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Tetiana Brovarets
Maksym Rylsky Institute for Art Studies,
Folkloristics and Ethnology
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1563-2572>
tetiana.volkovicher@gmail.com

“Pigeons Fly off a Stone Mountain”:
From a Cooing Lovebird to a War Pigeon,
or Modification of Embroidered Rock Dove’s Symbolics
in Today’s Ukrainian Merch

Abstract:

The article is devoted to the symbolics of doves on epigraphic embroidered towels (mainly known as *rushnyks* with inscriptions), which were massively produced by Ukrainian girls and women from the end of the nineteenth till the middle of the twentieth century. Embroidering lines from folk songs or proverbs on textile was a very popular kind of so-called written (or fixed) folklore. By combining these verbal texts with different images of pigeons, fundamentally new works were created. For some time, this phenomenon was almost forgotten. However, in the course of recent years Ukrainian collectors and artists have been actively using old embroidered samples for souvenir products or stage decorations. Being popularized and updated in our time, the meaning of these embroidered birds has undergone significant changes. On specific examples, the author shows how one and the same image of pigeons acquires different, often even opposite senses depending on the context.

Keywords:

embroidered towels (*rushnyks*), Ukrainian merch, doves, symbolics, anti-ship cruise missile Neptune, anti-tank weapon Javelin

Introduction

Ukrainian folk culture is so permeated with the use of *rushnyks* (ritual towels) in various rituals that a *rushnyk* itself as an object may evoke association with Ukraine. Approximately one hundred years ago, it was hard to imagine a single significant event that would have been without this textile item. Today, despite the total simplification of many traditions, towels are still quite often used in Ukrainian rituals. Perhaps the most common use of *rushnyks* is in wedding rituals, such as simultaneous standing of the newlyweds on a *rushnyk* in the registry office, serving a round loaf for them on a towel, tying their hands with a *rushnyk* and wrapping the icons with a towel for blessing them.

Speaking about *rushnyks* (both hand-made and machine-made) that are used in modern wedding rituals, one of the most common images is a pair of birds, in particular pigeons. The most typical embroidered inscription on such towels reads as a traditional wedding wish: “Na shchastia, na doliu!” [“For happiness and good luck!”]¹ (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. A contemporary Ukrainian wedding *rushnyk* with the image of a pair of pigeons sitting on gold rings entwined with roses and the inscription “Na shchastia!” [“For happiness!”] (From the one end of the towel) and “Na doliu!” [“For good luck!”] (From the other end of the towel). The embroidery is in the process. Photo by the author (June 15, 2022).

There is no doubt that the doves depicted on such wedding *rushnyks* symbolize love, peace, and harmony in a newly created family. At the first half of the last century, when there was a time of mass embroidering towels and not only for weddings, but for many other occasions (as well as decorating interiors), the images of pigeons could take on rather different connotations depending on the context.

1) On modern Ukrainian wedding towels, there may be some other birds (as an example, swans, swallows or storks) and wishes (for instance, “Kohannia ta zlahody!” [“Love and harmony!”], “Dostatku ta myru!” [“Prosperity and peace!”], or “Naviky razom!” [“Together forever!”]). However, images and inscriptions from this rather limited list offered by contemporary designers of cross-stitch patterns for such *rushnyks* are much less common than the previously mentioned pigeons and phrase “Na shchastia, na doliu!” [“For happiness and good luck!”].

Drawing upon the data from the *Interactive Online Index of Folklore Formulas (Epigraphic Embroidery)*, created by me in 2016 (from that year until today, I have constantly been updating the database with new materials)² let me demonstrate some of them below.

Diversity of Pigeons on Ukrainian *Rushnyks* of the Early and Mid-twentieth Century

Using the *Epigraphic Embroidery Index*,³ we can make sure that most of the embroidered inscriptions that accompany the image of doves on towels of the first half and the middle of the twentieth century are about love. Such are, for example, the following folk rhymes: “Holuby sydily, myluvalysia, syzomy krylamy obnimalysia” [“Pigeons were sitting, canoodling and embracing each other with their grey wings”] or “Roza i sirien – niezhy nyie tsviety, holub i holubka – eto ya i ty” [“A rose and a lilac are delicate flowers, a boy-dove and a girl-dove are me and you”].

Naturally, the love topic has various sub-themes. It includes not only the idyll of two lovers, but also emotional distress, primarily associated with their forced separation. Some of these towels with doves and inscriptions have such detailed plots that they may be considered as full-fledged narratives.

For instance, the following *rushnyk* with a love story consists of four parts.⁴ Apparently, the story on the towel should be read from left to right, moving clockwise. The first part (from the left, at the bottom) shows the idyll of two doves sitting closely huddled together and looking in the same direction. The inscription under this image reads: “My nerozluchni” [“We are inseparable.”] The next logical part is upper, at the side of the towel. It depicts one dove (who looks like a girl-dove) sitting and looking at the other dove (who looks like a boy-dove) flying away. From the verbal text, we know her farewell address to him: “Zhelaiu shchastia / Ya bez tebe, mii holube syzyi, ostaius ya pechalna odna” [“I wish you happiness / Oh, my blue-gray boy-dove, I am sad and alone without you.”] The third part (above the second end of the towel), demonstrates the return of the boy-dove to the girl-dove and his appropriate response: “Ne sumui / Bud vesela, moia syza holubka, ya do tebe vzhe lechu” [“Do not be sad / Oh, my blue-gray girl-dove, be happy, I am already flying to you.”] Finally, the last part is identical to the first part: closely pressed together, two doves cooing that they “are inseparable.”

Thus, this so-called embroidered narrative has a frame construction, as the end of the story is identical to its beginning. Love-birds are destined to be together. Thus, it represents traditional symbolics of a pair of doves. These birds are associated with love and harmony, first of all.

At first glance, another embroidered *rushnyk*'s story with doves has a completely different (and even opposite), outcome than in the case just considered.⁵ This is a towel with the embroidered inscription: “Mylyi, pokydaiesh mnie. Smert ne strashna mnie. Za shcho slozy llyutsia. Liubov doroha” [“Oh, my love, you are leaving me. Death is not scary to me. What are the tears for? Dear love”] (doubled on both sides). Trying to define the folklore genre, we may say that his verbal text sounds like a keening (a funeral lament). The edges of the *rushnyk* are almost identical. However, there are still several nuances connected with it: in the verbal part,

2) Brovarets, *Interactive Online Index of Folklore Formulas: Epigraphic Embroidery*.

3) Ibid.

4) See the photo of this *rushnyk* in the Epigraphic Embroidery Index via the link: <https://volkovicher.com/pokazhchik-tekstiv/za-abetkoyu/zhelayu-shhastya-ya-bez-tebe-mij-golube-sizij-ostaius-ya-pechalna-odna-mi-nerozluchni-ne-sumuj-bud-vesela-moya-siza-golubka-ya-do-tebe-vzhe-lechu-mi-nerozluchni/>.

5) See the photo of this *rushnyk* in the Epigraphic Embroidery Index via the link: <https://volkovicher.com/baza-danih/milij-pokidaesh-mine-smert-nestrashna-mne-za-shho-slozi-llyutsia-lyubov-doroga-p-1914-goda-s-p-1933-goda-s/>.

from the one side of the towel the date is "1914," while from its second side it is "1933"; and the differences in the visual part: the doves are turned in different directions.

In addition to the lament recorded on the fabric, this *rushnyk* is also of great interest (from the perspective of social and ethno-semiotics), because of an existing legend about it. We are talking about the history of the creation of the towel, associated with the infamous policy of the Soviet political leader Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) on the territory of Ukraine, particularly in the thirties of the last century. In 1933, a nineteen-year-old girl Paraska from the Kropyvnytskyi region (the central part of Ukraine), started to embroider a towel on the canvas prepared for the marriage ceremony with her boyfriend Ivan.⁶ However, as it is emphasized in all versions of the legend, the Soviet authorities decided otherwise. Ivan died during the Holodomor, never having time to marry Paraska. Then the unfortunate girl turned the pigeons in different directions, thus showing that they were not destined to coo together and give birth to children.⁷ The inscription speaks for itself. As it is not hard to guess, the embroidered dates from the one side of the towel is the year of birth of her fiancé (who was her same age), and from the other side of the towel is the year of his death, respectively. Paraska lived for sixty-eight years and died unmarried, remaining faithful to Ivan until the end of her life. The *rushnyk*, which was supposed to serve as a wedding towel, was constantly hanging on the wall at her house as a reminder of her eternal love.⁸

This legend is alive, as it is actively transmitted nowadays. Considering our digital age, the folk transmission of the *rushnyk*'s legend usually comes through the Internet, especially through social networks like Facebook. In particular, this often happens at Holodomor Memorial Day (annual commemoration of the victims of 1932–1933 famine-genocide which falls on the fourth Saturday of November in Ukraine).⁹

Considering both the content of the inscription itself and the legend of the towel, it can be assumed that a peculiar wrapping of the story around is also suggested by this embroidered lament, as we observed it in the previous narrative. Firstly, the embroideress claims that death is not terrible for her after her fiancé died. By this, she may indicate that they have to be together, but in the next world. Secondly, according to the legend, Paraska kept the towel in a prominent place in the house during all her life, remaining faithful to Ivan until her death. Thus, the story of the *rushnyk* confirms that pigeons are inseparable, regardless of any circumstances.

If so, there is still a significant difference between the last two examples. Unlike the previous embroidered narrative, this so-called wrap (if it is the case) is explicit. Whatever the case may be, from a semiotic point of view, the message of the towels with a pair of doves that love each other forever is the same.

It should also be noted that there are many Ukrainian *rushnyks* with inscriptions where it is not about a couple, but about one or conversely, many pigeons. The semantics of such samples is also often closely related to love (in the broadest sense of the word). However, since this is no longer a traditional pair of doves (but a single dove or, vice versa, many doves), the birds themselves may not directly personify the lovers. Instead of this, pigeons in such texts act as messengers or mediators. Below I will give only some of such embroidered inscriptions on Ukrainian towels, mainly made at the middle of the twentieth century: "Ne vorkui, holubko, yak rozluku chuiesh, a vorkui, holubko, yak liubov pochuiesh" ["Oh, girl-dove, do not coo, when you foresee breakup, but coo, when you feel love"]; "Svite misiats i zoria, nese vodu, rozmovlia / Nesu vodu azh iz brodu, koromisyl hnetsia, skazhy mini, mii holube, chi mylyi vernetsia" ["The moon and the star are shining, a girl is carrying water and talking / I am carrying water all the way from the ford, the rocker is bending, oh, my pigeon, tell me if my darling will return"]; "Prylytily holuby z ridnoho kraiu, rozkazhit pro

6) Biloshapka, "A *Rushnyk* of Love."

7) Fomenko, "Requiem."

8) Kryvishyn, "Death of the Groom."

9) Biloshapka, "A *Rushnyk* of Love"; Fomenko, "Requiem"; and Kryvishyn, "Death of the Groom."

moiu mamu, a ya y rozpytaiu” [“Pigeons have arrived from their native land, tell me about my mother, and I’ll ask more about this.”]

Here, pigeons are perceived as birds in general, which due to their ability to fly, have long been considered as mediators between this and the other world. It should be noted that embroideresses may ask for news not only about their beloved, but also about their mothers. So, most likely in the latter case, we are talking about a recently married young woman who yearns for her past unmarried life.

The ability to fly can, meanwhile, evoke some other associations. Since flight is a movement, and also, as a rule a rapid movement, Ukrainian folk embroidery semiotics may draw parallels between a bird (pigeon) flight and a human life, which passes rather quickly. The following *rushnyks*’ verbal texts are the evidences of such poetic metaphors: “Iz-za hory kamianoi holuby litaiut, ne zaznala rozkishonky, vzhe y lita mynaiut” [“Pigeons are flying off a stone mountain, I have not experienced luxury, but my years have already been passing”]; “Rozy tsvitut, holubka litaie, hoda idut, a shchastia nemaie” [“Roses are blooming, a girl-dove is flying, years are passing, but there is no happiness.”]

As we can see, in such folk sayings, in addition to the thought about the transience of human life, it is also emphasized that the embroideress never had to experience the happiness (luxury). Even so, we cannot claim that these towels were necessarily pessimistically directed. For example, on one of the towels,¹⁰ a variation of the first of the verbal formulas just given is organically combined with another formula which is a traditional greeting with a good morning wish: “Ne za hory z za krutoi holuby litaiut, ne zaznala roskishonky vzhe lita mynaiut / S dobrym utrom!” [“Not off the steep mountain pigeons are flying, I have not experienced luxury, but my years have already been passing / Good morning!"]. At the same time, it is namely the optimistic formula “S dobrym utrom!” [“Good morning!”] that is highlighted in both a brighter color and a larger font.

From the semiotic point of view, the verbal formula “S dobrym utrom!” [“Good morning!”] is also connected with the image of doves (not less than the first verbal formula), but in another way. Whereas the phrase “Ne za hory z za krutoi holuby litaiut, ne zaznala roskishonky vzhe lita mynaiut / S dobrym utrom!” [“Not off the steep mountain pigeons are flying, I have not experienced luxury, but my years have already been passing / Good morning!”] is associated with the ability of doves to fly (what is correlated with a temporality of our life), the traditional morning greeting “S dobrym utrom!” [“Good morning!”] reflects pigeons cooing (which usually occurs at this early time of day). In the both cases, doves or pigeons are perceived more broadly, that is as birds in general, but not as the concrete species. While creating a symbol, in the first case, the essential characteristic is that it is a bird, which means it can fly. In the second case, the essential characteristic is also that it is a bird. But here another property of a bird is taken, namely its usually singing in the mornings.

In fact, towels with the image of birds (sometimes they look more like swallows than pigeons), and the verbal formula “Dobroe utro!” or “S dobrym utrom!” [“Good morning!”], were embroidered *en masse* in the middle of the twentieth century in Ukraine. Such towels could be found hanging on the walls of bedrooms. This was probably so the person begins each day with a traditional morning wish.

In this case, it was interesting for us to notice that in folk semiotics somewhat different inscriptions may be selected for one and the same image (which is pigeons here). In other words, it shows that different characteristics can be taken as the basis for creating a symbol (which is, for example, such properties of pigeons like their fidelity to each other, and if we speak about a pair of doves: the ability to fly or sing in the morning). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the variability in the symbolism occurs in parallel not only within the framework of one genre (embroidered towels) and one temporary space (the first half and

10) See the photo of this *rushnyk* in the Epigraphic Embroidery Index via the link: <https://volkovicher.com/pokazhchik-tekstiv/abetka-n-p/ne-za-gory-z-za-krutoyi-goluby-litayut-s-dobrym-utrom-nezaznala-rozkishonky-vzhe-lita-mynayut-s-dobrym-utrom/>.

the middle of the twentieth century). It is even within the framework of one text (in this case, one *rushnyk* which undoubtedly is perceived as a single text), two verbal formulas can normally coexist, each of which corresponds to one visual formula (the image of pigeons) from different angles (the ability to fly and sing in the morning, respectively).

In the following chapters, I propose to consider how these centuries-old patterns are being rethought and practically used in the modern world.

Use of Embroidery Elements with Pigeons and Folk Inscriptions in the Modern Era

On August 24, 2021, a grand concert was held in Kyiv to mark the 30th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence Day. The name of it was symbolic: "Ark UKRAINE: X centuries of Ukrainian music."¹¹ Not only was the musical component thought out to the last detail, but so were the visual elements, inter alia, the stage decorations. Particularly, when a famous Ukrainian folk music quartet DakhaBrakha performed a spring song "Vesna" ["Spring,"] some parts of digitized and several times enlarged *rushnyks* with doves and inscriptions flashed on the stage.

Unfortunately, the operators' cameras did not fully capture the period when the epigraphic embroidery's elements emerged. From a distance and at an angle, and then only for a few seconds, can one see it on the recording.¹² However, even in those fragmentary pieces, one can see the prototype of the towel, which is obviously stored in the Ivan Honchar Museum (National Centre of Folk Culture) funds, as we can see it on the watermarked photo of this museum (a random photo from social networks).¹³ This is a *rushnyk* with the image of a pair of pigeons and the inscription "Nashcho holuba lovyt, nashcho yoho muchyt, vin za mnoiu prylytyt, yak za mnoiu skuchyt" ["There is no need to catch a boy-dove, there is no need to torture him, he will fly to me as he misses me."]

A post ("Kovcheh – the Vision of Talented Yaryna Winnytska, a Vision of Music, History, Folklore, Spirit, Roots," August 24, 2021) on the Facebook page of Kateryna Yushchenko, the former first lady of Ukraine (2005–2010), is even more significant in this regard.¹⁴ Expressing admiration for the concert and admitting that she could not even imagine such impressive scenery, she published several short videos and photos from the event. One of her close-up photos shows a decoration modeled on the epigraphic embroidery just mentioned.¹⁵

It is worth noting that in this way the re-actualization of this mid-twentieth century embroidered text took place at least twice: 1) the first time it was directly during the concert in the form of rapidly changing decorations; 2) for the second time, the revival of the same epigraphic embroidery moved into virtual space (the social network Facebook) in the form of a photo. It is extremely important that the semiotic connotations of the original embroidered text and its two modern re-actualizations are quite different.

The original *rushnyk*, apparently, could serve as life advice or guidance for a young girl who, according to folk customs, was not supposed to take the initiative in a love relationship, as she had to be modest and passive. Here the pigeon is a beloved young boy that a girl in love misses.

Getting into the stage decorations during the performance of the spring song, the same embroidered image and inscription is perceived rather as a visualization of the calling for spring. In this context, the pigeon appears

11) Ark "Ukraine," "Ark UKRAINE."

12) I+I, "A Musical Band 'DakhaBrakha' – 'Spring.'"

13) Klymenko, "Ivan Honchar *Rushnyk*."

14) Yushchenko, "The Vision of Yaryna Winnytska."

15)



Figure 2. Stage scenery (based on the mid-twentieth century Ukrainian *rushnyk* with the image of doves and the inscription “Nashcho holuba lovyt, nashcho yoho muchyt, vin za mnoiu prylytyt, yak za mnoiu skuchyt” [“There is no need to catch a boy-dove, there is no need to torture him, he will fly to me as he misses me”]) during the performing the spring song by Ukrainian folk music quartet DakhaBrakha (the concert “Ark UKRAINE: X centuries of Ukrainian music” devoted to the 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s Independence 24 August 2021). Photo by Kateryna Yushchenko: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4494052417320027&set=pcb.449405223986413>.

not as a beloved young boy, but as an association with springtime. Again, in the creation of this symbol, the dove is perceived as a bird in general. But here, one more previously unmentioned property of birds is taken: their usual arrival in spring; after all, the return of birds after wintering means that the cold has already receded.

After all, being photographed by a camera in the hands of the former First Lady, and posted on the network on the 30th anniversary of the Independence of Ukraine, and also supported by patriotic text, this same embroidered text can be perceived more widely. Now, this digitized mid-twentieth *rushnyk* may evoke an association with Ukrainian culture in general. It is not about the analysis of a specialist, but about an average citizen of Ukraine who, scrolling through the news feed on Facebook on this day (moreover, being obviously oriented on the celebration of the Independence Day of Ukraine), saw this photo post. Naturally, a Ukrainian citizen, after recent review of several celebratory messages, will perceive this embroidery (like many other cultural products), rather as a reminder of their national identity than as a symbol of a love relationship or a call for spring to come.

By the way, this same embroidered phrase “Nashcho holuba lovyt, nashcho yoho muchyt, vin za mnoiu prylytyt, yak za mnoiu skuchyt” [“There is no need to catch a boy-dove, there is no need to torture him, he will fly to me as he misses me”] with the image of doves is also repeatedly applied in our time in other, more everyday ways. It is one of the most popular ways to actualize old samples of folk culture which is the use of its motifs in the creation of new products for domestic brands.

As an example, in 2017 the company Mrii Marii, which specializes in the production of ethnic souvenirs and handmade gifts, sold a box with the ending of the verbal formula: “Vin do mene prylytyt, yak za mnoiu skuchyt” [“He will fly to me as he misses me.”]¹⁶ Two years later, in 2019, this company offered a new

16) @Miriimarii, “He Will Fly to Me as He Misses Me.”

hand-embroidered bag with the same optimistic part of the inscription.¹⁷ Both products are decorated with a pair of doves in flowers (albeit in different ways). Considering that the manufacturers twice abandoned the initial part of the verbal formula, which is telling about the futility of catching and torturing a pigeon, it may be assumed that the emphasis here is also shifted (regarding to the original mid-twentieth century towel). While the original pointed out the passive role of the girl in the relationship as required by folk moral standards, the modern products are decorated only with the ending of this formula bringing love to the fore, as there is not a hint of instructions or reproaches to a girl in love and it sounds like an attempt to comfort her.

Combining the two considered methods of re-actualization of ancient epigraphic embroidery (as decorations for the holiday and in everyday goods), we must also note that it is not uncommon for manufacturers to release a certain line of goods to coincide with the certain holiday. For example, Gunia Project, "a brand of exceptional things produced on the basis of traditional ethnic cultures," as it is stated in their description,¹⁸ presented a minimalistic capsule collection of accessories and ceramic products for Valentine's Day.¹⁹ The collection included two types of plates and a cup united by a common inscription "Sydyt para holubiv tai vorkuiut duzhe" ["A pair of pigeons are sitting and cooing strongly."²⁰

As indicated by the brand manufacturers, the inscription is borrowed from a twentieth century embroidered towel in the Poltava region.²¹ If we use the Interactive Online Index of Folklore Formulas (Epigraphic Embroidery), we can easily identify the specific *rushnyk* that inspired the design of the plates and cups. Namely, the fact is that this inscription is not a common verbal formula on Ukrainian towels. Today, it is presented in the Index as the only version (although it is possible that there may still be variants of it in folk embroidery, as we will see it below). Judging by the fonts, which are copies of the dishes from Gunia Project, as well as information about the Poltava region, this is a *rushnyk*, which is stored in the mentioned above Ivan Honchar Museum National Centre of Folk Culture (see Figure 6).

Notably, the just mentioned manufacturers took only the inscription from the ancient towel, without an image, obviously considering the minimalist design of their product. The opposite cases, on the contrary, are also known; where only the image (without an inscription) from a *rushnyk* is used for a future product. So did, for example, Yaitse Raitse, a "Zavalniuk sisters' cozy décor studio" which deals with "hand-made heart-warming things and decorations," as it is stated in their intro. It is curious that that this happened with the exact same embroidered plot and at about the same time.

On the next day of Saint Valentine's Day, 2022, Yaitse Raitse posted on their Facebook page: "A pair of pigeons are sitting and cooing strongly" – such an inscription and embroidery on a *rushnyk* from Kropyvnytskyi region inspired me to create this Easter egg. Pigeons in a pair are a symbol of love, and a symbol of Peace with an olive branch in their beaks."²²

Unlike Gunia Project, Yaitse Raitse took only the image of doves from a towel with a similar plot. Furthermore, their birds only remotely resemble those that we see on embroideries. But it is important that the creators themselves emphasize the connection of their products (Easter eggs) with an ancient *rushnyk* containing the appropriate inscription. By re-actualizing the motifs of the ancient embroidery, namely from this period of time, Yaitse Raitse insisted on the ambivalence of the doves' symbolics. On the one hand, a pair

17) Marii, "The People Will Say Wittily."

18) GUNIA Project, "Handmade Ceramic Plate with the Inscription."

19) Platforma, "Gunia Project Presented Collection."

20) Naidenko, "Unusual Accessories and Ceramics."

21) GUNIA Project, "Handmade Ceramic Plate with the Inscription."

22) Raitse, "*Rushnyk* from the Kropyvnytskyi Region Inspired Me."

of doves is a sign of love (which had relevance the day before on Saint Valentine's Day). On the other hand, doves are a symbol of peace enhanced by an olive branch in their beaks (which was no less relevant at that time, since in mid-February 2022 all of Ukraine lived in a state of a constant suspense that a full-scale Russian military aggression might occur).

Three and a half months later, during the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, Yaitse Raitse published several photos of one more version of Easter eggs with pigeons, with a similar description "A pair of pigeons are sitting and cooing strongly.' This is another plot from the folk embroidery that I was tempted to depict on the Easter egg. It is so naive and does not pretend to be a high art at all, but at the same time it is so kind and prophesies everyone to be in a couple, in peace and harmony throughout their lives!"²³

As we can see, the second post also emphasizes the dual semantics of the image of doves: they are love and peace. This time, the authors also attached a photo of the towel with pigeons which, apparently, served as inspiration for them (unfortunately, the inscription is not visible on the *rushnyk's* photo).

Obviously, there is also a third version of re-actualization of ancient towels – it happens when both verbal and visual (practically unchanged), embroidered formulas are transferred to modern products. Recently, at the beginning of 2022, a young private collector (an owner of the ethnographical collection *Drevo*), Eduard Krutko joined this activity.²⁴ Collaborating with various clothing, tableware, and soap companies, he sells many modern items with prints with the samples of the embroideries from his collection. Again, it is noteworthy that a significant part of the prints selected by the young collector are copies from the embroidered towels connecting the image of pigeons with the corresponding inscriptions. They are "Dva sertsia palaiut – razom zhyt bazhaiut" ["Two hearts are burning – they want to live together"]; "Iz-za hory kamianoi holuby litaiut, ne zaznala rozk-ishonky, vzhe y lita mynaiut" ["Pigeons are flying off a stone mountain, I have not experienced luxury, but my years have already been passing"]; "Dai sertsiu voliu – zavede v nevoliu" ["If you give your heart a freedom, it will lead you into captivity"]; "Molodi lita – zolote vremya" ["Young age is a golden time"]; "Roza i fiaska – dva moikh tsvitky" ["A rose and a violet are two my flowers"]; and "Holub i holubka – to yak ya i ty" ["A boy-dove and a girl-dove are like me and you.]"²⁵ (In fact, the last two inscriptions are the parts of one and the same verbal formula, but here they are presented as separate texts).

Anyone can purchase a cup,²⁶ soap,²⁷ cap,²⁸ or socks²⁹ with the appropriate print. In Eduard Krutko's words, as the enemy's goal is to destroy our culture, during the war it is necessary to popularize it, especially when many Ukrainians cannot physically enter the museum, it is important to show them part of the museum in such a modern way: "Today, the prints from *rushnyks* can get into everyone's home in the form of a T-shirt, cup, bowl, shopping bag, cap."³⁰ And since, as the collector points out, during a full-scale armed aggression of Russia against Ukraine, he will donate part of the profit (namely, all proceeds from the sale of the handmade soap³¹) to the Armed Forces of Ukraine;³² the compatriots of whom naturally try to support such activities.

23) Raitse, "Folk Embroidery I Was Tempted to Depict."

24) Krutko, "Merch from Ethnographic Collection 'Tree.'"

25) Nahorny, "'Naive' Merch."

26) Eduard, "Metal Enamel Bowls."

27) Mydelko.UA, "A Unique Series of Handmade Soaps."

28) Andrieiev, "Folk Ukrainian Motifs."

29) Ethnographic Collection, "The History of Our Collaboration."

30) Yaholnyk, "Popularizes Ukrainian Traditions."

31) Mydelko.UA, "A Unique Series of Handmade Soaps."

32) Krutko, "Socks and Craft Soaps on Sale."

Accordingly, the revival of centuries-old Ukrainian embroidery (in particular, motifs of embroidered doves with corresponding inscriptions) is now intensifying.

One more tendency connected with re-actualization of ancient Ukrainian *rushnyks* with doves in the context of the contemporary full-scale Russian war against Ukraine will be shown below. This is about creative rethinking of embroidered motifs and fitting them into military realities.

The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Re-interpretation of Embroidered Scenes with Pigeons

The above-mentioned embroidered text “Sydyt para holubiv tai vorkuiut duzhe” [“A pair of pigeons are sitting and cooing strongly,”] was also embodied in the drawings of modern Ukrainian artist Marta Leshak. Her works attract attention primarily because of how they fit into today’s war context. Less than a month after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory (February 24, 2022), the eloquent image began to circulate actively on social networks.³³ Visually reminiscent of the mid-twentieth century *rushnyk*, the pattern has undergone significant conceptual changes.



Figure 3 (left). A mid-twentieth century Ukrainian *rushnyk* (Poltava region, the central part of Ukraine) with the image of a couple of pigeons sitting on the flowering tree branch and the inscription “Sydyt para holubiv tai vorkuiut duzhe” [“A pair of pigeons are sitting and cooing strongly.”] Photo by the author (April 21, 2013).

Figure 4 (right). A design on the basis of the *rushnyk* (from the previous photo) by a modern Ukrainian artist Marta Leshak (2022). Photo from the source: <https://www.facebook.com/honcharmuseum/posts/pfbid0xv4eywzjuh8TgbMJ2W6KDnQ5vWD1AMqiNg-8ERLCyUAWRfNFRdpLGa9G6NWryRNYCl>.

33) Ivan Honchar Museum, “Avtorka Marta Leshak. Rushnyk XX stolittia z Poltavskoi oblasti. Zbirka Muzeiu Ivana Honchara” [“The Author Is Marta Leshak.” The *Rushnyk* of the Twentieth Century from the Poltava Region. Funds of Ivan Honchar Museum.”]

In the verbal part of Marta Leshak's drawing, the inscription "Sydyt para holubiv tai vorkuiut duzhe" ["A pair of pigeons are sitting and cooing strongly"] turns into the inscription "Sydyt para holubiv tai dzhave-lina hriiut" ["A pair of pigeons are sitting and warming a Javelin"]; (the font remains the same). In the visual part, between a pair of doves and a flowering tree branch, a new component appears which is a Javelin. Being green and looking like a branch (the artist made it in the same shades as the flowering branch), this modern American-made portable anti-tank weapon harmoniously fit into the mid-twentieth Ukrainian embroidered plot. Javelins, with which Ukraine is provided to resist the full-scale Russian aggression in 2022, have already become a repeated image in art, symbolizing the resilience of Ukrainians. In particular, there are widely known "Saint Javelin" Internet memes (depicting Madonna with an anti-tank missile system in her hands): primarily printed as stickers, Christian Borys (a Ukrainian, Polish, and Canadian journalist),³⁴ and further spread by many others.

Specifically, regarding the previously mentioned re-actualized epigraphic embroidery, here the image of a doves' couple sitting on a javelin and "warming" it turns into a complex symbol with several layers. As Marta Leshak claims in her interview, "In itself, the combination of weapons and doves as a symbol of peace is ironic. Such a reference to the concept of '*Russkiy mir*' and their 'war for peace'"³⁵ Being a homonym, the Russian lexeme "*mir*," has indeed two main meanings: 1) the first one is a "world"; 2) the second one is a "peace" or an "absence of war." After the cynical attack on the territory of independent states and the absurd inclusion of them in the so-called *Russkiy mir*, this concept sounds like an oxymoron.

What is more, some features of self-contradiction are also in the fact that pigeons, which since time immemorial have been considered as a symbol of peace, now are included in the military context: thus, they are obliged to defend their natural right to peace with the use of weapons (Javelins). Moreover, a few days earlier, a legend spread about pigeons fighting for the independence of Ukraine. It was about the fact that the Russians on the border with Ukraine were asked not to feed the pigeons, since the Americans allegedly "infect the birds at their biological laboratories in Ukraine in order to kill them."³⁶ The image of fighting Ukrainian pigeons, as well as Javelins, also instantly entered various types of modern art.

Another layer superimposed on the symbolism of modernized embroidered doves is related to the fact that a pair of doves, after all, means harmony in the relationship between them. Russian military aggression against Ukraine showed how the Ukrainian nation is able to unite in the common goal of defeating an external enemy. A peculiar variation of this idea is another work by Marta Leshak, presented two months later³⁷ as a merchandise for the Balcony Garment³⁸ and Peanut Butter³⁹ collaboration.

Another, *rushnyk* of approximately the same age and from the Poltava region with funds from the Ivan Honchar Museum⁴⁰ (also with the image of a similar pair of doves in flowers), has become the basis for a new painting by Marta Leshak.⁴¹ This time, the artist depicted birds sitting on a modern Ukrainian anti-ship cruise missile *Neptune*, as this weapon is also actively used by Ukrainians in the defense of their homeland. Resembling a tree branch, the neutral gray color and shape of *Neptune* fit well into the picture. The absence of an inscrip-

34) Alberga, "Sales Spike in Support of Ukraine."

35) Tatarenko, "'Fighter' Geese, Javelins, Cruise Missiles."

36) Voloshyn, "The Frenzy is Getting Stronger."

37) Leshak, "'Balcony Garment' and 'Peanut Paste TOM Collaboration.'"

38) Balcony Garment, "Doves Among the Flowers."

39) TOM, Merch "I am Ukraine."

40) Ivan Honchar Museum, "Embroidered *Rushnyk*."

41) Balcony Garment, "T-Shirt."

tion in the embroidered original is compensated for by a short, telling slogan “Tut i teper” [“Here and now,”] which speaks for itself.

In these cases, one and the same picture with doves, which once symbolized peace and harmony, but in wartime conditions in Ukraine it has turned into a symbol of readiness to repel the enemy and fight with weapons.



Figure 5 (left). A Ukrainian *rushnyk* (Poltava region, the central part of Ukraine) with the image of a couple of pigeons sitting on the flowering tree branch; without any embroidered verbal texts on it. Photo from the source: <https://honchar.org.ua/en/collections/detail/2431> (licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0).

Figure 6 (right). A design on the basis of the *rushnyk* (from the previous photo) by a modern Ukrainian artist Marta Leshak (2022). Photo from the source: <https://balconygarment.com/zhinkam/futbolka-zhinocha-bila-ptakhy>.

Conclusions

Thus, some motifs of Ukrainian *rushnyks* with inscriptions (mainly from the first half and the middle of the twentieth-century), are being actively popularized now. During this process, they have been and continue to be naturally modified. In particular, the image of doves, being a well-known symbol of peace and love, are proved to be able to form antonymic semantic pairs (love – separation; peace – war). Many centenary embroideries depicting pigeons, quite often acquire an antonymic semantics, especially being modified into the images of modern T-shirts, cups, and so forth. For some of these items, love and peace come to the fore, while for the others the main idea is separation and war.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the general meaning of pigeons’ symbolics as harmony remains the same. To be more precise, this general meaning is superimposed with new connotations. In the case of separation of lovers, a pair of pigeons continues to mean happy love, but in the past tense. In the case of war, a couple of doves continues to symbolize peace and harmony, but among themselves, in the sense of working in harmony to defeat the enemy.

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Working as part of this team as a volunteer in my free time from scientific research, I managed to find a surviving embroidered picture among the rubble of a damaged house in Bucha district of Kyiv region (presumably, the mid-twentieth century). There was the image of a couple of doves surrounded by a wreath of roses on this embroidery, which was a joyful for my team-mates. This was an emblematic find for us, because these birds are most often known as a sign of peace, love and harmony. Since I have been studying Ukrainian embroidery for a long time, and doves are one of the most beloved folk symbols (particularly, in this kind of art), that surviving embroidered picture among the ruins, as well as the team-mates’ reaction to it, was an inspiration for me in writing this article.



Figures 7 (top, left), 8 (top, right), 9 (bottom). Ukraine, Kyiv region, Bucha district, Piskivka urban settlement. A valuable ethnographic and emblematic find (an embroidered picture depicting a pair of doves surrounded by a wreath of roses; presumably the mid-twentieth century) during the rubble clearing (damage to buildings as a result of Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022) by a volunteer building division “Dobrobat.” Photos by the author (July 19, 2022).

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