Compared with the histories of many national movements in nineteenth-century Europe, in Bulgaria the industrial revolution was delayed and modern culture arrived late. Lagging behind most other Europeans, the Bulgarian population had to compensate for its lack of modern cultural development. Thus, one important characteristic of Bulgarian culture is its evolution at accelerated rates.

Before liberation in 1878, for almost five centuries the Bulgarian lands were under Ottoman rule, without their own governmental and religious institutions. Foreign rule, a feudal economy, a weak middle class, and the absence of national cultural institutions were serious obstacles to the development of a new culture on the western European model. The most important aims for the Bulgarians (led by educators, intellectuals, and revolutionists) were to struggle politically against Ottoman governance, economically for new industrial processes in the Ottoman Empire, and culturally for a national identity. The leaders of the revolutionary movement called for a struggle not against the Turkish people, but against Ottoman rulers and foreign clerks.1

These historical processes resemble those elsewhere in Europe, especially in the central and southeastern regions. Nineteenth-century Bulgarian culture therefore needs to be considered along with that of the Balkans more generally because of the cultural similarities, interactions, and fluctuations in this region.2 The establishment of a new economy and the fight for modern education were among the main priorities in Bulgarian communities.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are the so-called Revival period in Bulgarian cultural development, strongly influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment. As the conservative culture with its predominantly religious

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1 According to a popular revolutionary platform advocated by the Bulgarian national hero Vassil Levski, Turks, Armenians, and other ethnic and religious communities were to enjoy equal rights in the Bulgarian state.

2 Many politicians and scholars now prefer the term “Southeastern Europe” to “the Balkans” because of its pejorative connotations; Todorova (2009), 28.
consciousness shifted slowly from a theocentric to a humanistic perspective, secularization and rationalism provided opportunities for modernization. Traditional values coexisted with more modern attitudes, and the native coexisted with the foreign to create a basis for contemporary musical culture in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian Revival encouraged democracy and tolerance, and a multicultural Empire with a decentralized cultural life was a good medium for Bulgarians to assimilate different traditions. Initially the monasteries and their small schools were centers of enlightenment and especially music, but from the 1820s and 1830s most new developments in culture, education, and music took place in the towns.

Urban circumstances and urban life opened new horizons and perspectives for establishing a modern culture in which modern education could be realized and secular art and culture could flourish. The Bulgarian Revival was a process of Europeanization and Westernization in which a Bulgarian national identity and national culture were constructed through the assimilation of foreign traditions (mostly from the West) and through a process of self-development. Urban cosmopolitan musical traditions and imported novelties formed the core of the new Bulgarian musical culture. Popular songs and mass musical culture were important vehicles for the Bulgarian Revival, as against the higher genres that were important in other regions in Europe.

Choral Singing from the 1830s to the 1870s

The Bulgarian musical tradition in the early nineteenth century was predominantly monophonic. Its main elements were, on the one hand, instrumental performances and the folk tradition (with some regional exceptions for two-part singing), and on the other, church monody chanting with the ison (drone). The development of a Bulgarian language was the basis for the national revival. All the holy texts for the year-round ritual cycle were translated into modern Bulgarian by monks from Rila, one of the oldest and most important Bulgarian monasteries. New fiction and poetry were also published in the Bulgarian vernacular.

The period from the 1830s to the 1850s also witnessed the growth of Bulgarian schools. Music was included in the syllabus, and in the following decades choral singing played an increasingly important role. The Greek influence on education was replaced thanks to the development of Bulgarian institutions and specialists. In a few decades some 1,500 primary schools and dozens of secondary schools were established in the Bulgarian lands, set up