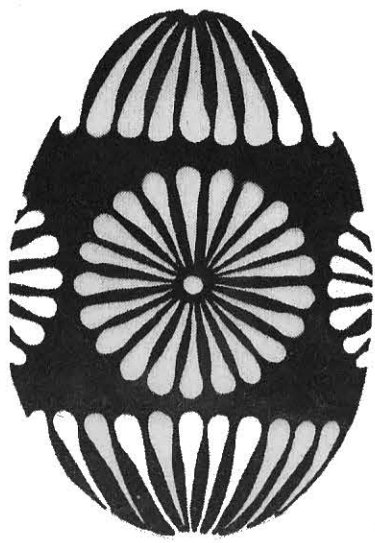


Lemko Easter eggs

(Based on ancient traditions of the Lemko Region of Ukraine)



Solar symbol.

Vasyl Jula

Pysanky

The egg is one of the oldest symbols known to mankind. Before the beginnings of recorded history men have used it to represent the universe. The decorating of eggs has always been a part of Slavic history for thousands of years. The Lemko people have preserved the earliest motives and the oldest technique of decorating this art form. The word *Pysanka* is derived from the Lemko verb *pysaty* ("to write"). Here the wax-resistant technique is utilized. A decorating tool, called a *Pysak* or *Pysachok* meaning "writing instrument" can be as simple as the plain end of a wooden match or a straight pin inserted into a wooden handle. To execute this method of decorating a small amount of beeswax was placed into a metal container and melted over a heat source. Then the decorating tool was dipped into the melted wax and quickly applied to the shell of a raw white egg in a drop-pull fashion. These elements are

short dashes and dots, looking like exclamation points, periods, and comas. The skill to execute these decorations is an exacting one. The egg is then dyed a color and the wax removed. This creates the characteristic teardrop motif.

Solar symbol

The most significant motif that distinguishes a Lemko Pysanka is the cosmic solar symbol. With its seemingly infinite forms of representation, this includes variations such as the spiral, rose, swastika, pinwheel and the magic circle. They define the life-giving, all-embracing, all-renewing force of the sun. The old color scheme for these pysanky was bichrome: white motifs on a single-color background. The Lemko used bright jewel tone colors, made of vegetable pigments, giving the eggs a festive elegant appearance. Today these Pysanky can be seen in a spectrum of rainbow colors. This is due to the myriad of chromatic aniline dyes that are sold and has led to the unlimited possibilities of colorization. Pysanky were not eaten and were thought to possess supernatural powers. The Lemko people believed that the shell of a Pysanka was magic.

One legend or folktale about the origin of these pysanky: While Christ was imprisoned under Pontius Pilate, his Mother, the Virgin Mary, prepared some brightly colored eggs and offered them to Pilate; she fell to her knees while pleading for her son's life. Pilate refused her plea and in grief she began to weep bitterly. The tears that were shed fell on the col-



ored eggs and washed away portions of the dye into the dot-and-dash ideograms transforming them into graphic teardrop-patterned Pysanky.

Wax relief Pysanky

One technique that doesn't use the wax resistant method is to apply darkened beeswax in relief form to a raw white egg and leave undyed. This is thought by ethnographers to be the oldest form of decorating Pysanky. This gives a dramatic

contrasting effect. The color of the wax was altered by heating it for a length of time causing the sugar in the wax to caramelize and the pollen residue to burn, thus turning the wax a dark chocolate color. Sometimes light and dark colored beeswaxes were also used to decorate a Pysanka. Today these Pysanky are still made, but on hard-boiled eggs and not the traditional raw ones. An even more recent style based on this concept is to decorate with multi-colored melted wax crayons on white or pastel colored eggs.

Krashanky

Krashanky are monochrome pigmented eggs without any design on them and meant to be eaten. The name *Krashanka* is derived from an old Lemko word *Krasna* meaning beautiful or *Krasheny* – color/red depending on how it is used. The old Slavic belief was that no matter what the color of the egg, it was considered and called red. Red is a magical color and is one reason why *krashanky* are thought to have healing properties. The most common method of coloring *Krashanky* are by dyeing them in onion skins. The end result is a striking reddish-brown hue from where the name for a *Krashanka* comes from; it's colored, it's red, and it's beautiful.

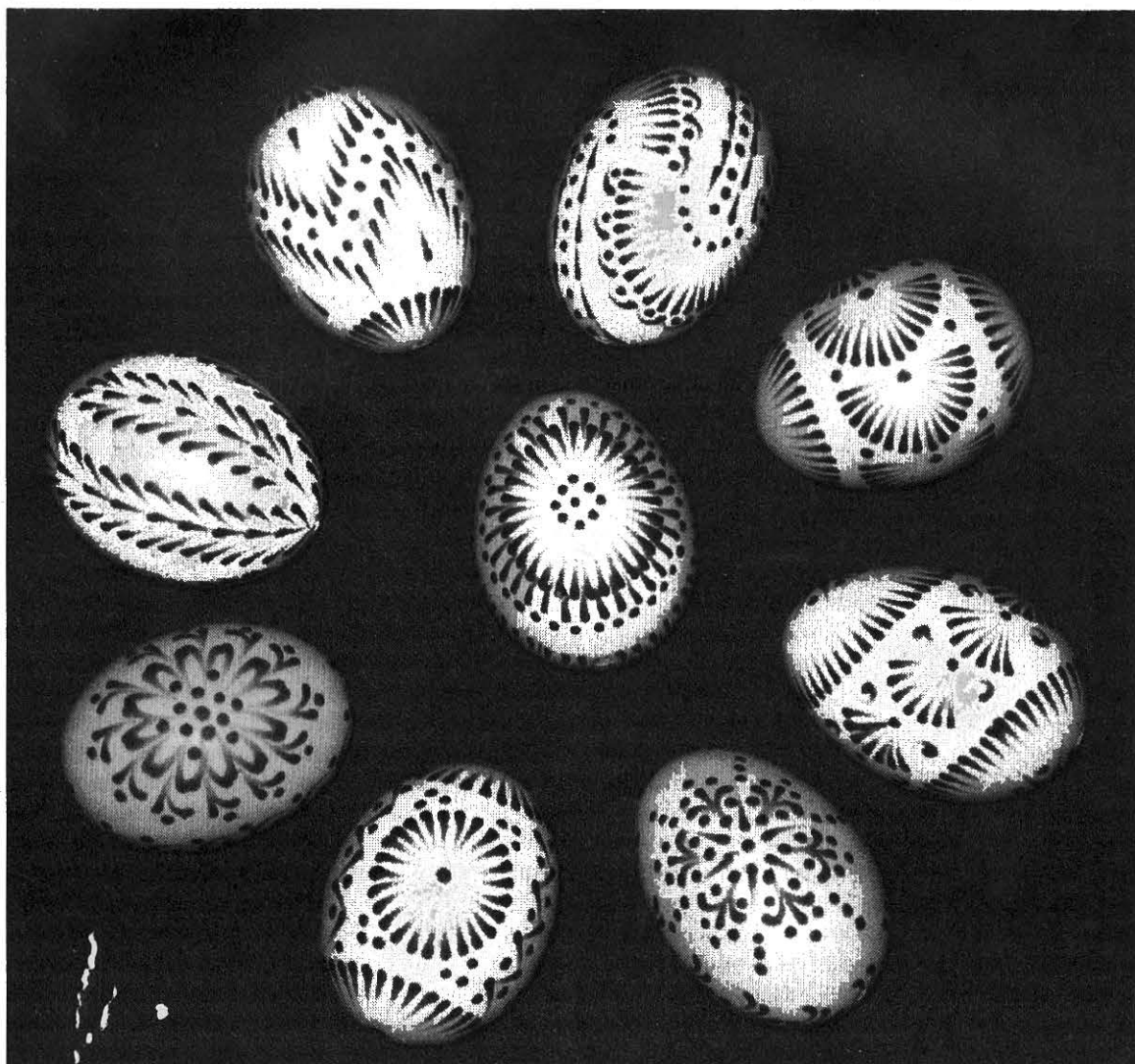
One old Lemko custom is to save the shell of the first *krashanka* peeled after the Pascal blessing and keep it in a place of honor next to an icon for an auspicious time. My Aunt Dorothy told me that it could be used to heal a sick person by a form of white magic. The egg shell is burned on a lit piece of charcoal placed on a pie tin and

put under the bed of the inflected person, letting the smoke envelope them. This process is also true for the flowers blessed on the Feast of the Dormition after they are dried. Another use for the blessed egg shell by "Bosorky," the name for witches in the Lemko dialect was told to me by my Aunt Ann, and she was told that it could be used in black magic; she shuttered and crossed herself after telling me that. Ann was the Pysankarka (pysanky artist) and Dorothy was the *Krashankarka* (*krashanka* artist) in the Jula family. They learned this art from their mother, Olena Badarak Jula.

There are also various folktales about *Krashanky*. The Blessed Virgin Mary is said to have filled a basket with hard-boiled eggs and gave them to the soldiers sitting at the foot of the cross and begged them to be compassionate. There she left the eggs. After a time, the blood of Christ splattered on the eggs and staining them their characteristic red color. Sometimes *Krashanky* are called blood-stained eggs.

Another legend is that the blood from Christ's wounds ran down onto the rocks beneath the cross, turning each stone into a scarlet *Krashanka*.

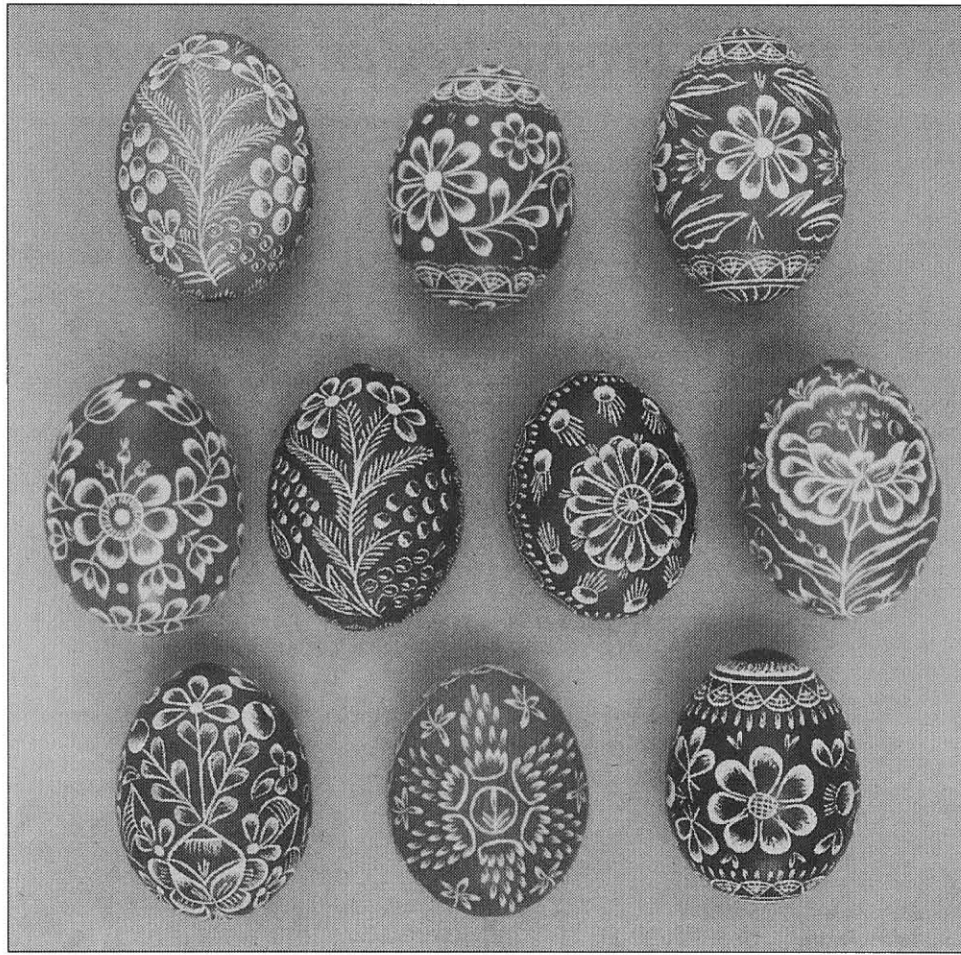
And still another one is that Mary Magdalene made her way to Rome and was telling the story of Christ's Resurrection in front of Emperor Tiberius. On a nearby table were white eggs. Emperor Tiberius said it would be easier for these eggs to turn red then for a man to rise from the dead. Simultaneously the white eggs turned crimson.



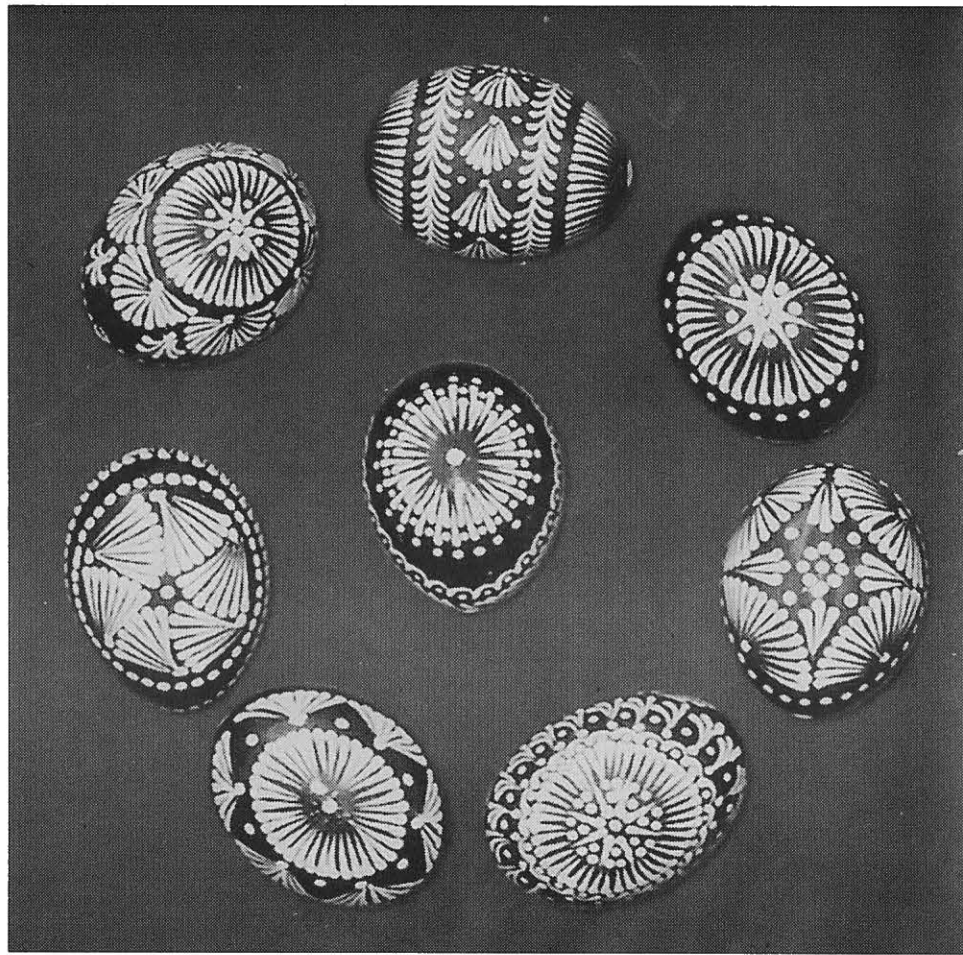
Wax relief Pysanky.

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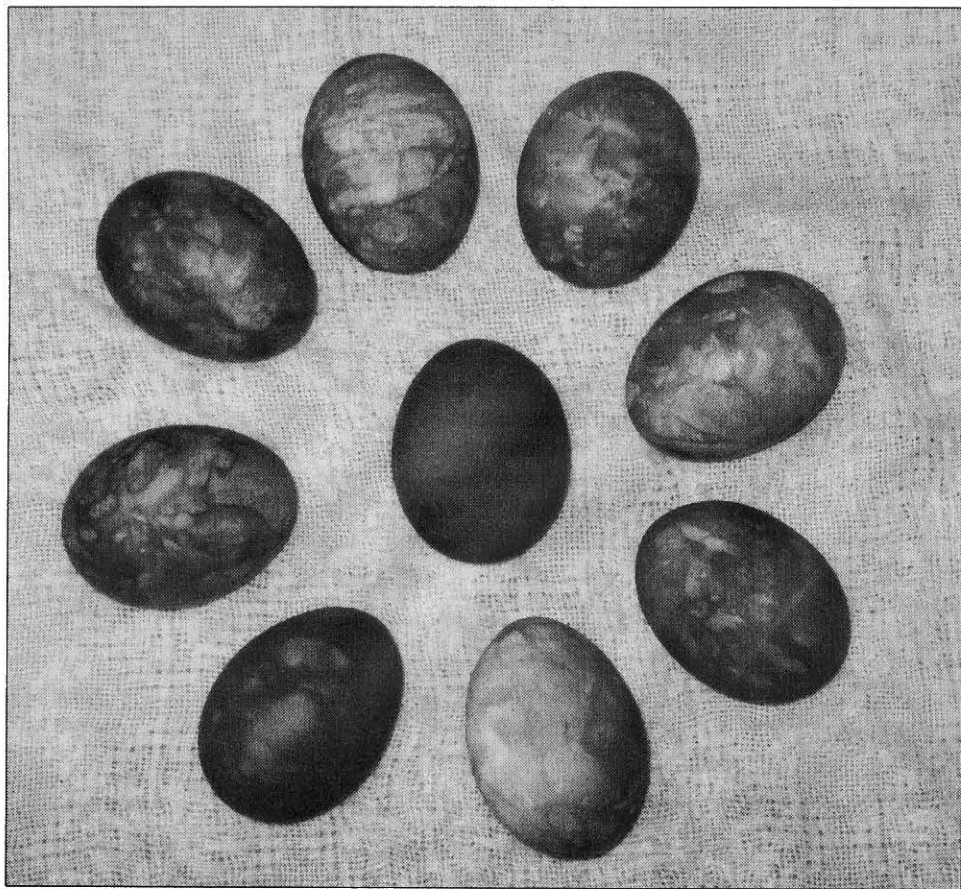
Lemko Easter eggs



Drapanky.



Lemko Pysanky.



Lystianky.



Zhillianky.

(Continued from p. 9)

Skrabanky or Drapanky

Sometimes a *krashanka* was given a decoration by scratching a design with a sharp implement onto the dyed shell. This too has a legend and is very similar to one about the *krashanka*. Again, the Virgin Mary gave eggs to the soldiers that were next to the foot of the cross and left them there, where they were stained by Christ's blood. A Jewish high priest observing the spectacle and making sure the execution was carried out came across the blood-stained eggs, which to a Jew were considered unclean. He kicked the basket of eggs out of his way. They spilled and rolled over sharp rocks scratching the surface of the eggs. Instead of the shells being disfigured and scarred, they were miraculously transformed into beautifully etched eggs. In Lemko these eggs are called *Skrabanky* or *Drapanky* from the verb *poskrabaty* or *podrapaty* ("to scratch").

Inert Pysanky

A technique that is almost unknown

or at least not practiced is to dye and hard-boil teardrop decorated eggs in one process. First, one gallon of onion skins are to be simmered in three quarts (12 cups) of water for about a half-hour or longer till a dark rust color is obtained, and then cooled to room temperature. While the onion skin/water is cooling, raw eggs are decorated in the wax resistant teardrop method with pure beeswax; it must be pure beeswax because paraffin will not work. If the eggs are decorated earlier and then refrigerated, they must be brought back to room temperature before proceeding.

Next, the decorated eggs are put into the pot of cold onion skin/water, nestling them among the skins, making sure the eggs are covered with enough water and do not touch. Now put the pot back on the stove to cook. Bring to a simmer, and then lower the heat until the water is just shimmering and cook uncovered for 15 minutes.

After 15 minutes, turn off the heat and let it sit for 15 minutes more. If paraffin were used, during the cooking process it would have melted away too quickly, but not pure beeswax. After the

allotted time, remove the eggs with a slotted spoon and place them on a rag, and rub away any residue of wax that might be left on the shell. Be careful the eggs are very hot; put them into cold water to stop the cooking action.

When the eggs are cold, remove them from the water, and dry and rub with oil. The finished product has a pale yellow motif on a brown background. These eggs are considered *Pysanky* even though they are cooked. I like the term "inert" but in the Lemko tongue they are literally called *dead Pysanky*, but hold no negative connotation.

Zhillianky

Yet another skill utilizes *zhillia* ("magical homeopathic herbs"). Tender young botanicals are dipped in egg white and applied onto the shell of a raw egg. This is then wrapped tightly in a square of nylon pantyhose and allowed to dry for an hour; then cook in onion skin/water for 20 minutes after it comes to a simmer. The heat is turned off and the eggs are allowed to sit for 20 minutes more. The eggs are put into

cold water to stop the cooking action if they are to be eaten.

When unwrapping the egg, it should have a silhouette of the *zhillia* on the shell. In this process they impart their mystical assets and gives the eggs a double whammy if you will, being red and imbued with homeopathic properties. These eggs are called *Zhillianky* in Lemko.

Lystianky

A derivation of the *Zhillianky* method is when dried onion skins are wrapped around the raw egg and put into a square of nylon pantyhose and cooked in onion skins/water, the same as above. The appearance of these eggs is uniquely interesting and will be that of stained glass, faux marble or a mottled effect. This technique is called *Lystianky* from the Lemko word *lystia* ("leaves"). All the above-mentioned styles of eggs are rubbed with oil or lard in order to give them a brighter and more lustrous appearance.