

THE MUMMERS TRADITION (KUKERI)

This tradition, dating back to ancient times, involves participants known as Kukeri, donning elaborately crafted masks and costumes made from fur, feathers and other materials. A characteristic feature of the costume is the often large, heavy bells hanging around the waist which are extremely noisy when the wearer jumps up and down!

The word Kukeri represents a person, frequently a tall male, wearing a disguise. The masks are often large and intimidating, representing various mythical creatures and animals such as goats, bears or demons. The event occurs in winter and the purpose of wearing the masks is to chase away evil spirits, bring good luck and ensure a bountiful harvest for the coming year.

In Bulgaria, many Kukeri festivals take place in small towns and villages, beginning around New Year, but on an International level, the "Surva" in Pernik and the "Starchevata" in Razlog are the only ones recognized by UNESCO. I have been to the one in Pernik, it was well worth seeing, and this year instead I was at a prelude to Pernik (held every year the last weekend of January) which took place earlier in January in a large park in Sofia. Apart from the festive processions, Kukeri gatherings often include communal feasts, music and dancing.

Of course, it wasn't as grand as the real thing but nevertheless was colourful, interesting and fun as groups from Pernik and surrounding places came to participate. It was great to once again experience one of the many traditions that to this day Bulgaria keeps alive.

Anna Travali



Scary mask and huge bells.