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Drinking to the Future: Wine in Communist Bulgaria

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This article explores wine production, consumption and trade in the context of late socialist Bulgaria and the wider Eastern Bloc. In particular, it connects wine to the process of building legitimacy in Bulgaria, as part of post-Stalinist culture of consumer abundance and even connoisseurship that was steeped in nationalist narratives and meanings, as well as utopian visions of the future. To complicate such narratives, it also delves into the contradictory ways in which late-socialist anti-alcohol narratives and campaigns similarly looked to local, if not national, precursors to ground their counter model of a sober socialist present and communist future.

In 1980 three journalists from the city of Plovdiv set out on a journey to chart the geography and history of Bulgarian wine. They spent nearly a year traversing the villages of the country's far-flung wine producing regions – from Thrace and Macedonia to the Black Sea coast and the wide Danubian Plain. They interviewed elderly residents, people who, they noted, 'had already come to the end of their life's vine and now were tranquilly drinking their wine'.¹ The resulting publication, *The Book of Wine* (*Kniga za vinoto*), waxed nostalgic about the depth to which wine production and consumption were embedded in Bulgaria's past and hence were inseparable from the 'Bulgarian character'.² The authors reconstruct the history of wine in vivid and wistful detail, albeit in impressionistic, unfootnoted vignettes. They enthusiastically describe wine as the elixir that famously bound and animated the culture of the ancient Thracians, some of the earliest known wine producers, who left their culinary roots and ancient vines in Bulgarian soil. The book celebrates wine production and consumption, not as a socialist achievement, but as an important part of historical *national* culture. Their book thus stands in stark contrast to earlier wine histories from the communist period that derided past practices and lauded the progress of the present towards a communist 'bright future'.

The Book of Wine was just one of the scores of publications written or released in and around 1981, the year of the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of the first Bulgarian state. This jubilee was celebrated through an astounding number of publications, events, exhibits, parades and ribbon cuttings for new buildings and monuments. These happenings were part and parcel of the heightened nationalist tenor in late socialist Bulgaria, with echoes elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc. Scholarship on the post-Stalinist Eastern Bloc has highlighted the use of nationalism but also the turn to consumer goods as 'alternative sources' of legitimacy, beginning in the late 1950s.³ But only works in food studies, it seems, have begun to connect the two parallel processes, most notably in relation to the

¹ Iliia Zaïkov, Ivan Dionisiev, Georgi Petrov and Kosta Forev, *Kniga za vinoto* (Sofia: n.p., 1982), 16.

² Zaïkov et al., *Kniga*, 20.

³ On Bulgaria see Ivalo Znepolski, Mikhail Gruiev, Momchil Metodiev, Martin Ivanov, Daniel Vachkov, Ivan Elenkov and Plamen Doinov, *Bulgaria under Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2019). For a bloc-wide analysis of nationalism and communism, see, for example, Martin Mevius, 'Reappraising Communism and Nationalism', in Martin Mevius, ed., *The Communist Quest for National Legitimacy in Europe, 1918–1989* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–24. On consumer needs and legitimacy, see Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, 'Introduction', in Bren and Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 8.

articulation of national, ethnic or multi-national cuisines.⁴ In this article, I further develop such connective threads, with an in depth look at the case of Bulgarian wine under state socialism. In particular, I explore how wine operated in the context of building late socialist legitimacy in Bulgaria, as part of new (food) culture of abundance and even connoisseurship that, at least at times, was steeping in nationalist narratives and meanings, as well as utopian visions of the future. To complicate such narratives I also delve into the ways in which late-socialist anti-alcohol narratives and campaigns similarly looked to local, if not national, precursors to ground their sober counter model of a utopian socialist future.

This work contributes to a growing, but still sparse historical literature on alcohol as a commodity and element of food and drink culture under socialism in Eastern Europe. Scholarship on alcohol in socialist Eastern Europe tends to focus on alcohol as a vehicle for sociability and leisure, as well as informal exchange – that is alcohol as currency.⁵ In the Russian-Soviet context, by contrast, vodka received considerably more attention as a commodity with a critical role in Russian and Soviet history.⁶ This literature establishes the complex place of vodka in Russian culture and politics, but not necessarily as a means of *nationalist* legitimization under late socialism. True vodka is commonly framed as bolstering the Soviet Union, like Imperial Russia, fiscally and politically, a situation that found parallels in the story of Bulgarian wine and other kinds of alcohol production. But work on official efforts to inculcate national meaning into vodka (or anti-vodka campaigns) under socialism have been largely absent from such studies; perhaps it was not operative at all. More relevant to this study is the work on champagne and wine in the Soviet Union, which points to its ever increasing consumption as a way to provide the ‘good life’ to Soviet citizens – under and after Stalin – which in part required quality and quantity, as well as ‘civilised’ (*kulturnost*) comportment.⁷

The Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites encouraged alcohol production and consumption under socialism, particularly in the final decades. Alcohol was integral to leisure consumption and emblematic of the socialist ‘good life’ – or the promise that socialism would bring abundance, pleasure and progress to all of its citizens.⁸ In the latter decades of socialism each Eastern Bloc state domesticated and legitimated socialism in its own way, drawing on local traditions and conditions.⁹ In Bulgaria, wine acted as a kind of anchor for the system, as production of wine proliferated exponentially in the 1960s and 1970s, not just for local consumption, but for export, and to supply the tourist industry. Scores of new drinking venues opened in urban areas and at tourist sites that mainly housed bloc visitors, mostly notably on the Black Sea coast and at alpine resorts. Wine and spirits were served up to domestic and foreign tourists but also exported across (and beyond) the bloc in ever greater

⁴ For an earlier work on this see Joyce Toomre, ‘Food and National Identity in Soviet Armenia’, in Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre, eds., *Food in Russian History and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). For a more recent work see Wendy Bracewell, ‘Eating Up Yugoslavia: Cookbooks and Consumption in Socialist Yugoslavia’, in Bren and Neuburger, *Communism Unwrapped*, 169–97. See also, Erik Scott, ‘Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table’, *Kritika* 13 (2012), 831–58.

⁵ For a notable exception, see the articles in the winter 1984 (4) special issue of *East European Quarterly* on ‘Ethnography, Alcohol, and South-Central European Societies’ and Narcis Tulbure, ‘The Socialist Clearing House: Alcohol, Reputation, and Gender in Romania’s Second Economy’, in Bren and Neuburger, *Communism Unwrapped*, 255–76.

⁶ See, for example, Mark Schrad, *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy, and the Secret History of the Russian State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Edwin Trommelen, and David Stephenson, *Davai!: the Russians and their Vodka* (Montpelier, VT: Russian Life Books, 2012); David Christian, *Living Water: Vodka and Russian Society on the Eve of Emancipation* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1990) and Laura L. Phillips, *Bolsheviks and the Bottle: Drink and Worker Culture in St. Petersburg, 1900–1929* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

⁷ See, for example, Stephen Bittner, ‘A Problem of Taste: An American Connoisseur’s Travels through the Soviet Union’s Black Sea Vineyards and Wineries’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History*, 19, 2 (Spring 2018), 312 and Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003).

⁸ For a look at the complex notion of the good life in the Bulgarian context, see Cristofer Scarboro, *The Late Socialist Good Life in Bulgaria: Meaning and Living in a Permanent Present Tense* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2012).

⁹ Undoubtedly one could find the use of national history and sentiment in the official framing of wine culture elsewhere in the region, for example, Hungary. Zoltán Halász, *Hungarian Wine Through the Ages* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1962).

quantities. Publications like *The Book of Wine* provided a historical, and hence decisively *national*, scaffolding to wine culture. In particular, the connection of wine to the ancient Thracian past paradoxically offered a kind of pedigree and validation for Bulgaria's efforts at achieving socialist progress. After all, if according to Marx only the most advanced nations were ready for the next phase of historical development, it would stand to reason that ancient signs of 'civilisation' would pave Bulgaria's path to progress on the foundation of a 'civilised' past.

Yet even as alcohol consumption was clearly accepted and promoted, state campaigns against drinking – albeit ultimately ineffectual – also took hold. Such efforts commenced in Bulgaria in the 1960s and intensified in the 1970s and 1980s. A torrent of academic and popular books, pamphlets and magazines, not to mention films, talks and exhibits, railed against the dangers of alcohol. Voices against drinking were in line with bloc-wide, but also global, concerns about the deleterious effects of alcohol on the body, the family and productivity. But in Bulgaria anti-drinking arguments (much like pro-drinking narratives) were also deeply embedded in local conditions and historical precedents. Indeed, while wine was a homegrown source of pleasure, it also presented a paradox. If wine (and drink in general) had its vocal champions, it also had its many detractors, past and present. The former, perhaps, were far more in tune with the general population's love of wine and spirits. But the voices of restraint were not insignificant or contrived, nor were they only anchored in the present. Instead they increasingly looked to *national* origins, including the medieval and even ancient past. In a sense, the desires and questions raised by both drinkers and teetotallers cut close to the heart of Bulgarian history and culture – its past, present and future.

This article explores the unique ways in which the various sectors of Bulgarian socialist economy encouraged – and even justified – the production, exchange and consumption of wine – even as they also supported critical voices of temperance. It draws on a range of published and archival material from the wine industry, the temperance movement and the tourist industry, as well as popular histories and cookbooks, to combine the approaches of consumption and commodity history with food studies. The case of Bulgarian wine, I argue, offers a window into the ways socialism was domesticated and negotiated through various narratives and practices, which looked to the communist future through a prism of the past. I explore a number of interrelated questions. Was wine a mark of a deeper (even ancient) European pedigree for Bulgarians? Was it a critical marker of *modern* socialist culture and connoisseurship, to be served up to foreign visitors, marketed and exported? Or was it to blame for backwardness resulting from alcohol-induced laziness, a waste of time and bodily strength, degeneration and over-consumption? Such questions pre-dated communism, but they became more pressing during the communist period as wine production and consumption vastly accelerated under the specific constraints of a communist regime and the Cold War. Until the bitter end of the system – the end of the line (or vine) for communism in 1989 – such questions remained: was wine a necessary accompaniment to socialist progress and a bright future? Or was that seemingly bottomless glass of red preventing that future from becoming a reality?

Wine Roots, Temperance Seeds

It is impossible to understand the Bulgarian communist transformation – in and beyond wine culture – without an understanding of what preceded it, in terms of producing and consuming traditions as well as both pro- and anti-drinking traditions and impulses. Prior to the communist period Bulgaria was still predominantly rural, with roughly 80 per cent of the country dominated by small peasant holdings, most of which had small vineyards for personal consumption.¹⁰ Bulgaria had long been a part of the traditional Mediterranean wine belt, where viticulture enjoyed suitable soil and climate as well as ample demand. Indeed, wine may have been produced in the region of Thrace – now divided between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey – even before the spread of the drink to France and Italy. Thracian grape varietals were also the probable original source for ancient

¹⁰ Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 283.

Greek cultivars.¹¹ Thrace was the home of the famed ancient cult of wine drinking and excess associated with Bacchus (in Greek, Dionysus), but it was also the birthplace of Orpheus, whose ascetic sect renounced wine and other intoxicants. While this preceded the migrations of Slavs and Bulgars to the region by many centuries, some of the rituals of the followers of Bacchus and Orpheus seem to have survived in local pagan, and later Orthodox Christian, traditions. Wine culture was grafted – like a hybrid cultivar – onto the many waves of migrants who settled in the region.

Orthodox Christians of the region navigated the world of wine and other earthly delights through elaborate cycles of feast and fast, or by designating holy people, like monks or nuns, to abstain on behalf of all. The community, then, was generally free to give in to weakness and indulgence, especially during the ample feast days that punctuated the year. In the so-called First Bulgarian Empire of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, a priest named Bogomil founded the famous dualistic (Christian) heresy that came to be known as Bogomilism. The Bogomils – dubbed ‘early Protestants’ (or latter-day followers of Orpheus) by some historians and religious scholars – demanded abstinence from drink, meat and other worldly pleasures. Few remained beyond the fifteenth century in Bulgaria, but their influence spread across Europe to lasting effect.¹² For most Orthodox Christians in the Eastern Balkans, in contrast, wine was consumed regularly, if relatively moderately. It was a ubiquitous part of daily life, linked to ritual, celebration and sociability, but it was also a source of sustenance, not a luxury. As the famous Bulgarian ethnographer Dimitur Marinov noted, ‘wine, bread and salt’ constituted the basic Bulgarian peasant food troika.¹³ For most, wine was not considered sinful; nor was it relegated only to the evening and times of celebration and leisure. In many places it was consumed for breakfast or during work in the fields – it was considered fortifying, a tonic for strength and vitality.¹⁴ In regions where the vine did not flourish, namely Western Bulgaria, distilled drinks such as *rakia* (brandy made from plums, grapes or other fruit) and *masika* (an anisette) became common by the fifteenth century, with their popularity spreading in the ensuing centuries to rival (or complement) wine in many places.¹⁵

Like the rest of the Balkans Bulgaria was historically part of a richly diverse landscape of religious and ethnic groups. Under the Ottoman Empire, from the fourteenth century until de facto independence in 1878, migration and conversion brought significant Muslim populations into the region. Prohibited from consuming alcohol, Muslims were the new non-drinkers of the Eastern Balkans. In fact, this Quranic proscription became an important distinguishing feature between Muslims and Christians, with the Muslim café and the Christian tavern serving as traditional hubs of work and leisure for the men of these two religious communities. Since the nineteenth century, a spate of Western travellers – particularly Anglo-American Protestants – had juxtaposed the ‘drunken’ Bulgarian to the sober Muslim.¹⁶ Protestants in the field often laid the primary blame on Orthodoxy itself for making the religion’s flocks drunk and culturally degenerate. Their reports portrayed Orthodox priests and monks as ‘miserable wine drinkers’ who not only consumed alcohol but even saw drinking as integral to their faith.¹⁷ As Reverend Meriam, a Protestant missionary, reported in apparent astonishment, the

¹¹ Paul Lukacs, *Inventing Wine: A New History of One of the World's Most Ancient Pleasures* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2012).

¹² See, for example, L.P. Brockett, *The Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia; or, The Early Protestants of the East: An Attempt to Restore Some Lost Leaves of Protestant History* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1879).

¹³ Raina Gavrilova, *Koleloto na zhivota: Vsekidnevieto na Bălgarskiia vuzrozhdeniiski grad* (Sofia: Universitetsko izd-vo ‘Sv. Kliment Ohridski’, 1999), 303–4.

¹⁴ Gavrilova, *Kolelo*, 305.

¹⁵ See Stoian Vakarelski, *Etnografija na Bălgarija* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na nauka i izkusto, 1974), 222–6.

¹⁶ There is a rich secondary literature analysing ‘Westerners’ traveling east, though food and drink are rarely looked at in depth. See, for example, Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). A notable exception is the coverage of food and drink in travel writing on nineteenth-century southeastern Europe in Bozidar Jezernik, *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (London: Saqi Press, 2003), 47–55, 147–70.

¹⁷ See *Missionary News from Bulgaria* (Samokov), 21 (31 Dec. 1888), 6 and William Webster, *Puritans in the Balkans: The American Board Mission in Bulgaria, 1878–1918; A Study in Purpose and Procedure* (Sofia: Studia Historico-Philologica Serdicensia, 1938), 88.

priests he met while travelling in the Edirne region in the 1850s were with one exception ‘miserable wine drinkers. On my refusing the invitation of one of these to drink with him, he exclaimed in astonishment, “What! are you not a Christian?”’¹⁸ Other sources corroborated that the local Orthodox populations associated drinking wine with *belief* in God, or even worse, pagan gods.¹⁹ As a result, in American (and British) Protestant theory and practice, the sobering of Bulgarian bodies and souls was a cornerstone of nurturing ‘virtuous industry’ in the region.

From the time they entered the Ottoman field, missionaries tried to lead by example and spread the gospel of temperance along with notions of a ‘reformed’ Christianity. American Protestants set up schools across the Ottoman Empire which became central hubs for conversion and the inculcation of abstinence. Temperance writings were woven into local Protestant publications, like the widely read Bulgarian-language newspaper *Zornitsa*.²⁰ American missionary women founded a local branch of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1891. Wine, the WCTU sources lamented, was ‘cheaper than water’ in Bulgaria, and brandy was distilled from wine, resulting in ‘universal drunkenness’.²¹ By the 1880s temperance societies had produced and distributed some 100,000 tracts and posters within Bulgaria.²² And although their efforts at conversion were often thwarted by their insistence on temperance, they also had considerable influence among a vocal minority of Bulgarians who converted or were simply heavily influenced by their Protestant education. By the interwar period Protestant temperance organisations were major players in the Bulgarian National Neutral Temperance Union, which promoted sobriety as the surest path towards a purer future of sober and productive bodies and souls.²³ Most temperance advocates prior to the interwar period had been connected to the active Protestant missionary milieu, and indeed abstinence had been a distinguishing factor between Protestant converts and the local Orthodox Christian populations – mimicking, in a sense, the sober Muslim–drunken Christian divide.²⁴

By the interwar period, however, the Protestants had company in their quest. There was a veritable blossoming of temperance advocacy among politically active segments of the population, in the face of the moral crisis precipitated by the devastation and dislocation brought by the Balkans Wars (1912–3) and the First World War. Such movements blossomed in the shadow of the devastation of war, which culminated in mass hunger and protest in 1916–8. A variety of movements and individuals looked to religious, moral, scientific and socio-economic reasons to explain why Bulgarians should leave the bottle behind. Along with the Protestants, some of the most organised teetotallers belonged to a vocal segment of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers Party, the precursor to the Bulgarian Communist Party. Party members, emboldened by Soviet prohibitions on vodka, created their own organisations, which became important ‘front’ groups between the world wars, especially when the Communist Party was pushed underground after a failed uprising in 1923.²⁵ There were also purveyors of temperance within the influential Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, a peasant political party under Alexander Stamboliski, which was in power from 1918 to 1923. Agrarians associated excessive drinking with the ‘evils’ of the parasitical city, but they also supported referendums to close taverns in

¹⁸ Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches*, vol. II (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1872), 190.

¹⁹ Stanislas St. Clair and Charles Brophy, *Residence in Bulgaria; or, Notes on the Resources and Administration of Turkey: The Condition and Character, Manners, Customs, and Language of the Christian and Musselman Populations, with Reference to the Eastern Question* (London: J. Murray, 1869), 2.

²⁰ *Zornitsa* was a weekly paper published in Istanbul that was said to be circulated in more than 300 towns in the Bulgarian provinces. By 1882 the circulation was about 4,000. See Webster, *Puritans*, 22, 82.

²¹ *Report of the Seventh Convention of the World’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Tremont Temple, Boston, Mass., October 17th–23rd, 1906*, vols. 7–9 (Evanston, Ill.: Woman’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1906), 60.

²² James F. Clarke, *Temperance Work in Bulgaria: Its Successes* (Samokov, Bulgaria: Evangelical School Press, 1909), 3.

²³ Tsentralen Istoricheski Dürzhevni Arkhiv (TsIDA), F-1027k, O-1, E-46, L-5.

²⁴ Khristo Dimchev, ‘Pūrvi Iskri’, in Krum Akhchiiski and Ianka Tosheva, eds., *Iubileen Nauchen Sbornik*, 1922–37 (Sofia: Studentska vúzdürzhatelno družhestvo, 1937), 10.

²⁵ Khristo Stoikov, *Dvizheniete na tressenost v Razgradski okrûg*, 1920–1982 (Sofia: Okrûzhen komitet za trezvenost, 1983), 7.

the rural areas.²⁶ Advocates of temperance emerged on the right as well, however, in line with eugenics thought, but also as part of the growing critique on both the right and the left of the penetrating influences of the West in Bulgarian cities. In fact, in spite of the political divisiveness of this period, there was agreement among many intellectuals and politicians on the apparent ills of modernity and capitalism, and for many drunkenness was one of those ills.²⁷

These sentiments also resonated outside of political circles, as alternative spiritual movements looked to self-fulfilment and social solutions in a sober way of life. Bulgaria had one of the most vibrant Tolstoyan movements outside of Russia, for example, with an agricultural commune near the Black Sea coast that published articles on temperance in its many periodicals.²⁸ There was also a highly visible religious sect called the White Brotherhood (*Bialo Bratsvo*) under the leadership of Petur Diunov. Diunov had attended American Protestant missionary schools in Bulgaria and went on to study theology and medicine in Boston from 1888 to 1895. After he returned from his studies a spiritual community began to form around him, and by 1921 the self-described 'Diunovtsi' had established the 'Sunrise' (*Izgrev*) commune, located in a park-like setting on the outskirts of Sofia. Here a community of followers lived in a kind of communal village, their all-white clothing marking them as members of the sect.²⁹ Their powerful alternative vision of the modern world – which called for temperance, vegetarianism and natural healing via food – attracted a large number of followers and sympathisers, including well-placed cultural and administrative elites, such as Evdokia, the sister of Tsar Boris II, and two of the tsar's closest advisers – Liubomir Lulchev and Ivan Bagrianov (and presumably the tsar himself).³⁰ The members of the White Brotherhood, like the Tolstoyans, were clearly influenced by the expansive, uneclesiastical spirituality of Tolstoy, who was influenced by the temperance strands of Buddhism and nineteenth-century theosophy. But interwar Bulgarian temperance advocates also looked to the home-grown Medieval Bogomil tradition. As Stoian Vatralski, a prominent writer and intellectual and a well-known Bulgarian Protestant of the period, noted, many of his contemporaries referred to the Diunovtsi as the 'new Bogomils'.³¹

While such movements flourished amidst the instability of the interwar period, so too did new forms of sociability and leisure consumption. Bulgarian cultural life, especially in the capital city of Sofia, changed rapidly in this period, with an array of new taverns, beer halls, cabarets, cafés and other places for public drinking, which were frequented by men as well as women of various classes.³² At the same time, changes in production processes, the first large-scale distilleries, began to bring cheaper and more plentiful sources of alcohol, in this case spirits, to the population – urban and rural. Such changes filtered out to the countryside, where a cash-based economy had begun to hold unprecedented sway. For some, this meant more 'liquid' income, or income for drink (however paltry), that could be spent in the rural tavern (*kruchma*), bringing increased rural debt and poverty. This was

²⁶ Paun Genov, *S Fakela na trezvenostta: Momenti ot borbata protiv pianstvoto i tiutiunopushcheneto pres 1300-godishnata istoriya na Bülgaria* (Sofia: Natsionalen komitet za trezvenost, meditsina i fizkultura, 1980), 54. These initiatives were supported by the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1919. Pavel Petkov, *Borbata za trezvenost vüv Vrachanski okrug, 1920–1980* (Sofia: Izdatelsvo na otechestvency niiia front, 1982), 49.

²⁷ See Nikolay Kamenov, 'A Question of Social Medicine or Racial Hygiene? The Bulgarian Temperance Discourse and Eugenics in the Interwar Period, 1920–1940', in Jessica Pliley, Robert Kramm and Harald Fischer-Tine, eds., *Global Anti-Vice Activism, 1890–1950: Fighting Drinks, Drugs, and 'Immorality'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 124–51.

²⁸ The commune was named Iasna Poliana, a Bulgarian translation of the name of Tolstoy's estate, Iasnaya Poliana (or Yasnaya Polyana). For more on this, see Georgi Konstantinov, *L.N. Tolstoi i vlianieto mu v Bülgaria* (Sofia: Biblioteka 'Svobodna misul', 1968); Khristo Dosev, *Blizo do Iasna Poliana: 1907–1909 g.* (Sofia: Lingua optima consilium, 2010).

²⁹ Raina Kostentseva, *Moiat roden grad Sofiia v kraia na XIX-nachalo na XX vek i sled tova* (Sofia: 'Riva', 2008), 183.

³⁰ See Kostentseva, *Moiat roden grad*, 183. For a list of some of his most influential followers, see <http://beinsadouno-plovdiv.org/all/english/05t.html> (last visited 27 Sept. 2017).

³¹ Stoian Vatralski, 'Diunov', *Zornitsa*, 41 (1926), 2–3, in Vergili Krustev, ed., *Izgrevut na Bialoto Bratsvo, pee i sviri, uchi I zhivee*, vol. 24 (Sofia: Biblioteka 'Zhiten Klass', 2008), 204.

³² See Rumen Daskalov, *Bülgarsko obshetsvo*, vol. 2: *Naselenie, obshtestvo, kultura* (Sofia: IK 'Gutenberg', 2005), 152–6.

echoed in the situation of urban workers, heightening alarm among temperance advocates about the effects of drinking to excess on the future of the poor, and by extension the nation.

In many respects, the changes and concerns of the interwar period set the tone for the post-war period. A vocal segment of the Bulgarian left was in agreement with other temperance advocates that drink was one of the ills of modernity and capitalism. They joined the Protestants and other religious groups in seeing drinking as a vestige of irrational aspects of (pre-communist) local tradition. Sobriety, then, was meant to propel modernity – albeit various alternative modernities – that would bring Bulgaria out of its ‘backwards’ state. The post-war communist state seemed to internalise, and continually rehash, the conflicting local (and global) impulses and dilemmas associated with an existential questioning of alcohol: to drink or not to drink.

Drinking under Socialism

With the Red Army invasion in September 1944, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was pulled into a power vacuum as the discredited wartime regime crumbled. The BCP consolidated power over the political system, economy and culture and set out to implement its utopian communist vision for the future. Progress was central to the party’s vision, but an alternative kind of progress, one that rejected Western capitalism and bourgeois means and modes of production and consumption. The BCP’s efforts to mobilise the population for its envisioned transformation were propelled as much through compromises and promises as through force. The ramping-up of wine production and consumption was part of this mobilisation, though tension and contradiction would plague alcohol policy for much of the period.

Without a clear and united policy, Bulgarian communists remained divided on the question of drink. Was it an abhorrent remnant of the capitalist past – as Party temperance activists claimed – or an integral part of the bright future? The Soviets provided a kind of blueprint, albeit with seeming room for variation. Bulgarian Temperance advocates looked back to the early Bolsheviks who had inspired them, even though their main organisation was disbanded by Stalin in 1930. Indeed, the more prominent model was the Soviet alcohol monopoly established by Stalin, who had considerably increased alcohol production. In part this shift was a result of Stalin’s recognition of the failure of prohibition, as the Soviet black market in homebrew was seemingly unstoppable. But Stalin’s imposition, and mobilisation, of a state alcohol monopoly and industry was also justified in terms of its financial benefits to the state. This very well could have also been a calculated effort to inebriate and control the population, but it was more likely a financial imperative – as alcohol sales were so lucrative to the state. It was also tied to his efforts to woo Soviet workers by providing vodka, which was seen by many as a basic necessity. Under Stalin, a newly revamped champagne and wine industry was more geared towards promises of the ‘good life’, that is providing what in the past would have been considered luxury products.³³ In the 1930s such a ‘good life’ was never achieved, and the sacrifices of war would push it ever further into the future, but it remained a primary goal of the Soviet, and now East European, socialist regimes. The parameters of this ‘good life’ always remained an open question. What exactly constituted the ‘good life’ under socialism, and how did the consumption of alcohol fit it? With Stalinist pro-alcohol policies in mind, the Bulgarian pro-alcohol leadership carried the day. The bulk of the Christian population consumed wine daily so the party could hardly expect them to go cold turkey overnight.

Still there were some ‘temperance’ measures implemented in the immediate post-war period, as a concession to temperance advocated within and outside the Party. From 1945–8 temperance

³³ On Stalin’s use of vodka to keep the population docile see Schrad, *Vodka Politics*, 223. On policy shifts in the Soviet Union grounded in financial benefits to the state, see Phillips, *Bolsheviks and the Bottle*, 22–3. See also Kate Transchel, *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895–1932* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 146–9. On the framing of this shift around the promise of the ‘good life’ see Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*, 26–9.

associations, which had been shut down by the state as ‘foreign agents’ in 1930s, were resurrected. This move appealed to party members and other supporters of temperance, but also, perhaps, to women, Muslims and others who were needed for their talents and commitment to the cause. Formed in 1945 the Bulgarian National Temperance Union began organising local associations across Bulgaria which produced newspapers, lectures, plays, films and exhibitions.³⁴ The movement stressed the destructive effects of alcohol on the body, the family and society – firmly blaming capitalist relations, but also the irrational and degenerate practices of the past. It touted, if only briefly, the importance of relinquishing alcohol for a glorious communist future. The 1947 ‘law on taverns’ (*krūchmi*) was the only piece of legislation from this period that targeted alcohol consumption.³⁵ The law nationalised taverns and limited their number to one for every 800 people in settlements under 30,000, and one for every 1,000 people in cities over 30,000.³⁶ The enforcement of this law, however, was inconsistent. The efforts of the temperance-committed cadres were quickly shelved when in 1948 temperance associations were disbanded and newspapers cancelled.³⁷ If the support of temperance cadres had been important in the immediate post-war moment, the unpopularity of their cause decidedly put it on the back burner in favour of the more pressing aspects of rebuilding the economy in the socialist image.

In the same period a 1947 law created a state monopoly on alcohol sales, which, like most alcohol production, was put under the control of the state agency Vinprom.³⁸ Under state control, revenue from alcohol sales could be put to use for ‘building socialism’ instead of lining the pockets of capitalist merchants, Orthodox priests or tavern owners. With post-war recovery, Vinprom was gradually given the resources needed to develop a modern wine and liquor industry at the service of the state. The first turning point came as early as 1951, when a special government decree called for the accelerated development of viticulture and a modern wine industry.³⁹ In part this was to be achieved through the active consolidation of smaller vineyards, coinciding with the first intensive drive to collectivise Bulgarian agriculture. This was just one of the many measures taken to begin the dramatic transformation of viticulture and wine production from a small-scale affair that was predominantly for personal or local consumption to large-scale cultivation, wine making and export. The trade journal *Viticulture and Winemaking* (*Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*) was founded in 1951 to chronicle expansion and mechanisation in grape cultivation and wine production. It provides a window into that process and how it was interpreted in a socialist framework by industry analysts.

Viticulture and Winemaking, along with the plethora of economic histories of wine from the communist era, follows a familiar Marxist-Leninist narrative on progress under communism. Such sources, echoing state documents, paint a picture of pre-communist wine production as primitive and backwards – grapes grown on a patchwork of tiny and unproductive parcels with small wine cellars and virtually no mechanisation, varietal development, scientific inquiry or coordinated production.⁴⁰ In contrast, these sources explain, since the early 1950s wine had been produced at ever bigger vineyards with larger and more ‘hygienic’ wineries. Amidst the narrative of growth and ‘socialist achievement’, the industry’s past was seen as decidedly pathetic, something to be jettisoned and overcome.⁴¹ Such

³⁴ Petkov, *Borbata*, 134.

³⁵ On the *krūchmari* see Ivailo Znepolski, *Bulgarskiiat komunizüm: Sotsiokulturni cherti i vlastova traektoriia* (Sofia: Ciela Press, 2008), 121.

³⁶ The law also prohibited *krūchmi* within 200 metres of mines, schools, factories, military bases, *chitalishte* (reading rooms or cultural centres) and military clubs.

³⁷ Khristo Stoianov, *Dvizhenie za trezvenost v Razgradski okrûg* (Razgrad: Okrûzhen komitet za trezvenost, 1983), 56.

³⁸ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 8 (1963), 24–5.

³⁹ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 1 (1962), 2.

⁴⁰ TsIDA, F-172, O-3, E-153, L-1; TsIDA, F-172, O-1, E-61, L-15-19.

⁴¹ See, for example, *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 1 (1964), 4; Ivan Zakhарiev and Marin Devedzhiev, *Teritorialno razpredelenie i ikonomicheska efektivnost na vinarskata promishlenost v NRB* (Sofia: BAN, 1969), 5 and Kaliu Katerov, P. Mamarov, I. Chalkov, and Konstantina Stoyanova, *Viticulture and Wine Industry Development in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Bulgaria, Center for Scientific, Technical and Economic Information in Agriculture and Forestry, 1971), 7.

descriptions were not just Marxist rhetoric or propaganda. The state was able to ramp up the industry as a result of collectivisation, but also post-war recovery and robust trade within the bloc, which gradually allowed for greater investments in agriculture and mechanised food and drink production. In the course of the 1950s the state was able to transition from feeding the post-war hungry to wining and dining the new upwardly mobile, the beneficiaries of the communist system.

This shift accelerated with Stalin's death in 1953 and the subsequent rise of Khrushchev. Following the Soviet lead, Bulgaria's dictator, Todor Zhivkov, initiated a range of new policies of cultural and economic reform. This process of 'de-Stalinization' called for a cultural 'thaw' and greater attention to the satisfaction of consumer needs, which historians have dubbed the 'consumer turn'.⁴² This new push to provide consumer comforts and pleasures, however, was by no means framed as a retreat from communism.⁴³ On the contrary, the post-Stalinist Bloc leadership touted a quickening of revolution and even a fast track to 'ripe communism' – that is, when the Marxist utopian future finally arrived. This meant both an overtaking of the West in terms of the standard of living, which called for abundance (and even luxury), but also the need to 'manage' desires through 'rational' consumption.⁴⁴ The reality was that the urbanising and modernising effects of the first decade of communism had brought new socialist consumers to the fore, along with their expectations regarding creature comforts, including a more than occasional glass of red (or white). The post-Stalinist state was keen on providing (even as it directed and controlled) 'deserved' leisure and pleasure for its citizens. In Bulgaria, wine and other alcoholic drinks were an important element of everyday leisure consumption.

Over the course of the period Bulgaria had ramped up all aspects of alcohol production. An Institute for Viticulture and Enology in Pleven became the centre of research and development for all aspects of the industry, with ten satellite stations across Bulgaria.⁴⁵ Production numbers climbed rapidly, as a million new decares (or roughly 250,000 acres) of vineyard were planted between 1951 and 1961, with some 156,000 decares more a year planned for the next five years. By 1964 100 new wineries with mechanised bottling and labelling were producing some 230 million litres a year, and this was only the beginning. Vinprom factories were mushrooming across the country – the largest of which was built in Sofia in 1961.⁴⁶ As wine provided an elixir for leisure and pleasure at home, it became fuel for the export engine that would drive the Bulgarian economy and industrialisation more broadly. Bulgaria became a major exporter of wine within the socialist camp, making it possible to 'buy machines' and hence 'build socialism'.⁴⁷ According to wine industry sources, many of the changes within the industry were undertaken in direct response to changing consumer tastes in Bulgaria, but also across the bloc, which had moved beyond the simple and 'unpretentious' desires of the past.⁴⁸ While Bulgarians appreciated local varietals such as Mavrud, Misket and Gumza, these wines had no name recognition abroad. New varietals began to be planted, in some cases replacing local varietals, to cater to a variety of foreign tastes, with increased production of dessert wines and champagnes, but also Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay.⁴⁹ As early as 1964

⁴² On the Bulgarian 'thaw', see Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 347–9. The eruption of mass discontent in the midst of this de-Stalinization – namely, East Germany and Poland (and on a smaller scale Bulgaria and Romania) in 1953 and Hungary in 1956 – is often cited as a major factor in the decision by socialist regimes to stabilise their regimes through expanded offerings in consumer goods. See, for example, David Crowley and Susan Reid, 'Introduction', in Crowley and Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 8. See also Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 98.

⁴³ For a more general survey of issues related to consumption under socialism, see Bren and Neuburger, 'Introduction', 3–16.

⁴⁴ See David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, 'Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture', in Crowley and Reid, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Postwar Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2000), 10.

⁴⁵ Katerov et al., *Viticulture*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 1 (1964), 4.

⁴⁷ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 2 (1962), 1.

⁴⁸ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 1 (1964), 5.

⁴⁹ A. Donchev and Kaliu Katerov, *75 godini Institut po lozarstvo i vinarstvo: Nositel na ordenite Georgi Dimitrov i N.R. Bulgaria: Pleven 1902–1977* (Pleven: Institut po lozarstvo i vinarstvo, 1977), 14. Katerov et al., *Viticulture*, 13.

thirty-four varietals were being grown in Bulgaria, and by the mid-1980s there were twenty-three Bulgarian brands of wine, with distinct names and even assigned appellations.⁵⁰ Bulgarian soils were particularly ideal, that is within the bloc, for new world varietals which were acquired, along with information and tools for production in various barter agreements with Pepsico.⁵¹ If branding was generally sparse under communism, in Bulgaria wine, along with cigarettes, had the most elaborate labels, name and varieties.

With a 'captive' bloc market, Bulgarian sources claim that the nation had become the number one exporter of bottled wine in the world by 1971, surpassing even France and Italy.⁵² The export value of Bulgarian wine rose from 17.6 million dollars in 1960 to over 195.5 million in 1989.⁵³ The Soviet Union was by far Bulgaria's biggest export market, but Bulgarian wine was also exported across Eastern Europe and in limited amounts to the West, most notably to the United Kingdom. Bulgaria did not have many consumer goods that could be traded on the bloc and the world markets, but its wine became widely desirable. In part this was a result of the national wine industry's proactive involvement in the burgeoning global wine industry, with exchanges of information and technologies, as well as tastings at international symposia and competitions. Within the bloc, a vigorous tradition of 'socialist competition' and exchange underpinned the numerous annual wine competitions that began in the 1960s in Budapest, Bucharest and Bratislava as well as Sunny Beach – a new resort on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.⁵⁴ But the Western European nations and other capitalist states also participated, as in the 1976 competition at Sunny Beach, which featured 140 firms from eighteen countries and five continents. Through such events, Bulgaria studied industry tastes and standards, and also showcased its own products and technologies.⁵⁵

Food and wine were integral not just for export, but also to the burgeoning Bulgarian tourist industry.⁵⁶ Nowhere in the Eastern Bloc was tourism more central to the state economy than in Bulgaria. Tourists were drawn to its lovely Black Sea shores, where mega resorts sprang up like new cities on the sand.⁵⁷ Hotels, restaurants, cafés and bars were stocked with Bulgarian wine, brandy (*rakia*) and other inebriating offerings. For Bulgaria, tourism, like wine, served as a key bargaining chip in inter-bloc trade, and hence it was a critical factor in 'building socialism'. According to Balkanturist, the number of foreign visitors rose to 1 million in 1965, and to 3 million by 1972.⁵⁸ Intoxicating drinks were vital to touristic leisure consumption and sociability, and tourists were invited to see 'socialist progress' on display, as well as to contribute to it by spending money on Bulgarian goods and services like food and drink. Images of wine were splashed across the pages of foreign-language pamphlets, magazines like *Bulgaria Today*, guidebooks on the Black Sea coast and domestic tourist magazines. It was fitting, then, that Bulgaria held its international wine competitions on the lovely Black Sea coast, where it was able to showcase not only its modern resorts and its wine industry, but also its pedigree, namely the nearby ancient and medieval ruins.⁵⁹

In fact, even as the Bulgarian state (and the wine industry) continually looked to the future, the past became a more important, even central, focus in Bulgarian wine histories and industry publications.

⁵⁰ Dimitur Tsakov, *Vinoto: Traditsiia, kultura, sūvremennost* (Sofia: Stefka Georgieva, 2008), 38–9.

⁵¹ Caroline Gilby, *The Wines of Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova* (Oxford: Infinite Ideas, 2018), 27–8.

⁵² Donchev et al., *75 godini*, 14.

⁵³ See Food and Agriculture Organizations statistics online for this data. Input Bulgaria, years 1960–89, trade, export value, wine and distilled beverages. <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#compare>

⁵⁴ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 7 (1963), 21.

⁵⁵ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 7 (1976), 1–10.

⁵⁶ Mary Neuburger, 'Dining in Utopia: A Taste of the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast under Socialism', *Gastronomica*, 17, 4 (Fall 2017), 48–60.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Tsentralno statistichesko upravlenie pri ministerskii sūvet, *Mezhdunaroden i vütreshen turizüm, 1960–1967* (Sofia: Tsentralno statistichesko upravlenie, 1968), 70, 141.

⁵⁸ Vicho Sùbev, *90 Godini organizirano turistichesko dvizhenie v Bulgaria* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1986), 11.

⁵⁹ While this was a far lower number than socialist Yugoslavia's reported 2.6 million tourists in 1965 and 8.4 million in 1985, it was still impressive given Bulgaria's size and resources. David Turncock, *East European Economy in Context: Communism and Transition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 45.

By the 1960s certain presumably progressive aspects of pre-communist wine production had been rehabilitated, including early wine cooperatives and turn of the century wine science, which was again being conducted at the original Pleven station.⁶⁰ Official sources made claims about wine as a source of health and vitality, which looked both to modern scientific studies and also to thousands of years of 'folk wisdom'.⁶¹ This was a stark transition from past discussions of peasant producing and consuming practices as excessive, irrational and primitive. By the 1970s the past was even more present in the constant evocations of wine's ancient roots in Bulgarian soil, with Thracian wine traditions as a common refrain.⁶² Wine branding was often in line with this trend, with popular brands such as Thrace (*Trakia*), marked by an image of Dionysus/Bacchus. By 1981 there was a veritable flood of publications reinforcing Bulgaria's ancient food and wine pedigree. There were discussions of past and present Thracian archaeological finds, which included seeds, urns and images of grapes and wine from the Bronze Age. But wine culture was also seen as deeply rooted in the late Ottoman period, the years of the so-called Bulgarian National Revival, as well as the 1878–1944 period.⁶³

In the 1982 *Book of Wine*, described at the beginning of this article, Bulgaria's wine past is presented as far from irrational and primitive. Marxist rhetoric is virtually absent, and modern industry is scarcely mentioned. Instead, 'homemade' (*domashno*) wine is cited as every Bulgarian's favourite variety.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Bulgarian varietals – not foreign transplants – are the most lavishly described. For example, there is Mavrud, 'the pride of Bulgaria', grown in the black soils of the valleys, red, strong and traditionally so 'thick' that it could be 'carried in a handkerchief'; and the lighter red Pamid, made from grapes grown in the rockier soil of the hillsides, conveniently ripening fifteen days before the Mavrud.⁶⁵ *The Book of Wine* wistfully describes the September wine harvests of the past, which it says were as festive as a fair. Caravans of donkey-drawn carts crawled across the fields and up the hills, carrying peasants in brightly coloured clothes singing with their 'orphyic voices' as the bells jingled on the donkeys' necks. Each detail is lovingly unfurled. The grapes were carried back each evening on the donkey carts to the wine cellars, where bare-legged peasants stomped them and drank some wine from the previous year's harvest. Local craftsmen filled the barrels, tasted the wines and sold barrels to merchants for regional and even international trade. *The Book of Wine* celebrates the Orthodox feast days, the 240 days a year on which wine drinking was allowed.⁶⁶ The most important feast days were marked by pilgrimages to the monasteries, each with at least 500 decades of their own vineyards, at which times the roads were choked with donkey-drawn carts, with revellers drinking along the way.⁶⁷ The 'march of progress' narrative, so common to sources throughout the communist period, is completely absent from *The Book of Wine*. Instead it valorises the small-scale peasant wine production of the past, embedded in the fabric of Bulgarian rural life, a fabric that had gradually but definitively unravelled in the decades since the communist takeover in 1945. And of course it celebrates wine – its depth of flavour, texture, colour, history and meaning for Bulgarians. By the early 1980s, therefore, wine's place in the communist 'good life' – which now seamlessly merged past, present and future – appears to have been secured.

Anti-Drinking under Socialism

And yet, it was not that simple. For in spite of the pervasive efforts to build the infrastructure (if not culture) of wine drinking, in the late 1950s the Bulgarian Communist Party also began to sponsor increasingly vigorous anti-drinking campaigns. This began with a 1958 decree to 'strengthen the

⁶⁰ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 8 (1962), 1–3.

⁶¹ Zakhарев и Диведжий, *Териториално разпределение*, 6.

⁶² See, for example, Katerov et al., *Viticulture*, 5.

⁶³ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 3 (1981), 44.

⁶⁴ *Lozarstvo i vinarstvo*, 4 (1984), 41. Zaïkov et al., *Kniga*, 42.

⁶⁵ Zaïkov et al., *Kniga*, 23.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 47–8.

struggle against alcoholism and drunkenness as foreign to the socialist order'. Youth were a special target of such state efforts, which were presented as critical to the 'creation of the new socialist person'.⁶⁸ Many of the old temperance veterans were called upon to reactivate the programmes of the interwar period and early 1940s. Party organisers appointed a national committee, regional and municipal temperance committees and youth groups to carry out a new range of local initiatives and measures, everything from plays, brochures, evening events, exhibitions and contests, to lectures on sobriety.⁶⁹ Such efforts gained momentum after follow-up decrees in 1968 and 1976, which included a commitment to enforce the existing law on *krúchni* from 1947.⁷⁰

A whole anti-drinking (and general temperance) literature – books, pamphlets, articles and dedicated periodicals – had blossomed by the 1970s. One of the key issues that framed these writings was the notion that excessive drinking was a product of the past and specifically capitalism, and as such it had no place in the presumably rapidly approaching communist future.⁷¹ But it was not just alcoholism and drunkenness that were the targets. Many of these sources claimed that *any* drinking would lead to drunkenness and excess, that it was a liability for socialist morality, the body and the future of the body politic.⁷² Public establishments became a particular focus of such invective, as temperance publications tracked with dismay failed local attempts to close bars and taverns and replace them with alcohol-free establishments.⁷³ Numerous lampoons of the process appeared in the pages of the newspaper *Temperance (Trezvenost)*. In one image from 1975, for example, an elderly couple is shown clapping as they watch the closing of a beer hall (*pivnitsta*). In the next frame, however, they are dismayed to see a new sign being hoisted above the storefront that reads 'BAR'.⁷⁴ Even outside of the abstinence literature, a critique of the pervasive culture of drinking and leisure consumption could be found. A 1964 cartoon from the magazine *Tourist (Turist)*, for example, depicts a rather puzzled looking hiker on a mountain top, surrounded by taverns, bars and restaurants.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, a *Turist* cartoon from 1975 depicts an innocent young girl standing on a sandy beach with her suitcase in hand surrounded by bars, while a man lies drunk in front of her on the sand.⁷⁶ The message from the official tourist (or alpinist) movement – as distinct from Balkanturist – was clear: tourism should be a healthy and invigorating outdoor pursuit, not an indoor booze fest. Indeed, temperance sources saw drinking as a form of 'irrational' leisure consumption, which sullied rather than refreshed workers' bodies and minds.⁷⁷

But for all of their efforts and state resources, the temperance crusade in Bulgaria was a difficult one. Its small but passionate cadre of true believers recognised that they were facing an uphill battle. For one thing, they were well aware that Bulgaria's economy depended on the profits from alcohol and tourism.⁷⁸ The production and consumption of alcohol and the building of booze-serving restaurants and bars, especially in the capital city and near resort complexes, continued unabated. The other issue,

⁶⁸ Miladin Apostolov, *Opiiania vashiat vrag* (Sofia: n.p., 1962), 68.

⁶⁹ Stoianov, *Dvizhenie za trezvenost*, 67–8.

⁷⁰ Dimitrina Kolarova-Paneva, Fani Videnova, and Spas Ivanchev, *Partiini i dürzhavni dokumenti po trezvenostta* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1984), 3–7, 66–7.

⁷¹ Dürzhaven Arkhiv Sofia (DAS), F-494, O-1, E-33, L-1 3; Apostolov, *Opiiania*, 20–1. Vasil Naïdenov, *Borbata za trezvenost – delo na tselia narod: Materiali ot okrúzhnata nauchnoprakticheskaya konferentsiya po problemite na trezvenostta, provedena prez mai 1979 g.* (Plovdiv: Okrúžhen komitet za trezvenost–Plovdiv, 1980), 35.

⁷² DAS, F-494, O-1, E-33, L-1 6; Apostolov, *Opiiania*, 69.

⁷³ *Trezvenost*, 21 July 1972, 2. For another example see *Trezvenost*, 18 Aug. 1972, 1.

⁷⁴ *Trezvenost*, 10 Jan. 1975, 2. *Trezvenost*, 1 July 1972, 4.

⁷⁵ *Turist*, Aug. 1964, 15.

⁷⁶ *Trezvenost*, 1 Jan. 1975, 4.

⁷⁷ DAS, F-494, O-1, E-33, L-5–6. Atanas Liutov, Boris Atanasov, Violeta Samardzhieva and Katia Stoianova, *Upravlenie na narodnoto potreblenie* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Búlgarskata akademiiia na naukite–ikonomicheski institut, 1984), 86. See also Veselina Vlakhova-Nikolova, *Problemi na tiutiunopushcheneto i alkoholnata upotreba sred mladezhta* (Plovdiv: Nauchnoizledovatelska laboratoriia za mladezhda, 1983), 154.

⁷⁸ On tobacco under communism, see Mary Neuburger, *Balkan Smoke: Tobacco and the Making of Modern Bulgaria, 1863–1989* (Cornell University Press, 2012), 167–228.

of course, was that Bulgarians enjoyed drinking. Not only was it embedded in tradition, but as some temperance sources recognised, it was a product of their new (post-war) urban patterns of leisure consumption.⁷⁹ Under socialism, the mass production and unprecedented availability of wine – along with the quickening and stress of modern life – enabled a new kind of drinking culture in which excess was arguably more pervasive. This presented a glaring contradiction within this literature in relation to the prevailing notion that alcohol and excess was a product and ‘remnant’ of the capitalist past.⁸⁰ At the same time, temperance writers and activists had to counter the seductive wine narratives and nostalgic mythologies that looked to this very past for cultural (and national) grounding.

As new drinking narratives evoked historical wine tradition, temperance writings made every effort to create counter-mythologies, by unearthing and touting the temperance ‘heroes’ of the Bulgarian past. At first such figures were almost strictly socialist, that is, Bulgarian social-democrats who had been actively involved in temperance prior to 1944.⁸¹ But temperance mythologies also reached back to nineteenth-century revival figures, who either were avowed abstainers (like Vasil Levski and Georgi Bekovski) or at least offered critiques of alcohol in their writings. These symbolic ‘founding’ fathers of the modern Bulgarian state were, after all, revolutionaries and even left-leaning, if not socialist (along with nationalist), and so they could easily be admitted into this ‘progressive’ anti-drinking pantheon.⁸² But Bulgarian ‘histories’ of temperance also dug back further in time, to Krum, a medieval khan of Bulgaria from the ninth century. Krum’s anti-alcohol legislation was cited, and by the 1970s so too were the early writings of medieval Bulgarian Orthodox priests and monks. In a stunning turn (and contradiction), temperance was traced not just to revolutionaries from the capitalist past, but to a feudal leader and church figures.⁸³ The Bogomils, of course, a more ‘revolutionary’ sect (but religious nonetheless), were also in this pantheon, but so were their detractors, those in the official church.⁸⁴ Indeed, in the lead-up to the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of the state, scholars traced Bulgaria’s history of both drinking and temperance.⁸⁵ But what of the Thracians, the ancient inhabitants of the region who offered drinking advocates the basis for a claim to an even deeper tradition of imbibing? The Thracians – best-known for their Bacchic excess – were notably absent from official anti-drinking sources.

And yet the Thracians were not left out by other voices of restraint and anti-drinking within the Bulgarian establishment. One such voice was Liudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of dictator Todor Zhivkov, who was (and remains) an enormously controversial figure, even a phenomenon. The first lady of Bulgaria since her mother’s untimely death in 1971, Zhivkova was tremendously prominent and influential in the realm of cultural policy in the 1970s.⁸⁶ Her father appointed her head of the National Committee of Art and Culture in 1972 and to the Politiburo in 1979, roles that gave her a tremendous amount of resources and power. Zhivkova became a driving force behind academic and popular interest in the ancient Thracians, and a close personal friend of Alexander Fol, one of the key Bulgarian scholars of Thracian culture. Significantly, in his own writings Fol argued that Thracian religion was based on not just the cult of Bacchus but also the ‘organised coexistence between Orphic (solar) and Dionysiac (lunar) mysteries’.⁸⁷ It was Orpheus and a Bulgarian lineage of bodily restraint that attracted Zhivkova, even becoming an obsession of sorts. She was opposed to the pursuit

⁷⁹ See, for example, Kolarova-Panева et al., *Partiini*, 6–7.

⁸⁰ See Naidenov, *Borbata*, 38.

⁸¹ See Apostolov, *Opiiania*, 66–8.

⁸² Khristo Nedialkov, *Bulgarski kulturni deitsii za trezvenost* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1977), 11, and Apostolov, *Opiiania*, 68.

⁸³ Khristo Nedialkov, *Bulgarski kulturni deitsii za trezvenost* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1977), 7–9.

⁸⁴ Nedialkov, *Bulgarski*, 9–10.

⁸⁵ Paun Genov, *S fakela na trezvenostta: Momenti ot borbata protiv pianstvoto i tiutinopushcheneto pres 1300-godishnata istoriya na Bălgariia* (Sofia: Natsionalen komitet za trezvenost, meditsina i fizkultura, 1980).

⁸⁶ For an excellent article on Zhivkova, see Ivanka Atanasova, ‘Lyudmila Zhivkova and the Paradox of Ideology and Identity in Communist Bulgaria’, *East European Politics & Societies*, 1 (May 2004), 278–315.

⁸⁷ Aleksandur Fol, *Trakiiskiat Dionis* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo ‘Sv. Kliment Ohridski’, 1991), 329.

of ever greater consumption as part of Bulgaria's path to the communist future; she looked instead to culture, aesthetics and spirituality.⁸⁸ By the mid-1970s Zhivkova was known to be a non-drinker, as well as a vegetarian, who often fasted, practices that reflected her interest in theosophy and Agni Yoga, but also the Bogomils, the fasting practices of the Orthodox Church, peasant folk medicine and the Bulgarian White Brotherhood. Zhivkova was by no means alone in her spiritual pursuits, and she had a kind of 'salon' of like-minded Bulgarian intellectuals, including Fol. In many respects Zhivkova was enormously influential in a flowering of 'alternative' strands of culture and science, and she was responsible for the publication of a range of 'alternative' works, including the three-volume set on folk medicine by the well-known folk healer Petăr Dimkov.⁸⁹ The imprint of her ideas could be seen directly in select abstinence writings that echoed her rhetoric on aesthetics but also in the increasingly prevalent connection to Bulgarian history and culture.⁹⁰ Zhivkova was certainly a major figure in the flowering of public interest in Bulgaria's past, as well as the grandiose celebration of the 1,300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state. But in all of this she also presented a clear threat to the communist establishment, with her open spirituality and rejection of the official approach to creating a communist 'good life' grounded in pleasures and intoxicants. Even today there is serious speculation that Zhivkova's mysterious death in 1981 was due to foul play from within the party (or Soviet) establishment, who saw her alternative vision as problematic.⁹¹

After Zhivkova's death the Bulgarian state's contradictory approach to alcohol continued to intensify. Publications on the glories of Bulgarian wine continued to be released, even as a quiet war on drinking continued. In the end it was clear that Bulgaria's economy depended on alcohol, and that most people did not want to give up the bottle. Any yet Gorbachev's assault on alcohol under *perestroika* did have consequences for the Bulgarian wine industry, as large tracts of vineyard were uprooted. Production of wine was almost cut in half between 1982 and 1989, from 574 to 265 million tons.⁹² In the last years of communism, in Bulgaria as elsewhere in the bloc, communist ideology was losing its lustre as the utopian future failed to arrive. The state's fragile legitimacy was closely connected to its ability to supply not just necessities, but also luxuries – increasingly seen as essential to modern life, such as wine.

Conclusion

Throughout the period, narratives on drinking practices were a critical part of the Bulgarian response and the country's positioning in relation to their larger objectives of building socialism, including its attendant promise of progress and the 'good life'. In terms of progress, wine as a commodity for export, the tourist industry and everyday domestic consumption provided an important engine for building socialism. In other words, just as the wine and tourist industries were transformed under communism, they in turn provided the capital for the larger socialist transformation. This was in essence on the bloc model, but Bulgaria had an important niche in the socialist division of labour, providing its southern climes for tourism and its new- and old-world wines for a growing market of urban consumers cum connoisseurs. By late socialism, the place of wine – and other alcoholic drinks – had been firmly established, sanctioned and encouraged by official production quotas, new varieties, branding, consumption venues and a variety of publications. It was interwoven with new kinds of leisure practices, everyday as well as touristic. Bulgarian wine culture – enabled by the

⁸⁸ See, for example, Liudmila Zhivkova, *Lyudmila Zhivkova: Her Many Worlds, New Culture & Beauty, Concepts & Action* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1986), 118.

⁸⁹ Konstantin Dilchev, *Zagadûchnata smûrt na Liudmila Zhivkova: Agni īoga—taînoto uchenie* (Sofia: Niu media grup, 2006), 59; Petăr Dimkov. *Bûlgarska narodna meditsina: Prirodolechenie i prirodosûobrazen zhivot* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bûlgarskata akademija na naukite, 1977).

⁹⁰ Mila Miladinova, *Esteticheska kultura i trezvenost* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1979).

⁹¹ See, for example, Atanasova, 'Lyudmila Zhivkova', 280–4.

⁹² See Food and Agriculture Organizations statistics online for this data. Input Bulgaria, years 1960–89, production, wine. <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#compare>

communist state – was about fulfilling the everyday expectations of a new generation of urban consumers. But for Bulgarians, wine also allowed for a mining – or reinventing – of national tradition, a calling upon the long history of wine making which dated back to the Thracians. This along with its provision of the ‘good life’ could doubly bolster the legitimacy of the state, which was faltering by the last decades of the period. In a sense, wine – as a beverage and national symbol – offered a fulfilment of, or perhaps alternative to, (failed) expectations of a utopian future.

And yet, communist-era wine culture developed in the shadow of Communist Party discontents, which also looked to the past for grounding. The Bulgarian Communist Party had a strong subculture of temperance, with vocal advocates of abstinence from alcohol who had been active since the early twentieth century. For these activists, ‘bourgeois’ pleasures under socialism had to be tamed and circumscribed in order for the true and sober ‘good life’ to prevail. Drinking was one of ‘vestiges of the bourgeois past’, which needed to be discarded for the bright future of ripe communism to arrive. Their work was in and out of favour – allowed in the early 1940s, and then again in and after the 1960s. It reached a more fevered pitch – with considerable efforts going into bloc-wide temperance campaigns by the 1970s and 1980s, precisely coinciding with the crescendo of wine culture in Bulgaria. And much like wine advocates, in the last decades of socialism, various kinds of temperance supporters felt the need to imagine or reinvent a long, even ancient, history – or pedigree – in the lands that were modern Bulgaria. Old and new temperance advocates attempted to forge Bulgaria’s socialist path and promise through bodily restraint, as opposed to excess. This kind of contradiction was present throughout the bloc in one form or another, but in Bulgaria it took on its own rhythm and pace. Bulgaria domesticated socialism in its own way, using its wine and tourist industry to attempt to build a ‘bright future’ and the ‘good life’ for its citizens. In the land of Bacchus and Orpheus, what the ‘good life’ meant was up for debate, but in the end, for most it certainly included a glass of fine wine.