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Borshchiv Embroidery: Past and Present

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Ukrainian embroidery occupies an important place among the various branches of Ukrainian decorative arts. Embroidery has a rich history in Ukraine, and has long appeared in Ukrainian folk clothes. Spreading over the territory of the country, Ukrainian embroidery varies depending on the region of origin. Embroidery has encoded symbols and power, rooted in the depth of Tripoli culture. These findings have been found by scientists, because of similar patterns found on dishes and other items of Trypilians.

An embroidered shirt is one of the most spectacular elements of the national costume which helps to look into the past, discover the mystery and magic of folklore often marked by a hidden deep-seated wisdom, philosophical attitude to life and the course of time. The Borshchiv embroidery shirt (figure 1) is unique, because it is impossible to find the same embroidery in Ukraine.



Figure 1. Traditional Borshchiv embroidery shirt

There are two explanations why the Borshchiv shirts were embroidered with the black thread. The ancient legend [2] says that the dominant black embroidery is associated with attacks of Turks and Tatars. After one of attacks they killed all the men in several villages of Naddnistrivia. Then the girls and women weeping over their bitter fate, vowed to mourn for the dead beloveds and get married in shirts embroidered with black thread for generations. The black thread is also the symbol of Ukrainian fertile ground. Borshchiv "black" shirts were sewn of carefully bleached hemp canvas. If unassuming linen does not avoid clay and sand, the hemp requires fertilized land and being fat. Actually rich black soil of Podillia produced the best variety of hemp in Ukraine.

Despite the diversity of Borshchiv embroidery [1, c. 27], clearly framing system for placing patterns on the sleeves was worked-out. The upper part was the most densely sewn and was called *ustavka*; under *ustavka* one can see *morshchynka* that is *pidustavkova* stripe of embroidery and ornamentation of the sleeves till the wrist, which in different villages of the district had specific names (figure 2).



Figure 2. The example of system for placing patterns on the sleeves

Elements of Borshchiv embroidery are used by modern designers to create their collections. The Spring / Summer 2008 collection, shown on figure 3, of Lviv designer Roksolana Bogutska consists of clothing decorated with Borshchiv embroidery.



Figure 3. The Spring / Summer 2008 collection of Lviv designer Roksolana Bogutska

Vira Matkovska – known in Ternopil area and abroad is a collector of Borshchiv national clothes. Now her collection consists of fifteen hundred women’s and men’s embroidered shirts, skirts, fur coats and zapasok. At first, Vira Matkovska bought shirts at markets. Some shirts are gifts of friends and different people. Sometimes the collector goes on so-called mini-expeditions to buy some interesting kind of the shirt. Then she often has to wash and clean and restore the lost pieces of embroidery.

References:

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