

## The Carnival of Satriano di Lucania-Angiolina Palermo



**Interview with Angiolina Palermo, a lady over eighty years old who, born in Satriano di Lucania, has lived this original Carnival intensely from her childhood to the present day, capturing the transformations that have taken place in this period of time.**

**-When did the origins of this Carnival date back to?**

-The research and studies of several anthropologists suggest that this carnival originated in the period of the Norman domination of Satrianum and, perhaps, it was from the meeting of different cultures that the mythical figure of "IL RUMITA", the tree mask, was born.

**-What are the typical masks of this Carnival still today?**

"**IL RUMITA**" (the hermit) is a man totally covered with ivy, holding a stick, with a butcher's broom in his hand, used to knock on doors. The mask remains in absolute silence, standing on the doorstep that it never crossed, even if the mask is invited. This mask represents the nature knocking on the door and that must be respected in order to receive a reward in return. In fact, no one refuses to give the Hermit an offer, consisting in foodstuffs until a few years ago, and today in a few pennies, because his visit is considered a good omen.

"**L'URS**" (the bear) is a man entirely covered in goat or sheep skins, gathered at the waist by a chain from which a cowbell hangs, accompanied by a shepherd who, armed with a stick, leads him through the streets of the town. With noisy and funny skits, until a few years ago, these masks tried to sneak into houses to steal the sausages and pork salami hung from the ceiling to mature. When the robberies were not successful, they were offered, however, salami or cheeses which were divided among those who had taken part in the masquerade.

"**La QUARESMA**" (Lent) is an old woman dressed in long and wide skirts of black cloth, with overlapping aprons of different colours, with shawls with long earth-coloured fringes that cover her face on which a red, wide and crooked mouth is painted. She carries on her head the "naca" (the cradle), in which, symbolically, she carries away the now finished Carnival. She is accompanied during her outings by other Lents that mourn in chorus for the end of the Carnival.

**-How was this typical Carnival celebrated when you were a child?**

-When I was a child (in the 1950s) I remember that on the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, children and adults wandered around the houses dressed as "**RUMITI, URS OR QUARESME**" in order to get some gifts, reciting nursery rhymes or telling legends that are part of the town's lived experience. Let's say that in my town the Carnival has always been a very popular festival!

**-Have you ever participated in the Carnival celebrations?**

-Sure, as a child I used to follow my brothers around the houses, maybe wearing their clothes to disguise me, hoping to receive some sweets. Really, **the "URS"** have always frightened me a little, because they are too noisy! Later in the years, already an adult, I happened to be part of the "Lenten" together with my friends of LUETEB, the university of the third age and we had a lot of fun. Too bad these last two years, due to the pandemic, the celebrations have been suspended!

**-Can you tell us about "A ZITA" and the wedding and funeral procession?**

- "**A ZITA**" is the staging of a peasant wedding with an exchange of roles: women representing men and vice versa. "**A ZITA**" (the bride) is accompanied by "**LU ZIT**" (the groom) followed by all the typical figures of a wedding ceremony: priest, altar boys and all the guests.

In the last century **the wedding procession** took place on Carnival Sunday and **the funeral procession** on Shrove Tuesday. At the end of the liturgical services on the last Sunday of Carnival, people stopped on the steps of the Mother Church to admire the masked procession which, after a collective representation in the square, walked the streets of the town, stopping in some houses where stories, tales, legends, typical of the country were represented. On the last evening of Carnival, on Shrove Tuesday, on the other hand, the streets of the town were crossed by the funeral procession, with male characters with carbon black faces and women characters of considerable size. Compared to the last century, the drama is now organized together with the walking forest.

**-Have the meanings of the traditional masks of this Carnival changed over time?**

-Yes, they have. The meaning of the mask of **the "URS"**, the bear, has changed. If it initially represented rich and noble people, after the war it was associated with emigrants who made their fortune and returned enriched. The **URS** are mute, they no longer speak the language of their town and are accompanied by a shepherd who keeps them at bay. On the other hand, after the great post-war emigration, **the "RUMITA"** was associated with the Satrianese who remained in town, poor but faithful to his land. Since 2014, a group of young people from Satriano has compared the figure of the "**RUMITA**" to that of the tree man and the walking forest made up of 131 tree men, symbolically one for each town in Basilicata, making the Carnival of Satriano a celebration of Nature. The desire to re-establish an ancient relationship with **Mother Earth** is the new message that we want to launch. This is now a green Carnival party with zero impact on the environment!