

EASTER EGGS IN UKRAINIAN CULTURE – RENDERING TECHNIQUES, ORNAMENTATION, SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

Easter (Великдень) is the most important holiday in the liturgical calendar of Christianity. There are different, symbolically charged rituals associated with each of the Easter days. Some of those ceremonies derive from the Bible, others are a lingering legacy of pagan customs adopted into the Christian context. One of said ritual traditions is painting Easter eggs. Egg-painting is a specific type of folk art, popular among various Slavic nations including Ukrainians. Each region of Ukraine boasts of unique techniques of making Easter egg such as painting patterns and colors. The most popular technique has always been writing with wax, so called "batik technique". Naturally extracted types of dye afforded colors with symbolic meanings.

The Place of Painted Eggs in Easter celebrations

Out of the folk customs, where egg used to function as a talisman providing protection from evil but also one that would draw in blessings, a symbol of vitality and life, love and fertility, grew the tradition of hallowing the Easter painted eggs. Barbara Ogrodowska says the following about folk beliefs concerning the eggs: "According to those beliefs egg acts counter to all that is evil. As such it was made use of in rituals aimed at bringing good crop yields and in those connected with pastures, in magic, medicine, in wooing and in ceremonies devoted to the dead. On the first day of Easter eggs were buried in field ridges as well as in vegetable patches in order to invite good harvest. Shells were thrown in the orchards under fruit-bearing trees. This was believed to ward off pests and bring an abundance of fruits" (Ogrodowska, p. 37).

During Christianization painted eggs were included as an element of Easter symbolism. Nowadays they are made before Easter, and for the occasion of the less and less celebrated and remembered "Jare Święto" ("marking the first day of spring" - a traditional Slavic celebration taking place at the spring equinox – March 21st – or on the first Sunday after the equinox full Moon). The eggs were painted during Lent or only during the Great Week - the work commenced on Palm Sunday or Good Thursday. They had to appear among Easter dishes and at hallowing the food; they were supposed to symbolize the rebirth of nature as well the hope drawn from the Christian faith in the resurrection of Christ. The tradition of hallowing eggs in the church is very old. It can be first discerned in Medieval times, among the monastic clergy, during times when the Lent fasting was observed so strictly that even eggs were one of the proscribed foods. Hallowing them was believed to prevent sickness after a long period of fasting, as well as to solicit a blessing for the soul and the body (Smosarski, p. 70).

Activities connected with preparing the eggs began often as early as two or three weeks before the Easter celebrations, however they had to be finished before the Good Friday. Eggs were initially painted only by women, young maids first and foremost, and during this time a man could not enter the chamber. If such a thing happened nonetheless, the potential ill-luck the intruder could have brought on the eggs, had to be ritualistically averted. The eggs were first given to the kin, and friends. God mothers received ones from the god children. In the week after Easter eggs were given to befriended people. Giving one to an unmarried girl or man was thought to be a signal of attraction (Smosarski, p. 73).

Painted eggs were given not only to the living. In an act related to age-old beliefs, they were also carried to the graves as an expression of remembrance. This tradition harkening back to pagan days has lasted to modern time among the Hutsuls. Eastern Orthodox believers take the eggs to cemeteries on the second Easter Sunday (Сітько, Русанова, p. 11). In Belarus this day is known as *Radunica* and falls on the Tuesday after the second Sunday of Easter. The tradition has roots in the pagan funerary celebration of *Zaduszki*, occurring during the spring solstice, on which later on the Christian Easter was imposed, utilizing however the older religious layer. In the olden days during the Easter feast of the dead (called *Niedziela Przewodnia*) eggs were rolled over the tombstones, dug inside the soil as an offering and as nourishment for the dead (Ogrodowska, p. 38). The relevant ceremonies include also the Cracow feast known as *Rękawka* (Gloger, p. 171). One scholar of Ukrainian mythology describes the custom of giving eggs to the dead in the following way: "The symbolism of egg as denoting the rebirth of the person was familiar to the Scythians: the funeral was carried out in egg-shaped kurgans, in which the tomb-chamber was sprinkled with yellow clay resembling the yolk. During the days of remembrance Ukrainians bring painted eggs and *krashankas* to the gravesites, venerating the ancestors" (Lozko, p. 34).

Techniques of Making Easter eggs. Types of eggs

Although the word Easter egg is used for every type of ornamented egg, the technique of making them could be divided into a few distinct types. Eggs dyed with just one color and not adorned with any patterns are called *krashankas* or *kroshonkas* (крашанки). Yet another kind is *drapankas* (дряпанки, різьбянки), which carry patterns that are scratched out on the uniformly colored surface. In order to scratch out the particular pattern one uses either a thin knife, a needle, a pin or a razor. The already painted egg may also be additionally covered with multicolor patterns with the help of drops of wax, which makes the egg into a *krapanka* (крапанки, галунки). Using paint a and a brush allows to create a *malovanka* (мальованка). *Pysankas* (писанки, галунки) are created with the use of the so called "wax-writing" method, that is to say - the batik method. The most peculiar to Ukraine are ones written over with wax, meaning *pysankas* in the proper sense. The techniques of adorning eggs and making *pysankas* have evolved through time, and below we elaborate on a few of them.

Pysankas (писанки, галунки) are eggs which, using a funnel instrument, are covered in a pattern with a heated wax, and then dipped in a pigment. The process of laying the ornament and dipping in paint may be repeated, resulting in a combination

of different hues. In the spots where the wax was poured, the shell retains the white coloration, thus making the decorative motives stand out. This technique was particularly popular among Slavs, since beeswax was easily accessible in their lands (Tvardovska, p. 18). In order to sketch the ornaments one could use different tools called *pisaki*, from ordinary quills to a variety of funnels made of thin plate. This is the oldest known technique of ornamentation and is often called the batik technique. Using this technique to paint patterns testifies to the ancient, cultic and magical use of eggs. Wax *pysankas* appear nowadays throughout the whole Eastern Europe (Ogrodovska, p. 37).

Krashankas (крашанки) are made through boiling an egg in a dye concoction, which once upon a time used to be produced only with natural ingredients. They are ornamented with the chisel method - a pattern is scrubbed on the egg-shell.

A different group of *pysankas* are **malovankas (мальованки)**, meaning eggs marked with varied ornaments with the use of paint and brush. As one scholar of Ukrainian culture put it, *malovankas* were bereft of the symbolism characterizing the traditional *pysankas*, produced mainly by painters and much closer to our times than *pysankas* in their historical form (Килимник, p. 213).

Nakleyankas are eggs adorned by gluing plants (bulrush) or other material (paper, yarn) to their shells. It is mostly done on eggs that had been hollowed out, using glue made of water and rye flour.

Drapankas (дряпанки, різьбянки, скробанки, царапанки) are uniformly painted eggs, the surface of which is covered in different patterns. Scratching out ornaments on surface is one of the oldest techniques of making *pysankas*. It is in use among others among the Lemkos and in the region of Polesie.

Kapankas (капанки) are the type of *pysanka* with a single-color background covered with colorful stains (no more than three different colors were used for this purpose). This type was produced without using a brush, but simply by dripping paint on the shell. S. Kylymuk (С. Килимник) informs that traditional *kapankas* started disappearing in XVIII century, however they can still be seen in Volhynia and in the region around Chernivtsi (Килимник, p. 216).

Apart from the above there exist other ways of adorning eggs. The less popular ones include etching - making the patterns with the use of cabbage acid or vinegar on a colored shell. When the acid was wiped off it left a white-colored pattern.

The tradition of adorning eggs during Easter has survived in the East of Ukraine up to this day in its traditional form, especially in the countryside. Each Ukrainian region developed a characteristic style of Easter eggs, as far as technique, coloration, and ornamentation go.

The Symbolism of Ukrainian Painted Eggs

Since the beginning, within the Christian symbolism the egg has been associated with Easter, alluding to Christ's Resurrection. Just as from inside the shell a fledgling hatches, the resurrected Christ rose triumphantly after three days from the grave (Forstner, p. 236). In the days of yore the egg also symbolized the Old and New Testament, that is to say the Old and New Covenant God made with man. The shell which is usually thrown away after breaking, stood for the Old Testament, while the yolk - the core of the new life - was the image of the New Covenant (Forstner, p.

230). Since the first ages of Christianity, the egg was also symbolically connected with the veneration of dead, as a symbol of life, hope and faith in the afterlife.

Egg symbolizes the embryo, the Universe, Sun, Earth, life-force, fertility, rebirth, the peculiar powers working against evil spirits. The symbolic message of a painted egg consists of both the symbolism of the egg itself as well as the symbolism of the ornaments painted thereon. When the egg was covered with ornamentation of a symbolic significance and, as believed, of magical power, it was not cooked, eaten, or played with. The egg symbolism was known in all the pagan cultures. An Ukrainian scholar touches on this symbolism in the following way: "A bird's egg is the seed of life, symbol of the Sun god; in antiquity it symbolically stood for good, joy, happiness, love, the sympathy of benevolent powers, and it protected people from the evil ones" (Манько, р. 176). In the Easter egg symbolism, there happened a meeting of the Christian faith in resurrection and the Second Coming and the pagan awe before the might and vitality of nature, which undergoes a continuous rebirth. The Easter eggs are dyes with different colors and ornamented with elaborate patterns containing a rich symbolism, and at the same time they constitute an interesting example of ritualistic aesthetics.

For Ukrainians *pysankas* are an invaluable treasure, one of the most refined works of art. It captivates with its exquisite beauty, allures with its variety of colors, ornaments and symbolism. Many Ukrainians will tell that seeing them is like a meeting with art that it related to the sacred, and that's why it is a spiritual event (Таланчук, р. 10). The Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko wrote:

Село на нашій Україні,
Неначе писанка село...

In this way he compared the beauty and the picturesque look of his home country with the Easter eggs, which since centuries before had been perceived by Ukrainians as one of the symbols of the motherland and its cultural uniqueness.

Today the beautifully ornamented Easter eggs can be bought at dedicated fairs. The oldest exemplars of the egg-painting arts can be seen in the Pysanka Museum in Kolomyia, as well as other museums both in Ukraine and Poland. The XXI-century Ukraine remains one of the few countries where in almost every corner of the land *pysankas* are still made before the Easter celebrations.

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