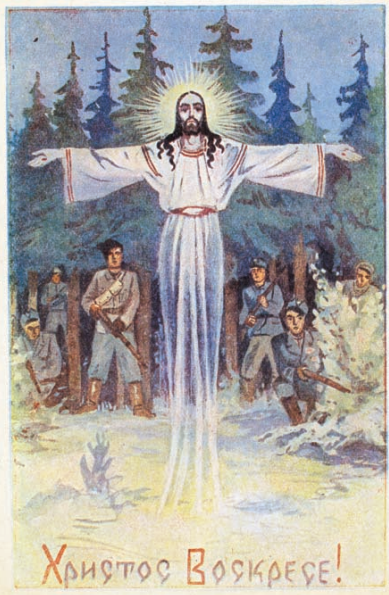


## The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

### UKRAINIAN EASTER GREETING CARDS *by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator*

In the Dec. 23, 2012 issue of the Sower I wrote about holiday postcards in general focusing primarily on Ukrainian Christmas greeting cards. In the present article I will discuss the timely subject of our Ukrainian Easter greeting cards.

Until recent years, sending greeting cards for such major holidays as Christmas and Easter was a standard phenomenon. But lately, the tradition of sending Easter greetings has declined somewhat. Cards for this



holiday are becoming rare, harder to find, and as a result have become important collector's items.

In general, and Ukrainian holiday greeting cards in particular provide not only religious and well-wishing sentiments, but also they have valuable informative content and often are considered to be significant works of art. Noted Ukrainian artists consider it important to have among their artistic output the production of holiday greeting cards. Most of these cards transmit an abundance of information about the religious aspect of the holiday, as well as the age-old traditions associated with it. Thus, the recipients of such cards are reminded of, and often experience the awakening of memories or the rediscovering of the many features which the holiday encompasses from the Ukrainian perspective.

Ukrainian Easter traditions are rich and deeply symbolic in their content. Many of the ancient, pre-Christian rituals celebrating the coming of spring and the resurrection of nature became part of the Christian Easter cycle of celebrations which led to the holi-

est of all events – the Resurrection of Christ. Such rituals as the following all come from ancient traditions incorporated into the Christian holiday: tapping each other with willow branches on Palm Sunday; baking of special breads – the *paska* and the *babka*; decorating Easter eggs (*Pysanka*) with ancient symbols; performing ritual spring songs



and dances on Easter Sunday – the *hahilky*; pouring water on each other on Easter Monday; and many more. The numerous Ukrainian artists who created Easter cards endeavored to incorporate many of these traditions and to depict them in their works.

Our Museum and Library has a fine collection of Easter cards. I chose three cards depicting the Resurrected Christ by three different artists: Mykhailo Dmytrenko, 1908-1997; Myron Levytsky, 1913-1993; and Edvard Kozak, 1902-1992. The first two are traditional iconographic depictions of Christ; the third one, the Resurrected Christ, appears or visits soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in their hideaway in the forest. This latter card was produced in the Displaced Person's camps in Germany at the time when the army was still actively engaged in fighting the Soviet invaders.

We also have vintage cards produced in Lviv in the late 1920s. A card by the artist Olena Kulchyt-ska, 1877-1967, depicts a crowd of folk people (Hutsul region) standing by the church during the Resurrection Liturgy. Another, by an unknown artist, shows Resurrected Jesus Christ appearing to a kneeling crowd of folk people. This card also has a border of embroidery designs and *pysanky*.

A few weeks prior to Easter, young girls would spend many hours decorating *pysanky* (which in Ukrainian we say "writing *pysanky*") because, according to belief, the symbols applied to the egg were actually coded messages which contained wishes for good fortune, health, prosperity, longevity, etc. *Pysanky* were given as gifts to family members, friends, and especially by girls to young men whom they admired. The artists Ha-

lyna Mazepa, 1910-1995, Myron Levytskyi, and Yaroslava Summach, 1925-2009, portray this activity in their own individual artistic styles. Two cards produced by Ukrainian POW's in Rimini, Italy illustrate the *pysanka* gift giving. In the card by S. Yatsushko a maiden is depicted as shyly giving a *pysanka* to a young Cossack, not being sure

if he would accept it. In a card by O. Ostrovsky the artist shows us in a humorous way the young man holding a huge *pysanka* he has just received. Yet in another card, by the artist Myron Levytsky, which was printed in Austria in 1946, we see the

recipient of a huge *pysanka* in need of help to carry it.

The artist V. Zalutsky in his card acquaints us with the preparation of Easter foods. In a festively adorned home the mother is placing the final decorative touches on the Easter bread and is instructing her young daughter in this ritual. In the card by the artist Petro Andrusiv, 1906-1981, a family is shown going to church with their Easter basket. The card has additional items associated with Easter: willow branches, *pysanky*, and embroidered cloths used to cover the baskets. The artist Yaroslava Summach in her glass painting depicts the blessing of Easter baskets in front of the church.

A favorite pastime for young boys on Easter Sunday was to go to the church bell tower and take turns ringing the bells. In Ukrainian villages the church bells would peal for hours on Easter Sunday. A card by an unknown artist and one by Edvard Kozak illustrate this activity.

Following Easter Liturgy, the blessing of the baskets, and Easter breakfast, young girls would come out on the church green and perform spring dances – *hahilky*. These dances and songs currently performed as joyful holiday expressions formerly had a magical purpose. People believed that through the magic of music, words, gestures, and bodily motion, one could awaken nature in the spring. By simulating sowing, planting and the growth of crops one could ensure a bountiful harvest. By walking in a continuous chain simulating the ris-

ing and setting of the sun (up the hill and down into the valley, as the song goes) would preserve the continuity of life on earth. The artists Petro Andrusiv and Edvard Kozak produced cards illustrating these rituals.

The tradition of drenching each other with water on Easter Monday is now a merry pastime, especially among the young. Originally it was a form of purification, the rebirth of a new, healthy life. Water has always been considered to be the most important purifying element. Cards by Myron Levytsky and Mykola Butovych, 1895-1961, illustrate this tradition.

A world renowned Ukrainian artist, Jacques Hnizdovsky, 1915-1985, managed to combine and illustrate all of these Easter rituals and traditions into just one card. This card included *pysanka* writing, baking of Easter breads, gathering of willow branches, going to church, blessing of the baskets, performing Easter dances, and ending with the drenching on Easter Monday.

Ukrainian greeting cards produced before the war in Western Ukraine and by the Ukrainian Diaspora contain and transmit not only valuable information but also serve as educational tools and in many ways help to preserve visually certain aspects of our heritage. We must

look carefully at the detailed work which each of the artists included in his/her cards and we will become enriched, inspired, and proud of the rich culture of which we are the inheritors.



**Explore and Experience Our Past**