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Survakari, Kukeri and Others

Abstract: The article provides an analysis of the Surva International Festival of Masking, in the town of Pernik, held from 29-30 January 2010. This is one of the most important wintertime cultural events in Bulgaria, where every year more than 6,000 masked people take part in parades. Bulgarian masks are mainly interwoven into the context of the holidays between Christmas and Easter. *Survakari* are masked dancers in Western Bulgaria who perform these rituals around New Year and most of them wear coats made of goat skin, cowbells, and high hats. The rural tradition is adapted to urban settings, taking on folklorism and folk dances and as a festival the tradition now includes women and folk dancers beside a traditional bear tamer, a priest, cross-sex dressing, witches, travelling gypsies, etc. We also observe winter-time masking in the Pernik area, together with parallels from elsewhere in Bulgaria, close neighbours and the wider European context. The focus is on the adaptation of village customs to the urban environment and the festival format, concurrent changes and specific features: masks and characters, the representation of genders, age groups and the financial aspects of the masking festival, and the use of internal and external space.

Keywords: Festival of the Kukeri and Survakari, *kukeri*, masking, mumming, New Year, Pernik, *survakari*

Introduction

Within the framework of the joint project of the Estonian Literary Museum and the Folklore Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, we had the opportunity, in January 2010, to observe and record the Pernik masking festival in Western-Bulgaria. This international festival, one of the oldest and best known ones in Bulgaria, with abundant participants, takes place during the two days of the last weekend in January. In 2010, there were more than 6,0 registered participants and 90 groups from all the regions of Bulgaria, and visiting participants from Europe, Asia and Africa.

As observers of the festival, we recorded the events on video and took photographs, focusing mainly on the two-day-long masked procession through the town, lasting from 10 am until 6 pm on both

days, in which the groups took turns to briefly perform for the panel of judges and thereafter moved to the larger stage to present themselves.

We mainly worked outside, on the streets, being simply involved among the thousands of spectators, and followed the groups of our liking. The parade of masked people proceeded from the Pernik Museum of History to the town centre, and further on to the free stage and culture house. The History Museum served as a temporary respite and warm-up place for us, however, the townspeople also came here to adjust their attire and masks.

As the History Museum is actually one of the organising institutions, we had the pleasant opportunity to meet the staff; moreover, one of our key contributing informants, Nikolay Sivkov, is also working at the museum as the head of the exposition department. N. Sivkov has been living in Pernik for decades and has been continuously involved in the festival due to his position.

Masking, and wearing animal masks in particular, is one of the older cultural phenomena with diverse semantics: this has been

Fig. 1. Typical outer and inner of the events: audience and performer.

described as an example of a fertility ritual, cult of ancestors and communication with dead relatives, as a rite of passage, a realisation of power relations, as the performance of important myths, and as an attempt to create a contact with the supernatural creatures by way of an invariant message of myths, and merely as entertainment, etc. Researchers have been intrigued by the fact that in a number of regions, the maskers were men, and their behaviour and attire differed from the individual alms-seekers and children who moved around during the same feast; likewise, quite a few of the scholars have based their research methodology on the contrasting feasts of men and women.

In the following, we will observe the winter-time masking in the Pernik region in Bulgaria, together with parallels from elsewhere in Bulgaria, close neighbours and the wider European context. The focus is on the adaptation of village customs in the urban settings, in the festival format, concurrent changes and features: masks and characters, the representation of genders, age groups and the financial aspects of the masking festival, and the use of internal and external space.

Masking tradition in the village

Masking is one of the oldest traditions in Europe. It is believed, e.g., that the Magura cave drawings, in Bulgaria, north of Sofia, in the vicinity of Belogradchik town, depict dancing people who are in masks, and these drawings date back over 12,000 years (Nikolova 1995). Likewise, the depictions of men in masks have been found in Neolithic petroglyphs, for example on the ones in the vicinity of Lake Onega.

The symbolic meaning of the masking and, in our case, the winter and pre-spring rituals are related to the end of the old year and the beginning of the new and to the upcoming awakening of nature for new life. These rituals connect the wish for a rich harvest, health and fertility for humans and farm animals; they are also intended to chase away evil spirits.

Masking festivals are still widespread in European countries up until today, and there are many regional features and specificities in this tradition, yet also a lot in common throughout times. For

example, Hanner's Chronicle describes King Henry's celebration of Christmas in Dublin in 1172 as"…the sport, and the mirth, and the continual musicke, the masking, the mumming and strange shewes, the gold, the silver, and plate, the precious ornaments, the dainty dishes…." The masked tradition of "mumming" in Ulster is said to date back 2,500 years. In the ancient annals of Ulster, men in tall conical masks are mentioned as the chief entertainers for King Conor, who lived in the royal fort of Emain Macha. (Haggerty 2011)

The majority of masking takes place during the period of dark late autumn times until Easter, and although the tradition is probably of pre-Christian origin, in contemporary times, the mumming and masking festivities are celebrated on the days dedicated to a wide range of saints. Estonia is a Protestant country, yet the mummers of St. Martin's Day and those of St. Catherine's Day are still a wide-spread custom; Christmas mummers and New Year's mummers are also known in Estonia, the more well-known of the latter is *jõulusokk* (Scand. *Julbock)* and *näärisokk* (literally: New Year Bock), whereas in Finland, *joulupukki* is the name for Santa Claus. Mumming was also a tradition during the days of other saints, e.g. on *tabanipäev,* winter-time St. Stephen's Day (December 26) in Western and Northern Estonia, mainly associated with horses and was brought to Estonian due to Germanic implications from Scandinavia. Mumming on St. Stephen's Day is a tradition known also in Finland.

Kukeri (Bulgarian: *кукери*) are the costumed men. In Western Bulgaria, the people who perform these rituals around New Year are known as s*urvakari,* and the local names are also *startsi, chkari*, *vasilichari, babugeri,* etc. (MacDermott 1998). The costumes cover most of the body and include decorated wooden masks of animals (sometimes double-faced) and large bells attached to the belt. Originating probably from Thrace, these characters are widely known under the names *Kurenty* (Slowenija), *Zvončari* (Croatia), meaning the 'bellmen', similar names are also *Busós* (Hungaria), *Brezaia* in Muntenia, *Capra* in Moldavia, *Cerbul* in Bucovina, and *Turca* in Transylvania - all these are masked characters, analogous to the Estonian *jõulusokk* or *näärisokk*. In the Balkan regions, furry animal-shaped creatures have also been regarded the embodiments of Dionysus. The performance, similar to contemporary *kukeri,* has been recorded in Ancient Greece - the Dionysiac Ritual is largely

Fig. 2. Common kukeri - *animal skins, bells and horned masks.*

the groundsel of the entire carnival culture. The masking festival with similar characters as the *kukeri,* taking place at the same time as the *Surva,* can be seen in Socho, among the Greeks of Thessaloniki.

Masking involves multi-layered scripts and characters, whereas the latter in more modern scripts are fighters (e.g. in British versions the saint and Turkish king), family, persons clothed in the attire of the opposite sex (men dressed as women and *vice versa),* (witch)doctors, priests, generals or other high-ranking military officers, who all perform shorter episodes in the form of short dialogues and action (pantomimes). The older layer, on the other hand, is represented by animal masks, such as the bear which moves together with its tamer, the stork, diverse hairy and horned characters (cf. the composition of the Irish group of Easter mummers, e.g. Pace Egg Plays (Cass 2004)). The characters and scripts of these performances and masking events tend to be similar to the Estonian tradition of St. Martin's Day's and St. Catherine's Day's mummers who give brief performances in front of the host family, although in

Fig. 3. The older layer of animal masks - a bear, a stork, and oxen

Estonia, the preferred option has been to perform as a travelling family, accompanied by different animals and birds.

MacDermott (1998) divides the main Bulgarian characters into two types of performers. The first ones are dressed as certain characters - the old man, old woman, a bride; and additionally a bear and bear-driver, camel and Arab, military man or policeman, doctor, priest and so on. The old man is the leader wearing tattered clothes and a shaggy hat, and carries a wooden phallus, painted red and wrapped in fur. The second group is animalistic, men wrapped in skin, carrying wooden staffs and different sizes of cowbells.

Village groups visit all the houses in the village during the period of *Mrsni Dni* — 'Dirty Days', that is, between Orthodox Christmas and Epiphany, and this might take several days. The most usual time for their activities is the Orthodox New Year (January 14). The group of *survakari* starts their procession from the leader's home, who usually takes the part of the "old man". The procession is noisy, with shouts, bellowing, miaowing, and rhythmically clanking bells. Most households prepare gifts and alms for them believing

that they would prevent the devil walking around during the period of the "Dirty Days", and that they can bring luck for the household. Indeed, it is interesting to note that only a few of them entered the house, most of the action is outside dancing, joking and performing role-playing.

Pernik as a festival town

Carnivals and festivals were a significant part of the cultural picture during the medieval and Early Modern times; during the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, rustic calendar customs formed the basis for the festival and were adapted in the town culture (see also Tsankova 1995). There is a need, in a modernising society, for rites and communities to amalgamate the village or town as a whole; after World War II, the masking tradition provided an opportunity to unite the groups of (young) men into collectives and also gave them a platform for a public performance. The masking tradition in the Balkans, and near vicinity, mainly means the whole body mask, i.e. special footwear, a costume covering the legs and body, and also a large mask to cover the head, a belt to secure the bells and metal waist-bells, the size of which differs from an ordinary cowbell to a smaller church-bell.

The making of the masks needs specialists (cf. Fikfak 2003 about Slovenia), the storing of masks and bells pre-necessitates space and relevant conditions, and the same goes for the training in order to achieve the proper rhythm of bell-tolling. Thus, there is a need for an entire support system and constant maintenance as it is not possible to simply go into a shop and immediately expect to be able to go and perform on the streets or join the group. The complexity of the masks and costumes, in particular, actually sustains the development of permanent groupings. Naturally, there have to be younger men living in the village. Masking is also a performance opportunity for famous Bulgarian village musicians and their orchestras; and as the festival has become more liberalised, even the local amateur ensembles and dance groups are utilised.

Several villages and towns in Bulgaria have gradually become festival centres: the largest and oldest of the kind is Pernik, with a long and renowned history, an industrial city in western Bulgaria

(around 40 km south-west of Sofia) with a population of 91,883 as of 2006. Pernik is situated on both banks of the Struma River in the Pernik Valley between the Viskyar, Vitosha and Golo Bardo mountains. Originally the site of a Thracian fortress founded in the 4th century BC, and later a Roman settlement, Pernik became part of the Bulgarian Empire in the early 9th century as an important strong point. The name Pernik is thought to have originated from that of Slavic god Perun with the Slavic place-name suffix *-nik* (or *-ik)* added, and was first mentioned in the 9th century. The medieval Pernik was the most important Bulgarian stronghold during the Bulgarian wars against the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century, when it was governed by the local nobleman, Krakra of Pernik.

Date	**Name**	**Description**	**Participants**
16.01.1966	Winter Carnival	only groups from the region of Pernik take part	800
15.01.1967	Second National Festival of the Kukeri and Survakari and the Spring Song and Dance Related to these Ancient Customs - Pernik '67	groups from various parts of the country attend	Over 1,300 participants
19.01.1969	Third National Festival of the Kukeri and Survakari and the Spring Song and Dance Related to these Ancient Customs - Pernik '69	groups from various parts of the country	Over 1,400 participants
17.01.1971	Fourth National Festival of the Kukeri and Survakari and the Spring Song and Dance Related to these Ancient Customs - Pernik '71	groups from various parts of the country	Over 1,300 participants

Table 1. The first years of the festival.

From 1396 until 1878, the city was under Ottoman rule and after the liberation of Bulgaria Pernik was a small stockbreeding village, which in the 20th century developed rapidly as a centre for coal mining and heavy industry. It has been a town since 1929 and since 1958 became the regional centre.

The Surva International Festival of the Masquerade Games started on January 16, 1966 and it is the oldest festival of the masquerade games in Bulgaria. Surva festival is the most important cultural event in the industrial city.

As seen from the table above, the festival quickly evolved into a country-wide event, with an abundant and stable number of participants even during its initial stages. The number of those taking part in the festival gradually increased during the next years (see Fig. 4) and has already reached 6,000 in the 21st century. (http://www.surva.org/Istoria_Eng.html)

In 1985, the festival gained an international-event status as groups from other countries had been invited to perform (Bokova 1999). In 1995, the International Federation of Carnival Cities accepted the town of Pernik as its full member. In June, 2009 Pernik was proclaimed as the European capital of Surva's and Mummers. (http://www.surva.org/TheFestival_Eng.html)

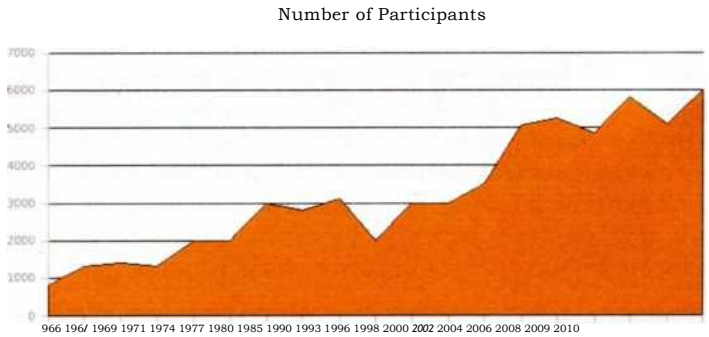

Fig 4. The number of participants has so far been steadily increasing, whereas the noticeable plateau and even a downfall in the participation figures can be observed in the 1990s, during the transition period. During the 2000s, however, the official figures regarding the participants have nearly doubled.

On average, more than 6,000 people, or about 90 groups from every folklore region of Bulgaria, as well as companies from Europe, Asia, and Africa took part in the contest in 2010.

The festival is actually a major integral cultural-economic event. With an aim to guarantee the continuity of the tradition, a conference is organised in the cultural palace during the festival, which in 2010 was titled "Masquerade - Bulgarian Festival and Carnivals", and also a workshop in the youth centre where the best mask-makers instructed the participants on how to make traditional masks. The award-winners and veterans of the festival had an opportunity to perform in the recording studio, and a "Night of Friendship" commenced in the cultural palace at 7 pm. All the museums, galleries and the medieval Krakra Castle in Pernik were open all night during the festival night, free of charge although the latter is open to the public without any fee all the time.

A number of publications have been issued as an outcome of seminars and conferences (Bokova 1995; Kraev & Bokova 1999; Bulgarian Folklore 2000, etc.) - this folklore phenomenon is one of the most thoroughly studied area in Bulgaria, yet the masking phenomenon is understandingly been dealt with in the wider folkloric (MacDermont 1998) and socio-political (Creed 2010) context.

Festival characters and costumes

In 2010, we had an opportunity to observe more closely a number of specific characters and the behaviour of groups in front of the audience. The participants cover the costs of the mask and the costume themselves thus everyone would calculate as to how much could they spend on masking. The MacDermott distribution of village maskers also tends to be valid in towns, however, with some additional masculine groups exclusively wearing animalistic masks.

The costumes and masks were very varied. In most of cases the *survakari* were clothed from head to foot in shaggy coats and sheep-skins, they had naturalistic masks incorporating the heads and horns of actual animals. Another popular way of masking was being clothed from head to foot in costumes made from red, or red and

white or green, or green and white and red cotton ribbons. Some of them had real rainbow coloured costumes. These masks and costumes are rather stereotypical without any specific features. In other popular styles the masks consist of tall cones of fur, or are made of more fantastic forms. Quite typical are the *survakari* with enormous headdresses, often taller than the men wearing them, the total height may be even close to 3 metres, and consisting of square, elliptical or pyramid frames covered with furs or feathers.

Fig. 5. The tall masks of Pernik area.

Allegedly, these constructions tend to grow in height every year. N. Sivkov drew our attention to a newspaper article discussing the fact that due to festival masks, there are not enough chicken and hen feathers in the Pernik area...

Naturally, in addition to the characters with bells, many groups had with them specific personae, as customary in villages; however, in the town, the more frequent characters were military, a bridal couple, priest and doctor. On some occasions, the characters depicted the professions and personae which are easily imitated, such as the devil, some ruler, cobbler, tailor, witch, a mother or a woman with a baby, etc.

A lot of performers came up with small sketches while waiting for their turn, or before performing to the panel of judges, and even during their performance (see also Kraev 1999). For example, a military man, who threw himself on the road and aimed his gun as if shooting at the crowd, caused a major sensation and some fun. On frequent occasions the soldiers, generals and policemen also had a whistle with them, in addition to a sword or a gun, to guide

the movement of the group or as a musical instrument to play melodies.

Trankova, in her guide to Jewish Bulgaria, vividly describes the action of the masked performers: The *kuker's* entourage includes the Orthodox "priest" and the Muslim "dervish", who wed everybody they can lay their hands on throughout the day. The Turkish *cadi* (judge) passes judgements and the *hrachars* (Turkish tax collectors) pursue their imaginary debtors, who get let off only if they buy them a drink in the pub. Meanwhile the "gypsies" walk around carrying their "babies" made of rags, "read palms" and try to "steal" anything they can; the "bear-ward" makes his "bear" dance; and the "Arab", a word used in the past to denote anybody with dark skin, "scares off" the children. Enough about the notorious Bulgarian tolerance towards otherness. (Trankova 2007)

The examples of interesting individual characters at the festival included, e.g., the black-faced figures from the older tradition of masquerading, whereas one of them was a tall man wearing a colourful costume, with their cheeks covered with dark spots or painted faces. On a number of occasions, the group of men were also accompanied by a bridal couple, where the bride was usually a young man in women's clothes and wearing a wig; there were also couples or individual young men moving around in the crowd, dressed provocatively as women, some of them depicting females with depraved behaviour. Such dressing in the garments of the opposite sex is also one of the older customs, enabling the male group to play female characters (this was also the situation historically in the theatre) and, at the same time, creating a slightly comical conflict situation.

More often than not, such a group would also involve a priest who would bless the bridal couple and the spectators; a person in a physician's outfit (who healed the wounded and the dead, etc.), as the masked men sometimes walked around with the so-called casualties on stretchers. As an innovation in the festival culture, these groups may now also comprise folk dance ensembles, and masked women and children. There were also young women who performed as nurses, full-breasted Arabs with face coverings and other female characters. Some of the women had dressed as male

figures, and some wore the *survakari* costume and bells (e.g. a group from Jelov Dol).

Popular characters were also Death with a sword, different devils and little imps (the latter were also popular figures among the spectators). Likewise, the share of era-appropriate fantasy-figures was conspicuous — vampires, Dracula's mermaids and also different creatures and pseudo-animals, the most sumptuous of which were, e.g., the crocodile-like creatures with ten heads. Indeed, there were also realistic animal masks, different types of hairy horses, creatures with donkey's heads, and also classical ways of masquerading, whereby two men, hidden under a large cover, would perform as a horse, or a man would perform as a horse and a rider. Undoubtedly, the most popular animals were the bear and bear-tamer: the bears would turn somersaults and, if possible rush into the crowd of spectators, held back by the bear-tamer, whose task was to whip the frolicsome animal as a punishment. The gipsy and the fortuneteller were and are typical masquerade characters, yet the girls of the Radomir gipsy group played as they appeared.

Fig. 6. The Radomir gipsy girls waiting for their performance.

Gender and age

A number of initially purely male or female traditions became more liberal during the 20th century, amalgamating into a joint event. The same tendency is also intrinsic of the Pernik masquerading festival, being one of the reasons for its success. As the first sign of liberalisation, and due to the competition requirements, the groups have been joined in by dancers and singers, i.e. abundant young women. This, however, is not the only sign of liberalisation — there are also women participating in male groups, wearing similar hairy costumes, or full costumes made of ribbons, and waist bells. Still, there are also separate groups of women, where men are in the minority, and it is also customary that young women move around in groups or in pairs, masked as animal figures, holders of certain professions, and also as attractive and sexy female characters.

Dressing up as the opposite sex is one of the older elements of the ritual and drama, providing simultaneously a better opportunity to parody the opposite sex and introduce the elements of humour. In this regard, we are convinced that all kinds of homo-erotic

Fig. 7. Among the masked characters we can see men dressed as women, devils and kukeri *families.*

interpretations, to perform as the opposite sex, are naive and archaic. Greater liberalisation has also resulted in the participation of youth groups and children, for example, there were 10-year-old and slightly older boys taking part in the masking group, dressed in animal skin masks and decorated with cow-bells as adults. Similarly, many fathers had their sons with them - the boys, in masks and with bells, moved together with the adult group, keeping close to their fathers. In today's cultural space, the masking tradition has no age- wise limitations, i.e. that the one-time feast of unmarried young men has become an event uniting different generations and one region. For instance, the youngest registered participant at the Simitli festival was one year old, and the most advanced in years was 85 (BGNES 2011). Good physical form and stamina are the limiting factors as the winter-time masking festival involves long processions, competitive performances and the free stage, and the heavy masks and costumes need to be worn for a long time.

Festival from inside and outside

When reading the overview of the Pennsylvanian Mummers' Museum and the mummers' parade, it was remarkable that the budget of the event was one million dollars, allocated to security expenses and the reward fund of 350,000 (Mummers 2011).

At the Pernik festival, however, security guards and policemen did not stand out, although the law enforcement was indeed present, stopping the curious spectators from filling the streets and thus hindering the route of the procession.

Yet the commercial side was much more conspicuous - in addition to 6,000 mummers, the festival in Pernik attracts thousands of people from outside the town, creating a significant burden for the infrastructure, and at the same time also a source of revenue. The festival had indeed enlivened trade in the town, although the more precise economic data was not at our disposal.

Cafes, other eating places and also shops were open, with numerous temporary barbecue sites, snack and beer counters. In addition, there were sales places for sweets, toys, balloons and souvenirs, some of them selling smaller or bigger statuettes of the *kukeri,* and cowbells.

Fig. 8. The festival had plenty of drinking and eating places.

It was also possible to purchase a cheap colourful wig, an elementary mask or a larger Halloween mask (the dead, devils, witches), hair extensions and braids, horns, colours for facial paintings, appropriate clothes and other items to meet the masking and mumming needs of the spectators and children — all these sales points created an additional aspect to the entire masquerade and the parade.

The events are no longer taking place only on the streets, or in exceptional cases in the buildings where only the masked persons can enter. The borderline between the participants in the parade and the spectators is merging and becoming ambiguous. Those mummers who return from the procession would anyway walk towards the free stage, to their own space. Indeed, it is relatively customary that the spectators would not only take photos of the mummers but it is also prestigious to have oneself or one's family photographed with a pleasant mask-wearer - all this makes the movement of groups more chaotic and random. People entertain themselves by throwing snowballs and walking among the spectators. Moreover, even the onlookers, both adults and children, have used some masking elements (colourful wigs, painted faces) or wear more simple masks and playfully enjoy themselves. The

photographers are also a joyful sight as they dash about and sometimes take amusing poses. Thus, similarly to the more liberal masquerade tradition, the spectators have also tried to blend into the festival atmosphere and often use less complex masking devices, participating, indirectly, as the festival performers. The onlookers have a significant role in the imperceptible shaping of the festival atmosphere.

Festival route

While waiting for their performing time, the participants stood in groups, within a long formation permeating through half of the town. As the waiting time was extremely long, the participants constantly communicated with the spectators, knowing some of them, and presented small show-sketches from time to time. During such forced stops, the musicians, who had come together with the groups, played their instruments. As mentioned above, these were typical village orchestras: drums, trombones, sometimes accordions, and there were also flamboyant bagpipers and bagpipe ensembles, intrinsic of the region. Music was performed and instruments were played in

Fig. 9. Almost every group had a musician.

stopping places, while waiting, and also to accompany the performances.

As there are thousands of spectators, the performances were also shown on a large screen. The programmes, put together according to tradition, mostly comprised all classical elements of masking performances. The performance, in front of the jury, took about ten minutes: for this purpose, the mummers had prepared brief firmly structured sketches, whereas the significant role was to be assumed by the folk dance and singing ensembles who had joined the group: these female and mixed ensembles danced folk dances in circles, and the entire undertaking was constantly accompanied with rhythmical bell-chiming, prepared in advance. The performance was assessed by an international panel of specialist judges, giving consideration to the artistic value and folksiness of the masks and the performance; the jury members also comprised an artist and an ethnologist. Even the audience would express their opinion, supporting the groups by sending SMS messages. After the performance, the groups would slowly mingle in the crowd, presenting spontaneous fragments of the show from time to time.

Masquerade tradition in Bulgaria and elsewhere

As the masquerade tradition in Bulgaria is still alive, it is subject to constant change. It takes on new symbols and images and the once strict requirements towards the age and sex of the participants tend to become relaxed. Since the days of the Bulgarian Cultural Revival characters from the neo-folklore culture have started to appear in the rituals. Significant political and economic changes and social issues still produce parodies of representatives of different social classes. Nowadays the minimum requirement for participation is having the willingness to take part, therefore it is not uncommon to see toddlers walking side by side with 70-year-old carnival veterans, women and young girls who feel part of the tradition put on masks and costumes and go out with the rest of the crowd. The masquerade games of today have a dual nature. On the one hand, in accordance with tradition, they are still performed on the traditional day and in the traditional location every year, but on the other, they have taken on an element of show and competition and are now adapted for the stage and for the audience attending

the ever increasing number of carnivals and festivals in Bulgaria and abroad.

Masquerade festivals are quite widespread in the Balkan region today, there are about a dozen festivals of the kind merely in Bulgaria, e.g.:

- *The small south-western town of Simitli hosts a more than 2000 kukeri during the festival. They attracted some 10 000 spectators - more than the actual population of the town. (BGNES 2011)*
- *Over 500* kukeri *from all across the country participated in the carnival called "Pesponedelnik"in Shiroka Luka village in the Rhodope Mountains. (BGNES 2009)*

Broad-based and rapidly internationalising masquerade festivals also emerged elsewhere, approximately at the same time as the festivity in Pernik. Similar rituals can also be found in Romania, Serbia, Italy, Greece and Spain. Some of the most interesting festivals in this context are the following:

1. The village Vevcani Carnival on the 13th and 14th of January every year is dedicated to Saint Basil the Great. The participants of the Carnival are known as *Vasiličari.* In 1993, the Carnival and the village of Vevcani officially became a part of the World Federation of Carnival Cities. This carnival has **most of humour** elements, in recent years a special "Carnival Passport" has been issued. "The Vevcani Carnival carries with it tradition, as well as the irony and satire of current events, which, quite spontaneously, creates a perfectly distorted picture of the time and place in which we live," Elizabeta Kanceska-Milevska, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia, said at the formal opening of the carnival, (http:// www.thefreelibrary.com/Vevcani+Carnival--celebration+ of+authentic+and+everlasting+folk+humor.-a0199070800)

2. Kurenti Carnival in Ptuj, Slovenia is one of **the longest** festivals. The Carnival's official duration is eleven days, and it calls itself the unique name of *kurentovanje*. During this period *kurent* groups with carnival masks similar to Bulgarians consider this gathering their most prestigious annual event, (http://www.carnivalcities.com/ slovenia; Fikfak 2003)

3. The **biggest one** is the Rijeka International Carnival Parade in Croatia. It is Eastern Europe's most spectacular and largest with 9,0 participants and 150,000 spectators, (http://www.aforum.com/cgi-bin/forum?14@@.ee6b847)

4. One of the **most recently internationalised** masking festivals is the one on Crete, where the first foreign guests were the winners of the Pernik 2011 festival, with the group of mummers from Boyanovo village, Municipality of Elhovo, Yambol District. The group is a member of an international organisation for folk art, winner of gold medals from different carnival festivals in Bulgaria. It was awarded the first prize - the Golden Mask - of the International Festival of Masquerade Games Surva 2011 held in Pernik. The mummers' group was selected on the recommendation of ethnologist Nikolay Sivkov whose daily life resonates with the pulse of celebration during his numerous travels around the country for assessing and meeting the tradition. (GRReporter 2011)

5. It is interesting to note that **plans have been made** in Estonia to introduce mummers in the public urban space: in connection with the fact that Tallinn is the cultural capital of Europe in 2011, the city is intending to organise a masking and mumming festival in its premises.

Conclusions

Before World War II, Bulgaria was mostly an agrarian country, with agriculture and related activities engaging about 80 percent of the people living in rural areas, and people depended on agriculture for their livelihood. As a tradition uniting the village folk, and the men in particular, masking was an important symbol in the village, part of the Bulgarian identity. The significance of masking is also underlined by the long continuation of the tradition and its successful adaptation in urban settings. The fact that masking is a phenomenon uniting young men and collective identity has also been noted in the case of Slovenia (Volarič 2008).

An example of media blending is the Internet, but Pernik's case is an example of a direct blending culture. Generalisations can be made, on the basis of the Surva Festival in Pernik that the borders

between inner and outer are slightly disappearing. Some town people and bystanders mask themselves to different degrees: some just paint the face, buy coloured wigs or other accessories from the street, wear comic clothes imitating somebody - devil, witch, etc., they walk around (alone, in pairs, as small groups) in crowd of participants and unmasked people.

As previously the inner category of the festival was the participants and outer one the public (= actor *vs* watcher), then now we can see the new inner and outer opposition what is rather an opposition of the members of organised groups and informal maskers, or participants of the procession and spontaneous street maskers (= organised *vs* spontaneous).

Minorities are also assimilating the Bulgarian customs, e.g., the masking tradition began to spread among the Roma people as early as in the beginning of the 20th century (Wace 1912). Initially, the masking tradition was solely associated with young men, yet it is becoming more liberal: one addition are the young women who participate in groups of men, wearing masks meant for men. Women are also openly visible as members of included folk dance groups.

Fig. 10. The Surva goes on..

Integration of children: groups of children and young people of all ages take part along with the adults of the region.

Besides traditional masks (gipsies, death, police, priests, horses, bears, etc. animals), frightening fantastical masks have appeared, some of them are quite modern.

The carnival festival is an opportunity to communicate with friends, relatives and acquaintances. There is a lot of remarkable intra-group communication. The viability of the tradition is sustained by the Bulgarian diaspora as they continue the masking tradition abroad.

There are first two museums on masks and mummings in Bulgaria, in addition to local museums displaying mumming costumes and a variety of masks as an important element of Bulgarian national identity.

The relevance of the festival is also reflected in the multi-level recording of the event: people take photos of themselves and their close ones together with the mummers (this is a stratification issue), and the festival is also recorded for home videos, broadcast by the state television and talked about in the daily news programmes.

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