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COSTUME DOLLS from BULGARIA G73



The Republic of Bulgaria is located in south-east Europe - south of Romania and north of Greece, with Serbia to the west and the Black Sea to the east. On the map on the right it is marked in orange (the countries marked in pale orange belong to the European Union, as does Bulgaria).

Bulgarian is a Slavic language, which means it is related to such languages as Russian and Polish. Slavic people moved into the area of modern Bulgaria in the seventh century. In 864, Bulgaria accepted the Orthodox Christian faith. The country became a major European power in the ninth and the tenth centuries, fighting with the Byzantine Empire for the control of the Balkans.



Until the fourteenth century Bulgaria struggled with the Byzantine Empire to dominate the area. In the late fourteenth century Bulgaria was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. For the next five hundred years the region was ruled by the Ottomans. Some Turks moved into the area and some Bulgarians converted to Islam.



In the 1870s Russia invaded and drove out the Turks. An independent Bulgaria was re-established. Many Turks were driven out by Bulgarian Christians who resented the way they had been treated.

After the Second World War Bulgaria came under Soviet Russian control and a one-party Communist state was established. The communist regime combined socialism with nationalism and in 1989 many of the remaining Turks were driven from the country. In November 1989 the Communist leader Todor Zhivkov was driven from power, at the same time as the Berlin Wall was toppled in East Germany.



Photographs. Top: Pirin Monastery, one of the most important historic sites in the country. Middle: Pirin National Park in south-west Bulgaria. Bottom: Modern houses in the capital city, Sofia.

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In the nineteenth century several European countries that were struggling for independence were influenced by ideas of Romantic Nationalism, which often celebrated regional music, craft and costume. In Norway, for example, which gained independence from Sweden in 1905, middle class people collected (and even created) regional costumes in order to foster a sense of pride in Norway. Today most teenagers in Norway are given a costume from the region where their ancestors originated, when they are confirmed (at about the age of 19). Between 200 and 300 regional costumes are officially recognised in Norway. The photograph on the right shows costumes from the Hardanger Fjord region in Norway.

The bright colours and elaborate patterning of the Norwegian costumes is similar to that found on those from Bulgaria. The same features can be found in the costumes of other European countries too, from Finland to Italy. It needs to be remembered that most of these costumes reflect the clothes that were worn by peasants on festive occasions - Christmas and Easter, marriage celebrations, christenings, dances, harvest festivals and so on. They were not the clothes that people would have worn for everyday tasks!

The dolls and booklet (dated 1950) in this box were produced in Bulgaria during the Communist regime and reflect the Bulgarian Communist Party's adaptation of the Romantic Nationalism that popularised these costumes in the first place. The English pages at the end of the booklet celebrate folk costume as 'the concrete expression of the people's creative powers and of the character of their industrial relations'. The text is also tinged by nationalistic anti-Turk feelings.



Costumes from Greece, Hungary and Serbia.

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The 60 pictures in this box identify individual costume designs with specific Bulgarian regions. It is certainly true that each region and sometimes even each village had its own favoured costume designs. However, there were variations between each individual costume. People would try and show off by creating even more colourful and elaborate variations than their neighbour's! Also, fashions changed over time and ideas were borrowed from nearby regions. There is a tendency in the modern period for local designs to be made fixed and unchanging. The dolls in this box reflect some of the common features of Bulgarian traditional costume, without being clearly identifiable as belonging to a particular place.

The basic item of dress for both Bulgarian men and women is a chemise (or shirt) called a riza. Over this women wore a dress and apron, a headdress, a belt, knitted socks, felt slippers and often a waistcoat or overcoat.

The most distinctive item worn by Bulgarian women was the bruchnik - two woollen aprons worn over the front and back of the skirt. The front apron is often made of one or two straight lengths of fabric, while the back apron may be made of several pieces of fabric joined either vertically or horizontally and pleated or gathered. A red pleated back apron is often found in north-west Bulgaria. It is sometimes called vulenik instead of bruchnik. It is worn with a front apron made of one or two widths of fabric with a horizontal seam. Two of the dolls appear to be wearing this style of dress. A pleated black back apron is worn in north-east Bulgaria. One of the dolls is wearing a dress like this. All variants of the bruchnik are worn with a narrow woven fabric belt.



Right. Modern Bulgarian peasant women in their everyday clothes.

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Men's clothes were referred to as either White Dress (belodrešnik) or Black Dress (chernodrešnik). These were not geographical variants, but are two consecutive stages in the development of men's costumes. Belodrešnik was an older form of Slavic dress. The names of the costumes refer to the colour of the trousers and waistcoat (called a lek) or overjacket. Both types of costumes were worn with a white shirt (riza), a wide, brightly coloured sash (pojas), a hat made of black lambskin (kalpak), leggings made of pieces of cloth tied onto the legs (novoushta) or socks, and leather one-piece sandals (tservuli - right). All the male dolls are wearing chernodrešnik, which first appeared in the nineteenth century. The trousers (potouri) are baggy at the hips and tight from the knee. Baggy bottoms were said to denote wealth this is particularly the case with the doll carrying a shoulder bag!





An example of a male white dress suit can be seen on the left.