

Ukrainian

Symbols and Designs

The smooth, symmetrical shape of the egg lends itself to the beautiful patterns which have developed over the centuries. The Pysanky were exchanged on Easter morning between friends and relatives, much as valentines are given as tokens of love today. If, for example, a friend was a farmer, he might be presented with an egg decorated with shafts of wheat wishing him a bountiful harvest. There might also be rakes and other tools incorporated into the design. These would signify the "wish" for him to practice the art of farming with success.

Young married couples would often be presented with an egg decorated with a chicken design. Since the chicken is a symbol of fertility, it was hoped that the family would grow in number.

Since the "wishes" would vary from one year to another and from one egg to another, the design would develop into an ever-changing combination of color and motifs. It is somewhat difficult to say that the sun always meant "good luck". Sometimes it did, but it also represented life, warmth, and growth. Often it depended on the idea in the egg-maker's mind, or even the region of Ukraine from which he came, for its true meaning.

We have collected a sampling of some of the patterns which are popular. Pysanky designs are usually intended to suggest a thing rather than to picture it exactly. They fall into three general categories: plant, animal, and geometrical. This list is by no means complete!

There is such an infinite variety of designs from the different regions of Ukraine that an entire volume of several hundred pages could be devoted to their origins. We have



made no attempt to categorize the patterns, but just to give a tempting sample of the variety and beauty possible.

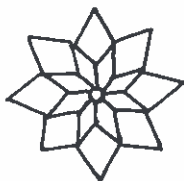
We would like to mention also, that a very recent but popular development in decorating eggs has been to "personalize" them by incorporating a "Happy Easter to Grandpa 1975" into the border of the designs. Some people prefer to collect dated eggs.



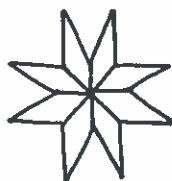
Plant Symbols

Flowers predominate in plant designs.

Since the native artists drew on nature's beauty, they used the richly colored flowers to enhance their designs. The following two roses demonstrate a geometric motif.



rose



empty rose

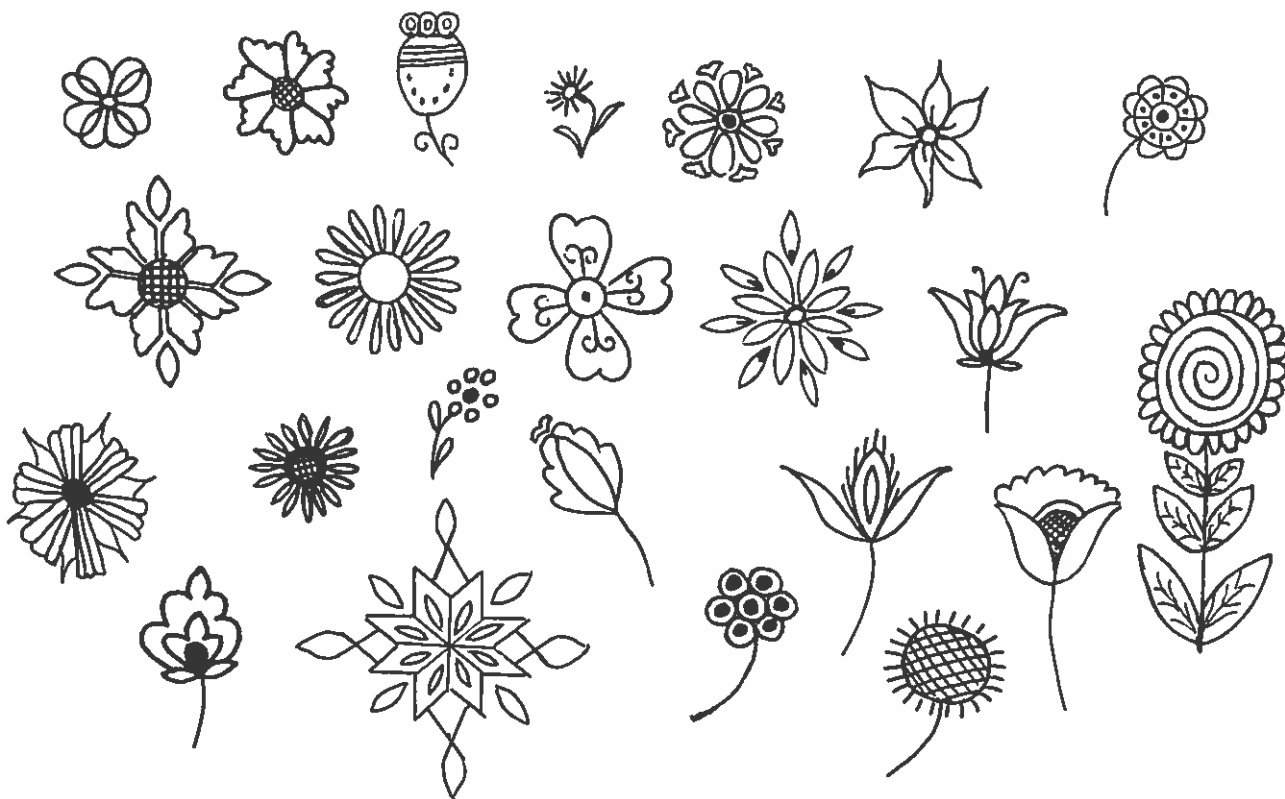


poppy



Barvinok
(periwinkle)

Flowers symbolize love, charity and good will. Sunflowers depict the warmth of the sun's rays. Roses are also a very popular flower, symbolizing love and caring.



Evergreen trees symbolize eternal youth and health.

Wheat symbolizes good health and wishes for a bountiful harvest.



There is a rich variety of plant motifs.



apple trees



apples



oak leaves



branches



vines



cherries



pussy willows

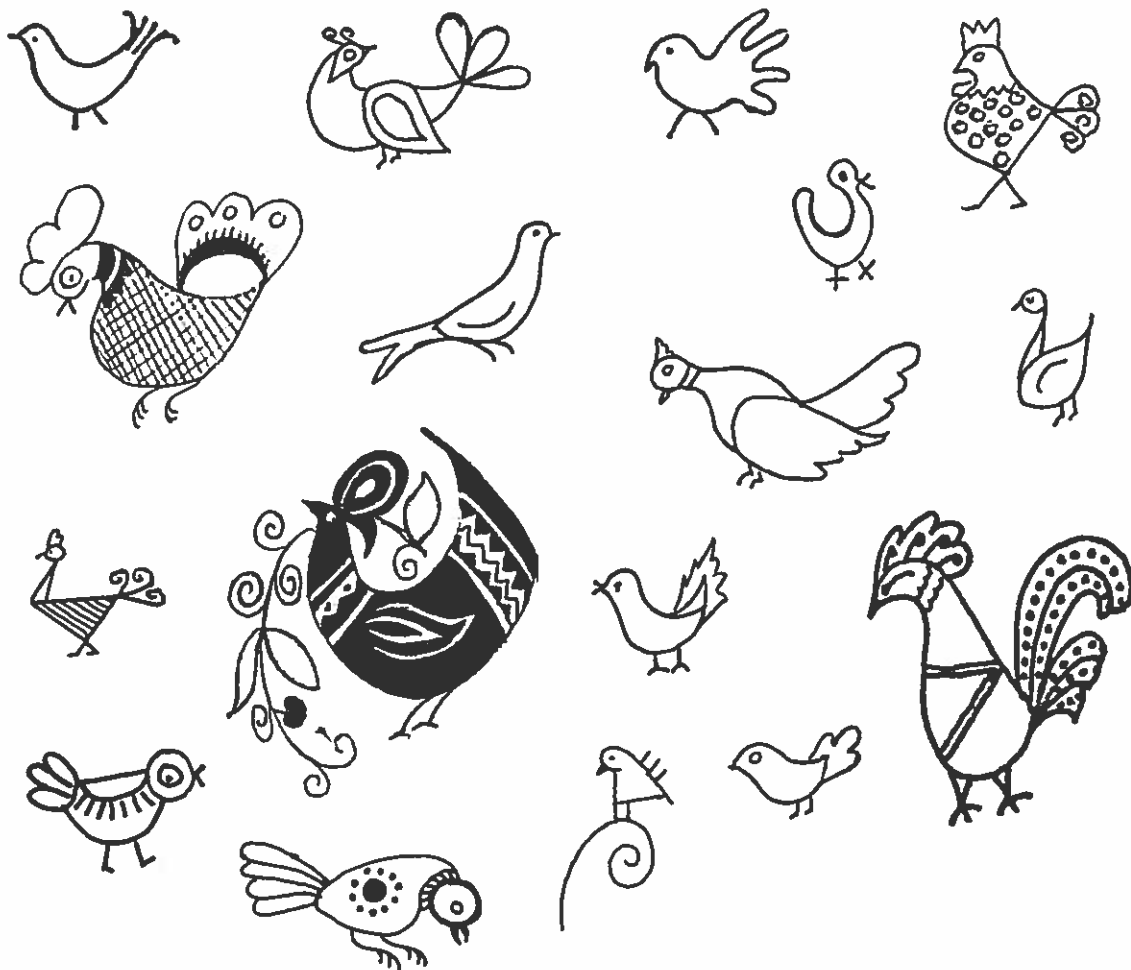
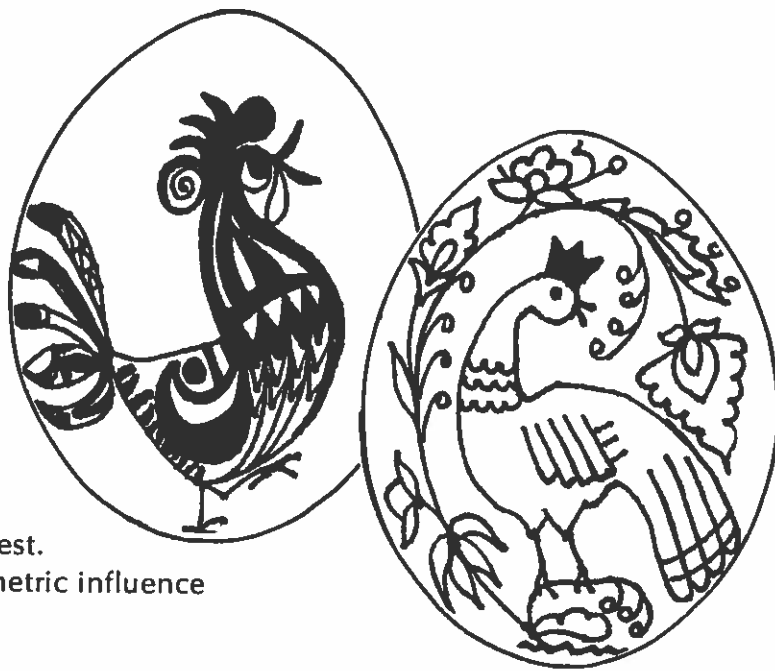


grapes



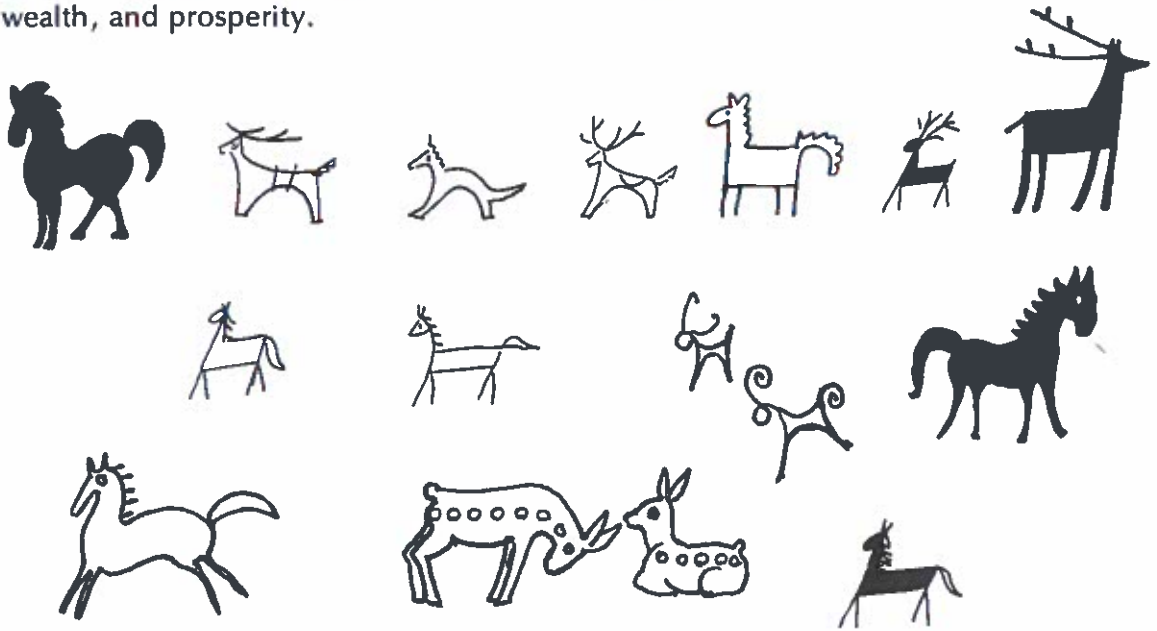
Animal Symbols

Storks, chicks, hens, roosters, all symbolize fulfillment of wishes and fertility. The bird is not depicted flying and is shown at rest. Here again you can see the geometric influence in the many styles of fowl.

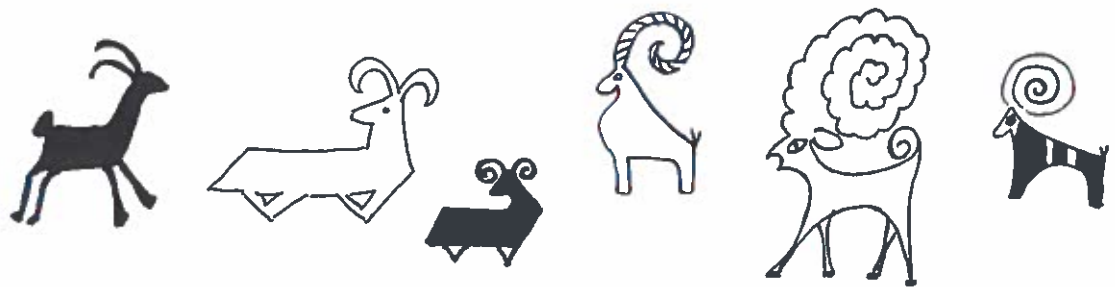


Animal Symbols

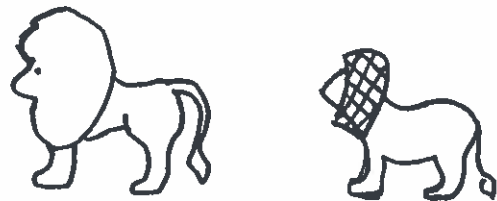
Deer and horses symbolize a wish for good health, wealth, and prosperity.



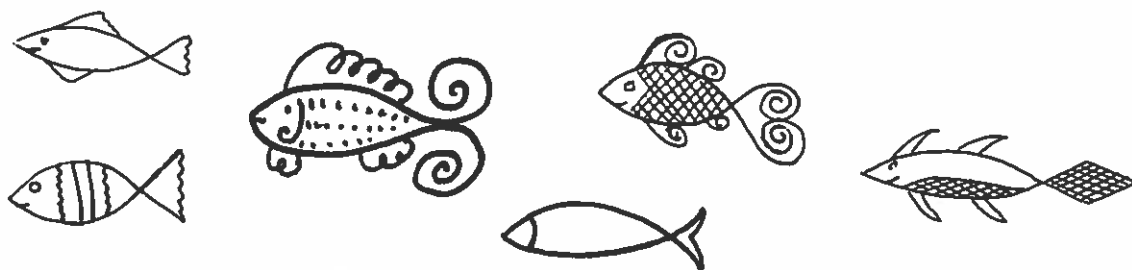
Rams are much like the horse and deer in the symbolism of wealth and prosperity.



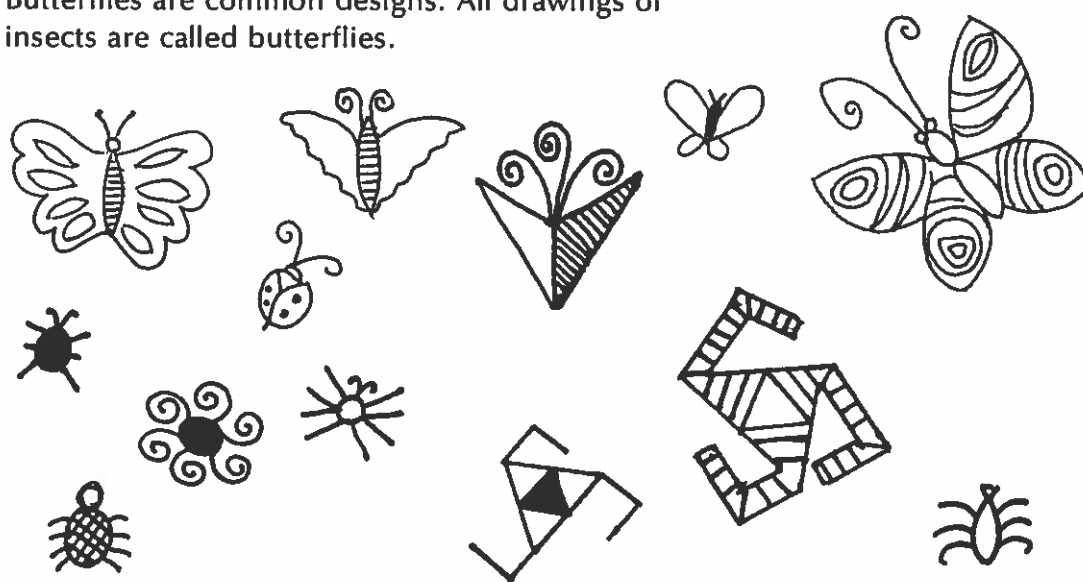
The lion is a symbol for strength but is not very common.



Fish have been known as the early symbol for Christianity.



Butterflies are common designs. All drawings of insects are called butterflies.



spiders

spiderwebs

crab



eyes



rooster's comb



wolves teeth
represent protection

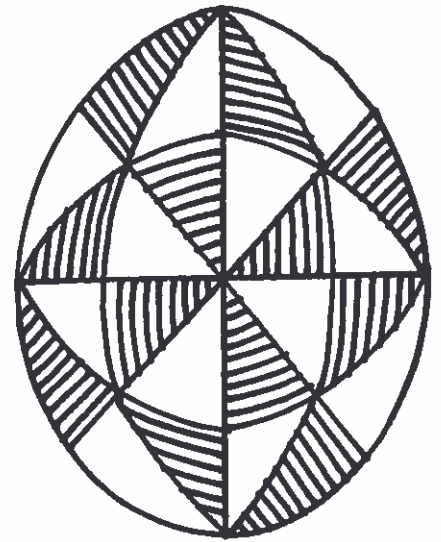
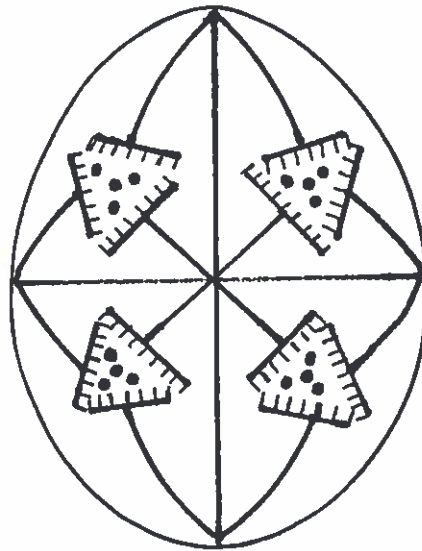


rams horns



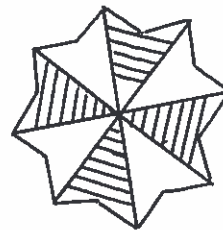
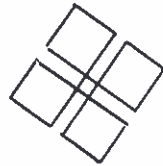
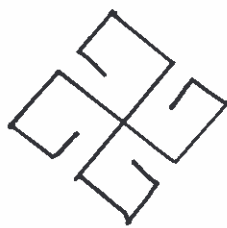
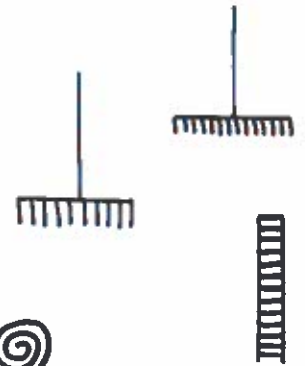
hens and ducks feet

Geometric Symbols



Rakes and ladders

The ladder and rake are seldom used alone, and are usually combined into a pattern to enhance the design. They are common tools which the peasant needed to provide a plentiful harvest for his family. These symbols represent good husbandry and prosperity. The windmill was also used as a central pattern in many motifs.



coal ax



windmills

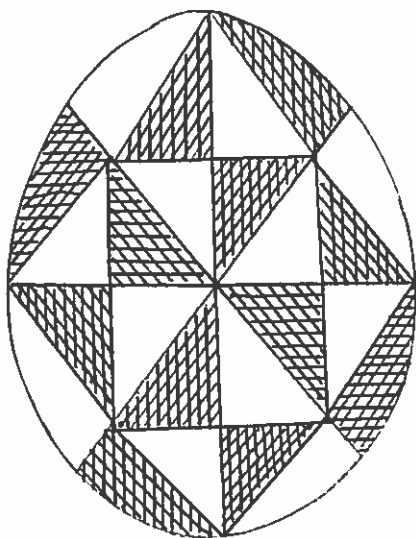
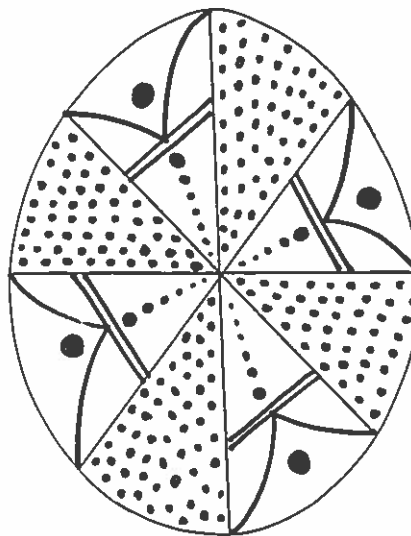


crown of thorns

This signifies the crown of thorns worn by Jesus on the cross.

Drops

Drops usually symbolized the fallen tears of Mary as she wept for Jesus on the cross. Sometimes, in an all over dot pattern, the dots suggest the stars. Dots are a beautiful way to divide space in patterns (instead of a line). They add color and harmony to many designs.



Triangles

Triangles are very popular in typical Ukrainian designs. They symbolize several forms of the trinity. They may represent air fire and water or heaven, earth and hell, or the family (father, mother and child), sun, thunder and bonfire, and especially, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



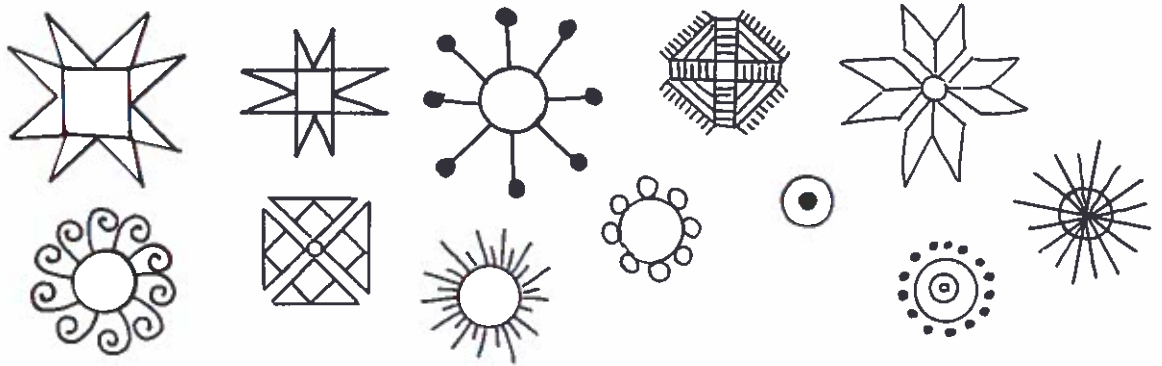
Net

The crisscross design symbolized the net to which Christ referred when He said we Christians were to be "fishers of men".



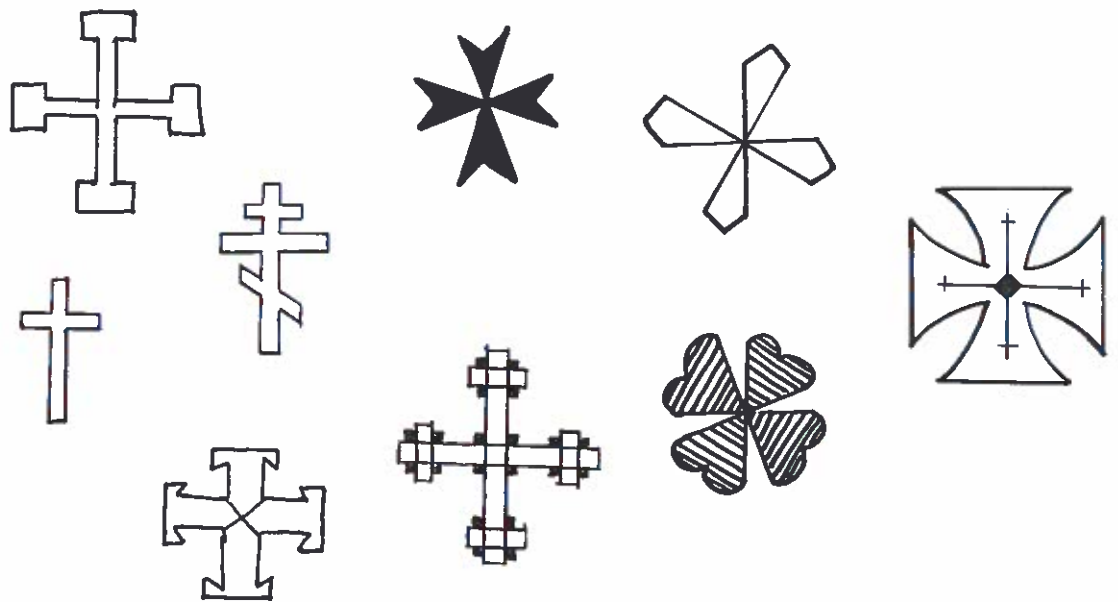
Sun and stars

The sun and stars symbolize life itself; growth and good fortune.



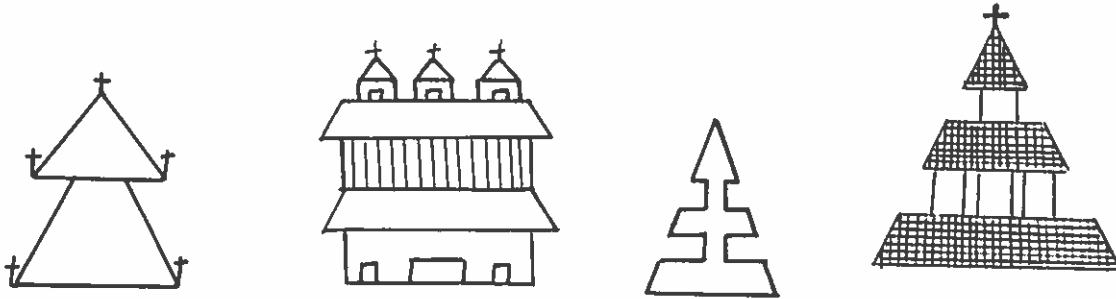
Crosses

Crosses remind us of Christ's victory over death. Easter eggs with one or three bars in all variations have a purely Christian significance but in general, they are not very widespread.



Churches

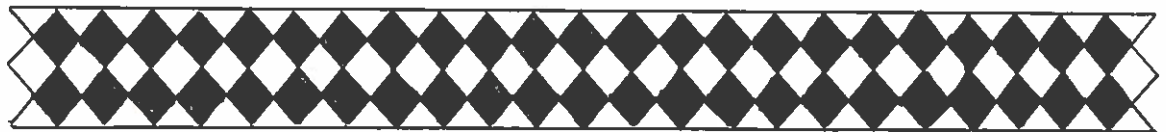
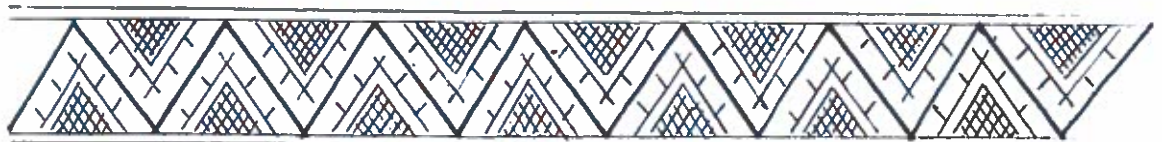
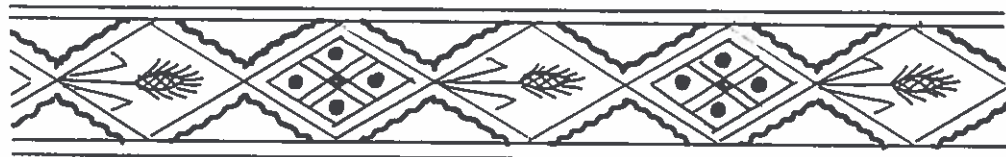
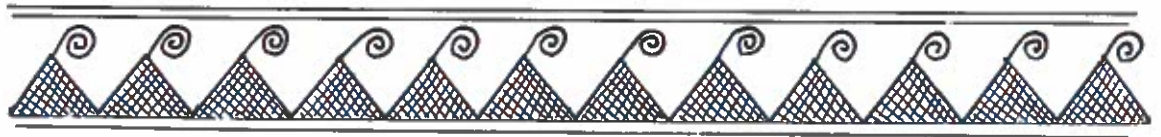
A typical church egg, a favorite of Hutzals, is a geometric combination of a cross and triangles. The net or grating which covers the entire surface with triangles, spirals, and rhombi has only a decorative use.

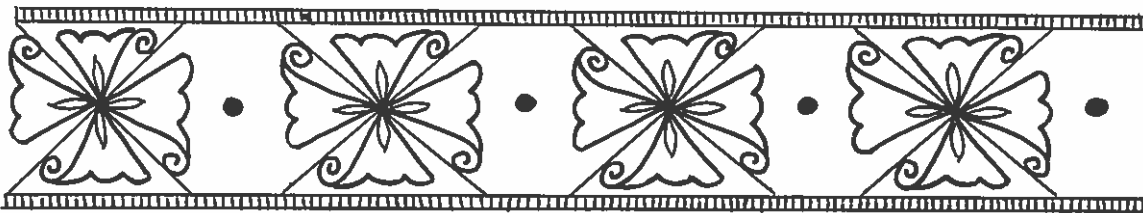
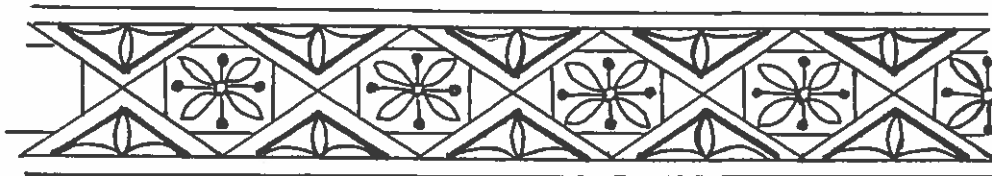
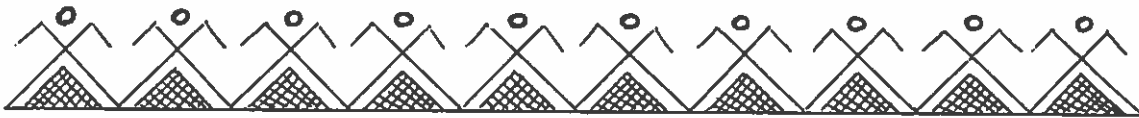
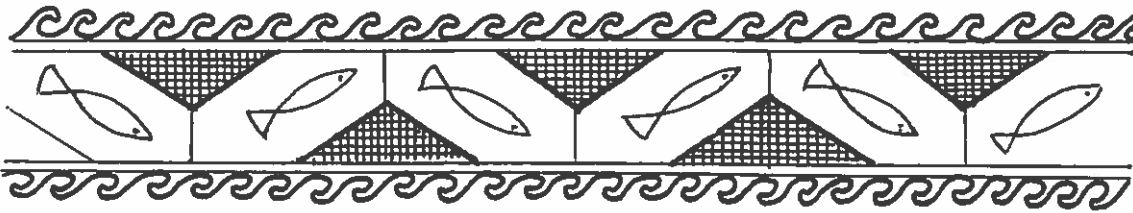
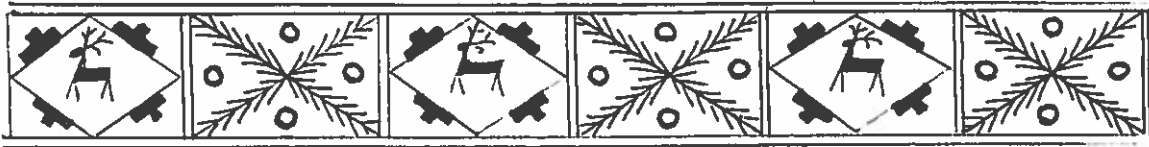


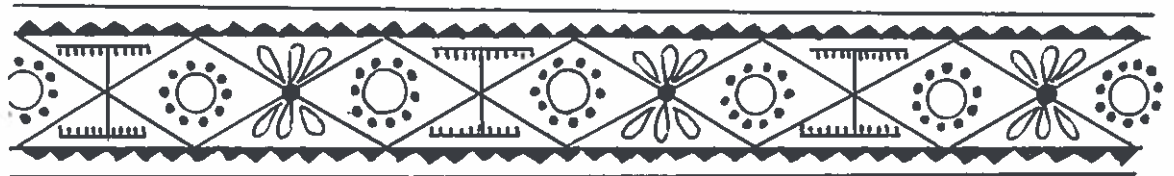
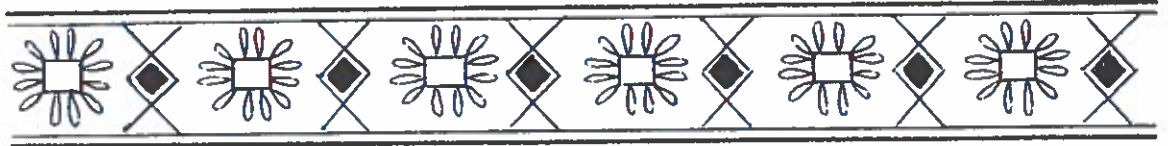
Ribbons

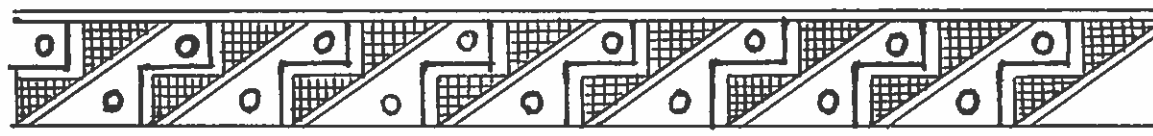
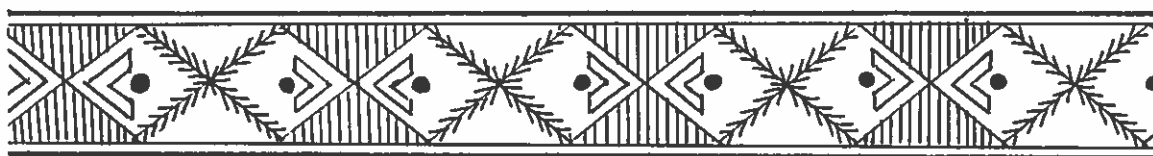
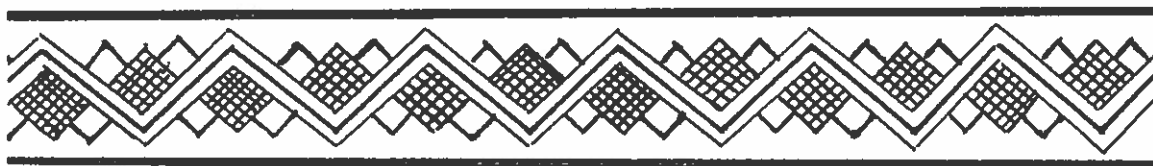
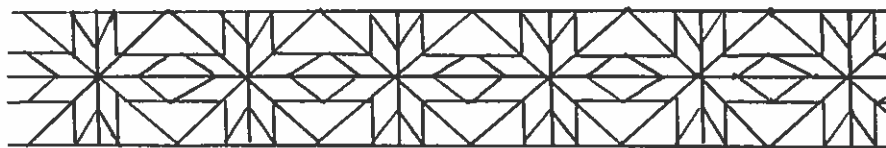
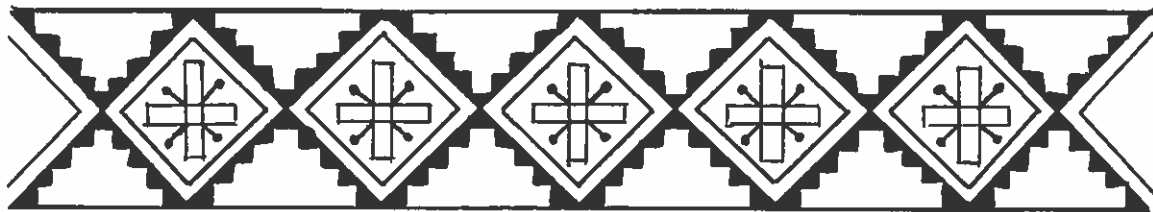
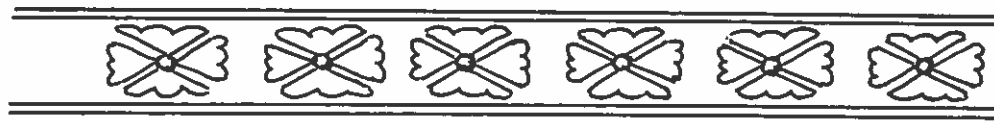
The ribbons symbolize a never ending line representing everlasting life. The ribbons of waves represent water. An important geometric element is the endless line (Bezkonечnyk) that goes entirely around the egg and meets. It is a wavy line which arises from the joining of several concentric circles and is continued in the direction of the following circle. The name comes from the continuous nature of the form which proceeds forward in many curves without any visible endings.











Some designs for the end of the egg.

