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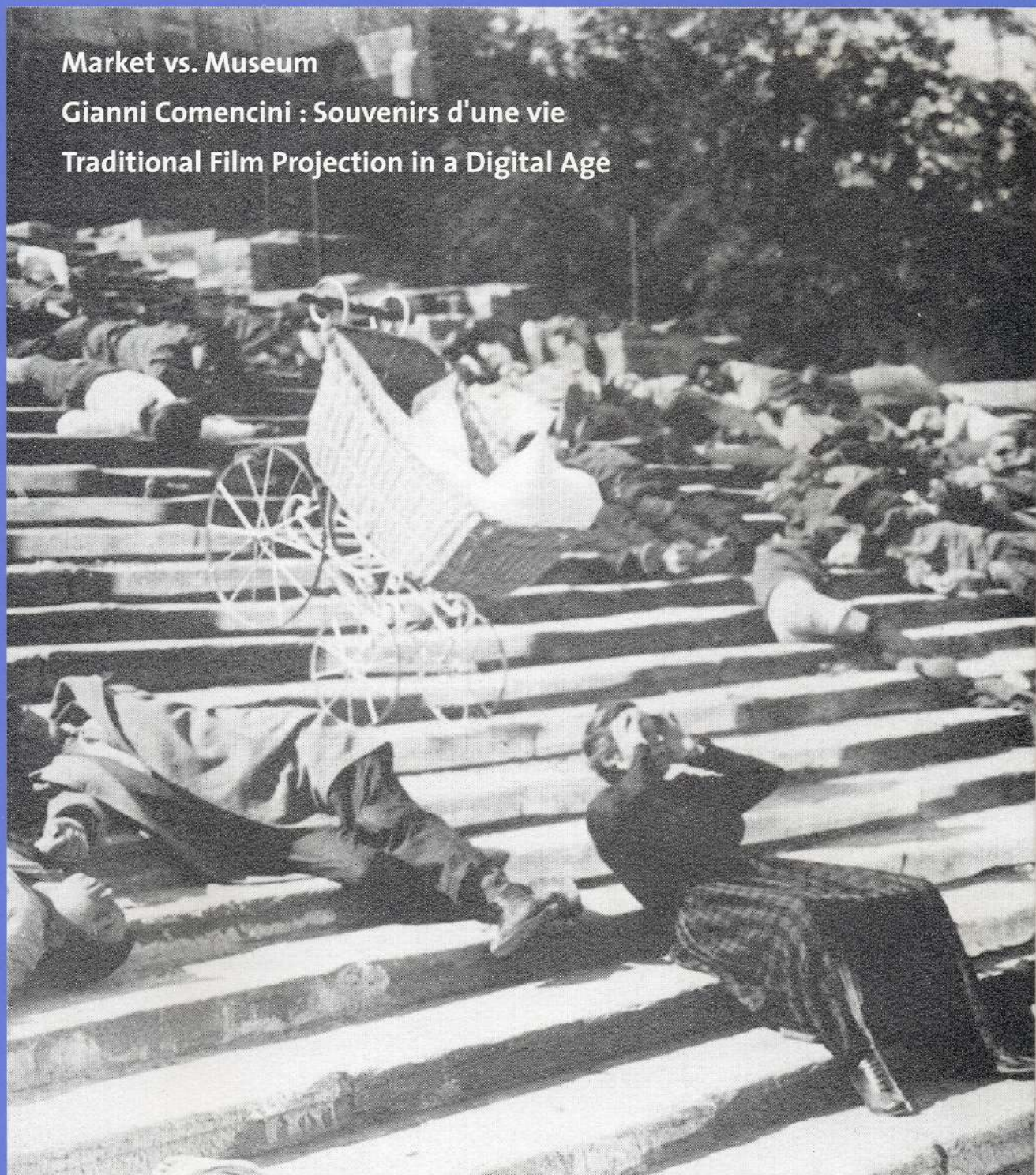
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Karadjordje

Roger Smither

DVDs

There is almost always romance in any story of the finding of a lost film, but few such stories can be more romantic than that of *Karadjordje* (or, to give it its full title, *The Life and Deeds of the Immortal Duke Karadjordje*). The first Serbian feature film, almost certainly the first Balkan feature film, made in 1911, *Karadjordje* matched its novelty with its subject matter. The film portrayed the life of the eponymous national hero – the resistance leader of the early 1800s who turned the tide after three and a half centuries of Turkish rule and laid the foundations of a Serbian nation. In spite of huge popularity and obvious historical significance, however, the film vanished from sight at the end of the 1920s, and, like so many important silent films, was considered thoroughly lost for seventy years... Then, in July 2003, a print was found in the Filmarchiv Austria, among the effects of Ignaz Reinhale (Rantauer) the former proprietor of a cinema in Osijek who came to Austria with his films when the First World War brought about the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. The film was rediscovered just in time to be screened to mark the 200th anniversary of the original *Karadjordje*'s uprising.

The DVD shares this find with the world. At its heart is a faithful rendition of the print that turned up in Vienna. Not yet in any sense a restoration, the transferred print is known to be shorter than the original film. It also shows the traces of occasionally significant nitrate deterioration and other blemishes, although the underlying picture quality is excellent. As the found print lacked intertitles, the Jugoslovenska Kinoteka has generated new titles, working from dramatic and biographical sources.

The "extras" on the disc include a 20-minute documentary *Karadjordje for the Second Time Among Serbs*. This tells the story of the film and of its rediscovery, mainly by using a succession of interviews with film historians Dr Dejan Kosanović and Stevan Jovčić, with Aleksander Erdeljanovic, Radoslav Zelenović and Dinko Tucaković from the Kinoteka's senior staff, and with Nikolaus Wostry of Filmarchiv Austria. Other extras include digital versions of the exhibition, the book and the poster prepared by the Kinoteka for the (re)presentation of the film in 2004. Although naturally presented in Serbian, the DVD caters well for English speakers, with a separate English-language menu and full subtitling. The DVD does not provide quite all the information one might hope for – I could, for example, find no credit for the music that is used on the film, and no statement as to whether the yellow/sepia tinting of the film was a faithful reflection of the print that had been copied or a selection by the Kinoteka – but it certainly makes it easy to watch *Karadjordje* and consider its place in the spectrum of film history.

As a national treasure, the film is of course beyond price: effectively a unique example of a potential film industry that barely got started

Premier long métrage serbe, et vraisemblablement premier long métrage produit dans les Balkans, *Karadjordje* (1911) fut un événement, aussi bien par sa nouveauté que par le sujet dont il traitait : la vie du célèbre héros de la résistance du début du 19^e siècle qui mit fin à trois siècles et demi de domination turque et jeta les bases de la nation serbe.

Malgré sa popularité, comme beaucoup d'autres films de l'époque, *Karadjordje* disparut de la circulation à la fin des années vingt et fut dès lors considéré comme perdu. Or en 2003 une copie du film fut retrouvée dans les collections de la Filmarchiv Austria, juste à temps pour les célébrations du 200^e anniversaire du soulèvement de Karadjordje!

L'édition dvd du film n'est pas à proprement parler une restauration : c'est le transfert, avec traces de détérioration du nitrate et autres blessures, de la copie (légèrement plus courte que le métrage d'origine, nous dit-on, sans préciser à quel moment manquent des scènes) de la copie retrouvée en Autriche. La Jugoslovenska Kinoteka a reconstitué les intertitres qui avaient disparus de la copie retrouvée – contrairement à la pratique de l'époque, les intertitres suivent l'action, plutôt que de la précéder : une pratique balkanique, ou une initiative des restaurateurs?

Le dvd inclut également un documentaire de vingt minutes, qui fait l'histoire du film et de sa redécouverte, et des images du livre et de l'exposition qui accompagnaient la projection du film en 2004. Le dvd comprend un menu complet et des sous-titres en anglais.

Véritable trésor national, le film est également un exemple intéressant des débuts d'une cinématographie que la guerre empêcha de se développer. Produite par le propriétaire de la première salle spécifiquement construite pour le cinéma à Belgrade, le film fut réalisé par un metteur en scène de théâtre et photographié par un certain Louis de Beéry qui, malgré l'allure française de son nom, était possiblement autrichien.

before the wars of the second decade of the 20th Century brought it to a standstill. As an example of pioneer feature film production it has considerable interest. The framework of the film derives from literary precedents – including a stage play and an epic poem – and many scenes, particularly interiors, look “stagey” in the style familiar from much early cinema. On the whole, action is filmed in medium shot, with next to no camera movement and no close-ups. Emotion is represented by grand gestures and frequent tableaux – most memorably by an “Apotheosis of Karadjordje” which has quite understandably been selected by the Kinoteka as the image that represents the film on the poster and the covers of the book and DVD. On occasion, however, the film opens up with exteriors that are dramatic in another sense: our hero has to escape the Turks by crossing a river into Austrian territory, and later returns by another clandestine river crossing; at the crucial Battle of Misar in 1806, Karadjordje and his officers await the impact of Turkish cavalry who charge towards the camera in memorable long shot. Such moments show real panache, and give the film considerable interest in its own right, as well as the automatic value it has on account of its remarkable history.

The film was produced by Svetozar Botorić, proprietor of the first purpose-built cinema in Belgrade, directed by a theatre director called Ilija Stanojević, and filmed by an operator using the French-sounding name Louis de Beéry, whose identity remains uncertain but who may – according to the documentary on the DVD – have been an Austrian. They clearly constituted a production team with real vision, and enjoyed sufficient resources to realise that vision. The cast was led by Milorad Petrović in the title role, the leading Serbian actor of his time whose presence offers further confirmation of the film's high profile.

While, as somebody who speaks not a word of Serbian, I am hesitant to raise questions that may well be answered in the parts of the DVD that were inaccessible to me, there are some aspects of the DVD that aroused my curiosity. The first concerns the completeness of the film: we are told that the film is shorter than the original release, but not where it is believed that material has been lost. My guess would be, towards the end of the film, as the clear narrative arc of the hero's birth and path to initial triumph becomes much harder to follow as his achievements are undone, disunity breaks out in his movement, and he is finally assassinated by former colleagues. The second concerns the overall shape of the film: describing his emotions when the first news of the discovery arrived, Mr Erdeljanović says he knew immediately it was the right film because the “opening scene” showed the presentation of the actors. Such scenes – with the cast literally taking an on-screen curtain call – are indeed common prologues to films of the period, but these curtain calls appear at the end of the DVD: were they moved, and if so, why? Also at the end of the film there appear three scenes evoking other memorialisations of Karadjordje: the first verse of an epic poem, and two Belgrade monuments. The last is clearly an afterthought to the main 1911 film, as we see the unveiling of the monument in 1913, but we are not told when this or the other additions were made.

One final question: in the silent cinema to which I am accustomed, the

Karadjordje (1911), el primer largometraje serbio, acaso el primero producido en los Balcanes, fue un acontecimiento no sólo por la novedad, sino también por el argumento: la vida del célebre héroe de la resistencia de principios del siglo XIX, que puso fin a tres siglos de dominación turca y sentó las bases de la nación serbia.

Como muchas películas de esa época, y no obstante la popularidad de que gozó, *Karadjordje* desapareció a fines de los años 20 y, como suele suceder, fue dada por perdida. Sin embargo, en 2003 se descubrió una copia en el Filmarchiv Austria, precisamente cuando se aviaban las celebraciones del 200º aniversario de la sublevación de Karadjordje.

La edición de la película en DVD no es estrictamente una restauración, sino la transferencia, con huellas de deterioro del nitrato y otros daños, de la copia austríaca. Esta copia, como se aclara es más corta que el original, pero no se indican las partes que faltan. La Jugoslovenska Kinoteka ha reconstruido los intertítulos desaparecidos en la copia, pero, contrariamente a lo que se hacía en esa época, éstos siguen la acción en lugar de anunciarla, y no se sabe si se trata de una característica balcánica o de una libertad tomada por los restauradores.

El DVD comprende también un documental de 20 minutos con la historia de la película, su descubrimiento y algunas imágenes del libro y la exposición que acompañaron la proyección de 2004. Contiene además un menú completo y subtítulos en inglés.

Auténtico tesoro nacional, *Karadjordje* es también un ejemplo interesante de una industria cinematográfica cuyo desarrollo fue frustrado por la guerra. La película, producida por el propietario de la primera sala de Belgrado dedicada exclusivamente al cine, fue realizada por un escenógrafo teatral; la fotografía se debe a Louis de Beéry, hoy desconocido, quien, a pesar de la fonética francesa de su apellido, parece haber sido austríaco.

intertitles or captions commonly appear at the start of a scene, or just before a character speaks, to guide the audience in interpreting what it is about to see. In *Karadjordje*, the titles commonly appear some time after a scene has started, sometimes after quite a lot of action has transpired. The effect is quite startlingly different, and I wondered whether this is a common feature of Balkan cinema? As already noted, the original intertitles (if there were any) did not survive, so these titles are recreations by the Jugoslovenska Kinoteka's expert team. Did the surviving print suggest to them where titles were needed, or is the titling entirely their own conception?

To conclude: the rediscovery of *Karadjordje* is clearly a major event for Serbian and Balkan cinema, but the film offers much for anybody interested in film history to admire and to think about.

Karadjorje

Long feature, 1911, 100 minutes.

DVD PAL-colour including film with Serbian and English titles, booklet. Jugoslovenska Kinoteka, Belgrade, 2004.