Traditional Bulgarian Folk Costume

The Bulgarian folk costume

- The Bulgarian folk costume was worn in Bulgarian villages until the beginning of the 20th century. These garments were hand-made in the villages using materials that were produced locally. The traditional materials are linen, hemp, wool, silk, and cotton. Bulgarian women made their costumes all by themselves. At the age of five, little girls started learning to spin wheels, sew, weave and prepare the trousseau for their weddings.

Map of Bulgarian national folk costumes

- Bulgarians tend to wear traditional costumes for a number of festivals, as part of their folk dance culture, or as seen through various periods in history. A folk costume (also referred to as regional costume, national costume, or traditional garment – ‘nosiya’ in Bulgarian) expresses the identity of a specific population and their traditions through costume. This type of clothing is usually hand-made from local materials and consists of several colours.

MOTIFS AND ORNAMENTS IN BULGARIAN FOLK COSTUME

- The Bulgarian costumes contain many elements and motifs from the pagan beliefs and legends. No one wore clothes with fully symmetrical decorations, because Bulgarians believed that full symmetry was a diabolical creation. Therefore, elements were often added and removed, so that no symmetry should exist. Those were intentional mistakes in order to prevent the evil eye. Each region of Bulgaria has its own costume with unique, typical motifs. A specific code is weaved into the ornamentation of the Bulgarian costumes – in the past, the Bulgarians used to rely on it for information about the family of those, who wore them, and the areas of the country, where they lived. Each costume had its message.

Women's costumes

- Commonly, female costumes are divided into four categories: one-apron, two-apron clothes, tunics, and the Saya garment. The aprons, dresses, and shirts are usually embroidered in regional colors and folk motifs. Red features heavily in Bulgarian folk dress, but black, green, and white are also a part of the traditional clothing.
- The two-apron female costume is widespread in Northern Bulgaria. It consists of a chemise, two aprons (fastened at the waist, one worn in front, and the other at the back) and a belt.
  Fine embroidery decorates large portions of the sleeves and the front and back sections of the chemise. The two aprons (or “drapes”) were made of home-woven decorative fabric – the back one falling in folds and frills, the front piece consisting of one or two parts with horizontal or vertical embroidery.

Southwestern Bulgarian costumes

- Most of the decoration of the Saya clothing is at the neckline and the sleeves. The costume consists of the colorful Saya (overcoat) with a trapezoid cut, chemise, apron and belt. The Saya costume used to be widespread in southern and southwestern Bulgaria. The decoration is concentrated on the bosom and the sleeves. This type of Bulgarian folk costume persisted till the middle of the 20th century in South Bulgaria and Macedonia. Predominant colors were the one-color white, black, blue, and dark blue .

southeastern Thrace costumes

- The soukman or tunic was the most widely spread female costume and is typical for southeastern Thrace. It consists of chemise, tunic, apron, and belt; The soukman is most often a sleeveless dress, although in some places it has short or long sleeves. Typically, strips of the soukman fabric are attached to the sleeve openings forming the so-called “tails”. The typical decoration is most noticeable at the foot of the dress and the neckline. The apron is the central decorative piece of the soukman dress. It is richly ornamented and colorful, standing out in beautiful contrast with the soukman.

Rhodope's costumes

- The one–apron costume can be seen mostly in the Rhodope area. It consists of a chemise and one apron tied at the waist (either narrow, made of one piece, or wider, two-piece item) with a rather simple ornamentation. Till the first quarter of the 20th century, it was mainly typical of Bulgarian Moslem women in the Rhodope Mountains, since it was practical and met the requirements of their daily work activities. Characteristic of the women in the Rhodopes region was their preference for light yellow and orange, as well as grass-green shades skillfully combined in the texture of the apron

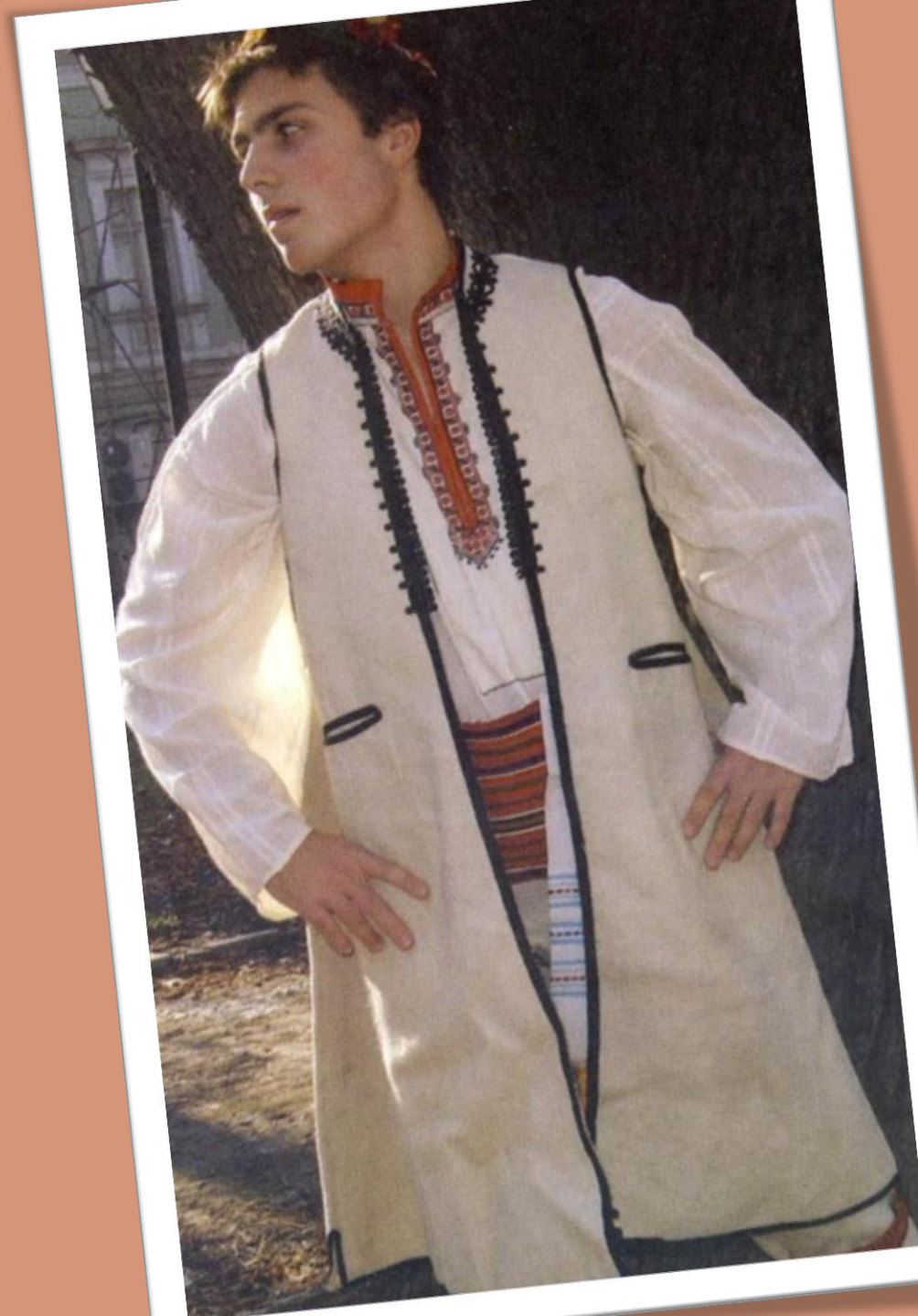
BULGARIAN

FOLK COSTUME-ACCESSORIES

- To all types of female costumes there were specific hair styles and arrangements of the head-clothing featuring jewellery, caps, scarves and flowers. Shoes, gloves, socks and fur coats fo the winter were also decorated with very impressive regional and local specific items and embroideries.

White men's costume

- The “white” male clothing consists of a shirt, tight or looser breeches or pants, wide girdle, belt and top clothes made of a white home-spun frieze. Upper garments modify the silhouette of the costume, whereas its decoration performs linear embroidered patterns and colored woolen bands/braids on the bosom and the chest, on the sleeves and the leggings. The waist-band is an essential element made of richly ornamented fabric. It is predominantly red, tightly wound around the waist.



Black men's costume

- The “black” men clothing, which is typical for the Middle Rhodope Mountain region, consists of a shirt, loose wool trousers in a dark color, girdle, belt, a cap and an outer garment (a vest or a jacket with sleeves) made of a black woolen frieze. The earliest prototype is assumed to be the one consisting of a long shirt with skirts falling above the white woolen or cotton pants tied at the waist with a waistband or belt. This conservative style was preserved for a long time because it was suitable for the most common occupations – farming and cattle-breeding.

Our students in traditional Bulgarian costumes.