

= Vasil Levski =

Vasil Levski ( Bulgarian : ????? ????? , originally spelled ????????? , pronounced [ v??si? ?l?fski ] ) , born Vasil Ivanov Kunchev ( ????? ????? ; 18 July 1837 ? 18 February 1873 ) , was a Bulgarian revolutionary and is a national hero of Bulgaria . Dubbed the Apostle of Freedom , Levski ideologised and strategised a revolutionary movement to liberate Bulgaria from Ottoman rule . Founding the Internal Revolutionary Organisation , Levski sought to foment a nationwide uprising through a network of secret regional committees .

Born in the Sub @-@ Balkan town of Karlovo to middle class parents , Levski became an Orthodox monk before emigrating to join the two Bulgarian Legions in Serbia and other Bulgarian revolutionary groups . Abroad , he acquired the nickname Levski , " Lionlike " . After working as a teacher in Bulgarian lands , he propagated his views and developed the concept of his Bulgaria @-@ based revolutionary organisation , an innovative idea that superseded the foreign @-@ based detachment strategy of the past . In Romania , Levski helped institute the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee , composed of Bulgarian expatriates . During his tours of Bulgaria , Levski established a wide network of insurrectionary committees . Ottoman authorities , however , captured him at an inn near Lovech and executed him by hanging in Sofia .

Levski looked beyond the act of liberation : he envisioned a " pure and sacred " Bulgarian republic of ethnic and religious equality . His concepts have been described as a struggle for human rights , inspired by the progressive liberalism of the French Revolution and 19th century Western European society . Levski is commemorated with monuments in Bulgaria and Serbia , and numerous national institutions bear his name . In 2007 , he topped a nationwide television poll as the all @-@ time greatest Bulgarian .

= = Historical background = =

In 1396 the medieval Bulgarian Empire had ceased to exist , falling under full Ottoman domination . The inegalitarian Ottoman millet system ( Sharia Laws ) had turned Bulgarians and other Non @-@ Muslim subjects into second @-@ class citizens , and the religious differences had created insurmountable cultural antagonism . The empire 's 19th @-@ century economic hardships , which prompted its personification as the " sick man of Europe " , meant that the Ottoman state 's Non @-@ Muslim residents suffered more than its Muslim subjects , and reforms planned by the sultans faced insuperable difficulties .

Bulgarian nationalism gradually emerged during the mid @-@ 19th century with the economic upsurge of Bulgarian merchants and craftsmen , the development of Bulgarian @-@ funded popular education , the struggle for an autonomous Bulgarian Church and political actions towards the formation of a separate Bulgarian state . The First and Second Serbian Uprisings had laid the foundation of an autonomous Serbia during the late 1810s , and Greece had been established as an independent state in 1832 , in the wake of the Greek War of Independence . However , support for gaining independence through an armed struggle against the Ottomans was not universal . Revolutionary sentiment was concentrated largely among the more educated and urban sectors of the populace . There was less support for an organized revolt among the peasantry and the wealthier merchants and traders , who feared that Ottoman reprisals would jeopardize economic stability and widespread rural land ownership .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life , education and monkhood = = =

Vasil Levski was born Vasil Ivanov Kunchev on 18 July [ O.S. 6 July ] 1837 in the town of Karlovo , within the Ottoman Empire 's European province of Rumelia . He was the namesake of his maternal uncle , Archimandrite ( superior abbot ) Basil ( ??????? , Vasilij ) . Levski 's parents , Ivan Kunchev

and Gina Kuncheva ( née Karaivanova ) , came from a family of clergy and craftsmen and were members of the emerging Bulgarian middle class . An eminent but struggling local craftsman , Ivan Kunchev died in 1844 . Levski had two younger brothers , Hristo and Petar , and an older sister , Yana ; another sister , Maria , died during childhood .

Fellow revolutionary Panayot Hitov later described the adult Levski as being of medium height and having an agile , wiry appearance ? with light , greyish @-@ blue eyes , blond hair , and a small moustache . He added that Levski abstained from smoking and drinking . Hitov 's memories of Levski 's appearance are supported by Levski 's contemporaries , revolutionary and writer Lyuben Karavelov and teacher Ivan Furnadzhiev . The only differences are that Karavelov claimed Levski was tall rather than of medium height , while Furnadzhiev noted that his moustache was light brown and his eyes appeared hazel .

Levski began his education at a school in Karlovo , studying homespun tailoring as a local craftsman 's apprentice . In 1855 , Levski 's uncle Basil ? archimandrite and envoy of the Hilandar monastery ? took him to Stara Zagora , where he attended school and worked as Basil 's servant . Afterward , Levski joined a clerical training course . On 7 December 1858 , he became an Orthodox monk in the Sopot monastery under the religious name Ignatius ( ??????? , Ignatiy ) and was promoted in 1859 to hierodeacon , which later inspired one of Levski 's informal nicknames , The Deacon ( ??????? , Dyakona ) .

= = = First Bulgarian Legion and educational work = = =

Inspired by Georgi Sava Rakovski 's revolutionary ideas , Levski left for the Serbian capital Belgrade during the spring of 1862 . In Belgrade , Rakovski had been assembling the First Bulgarian Legion , a military detachment formed by Bulgarian volunteers and revolutionary workers seeking the overthrow of Ottoman rule . Abandoning his service as a monk , Levski enlisted as a volunteer . At the time , relations between the Serbs and their Ottoman suzerains were tense . During the Battle of Belgrade in which Turkish forces entered the city , Levski and the Legion distinguished themselves in repelling them . Further militant conflicts in Belgrade were eventually resolved diplomatically , and the First Bulgarian Legion was disbanded under Ottoman pressure on 12 September 1862 . His courage during training and fighting earned him his nickname Levski ( " Lionlike " ) . After the legion 's disbandment , Levski joined Ilyo Voyvoda 's detachment at Kragujevac , but returned to Rakovski in Belgrade after discovering that Ilyo 's plans to invade Bulgaria had failed .

In the spring of 1863 , Levski returned to Bulgarian lands after a brief stay in Romania . His uncle Basil reported him as a rebel to the Ottoman authorities , and Levski was imprisoned in Plovdiv for three months , but released due to the help of the doctor R. Petrov and the Russian vice @-@ consul Nayden Gerov . On Easter 1864 , Levski officially relinquished his religious office . From May 1864 until March 1866 , he worked as a teacher in Voynagovo near Karlovo ; while there , he supported and gave shelter to persecuted Bulgarians and organised patriotic groups among the population . His activity caused suspicion among the Ottoman authorities , and he was forced to move . From the spring of 1866 to the spring of 1867 he taught in Enikyoy and Kongas , two Northern Dobruja villages near Tulcea .

= = = Hitov 's detachment and Second Bulgarian Legion = = =

In November 1866 , Levski visited Rakovski in Iași . Two revolutionary bands led by Panayot Hitov and Filip Totyu had been inciting the Bulgarian diaspora community in Romania to invade Bulgaria and organise anti @-@ Ottoman resistance . On the recommendation of Rakovski , Vasil Levski was selected as the standard @-@ bearer of Hitov 's detachment . In April 1867 , the band crossed the Danube at Tutrakan , moved through the Ludogorie region and reached the Balkan Mountains . After skirmishing , the band fled to Serbia through Pirot in August .

In Serbia , the government was again favourable towards the Bulgarian revolutionaries ' aspirations and allowed them to establish in Belgrade the Second Bulgarian Legion , an organisation similar to

its predecessor and its goals . Levski was a prominent member of the Legion , but between February and April 1868 he suffered from a gastric condition that required surgery . Bedridden , he could not participate in the Legion 's training . After the Legion was again disbanded under political pressure , Levski attempted to reunite with his compatriots , but was arrested in Zaječar and briefly imprisoned . Upon his release he went to Romania , where Hadzhi Dimitar and Stefan Karadzha were mobilising revolutionary detachments . For various reasons , including his stomach problems and strategic differences , Levski did not participate . In the winter of 1868 , he became acquainted with poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev and lived with him in an abandoned windmill near Bucharest .

= = = Bulgarian tours and work in Romania = = =

Rejecting the emigrant detachment strategy for internal propaganda , Levski undertook his first tour of the Bulgarian lands to engage all layers of Bulgarian society for a successful revolution . On 11 December 1868 , he travelled by steamship from Turnu Măgurele to Istanbul , the starting point of a trek that lasted until 24 February 1869 , when Levski returned to Romania . During this canvassing and reconnaissance mission , Levski is thought to have visited Plovdiv , Perushtitsa , Karlovo , Sopot , Kazanlak , Sliven , Tarnovo , Lovech , Pleven and Nikopol , establishing links with local patriots .

After a two @-@ month stay in Bucharest , Vasil Levski returned to Bulgaria for a second tour , lasting from 1 May to 26 August 1869 . On this tour he carried proclamations printed in Romania by the political figure Ivan Kasabov . They legitimised Levski as the representative of a Bulgarian provisional government . Vasil Levski travelled to Nikopol , Pleven , Karlovo , Plovdiv , Pazardzhik , Perushtitsa , Stara Zagora , Chirpan , Sliven , Lovech , Tarnovo , Gabrovo , Sevlievo and Tryavna . According to some researchers , Levski established the earliest of his secret committees during this tour , but those assumptions are based on uncertain data .

From late August 1869 to May the following year , Levski was active in the Romanian capital Bucharest . He was in contact with revolutionary writer and journalist Lyuben Karavelov , whose participation in the foundation of the Bulgarian Literary Society Levski approved in writing . Karavelov 's publications gathered a number of followers and initiated the foundation of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee ( BRCC ) , a centralised revolutionary diasporic organisation that included Levski as a founding member and statute drafter . In disagreement over planning , Levski departed from Bucharest in the spring of 1870 and began to put into action his concept of an internal revolutionary network .

= = = Creation of the Internal Revolutionary Organisation = = =

Despite insufficient documentation of Levski 's activities in 1870 , it is known that he spent a year and a half establishing a wide network of secret committees in Bulgarian cities and villages . The network , the Internal Revolutionary Organisation ( IRO ) , was centred around the Lovech Central Committee , also called " BRCC in Bulgaria " or the " provisional government " . The goal of the committees was to prepare for a coordinated uprising . The network of committees was at its densest in the central Bulgarian regions , particularly around Sofia , Plovdiv and Stara Zagora . Revolutionary committees were also established in some parts of Macedonia , Dobruja and Strandzha and around the more peripheral urban centres Kyustendil , Vratsa and Vidin . IRO committees purchased armaments and organised detachments of volunteers . According to one study , the organisation had just over 1 @, @ 000 members in the early 1870s . Most members were intellectuals and traders , though all layers of Bulgarian society were represented .

Individuals obtained IRO membership in secrecy : the initiation ritual involved a formal oath of allegiance over the Gospel or a Christian cross , a gun and a knife ; treason was punishable by death , and secret police monitored each member 's activities . Through clandestine channels of reliable people , relations were maintained with the revolutionary diasporic community . The internal correspondence employed encryption , conventional signs , and fake personal and committee

names . Although Levski himself headed the organisation , he shared administrative responsibilities with assistants such as monk @-@ turned @-@ revolutionary Matey Preobrazhenski , the adventurous Dimitar Obshti , and the young Angel Kanchev .

Apocryphal and semi @-@ legendary anecdotal stories surround the creation of Levski 's Internal Revolutionary Organisation . Persecuted by the Ottoman authorities who offered 500 Turkish liras for his death and 1000 for his capture , Levski resorted to disguises to evade arrest during his travels . For example , he is known to have dyed his hair and to have worn a variety of national costumes . In the autumn of 1871 , Levski and Angel Kanchev published the Instruction of the Workers for the Liberation of the Bulgarian People , a BRCC draft statute containing ideological , organisational and penal sections . It was sent out to the local committees and to the diasporic community for discussion . The political and organisational experience that Levski amassed is evident in his correspondence dating from 1871 to 1872 ; at the time , his views on the revolution had clearly matured .

As IRO expanded , it coordinated its activities more with the Bucharest @-@ based BRCC . On Levski 's initiative , a general assembly was called between 29 April and 4 May 1872 . At the assembly , the delegates approved a programme and a statute , elected Lyuben Karavelov as the organisation 's leader and authorised Levski as the BRCC executive body 's only legitimate representative in the Bulgarian lands . After attending the assembly , Levski returned to Bulgaria and reorganised IRO 's internal structure in accordance with BRCC 's recommendations . Thus , the Lovech Central Committee was reduced to a regular local committee , and the first region @-@ wide revolutionary centres were founded . The lack of funds , however , precipitated the organisation into a crisis , and Levski 's one @-@ man judgements on important strategic and tactical matters were increasingly questioned .

= = = Capture and execution = = =

In that situation , Levski 's assistant Dimitar Obshti robbed an Ottoman postal convoy in the Arabakonak pass on 22 September 1872 , without approval from Levski or the leadership of the movement . While the robbery was successful and provided IRO with 125 @,@ 000 groschen , Obshti and the other perpetrators were soon arrested . The preliminary investigation and trial revealed the revolutionary organisation 's size and its close relations with BRCC . Obshti and other prisoners made a full confession and revealed Levski 's leading role .

Realising that he was in danger , Levski decided to flee to Romania , where he would meet Karavelov and discuss these events . First , however , he had to collect important documentation from the committee archive in Lovech , which would constitute important evidence if seized by the Ottomans . He stayed at the nearby village inn in Kakrina , where he was surprised and arrested on the morning of 27 December 1872 . Starting with the writings of Lyuben Karavelov the most accepted version has been that a priest named Krastyo Nikiforov betrayed Levski to the police . This theory has been disputed by the researchers Ivan Panchovski and Vasil Boyanov for lack of evidence .

Initially taken to Tarnovo for interrogation , Levski was sent to Sofia on 4 January . There , he was taken to trial . While he acknowledged his identity , he did not reveal his accomplices or details related to his organisation , taking full blame . Ottoman authorities sentenced Levski to death by hanging . The sentence was carried out on 18 February [ O.S. 6 February ] 1873 in Sofia , where the Monument to Vasil Levski now stands . The location of Levski 's grave is uncertain , but in the 1980s writer Nikolay Haytov campaigned for the Church of St. Petka of the Saddlers as Levski 's burial place , which the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences concluded as possible yet unverifiable .

Levski 's death intensified the crisis in the Bulgarian revolutionary movement and most IRO committees soon disintegrated . Nevertheless , five years after his hanging , the Russo @-@ Turkish War of 1877 ? 1878 secured the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in the wake of the April Uprising of 1876 . The Treaty of San Stefano of 3 March 1878 established the Bulgarian state as an autonomous Principality of Bulgaria under de jure Ottoman suzerainty .

= = Revolutionary theory and ideas = =

At the end of the 1860s , Levski developed a revolutionary theory that saw the Bulgarian liberation movement as an armed uprising of all Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire . The insurrection was to be prepared , controlled and coordinated internally by a central revolutionary organisation , which was to include local revolutionary committees in all parts of Bulgaria and operate independently from any foreign factors . Levski 's theory resulted from the repeated failures to implement Rakovski 's ideas effectively , such as the use of foreign @-@ based armed detachments ( ???? , cheti ) to provoke a general revolt . Levski 's idea of an entirely independent revolution did not enjoy the approval of the entire population either ? in fact , he was the only prominent Bulgarian revolutionary to advocate it . Instead , many regarded an intervention by the great powers as a more feasible solution .

Levski envisioned Bulgaria as a democratic republic , occasionally finding common ground with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen , and largely reflecting the liberal ideas of the French Revolution and contemporary Western society . He said , " We will be free in complete liberty where the Bulgarian lives : in Bulgaria , Thrace , Macedonia ; people of whatever ethnicity live in this heaven of ours , they will be equal in rights to the Bulgarian in everything . We will have a flag that says , ' Pure and sacred republic ' ... It is time , by a single deed , to achieve what our French brothers have been seeking ... " Levski held that all religious and ethnic groups in a free Bulgaria ? whether Bulgarians , Turks , Jews or others ? should enjoy equal rights . He reiterated that the Bulgarian revolutionaries fought against the sultan 's government , not against the Turkish people and their religion : " We 're not driving away the Turkish people nor their faith , but the emperor and his laws ( in a word , the Turkish government ) , which has been ruling not only us , but the Turk himself in a barbarian way . "

Levski was prepared to sacrifice his life for the revolution and place Bulgaria and the Bulgarian people above personal interests : " If I shall win , I shall win for the entire people . If I shall lose , I shall lose only myself . " In a liberated Bulgaria , he did not envision himself as a national leader or a high @-@ ranking official : " We yearn to see a free fatherland , and [ then ] one could even order me to graze the ducks , isn 't that right ? " In the spirit of Garibaldi , Levski planned to assist other oppressed peoples of the world in their liberation once Bulgaria was reestablished . He also advocated " strict and regular accounting " in his revolutionary organisation , and did not tolerate corruption .

= = Commemoration = =

In cities and villages across Bulgaria , Levski 's contributions to the liberation movement are commemorated with numerous monuments , and many streets bear his name . Monuments to Levski also exist outside Bulgaria ? in Belgrade , Serbia , Dimitrovgrad , Serbia , Parcani , Transnistria , Moldova , Bucharest , Romania , Paris , France , Washington , D.C. , United States , and Buenos Aires , Argentina . Three museums dedicated to Levski have been organised : one in Karlovo , one in Lovech and one in Koprivnica . The Monument to Vasil Levski in Sofia was erected on the site of his execution .

Several institutions in Bulgaria have been named in Vasil Levski 's honour ; these include the football club PFC Levski Sofia , the Vasil Levski National Sports Academy and the Vasil Levski National Military University . Bulgaria 's national stadium bears the name Vasil Levski National Stadium . The 1000 Bulgarian leva banknote , in circulation between 1994 and 1999 , featured Levski 's portrait on its obverse side and his monument in Sofia on the reverse . The town of Levski and six villages around the country have also been named in his honour . The Antarctic Place @-@ names Commission of Bulgaria named an Antarctic ridge and peak on Livingston Island of the South Shetland Islands Levski Ridge and Levski Peak respectively .

The life of Vasil Levski has been widely featured in Bulgarian literature and popular culture . Poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev dedicated his last work to Levski , " The Hanging of Vasil Levski " . The poem , an elegy , was probably written in late 1875 . Prose and poetry writer Ivan Vazov

devoted an ode to the revolutionary . Eponymously titled " Levski " , it was published as part of the cycle Epic of the Forgotten . Levski has also inspired works by writers Hristo Smirnenski and Nikolay Haytov , among others . Songs devoted to Levski can be found in the folklore tradition of Macedonia as well . In February 2007 , a nationwide poll conducted as part of the Velikite Bulgari ( " The Great Bulgarians " ) television show , a local spin @-@ off of 100 Greatest Britons , named Vasil Levski the greatest Bulgarian of all time .

There have been motions to glorify Vasil Levski as a saint of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church . However , historian Stefan Chureshki has emphasised that while Levski 's post @-@ monastical life was one of a martyr , it was incompatible with the Orthodox concept of sainthood . Chureshki makes reference to Levski 's correspondences , which show that Levski threatened wealthy Bulgarians ( ????????? , chorbadzhi ) and traitors with death , endorsed theft from the rich for pragmatic revolutionary purposes and voluntarily gave up his religious office to devote himself to the secular struggle for liberation .

Vasil Levski 's hanging is observed annually across Bulgaria on 19 February instead of 18 February , due to the erroneous calculation of 19th @-@ century Julian calendar dates after Bulgaria adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1916 . Although the location of Levski 's grave has not been determined , some of his hair is on exhibit at the National Museum of Military History . After Levski gave up monkhood in 1863 , he shaved his hair , which his mother and later his sister Yana preserved . Levski 's personal items ? such as his silver Christian cross , his copper water vessel , his Gasser revolver , made in Austria ? Hungary in 1869 , and the shackles from his imprisonment in Sofia ? are also exhibited in the military history museum , while Levski 's sabre can be seen in the Lovech regional museum .