

# PHRASES AND SAYINGS from kitchen hangings

Exhibition from the collection of Elżbieta and Piotr Branekov





The exhibition organized by the Franciszek Kotula Ethnographic Museum in Rzeszów in early 2020, presented artifacts from the collection of Elżbieta and Piotr Branekov originating from Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia, Portugal, Bulgaria, and Germany.

The majority of the presented objects were charming hangings that once adorned kitchen walls and served as a schematic, pictorial lexicon. The exhibition also included other decorative items such as towels, cloth wall pockets for storing a variety of small objects, and so called “ząbki” or scalloped edging once pinned to shelf edges.

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The origin of white cloth wall hangings with simple embroidery intended for kitchen decor was in the Netherlands and Germany. There they were already in regular use in the 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century they also graced the interiors of other European homes and were used in Austria, western Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, France (Alsace and Lorraine), Great Britain, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, and Ukraine. They were first used in upper-class homes, later by the middle class, and eventually by peasants.



Wall hanging, multicolored cross-stitch embroidery, Slovakia, "There can be no rose without roots, nor love without affection"



Wall hanging, navy blue print, Hungary, "The white dove flies above the village carrying with it my sad heart..."



Wall hanging, blue and yellow embroidery, Bulgaria

The flourishing period for this decorating fashion was in the 1960's. At the beginning, hangings were embroidered in one color, typically blue, occasionally red or black. By the 1930's they were increasingly more multicolored. The next stage of development were commercially printed hangings with mono- or poly-chrome designs, ready for immediate use after purchase.



Towel, multicolored printed design, Poland,  
"Love builds happiness"



Wall pocket, red embroidery, Bulgaria



Wall pocket, blue embroidery, Germany, "Brushes"

The inspiration for so-called “Dutch” motifs found on many hangings came from the characteristic Dutch pottery with cobalt blue patterns called Delftware. This type of earthenware was produced in the city of Delft in the province of South Holland in the Netherlands. Delft faience enjoyed a period of greatest popularity from around 1650-1750. This instantly recognizable blue and white pottery featured designs with windmills, cityscapes, people in folk costumes, landscapes, and floral motifs. Wall hangings with similar designs were immensely popular in all countries where these home decor objects were in demand and they frequently preserved the color palette of Delft pottery: a white ground with blue motifs.



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Slovakia



Wall pocket, blue embroidery, Czechia, "Clothing brushes"



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Poland, "She sat at the well waiting for her Uhlán!"

The designs on wall hangings typically included two elements: the main design – often a symbolic picture that was easy to understand – along with a corresponding written message.

Wall hangings with both secular and religious themes served as schematic, pictorial guides presenting values that should be considered most important throughout life.



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Hungary, "To Merciful God I pray that He keep my family safe from all evil."



Wall hanging, red embroidery, Poland, "When I cook, everyone likes it!"

The guiding principle of these messages was two-fold: to transmit ideals pertaining to daily behavior, family life, patriotism, and national pride and well as to indicate appropriate aesthetic and cultural standards.

The motifs of these hangings were often a material representation of the widely known and popular German motto of the Three K's:

## **Kinder, Küche, Kirche (Children, Kitchen, Church),**

most likely coined by Emperor Wilhelm II. The modified version used in Poland was:

## **kuchnia, kościół, kołyska (Kitchen, Church, Cradle).**

A somewhat different version was also known in England:

## **Barefoot and pregnant**

(indicating that a housebound pregnant woman didn't need shoes).

Such slogans reinforced the traditional role of women in 19th century society and family. Women were to ensure progeny, take care of family, and provide them with a necessary moral foundation.



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Bulgaria



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Germany



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Slovakia,  
“Through work and diligence, you will find happiness”



Wall hanging, blue embroidery, Bulgaria



Wall hanging, black embroidery, Slovakia,  
*"Welcome are those with a good heart."*



Wall hanging, red embroidery, Bulgaria

Oftentimes, partially complete hangings (pieces of fabric with pattern outlines) could be purchased at markets, fairs, bazaars, from traveling merchants, and in fabric shops and haberdasheries. They were made of commercially woven cotton, typically plain-weave. Occasionally they were made of homespun cloth, often linen, sometimes hemp, or rarely cotton.

At first they were decorated with simple outline embroidery following the pattern indicated on the cloth most commonly using stem stitch. In later phases of development, satin stitch (both plain and shaded) and cross-stitch embroidery were also popular.

Outline embroidery was often done in thread of a single color. In many countries, including Germany, Netherlands, and Poland, blue was most common. In Slovakia and Hungary black was favored while in Ukraine red was typical.



Wall hanging, embroidery in progress, with hoop

In the 1960's, designs became more and more colorful, sometimes even motley or clashing. Designs executed in satin- and cross-stitch embroidery were typically multicolored. On the rare occasion that they were monochrome they were done in blue, black or red thread. Colored embroidery threads were generally purchased, though occasionally threads were hand dyed at home.



Wall pocket, multicolored cross-stitch embroidery, Slovakia, "Brush and Comb"



Wall hanging, multicolored cross-stitch embroidery, Hungary, "Every rose has its thorns"



Scalloped edging with floral motifs, manufactured trim, red thread



Edging with Dutch motifs, manufactured trim, black thread

It was very common for the edges of wall hangings to be embellished with decorative trim (though this practice was uncommon in Poland). Trims were often two colored: black, red or blue designs on a white ground. Alternatively, edges could be finished by folding back the hem and decorating with regional hand-embroidery stitches, crochet or machine sewing.



TŁUMACZNIE NA ANGIELSKI / ENGLISH TRANSLATION: JAN ŁĘTOWSKI

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