

According to documents of the Middle Ages, the word "Bulgarian" is to be linked to the Volga river, Others suggest that it comes from the verb "boulg" which means to mix. Others maintain that the exact translation of "Bulgarian" is in fact "rebel."

Most people would not know where to find Bulgaria on the map, a mountainous country with large fertile valleys. It is in the Balkans, where Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks and Yugoslavians have struggled for more than a century. One result of this struggle was the partition of Macedonia. Bulgaria has repeatedly lost this territory, so Bulgarians today hardly expect to recover it. Bulgaria has now about 8.2 million inhabitants in its 111,000 square kilometers, with a birth rate which is in free fall since 1990. The Bulgarian State was founded in 681 by Khan Asparouch. Ruler of the proto-Bulgarians, he forged a union with the Slavs. These two peoples intermixing with the Thracians, the oldest settlers on the territory, formed the Bulgarian nation.

At times during its history, Bulgaria was a great nation and had its czars, its "founding fathers": Czar Boris who reigned from 852 until 889 and Czar Simeon, nicknamed the Bulgarian Charlemagne, who reigned from 893 until 927. It was under Czar Boris that Bulgaria became Christian.

Invention of the Cyrillic alphabet

It is one of the glories of Bulgaria that it introduced to Kiev, in the Ukraine, the Cyrillic alphabet, that is the Slav alphabet or Slavonic, invented by Saints Cyril and Methodius. As a result of vast migrations, the Bulgarians are part Slav and part Turk; they had periods of splendor, to the point of breaking free from the power of Byzantium. In the 13th century Bulgaria stretched from the Black Sea to the Adriatic and the Aegean.



But feudal anarchy dismembered the country, which came under Turkish rule. It must be said that the Christian faith is what helped Bulgarians preserve their identity for five centuries until 1878, when it became independent thanks to Russia which defeated the Turks. Bulgarians have always felt grateful to the Russians for this. But a strong minority of 1.2 million Muslims is still part of the country. Despite all the efforts of the Communist regime, which tried to change all the Turkish names into Bulgarian, the minority is still very much alive. Some of the great names of Bulgarian literature and culture deserve to be mentioned: I. Vazov (writer), H. Botev (poet), Z. Boyadjev (painter), P. Yavorov (poet), Saints Cyril and Methodius and St. John of Rila.

A troubled history

Since its independence in 1878, Bulgaria's history has been one of upheaval: a Balkan war in 1812, the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919 by which it lost Macedonia, the alliance with Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944, the occupation by Soviet forces from September 1944 to the end of 1947. Already in 1946, the Bulgarian Communist party came into power, calling itself a 'popular democracy.' The constitution was entirely based on that of the USSR, with all that that meant: 'people's courts' which condemned 2,700 people to death, concentration camps (100,000 political prisoners) and purges within the Communist party itself (30% of its members), five-year plans and intense Russification.



The Orthodox monastery in Rila Moreover, the Bulgarian secret police, as an armed branch of the Soviet KGB, was responsible for many despicable and intolerable actions. This recent history allows us to understand better how the Communist regime tried to destroy Bulgarian Christianity.