

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

FROM THE TREASURE CHEST OF OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

The folk art collection in our Museum and Library consists of a few thousand artifacts. This collection includes ex-



amples of the many aspects of folk creativity from the various regions of Ukraine. These artifacts illustrate how the folk utilized a variety of materials for their production of practical, religious, and aesthetic items.

Today, I would like to discuss some of the metal artifacts in our collection from the Carpathian Mountain region of Ukraine – the Hutsul region. The Ukrainian highlanders – the Hutsuls – possess many fascinating and admirable traits, one of which is their exceptional talent in artistic creativity and in the delight they took in doing this work. Their singular aesthetic tastes and their innate need for embellishing and deco-



rating items which they created or came in contact with resulted in a wealth of original and artistically sophisticated folk art items cherished and admired to this very day.

The folk costume of the Hutsuls is quite picturesque and striking, because of its decorative and colorful aspects and of its high quality of workmanship. For its fashioning, the creators did not skimp on money or time. Parts of the costume, as well as its accessories, were very often skillfully and attractively enhanced by ornamental designs made out of metal and were thus an integral part of the Hutsul folk dress.

Decorative metal casting in Ukraine had been known from the days of Kiyevan-Rus and was widespread throughout Ukraine for centuries. It was especially highly developed and extensively pursued by the Hutsuls in the Carpathian Mountains. The period from the early nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries is considered to be the most abundant years of finest achievement in the production of metal artifacts by the Hutsuls.

One type of accessory for the Hutsul folk costume was a necklace made out of metal crosses called zgarda which were worn by women, and large pectoral crosses worn mostly by men and sometimes by women. These accessories were not only an intrinsic part of a holiday and ceremonial outfit, an exhibition of wealth, and of aesthetic refinement, but also as a symbol of faith and as sort of talisman of protection. Most of these

crosses were cast from copper, some from German silver. The zgardy and metal copper crosses in our collection were cast in the mid-nineteenth century. Our Museum succeeded in obtaining them in the 1930s when

our first curator, Father Leo Chapelsky, traveled to the Hutsul region and purchased them in order to build up our own representative collection of Ukrainian folk art.

The zgardy crosses have at its center the crucifixion or just a linear cross. The four cross-arms were either edged with triangular shapes engraved with a mesh-like design and ending with a cross, or with oval peta-like shapes with engraved circular motifs in each petal. To form a necklace, the zgardy crosses were attached to hooks in between copper spirals. The large pectoral crosses have a combination of Christian motifs – the Crucifixion, the initials INTSI (Isus Nazarianyn Tsar Iudeisky, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews), as well as crosses and pre-Christian solar motifs. One large pectoral copper cross in our collection, attached to a leather strap decorated with metal brass studs, is part of a woman's costume from the village of Perehinsko. This costume our Museum acquired in 1936 through the efforts of Sister Severine Parylle, OSBM.

Another interesting group of cast copper crosses in our collection: small self-standing crosses attached to either a metal post or else inserted into a wooden circular pedestal. The wooden pedestals are decorated with horizontal linear grooves and colorful seed beads. These crosses were also obtained in the 1930s through the efforts of Father Leo Chapelsky and Sister

Severine Parylle. Whether these tiny crosses were used for the church or for the home, I do not know. In all of the scholarly sources on Hutsul metal artifacts, I have not seen any examples of such small crosses on pedestals or

even any mention of them.

These are just a few samples of the treasures which we have in the chest of our Museum and Library. Please help us to preserve these and many other treasures of our precious Ukrainian heritage and culture.

