

Easter Greetings From

WHEREVER Ukrainians live, an ancient and beautiful folk art flourishes anew each Eastertide.

An outsider marvels, watching the ritual unfold. On a table he sees a lighted candle and a lump of beeswax. Nearby lies a *kistka*, a small writing instrument. Half a dozen jars of brilliant dyes stand at one side. In a bowl rest pagan symbols

of the life force—freshly laid eggs, white, blemish free.

Now a handsome dark-haired woman wearing an embroidered peasant blouse seats herself, bows her head, and makes the sign of the Cross.

"Bozhe blahoslovy ē pomozhy," she prays. "God bless and help us." As her sun-worshipping ancestors decorated eggs in joy



By ROBERT PAUL JORDAN
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Photographs by JAMES A. SUGAR

the Ukrainians

at the rebirth of spring, so she commemorates the rebirth of man.

She picks up an egg. Swiftly, surely, she writes on it with the kistka, flowing straight lines of melted beeswax onto the curved surface. Her basic design emerges, and she dips the egg in the lightest

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SYMBOLS OF SPRING'S REBIRTH, *eggs glow with brilliant designs created with wax and dye. Ukrainian communities fashion the keepsakes for Easter gift giving, a hallowed custom brought from their east European homeland.*



WORK OF WORSHIP produces a token of love. Twenty-one-year-old Christine Ambroziak (left) of Minneapolis, Minnesota, asks God's blessing as she decorates an egg to present to her beau on Easter morning.

Mrs. Luba Perchyshyn, also of Minneapolis, demonstrates the technique she learned from her mother. Some people first empty the eggs through pinholes, but Mrs. Perchyshyn does not; the contents eventually dry up. Her tool is a kistka, a brass cone mounted on a stick.

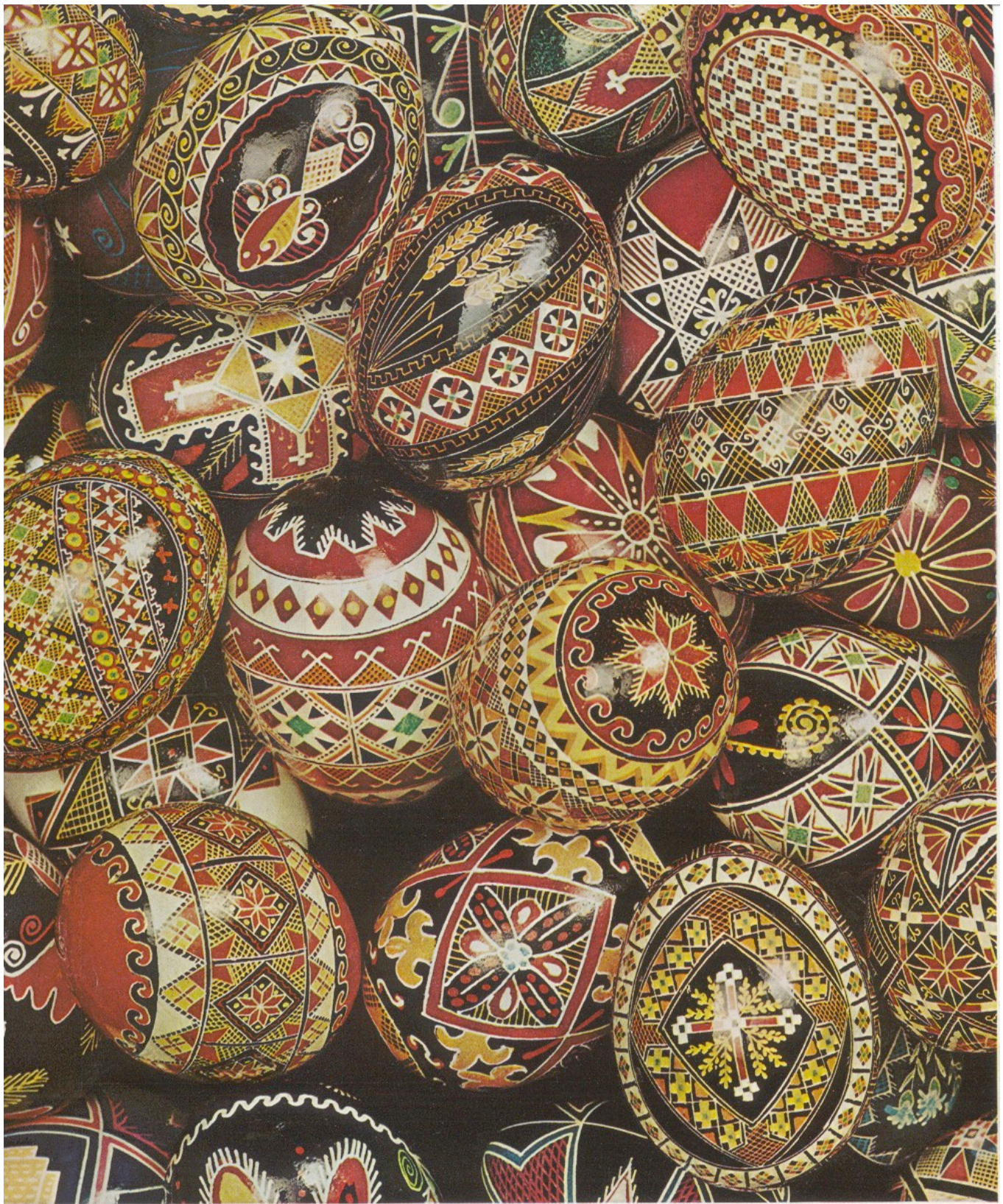
Heated over a candle and filled with beeswax shavings, the cone flows with the melting, soot-blackened wax, as a pen flows with ink (1). These first lines shield the egg's natural white during the many dye baths that follow. Mrs. Perchyshyn adds successive colors with the dye dips or a brush, covering each new tint with more wax from the kistka (2).

A bath in yellow (3) shades all areas of the shell not yet protected. After drying the egg with tissues, she creates designs in yellow by covering areas of that color with wax. Then she repeats the process of waxing (4) and dyeing with progressively darker colors. The last bath this egg receives is black.

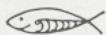
Warming the egg over a candle melts all the wax (5), and polishing with a tissue reveals the various colors (6). A coat of varnish adds protection and luster.

Some women become masterful artists, creating as many as a hundred different designs each season. The rooster drawn here represents fertility and fulfillment. Blessed and displayed in the home, the eggs signify God's protection, especially against fire and lightning.





In the language of symbols, a triangle represents the Trinity, and netting suggests Christ's fishing for men.



The fish became a sign of Christ because an acrostic from the Greek words for "Jesus Christ Son of God Savior" is ichthys—Greek for fish.



Wheat, betokening a bountiful harvest, reminds that since early times the Ukraine has been a breadbasket of Europe.



Emblem of the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Christ, the cross appears in many forms.



ROBERT S. OAKES



When Ukrainians accepted Christianity in 988, the eight-pointed star, then the sign of a sun-god, became a symbol of Christ.



Dots depict stars in the heavens, and also recall Mary's tears when, a legend tells, Pilate refused her plea for mercy.



Deer and other animals of the Carpathian Mountains signify prosperity.



Waves and ribbons circling an egg, without beginning or end, suggest eternity.

“I *had* to
decorate
an egg”

dye bath—yellow. A succession of other designs in wax and dippings in ever-darker dyes ensues; the technique is akin to batik.

Finally she wipes off all the wax—and behold! A fragile jewel. A breath-taking delight. A coat of varnish seals the pattern; the yolk will eventually become a dry lump and the white will turn to dust. The ornate shell will last indefinitely.

Ukrainians call these intricately decorated, exquisitely colored Easter eggs *pysanky* (from the verb *pysaty*, to write) and pass the tradition down from mother to daughter.

In America it thrives best perhaps in Minneapolis and St. Paul, to the intense satisfaction of 84-year-old Alexander A. Granovsky, a leader of the Ukrainian community in the Twin Cities and an authority on the art and culture of his homeland. An entomologist, he is a professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota.

“When I came to St. Paul in 1930,” Dr. Granovsky recalls for a visitor at his home, “I found a depressed spirit. My people—poor peasant immigrants, most of them—were submerged in the American melting pot. They were ashamed to show their national costumes, to make the beautiful Easter eggs.

“I tried to encourage them. I told them to be proud. ‘We came here not only with our hands,’ I said. ‘We brought a great cultural heritage.’”

The short, stooped scientist sorts through his *pysanky* collection as he talks—fifteen hundred decorated eggs, each different, four decades in the gathering, probably the largest collection in the United States. He handles the eggs as deftly as he handles words.

“Gradually our heritage renewed itself. A few women had always decorated eggs for their own satisfaction; now others joined in. Soon bookstores and gift shops in New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, and elsewhere began to place orders. Here in the Twin Cities this lovely

tradition was reborn in America.”

One who never put it aside is Mrs. Marie Procai. Much of *pysanky*’s popularity in the U. S. today may be traced to this gentle woman’s love for the art. She brought the technique with her nearly 60 years ago as a 15-year-old immigrant girl, having learned it from her grandmother in the western Ukraine.

“Three weeks before Easter she would begin,” Mrs. Procai says softly, memory bright as Eastertide’s sharp sunlight. “She made *pysanky* by the stove where she baked bread. When I came to Minneapolis, I was homesick. At Easter, I *had* to decorate an egg. It was something in me.”

For a *kistka*, she used the metal tip of a shoelace. At first, her lines of wax looked like noodles. She persevered. In time she began presenting eggs to friends. Then she started giving demonstrations in department stores.

Today Mrs. Procai and her daughters, Mrs. Luba Perchyshyn and Mrs. Johanna Luciow, operate a Ukrainian gift shop. They handcraft thousands of *pysanky* a year, shipping them throughout this country and abroad.

Even a ham-handed male beginner can receive encouragement at the gift shop. “Anyone can become proficient,” Mrs. Perchyshyn, a vivacious brunette, reassures him. “It’s just a matter of practice. I love to do this. Sometimes I get up at 4 a.m. and work until midnight.”

Mrs. Perchyshyn takes from 15 minutes to several hours to decorate an egg, depending on the complexity of its design. But simple or complex, similar symbols are used. All have meaning. When she traces an eight-pointed star, for example, she harks back to a sun-god worshiped by the early Ukrainians; a triangle symbolizes the Holy Trinity; a fish, Christianity; a bird, fertility.

Blessed by a priest, *pysanky* are believed to contain talismanic powers. People exchange them after Easter services as gestures of friendship. Girls offer their best handiwork to their favorite young men, and friendship takes on a new dimension. Displayed at home, *pysanky* serve as

protection, some Ukrainians say, against fire and lightning. Mrs. Perchyshyn often gives eggs featuring a hen or rooster motif to childless married women.

One antique belief is especially intriguing: The fate of the world depends on the making of pysanky. Should the custom cease, evil in the form of a chained monster will burst his fetters and devour us all. In a year of few eggs, his chains loosen and evil spreads. In a year of many, the monster cannot move.

Love conquers evil. After church services on Palm Sunday, women's auxiliaries hold their annual Easter egg and bakery sales. In the auditorium of St. Michael's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Minneapolis,

bountifully laden tables stand along both sides of the room, across the front, and on the stage. Parishioners and visitors mill about in jovial fellowship, festive for a festive occasion. Ladies of the church have fashioned and donated more than fifteen hundred pysanky. All will be sold before the afternoon is out.

At one table, children in national costume are busily decorating eggs. A spectator asks pert 10-year-old Jill Haywa to hold up her handiwork.

She does, and he pronounces it lovely. "Are you making it for your boyfriend?"

Head bobs, blond tresses fly, blue eyes widen. "I'm going to make him a better one than this," she whispers. "There's a rumor he loves me." □

Ukrainians in Winnipeg, Manitoba, bring eggs and bread to Holy Saturday services.



DONALD GETSUG, RAPHO GUILLUMETTE