



Hungarian "Himes Tojas" Eggs

Folkart eggs



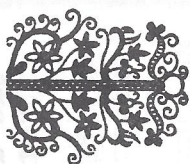
No matter how often I do my researches into the folk lore and art of the Egg, I still find information to astonish and delight my spirit, while at the same time fitting more pieces into the puzzle of Man's long association with the mystical egg.

So it is with great pleasure that I am able to present these Hungarian treasures to you. At first glance they may appear similar to other eastern European decorated eggs, but as we shall soon see, there are some notable differences.

Although made for the Spring & Easter celebrations, the origins of their meanings reach far back into the mists of time. And have been kept alive by generations of Hungarians passing on their cultural heritage down to the present. It is a constant flow of artistic abilities revitalized again & again.

The beautifully natural dyed & scratched bottom egg was done by Emese Kerkey, curator of the Hungarian Museum, without whom's help this article could not have been written. The other two eggs were hand painted by Zsuzsanna Korman, a gifted N.J. artist in many forms of folkart from ceramics to wooden utilitarian objects.

These two talented ladies have helped me fit their unique eggs into my puzzle, but they have also shown me that a few other pieces are yet to be discovered, researched & studied. A " ... woman's work is never done..." especially with an EGG!



Hungarian "Himes Tojas" Eggs

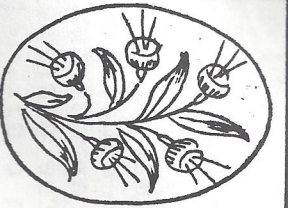
As we all know, the symbolism of the egg is a very ancient concept. To the ancients, an egg represented Creation and all its mysteries. The secret of eternal life was condensed in a small, closed but perfectly geometrical form. The oval shape represented the heavens above us, which is the residence of God. Inside the ever fluid, ever protective egg white floated the mysterious gold of the universe - the egg yolk. A dew drop of the sun (Son), the creative force of the Cosmos, the Secret of Secrets and the eternal Sprout of Life.

Such is the power of the Egg - a concept so limited by the use of the word "Easter" egg to a single day and a single event. But not to the Hungarians. They refer to their eggs as "Himes Tojas" or embellished eggs. The root word, HIM, is an old term for the idea of "beauty".

It is also used to denote the male gender of an animal species, since they are the more beautiful, like the Peacock rather than the Pea Hen. Likewise, it is used in embroidery, not to mean the act of sewing but rather the more creative talent of decorating the fabric with beauty. So "Himes Tojas" is truly describing the creative action of embellishing or decorating an egg with great beauty.

At other times, these eggs may be referred to as "red eggs" or as good luck they may "wish you many red eggs". Red is a color of life - the color of blood, the source or home of life within Man - so it is full of magic.

The red egg on the cover is just such a magic egg. It had been painted red first then the white "tole" designs brushed on in fast, full & flowing movements, much like a spark of Creation itself. But this motif



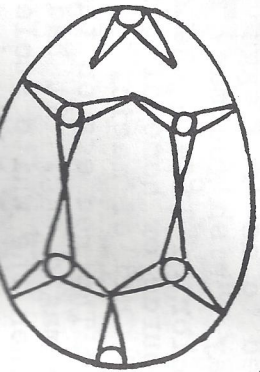
could also be made by using the wax resist methods of pysanky - either the pin heads or kistka, known in Hungarian as a Kistke Gice or a Tro-Kica.

The eggs themselves which are made in this batik manner are called "trött tojas" or written eggs because they are written or drawn upon the eggshell. It is interesting to note that the root word "iro" means "to write", just as the root words of py-stye in Polish & Ukrainian mean "to write". Proving once again that the basic concept of the egg remains universal, it is only the spelling and native dialect which changes.

The blue egg in the center of the cover photograph is just such a written egg often made in the Sárköz region of Hungary. They are very famous for their splendid embroidery patterns, which work equally as well on an eggshell. It is unusual in that blues & greens are frequently used in such large areas of the design, instead of the more common black or purple or even red background. This particular one has again been hand painted by Zsuzsanna but upon closer study you can see how well the ram's horns, flowers & borders lend themselves quite easily to hot waxes & progressive dyeing or even scratching (with a lot of patience) as was our bottom egg.

These scratched eggs or "Vokart" are often made by men for their sweethearts or daughters or merely to pass the time as they watch their flocks on the pastures. The patterns are intricate & usually of a geometric motif rather than flowers or animals.

Although there are some beautifully simple designs based upon hunting, herds & horses.

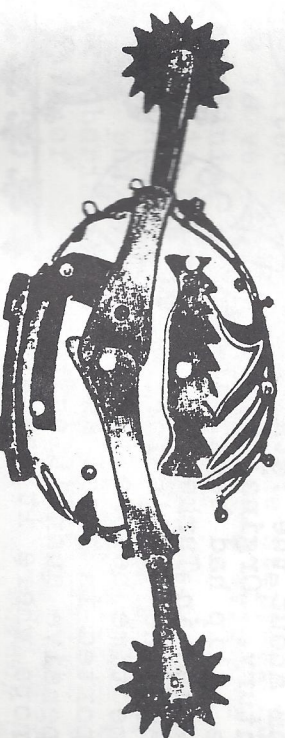
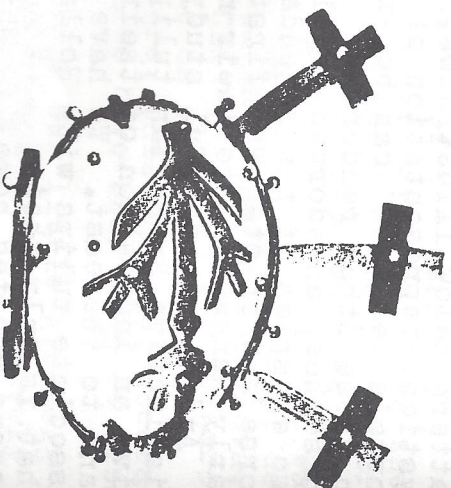
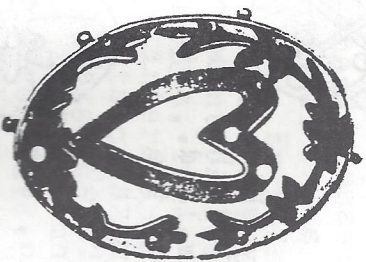


Shepherds' Star

Some of these simple patterns are beautifully exhibited in the eggs shown below; known as "Vosalt Tojas" and are from the Sárköz region.

These are goose eggs which have been blown out, cleaned and filled with sand by Blacksmiths who have further "embellished" them by attaching metal ornaments, spurs & hangers with pins to the shells.

They are truly a unique Hungarian craft form and lend new meaning to the term - appliqué. Plant, flower and fabric appliqué is generally done by women to achieve patterns and colors on an eggshell but this manipulation of metal by men is an art form exhibited only in Hungary and is rare to find, especially in today's modern society.



Hungarians are lovers of horses and this is reflected in the many themes of their folkarts - like the ones below. As in most spiritual things, an exact reproduction of an object is not necessary. Instead the representations are generally stylized into a pleasing usually repetitive composition, which seems to capture and hold the very "essence" of the life of the object.

The colors too, seem to be more muted and are usually dyed singly or with perhaps two-color combinations. This is especially true of the beautiful almost lace like work produced in the Palóc region. But each region added its own accent to the basic colors & patterns which are typically Hungarian.

So although a horseman like figure can be drawn as the embroidered pattern below illustrates, the more mystical representation of the horse's "essence" can be expressed in these other renderings of a - horseshoe, an adorned bridle and two examples of the legendary white horse and/or stag who first led the early Hungarians to their new land.

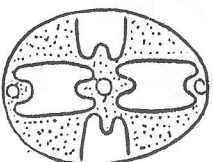
And a more careful study of the distinctive Hungarian tulip might give an indication of their "old" land to the east. We have come to associate tulips with Holland, but that is only their second adopted home from about the 18th century. Originally, the tulip had been cultivated in Turkey from about the 1600's for some time before it was exported in great and expensive quantities to Europe where it was a



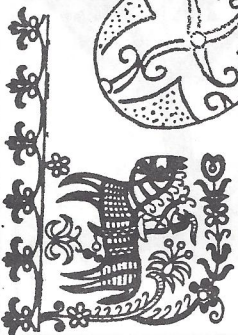
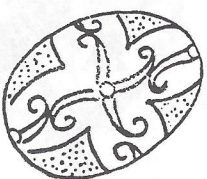
Horseshoe



Adorned
Bridle



White Horse



highly prized commodity of kings. Great fortunes were won and lost over just one small tulip bulb!

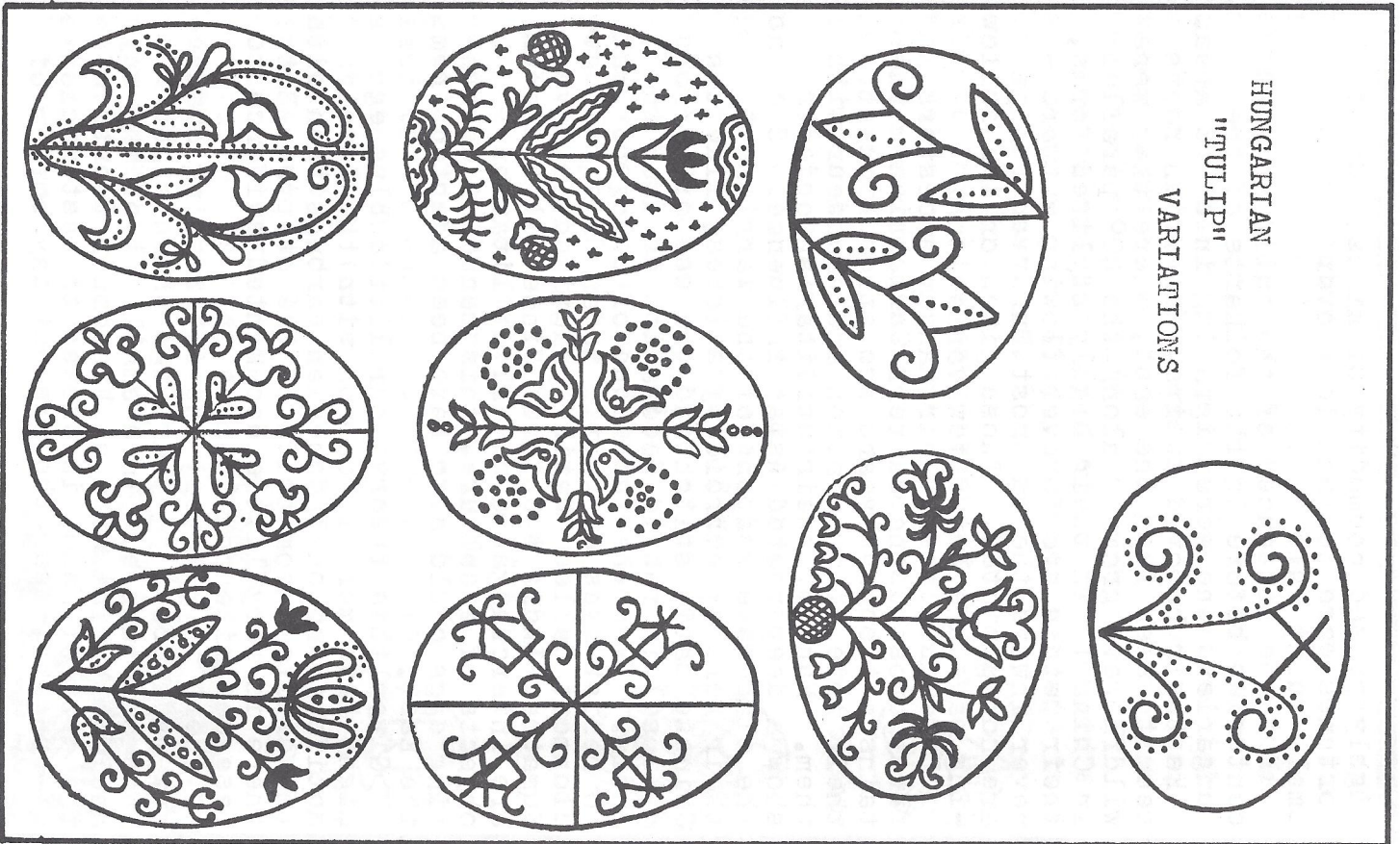
But the "essence" of the tulip arrived centuries before in the folkarts of the Hungarians who were migrating into the area. Like their beloved tulips, Hungarian roots seem to stem from the east, where they were wildflowers growing along the 40° parallel in China! In their highly stylized forms, their petals are forever flowing outward - never inward the way most European tulips are now depicted. Those given on the following page are but a few variations.

Likewise, when their Magyar ancestors first crossed the eastern Carpathian mountains a thousand years ago, they brought their love of decoration and grandeur with them. Many of their utilitarian objects show a deep rooted Asian influence. Such as the elaborate weapons of the warriors & their horses; embroidery stitches, like the Chinese satin stitch and the use of mirrors & tinsel in fabric decoration as used in India. Even the technique of using hot wax to resist dyes on fabric is an Oriental development called "batik" practiced in Java, Sumatra, India & China. Since all folkarts are interchangeable on all utilitarian objects of a culture, this means of decorating eggs could also have been adapted from the East.

Given this theory, our little blue eggs might have more in common with the lovely motifs found on Indonesian sarongs than with the stilted geometrics of the steppes. But there is very little documented evidence to base definite conclusions on.

There is however, one interesting discovery made about 50 years ago which might fit into our puzzle. In a small out of the way ancient burial site at Kiszombor (south of the city of Mako, in the south east region of Hungary, near the present day border of

HUNGARIAN
"FULTIP"
VARIATIONS



(Szeged) a 1300 year old grave was discovered containing the remains of a woman and some other burial equipment. But in her hand they found carefully placed and preserved - an EGG ! It had been naturally dyed and then scratched with a sharp instrument to produce a series of decorations. An artist's rendering of the pattern is given in the sketch below.

Although we cannot know for certain, the exact meanings of all the symbols, several inferences can be assumed.

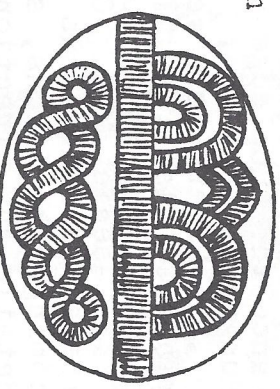
The broad dividing belt encircling the shell is usually symbolic of eternity - a continuity of life eternal. It is a thin dividing line separating the physical life here on earth from the spiritual life in the world beyond death.

The beautifully intertwined loops may be representative of interlocking snakes - which is usually symbolic of fertility and love through continuation, survival & eternal life.

The top design resembles a stylized sprouting palm bud (again of an eastern influence) which is historically an ancient symbol of the birth of the Tree of Life - meaning the Resurrection.

Complementing this gift of eternal life is the finding of what appears to be an egg shaped toy (resembling a kind of rattle) near Budapest and perhaps dating from the Bronze Age. It is interesting to note that on certain wall paintings in the tombs of the Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom in Egypt these very similar "Life Rattles" have been found. They are believed to have been used in burial rituals in which the loved one was prepared for his new life in the world beyond his own death.

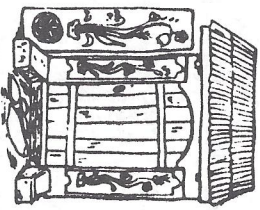
So we are finding



different areas and different time periods are still reinforcing Man's basic concepts of Life & Death symbolized in the EGG !

But it is through cultures like the Hungarian that we are able to find the common roots to our own universal human nature. For theirs is one of the richest cultures of egg art - with so many varied and diverse techniques uniquely their own, ranging from the simple naturally dyed to the elaborate metal ornaments.

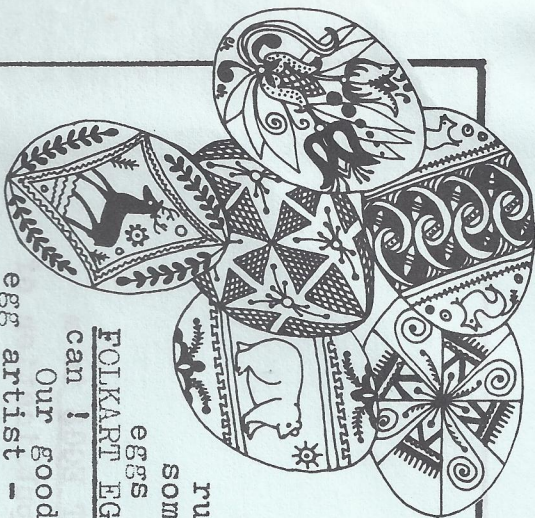
In content and form, they reflect a long process of assimilation of all the experiences of a people closely bound by historical background, economic status, climate & geography. All of these are reflected in their folkarts which are perpetuated by tradition & truly express that which is essential, characteristic and meaningful in human experience.



hungarian folk museum

And it is for these very reasons that the Hungarian Folk Museum was founded in Passaic New Jersey. It was established to exhibit, conserve & collect Hungarian folk material through the support and involvement of the community and interested public by lectures, workshops, programs & events which will enhance the knowledge and understanding of the Hungarian heritage.

The Museum is a very warm & friendly place to visit, full of beautiful things to see and do. It is located at 217 Third St., Passaic, N.J. 07055 - (201) 473-0013. There are renovations planned for several upcoming exhibitions, so do call ahead for details and directions.



GOOD NEWS !
GOOD NEWS !

Did you ever
wish you could just
run right out and BUY
some of the special
eggs I tell you about in
FOLKART EGGS ? Well, now you
can !

Our good friend and talented egg artist - Cheryl Christensen - has done us all a BIG favor. She has started a mail order business which will not only provide us with all the supplies, books and equipment we use to make our own folkart eggs ; but she has also begun to create all the folkart eggs we may need for our own collections or gift giving !

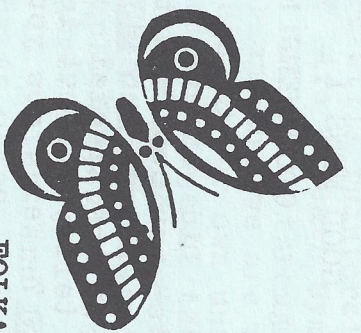
Yes ! Through Cheryl we can now buy our fully decorated eggs out of a special little "wishing book". Her beautiful 24 page is complete with several full color photographs of over 160 egg designs, plus black & white pictures of many other folkart eggs - from Austrian to Ukrainian & all in between.

So in order to get yours & start "wishing" send \$ 1.50 to :

Cheryl Christensen
P.O. BOX 257
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Do it today, so you
won't forget - it's
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