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Ouăle de Paști în Ungureni – Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș

Rezumat

Lucrarea își propune să evidențieze impactul pe care îl au ouăle „împistrite” [încondeiate] din Ungureni – Țara Lăpușului asupra mentalității oamenilor trăitori în lumea satului tradițional maramureșean. Chiar dacă în Bucovina, ouăle încondeiate au devenit un *brand*, ouăle încondeiate din Țara Lăpușului respectă aceleași ritualuri străvechi. Alături de ouăle vopsite în roșu, care reprezintă o aluzie la sângele Mântuitorului Iisus Hristos, alături de ouăle cu simboluri fitomorfe (frunze, flori), vopsite în coji de ceapă din alte zone etnografice, remarcăm, în prezent, în Țara Lăpușului și ouăle încondeiate cu ceară. Impresionează cromatismul, utilizarea culorilor de bază – roșu, galben, albastru, verde. Menționăm faptul că în trecut se foloseau culori naturale obținute din diverse plante. Simbolurile utilizate subliniază dexteritatea femeilor din Ungureni. Alături de cruce (simbol solar) remarcăm și alte simboluri: cercuri, linii orizontale, linii verticale, linii duble, romburi, spirale (simboluri geometrice); soare, stea (simboluri astrale); flori, frunze, spice de grâu (simboluri fitomorfe); Pomul Vieții, cetina (simbol dendromorf); grebla, fierul plugului, bâta păcurarului, calea rătăcită (simboluri scheomorfe) etc. În prezent, în Ungureni, de Moșii de Paști, de Moșii de Rusalii, lumea se adună pe neamuri la biserica veche de lemn de jur împrejurul lespezilor de piatră pentru a comemora plecarea în lumea de dincolo a celor adormiți. Pe lângă bucatele tradiționale se oferă de pomană ouă roșii și ouă încondeiate. Analiza sincronică, perspectiva comparativ-analitică potențează complexitatea temei.

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Easter Eggs in Ungureni – Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș

Summary

The paper aims to highlight the impact of the "împistrite" [painted] eggs from Ungureni – Țara Lăpușului, on the mentality of people living in the traditional Maramureș village. Even if in Bucovina, the decorated eggs have become a brand, the painted eggs from Țara Lăpușului respect the same stages. Next to the red-painted eggs, which are an allusion to the blood of the Redeemer Jesus Christ, along with the eggs with phytomorphic symbols (leaves, flowers), painted in onion shells from other ethnographic areas, we also notice now, in Țara Lăpușului, the waxed eggs. The chromatism, the use of basic colors impresses – red, yellow, blue, green. We mention that natural colours obtained from different plants were used in the past. The symbols used emphasize the dexterity of the women in Ungureni. Along with the cross (solar symbol) we also notice other symbols: circles, horizontal lines, vertical lines, double lines, rhombuses, spirals (geometric symbols); sun, star (astral symbols); flowers, leaves, wheat ears (phytomorphic symbols); The Tree of Life, fir-tree branch (dendromorphic symbol); the rake, the ploughshares, the shepherd's bat, the lost path (schemomorphic symbols) etc. Nowadays, in Ungureni, on Moșii de Paști and on Moșii de Rusalii feasts, the relatives gather at the old wooden church around the stone slabs to commemorate the death of the departed ones. In addition to the traditional dishes, red eggs and painted eggs are offered to charity. The synchronic analysis, the comparative-analytical perspective, enhance the complexity of the theme.

Easter Eggs in Ungureni – Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș

1. Introduction

The egg is a complex archetypal symbol with various meanings. We currently correlate red eggs with Easter holidays, with Christianity, but dyed and painted eggs also existed before Christianity. It is believed that the art of painting and decorating eggs was known to the Dacians, the ancestors of the Romanians.

According to cosmogonic legends, it starts from the premise that the Earth itself was formed from an egg that floated on the waves of the primordial ocean: „from the top of the shell appears the heaven, from the bottom - the earth, and the yolk turns into the sun”².

The egg appears in various cultural spaces and introduces a number of functions: apotropaic, agrarian, cyclic, regenerative, initiatic, of fecundity, of fertility, of mediated consciousness between microcosm and macrocosm, magical-symbolic, ritualistic, therapeutic, utilitarian.

The egg represents an *imago mundi*, a symbol of resurrection, of eternal life. The egg is a dual symbol: beneficent - wicked. On the one hand, the cosmogonic egg that leads us to birth, to the creation of life, is beneficial. On the other hand, the egg used in incantations and hatched under the armpit for forty days is evil. The Ukrainians believe that a cock, called *carik*, starts crowing already from the egg, frightening even the Evil One³.

The egg is a complex symbol that inserts „the symbology of generic cosmogonic potency, but also integral and cosmological integrative”⁴.

The ancient dilemma doesn't appear by accident: „Which came first: the chicken or the egg?” This question attests the concerns of the predecessors about the emergence of the universe, about the development of life on Earth.

The expression „Columbus Egg” is used when a person claims to know the solution to that problem only after someone else has solved the problem. Girlando Benzoni, in the study „The History of the New World” (1565), reports an anecdote of how Christopher Columbus, who discovered a new continent, attracted many malice and envy from some people. It is believed that a man would have said that if there was already a New World, he would just have to think about going there. Then Christopher Columbus would take an egg from the table and ask them to put it steady upright. Nobody has succeeded. Flattening it slightly to one end, he was able to place the egg on the plate in the upright position. The Spanish nobles would exclaim:

² Ivan Evseev, *Dicționar de simboluri și arhetipuri culturale*, Timișoara, Amarcord Publishing House, 1994, p. 126.

³ Antoaneta Olteanu, *Metamorfozele sacralului. Dicționar de mitologie populară*, Bucharest, Paideia, 1998, p. 59.

⁴ Marian B. Marin, *Mitologia oului*, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1992, p. 31.

«Oh, we already knew this!» Columbus replied, laughing: «It only had to come to your mind. That's all!»⁵ These examples enhance the importance that we need to allocate to the egg.

2. The meaning of the egg itself and the Easter red-painted eggs in the Romanian cultural space

The egg is present in the important moments of human life (birth, marriage, death), in ritual praxis, in agrarian manifestations and magical-symbolic rituals. Here are some examples:

a₁ The egg is indispensable from the first bath of the newborn child, in order to be healthy, vigorous, and full of vitality.

a₂ Once the religious service in the church has been completed, the bride and groom will celebrate with the wedding guests. Sitting at the table, they first need to eat an egg in order to remain together until old age.

a₃ It is believed that the soul of people who passed away on Easter, will surely end up in Heaven. It is good to be buried holding in the right hand a red egg decorated with the motif of the lost way. It is believed that the symbol will help the defunct to cross the customs of the skies successfully.

a₄ The eggs consecrated in the Vigil Services during the Passion Week must be buried in the ground for the people to have rich fruit or to save the harvest from hailing during the year, which is called „piatră” [stone] in Romanian villages. The red egg consecrated and buried in the ground on Good Friday has an apotropaic role, that is, a protective function.

a₅ Before sowing wheat, corn, it is good to throw an egg toward the heavens. It is believed that the plants will grow as high as the egg was thrown. We notice the sympathetic magic, a concept developed by English anthropologist James George Frazer. It starts from the premise that „the similar produces similar”⁶.

a₆ Before being sown, the seeds, mixed with red egg shells, from the previous Easter celebrations, must be consecrated at the church.

a₇ On the eve of Easter holidays, Christians sprinkle red eggshells, and *blajinii*, also called *rohman*s, know that is Easter.

a₈ Red eggshells are sprinkled over the clay doll called *Caloian*.

a₉ In order to be beautiful and wooed by lads, girl with premarital status symbolically rub their faces with a red egg or wear it between their breasts.

The above-mentioned examples highlight the complexity of the egg itself and the Easter red-painted eggs in the Romanian cultural space.

⁵ See the link https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oul_lui_Columb, Site Access: 18. 04. 2019.

⁶ James George Frazer, *Creanga de aur*, vol. 1, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1980, p. 33.

3. Red-painted eggs and decorated eggs in Ungureni – Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș. Symbols, basic functions, chromatism

It is believed that those who knock red eggs by Easter are guaranteed that to meet in the world beyond [the world without longing]. The red eggs, as mentioned above, symbolize the Savior's blood. Believers who knock Easter eggs utter formulas, such as: „Hristos a Înviat!” [Christ is risen] and „Adevărat a Înviat!” [Indeed He is risen].

There are several legends related to red-painted eggs:

b₁ It is believed that the stones thrown to Him when carrying the cross on the way to Golgotha, the place of His crucifixion, turned into red eggs.

b₂ It is assumed that the eggs in the basket of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene became red at the moment of the martyrdom to which the Savior was subjected.

In the village of Ungureni, as well as in the other villages of Maramures, the Christians who go to the Resurrection wash their faces with the untouched water in which a red egg, basil and silver money were service placed to be healthy like an egg, dear to all, like basil and pure like silver. In other villages, basil is substituted with nettle, so that the Christian is fierce, like the nettle.

„Împistrite” [painted] eggs draw attention to chromatism and ornamental symbols. In Ungureni, the eggs, collected in time, are painted on Good Friday, on the day of the crucifixion of the Savior (photo 1). In Bucovina, the eggs are painted on Holy Saturday and are collected on Paresimi, which is Wednesday on the fourth week of the Lent. In Bucovina, the eggs painted first are called „cearcă”. Only children have the right to eat them, but without saying a word. The eggshell, filled with flour, is hung on the eaves of the house. There is a belief that the family will have health, well-being, good fortune, protection throughout the year. In Bucovina, besides boiled eggs, raw eggs are also decorated, but they cannot be consumed. Those eggs are called „necăjite” [upset] eggs, „muncite” eggs and remind of the torment to which the Savior Jesus Christ was subjected on the cross.

In Ungureni, the eggs are boiled in a pot in which some oat straws were put (photo 2). These straws help the colours and motifs applied on the egg not to be cleared. In the past, the colours were obtained from various plants, confirmed by the women from Ungureni village as a result of the field research undertaken in 2013 - Buda Maria, Buda Ana, Ungur Veronica, Buda Mărioara⁷ (photo 3):

c₁ red – onion red shells, apple blossoms, poppies, rhubarb, snowball tree's fruit;

c₂ yellow–onion yellow shells, yellow crocuses, dandelions, sunflower;

c₃ blue – violets, bluebells;

c₄ green – walnut leaves, willow twigs.

Red represents love, life, and yellow means light, prosperity. Green means hope.

⁷ See details at Delia-Anamaria Răchișan, *Formulele magice și antropologia vârstelor. Magia cuvântului în Maramureș*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2013, pp. 183-184; See the ethnological documentary *Tradiții pascale în Maramureș*, producer: Delia-Anamaria Răchișan, 2013.

Blue means faith because it is assumed that when we lift up our eyes to the sky, we have the certainty that from there comes the divine help.

The beeswax is used (photo 4). The wax warms and melts. Then, using the pen, the first model is applied. The egg is inserted in a colour, for example, in red, then it is removed from it, another model is applied, then the egg is inserted in another colour, for example in yellow. The procedure is repeated until the egg is passed through the four colours mentioned above⁸. At the end, the decorated egg is greased with salt pork, to give it a shine, and is wiped with a piece of wool.

The used instruments are called pens. One has a thick tip, the other one has a thin tip. Depending on the ethnographic area, that pen has certain regional names: *chișița/bijara/vizaric/închistritoare*. Also, in other ethnographic areas of Romania, the pen used to draw points is called *feleșteu/motoc/pămățuf/mățuf*. In the village of Lapuș, a piece of wood with a metal tip on the top is used as a pen. Like their ancestors, women used a thin-tipped pen and a thick-tipped pen.

The ornamental motifs⁹ render geometric, phytomorphic, dendromorphic, astral, scheomorphic symbols (photo 5).

We notice that lines are predominant. The double line emphasizes cyclicity, unceasing time, regeneration, eternity. The horizontal line involves the idea of death. The vertical line suggests life. The broken line and the zigzag line mean life with ups and downs, the fierce struggle between material and spiritual. The wavy line leads us to think about water. The rhombus is a geometric and solar symbol, made up of two triangles: masculine and feminine, earth and sky, a dialectic of opposing oppositions, so a dialectic of the opposites which harmonize. The spiral to the right or to the left announces the binarity: ascending-descending. The phytomorphic motifs are represented by flowers and various leaves (oak, clover, etc.). The dendromorphic motifs usually reveal the Tree of Life or the fir tree as a Thracian-Dacian symbol. The sun, the shepherd's star, attests the age of the astral motifs. The rake, the ploughshares, the wheel of the cart, the wheel of the mill are scheomorphic motifs that remind of the objects used in the house, in the Romanian peasant's household. We also mention other significant symbols: the lost way, the swallow's tail, the shepherd's crutch. The Christian cross, the Celtic cross, the cross of St. Andrew in „X” shape are indispensable solar symbols. Of these crosses, the Christian cross now prevails.

In the villages of Ungureni and Cupșeni from Țara Lăpușului, currently, the feast Moșii de Paști is celebrated on the second day of Easter. In memory of the departed ones, by Easter, and also by Pentecost, traditional dishes are offered - *crestată, prinos, pupi*, clay pot in the past, now a plastic bowl, knot-shaped bread, brandy, red and decorated eggs. In Ungureni are also celebrated Moșii de Florii and Moșii Arhanghelilor Mihail și Gavril feasts. Red decorated eggs are given as offerings only by Easter and Pentecost. The people

⁸ See details about applying colours to S. Fl.Marian; Tudor Pamfile; Mihai Lupescu, *Cromatică poporului român*, Bucharest, Saeculum I.O. Publishing House, 2002, pp. 210-217.

⁹ See other ornaments at Artur Gorovei, *Ouăle de Paști*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing House, 2001.

from Ungureni gather at the old wooden church at the stone slabs. The Easter knot-shaped bread and eggs are given as offerings to the poor people: „At this table, each participant, while sitting, has the obligation to kiss the red egg and the knot-shaped bread”¹⁰. Currently, these ritual practices are subject to desacralisation, but attest the age of ancient customs and the respect for the deceased ones¹¹.

4. Conclusions

The Easter eggs from Ungureni (Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county) attract the attention due to the beauty, the craftsmanship, the dexterity of the women who decorate them. The ornaments, the eggs`chromatism attest the ancient tradition of decorating the eggs. During feasts Moșii de Paști and Moșii de Rusalii, red decorated eggs are given as offerings, besides the traditional dishes. By appealing to the interdisciplinary perspective, to the synchronic and comparative-analytical analysis we potentate the meanings of the egg in the Romanian cultural space, the importance of the archetypal egg and the uniqueness of the Easter red eggs and of the decorated eggs. The egg is a universal symbol, a complex symbol with multiple meanings. The Easter eggs have always been present on the table of the Christians, regardless of the cultural space.

¹⁰ Pamfil Bîlțiu, *Studii de etnologie românească*, vol 3, Baia Mare, Eurotip Publishing House, 2012, p. 139.

¹¹ See the ethnographic documentary *Moșii de Florii, Moșii de Paști din Ungureni*, Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county, Producer: Delia-Anamaria Răchișan, 2013.

Photo Annex - photos taken by Delia-Anamaria Răchișan



Photo 1: *Eggs „împistrite” [decorated], Ungureni, Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county, 2018.*



Photo 2: *Poached eggs made with oat straws, Ungureni, Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county, 2018.*



Photo 3: *Women decorating eggs*, Ungureni, Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county, 2013



Photo 4: *Wax*, Ungureni, Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county, 2018.



Photo 5: *Decorated eggs* from Ungureni, Țara Lăpușului, Maramureș county, 2016.

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