); and Ivanov, *Kogato Govorekha Pushkite*.

⁷⁰ Ivanov, *Kogato Govorekha Pushkite*, 52.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷² PODA (F-1943, O-2, E-1, L-17-8).

⁷³ PODA (F-1943, O-2, E-1, L-18-19).

⁷⁴ PODA (F-1943, O-2, E-1, L- 57).

⁷⁵ PODA (F-1943, O-2, E-1, L- 57).

⁷⁶ *Asenovgrad krepost*, March 15, 1925, 2.

⁷⁷ *Asenovgrad krepost*, March 15, 1925, 2.

⁷⁸ See Avramov, *Komunalniiat Kapitalizim*, Vol 3, 44-47.

⁷⁹ Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 102.

⁸⁰ *Asenovgrad krepost*, November 22, 1926, 4.

⁸¹ *Asenovgrad krepost*, November 3, 1926, 4.

⁸² While admitting some “mistakes”, the “AK” leadership was exceedingly transparent when it came to finances, and the costs and income of the cooperative were regularly printed in the cooperative newspaper *Asenovgrad krepost*, December 5, 1926, 3.

⁸³ *Asenovgrad krepost*, December 5, 1926, 1.

⁸⁴ *Asenovgrad krepost*, December 28, 1926, 2.

⁸⁵ Krüstev, *Asenovgrad krepost*, 106.