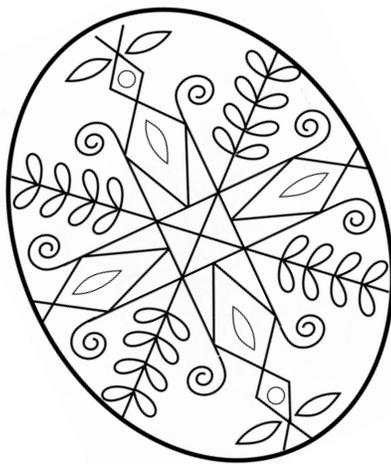


# The Ukrainian Pysanka



## Legends About Pysanky

A very long time ago God sent a terrible plague. Entire villages were dying, and nobody knew the cure for the plague. One woman – a widow – had ten sons, and the plague took nine of them. The woman suffered much, and prayed to God so ardently, that he took pity on her and said: she could save her youngest boy if she made him a shirt embroidered with crosses and flowers, so that the Angels of Death would recognize him.

The woman saved herself, and her son, but now she suffered even more, because she knew that the plague was continuing to kill people indiscriminately. She wanted to tell everyone about God's cure, but she couldn't, because God had told her this: if you tell other people, you will not be able to save yourself.

Easter approached, and long before the holiday the woman began decorating eggs with dyes and giving them to people, to have them blessed and eaten. She painted on them crosses, flower, leaves.... The eggs were so nice, that the people didn't eat them, but saved them and placed those pysanky in a prominent place in their homes.

In this way did the wise woman save her people, as well as her son and herself, from death.

\*\*\*\*\*

The first pysanky were written by the Virgin Mary. When Jesus was little, he liked to play with pysanky. Mary wrote pysanky for him with a golden stylus. When Christ was taken away to be crucified, the Virgin Mary wrote them in the dark, but they turned out very beautiful, because, while writing them, she was crying, the tears pouring out of her eyes; wherever the tears fell on the pysanky, colorful dots were formed. That is why pysankamakers still put dots on their pysanky.

\*\*\*\*\*

A poor man was carrying a basket of eggs to market on the day Jesus Christ was being led to be crucified. The cross was heavy, and Christ was collapsing beneath his burden. The man felt pity for Christ; he left his basket by the side of the road, and went to help Jesus carry the cross, carrying it all the way to the place of crucifixion.

When the man returned to his basket, he saw that the eggs had all been transformed into pysanky and krashanky.

\*\*\*\*\*

When Christ was crucified, the blood from his wounds dripped onto the stones below the cross. Each of these rocks became a red krashanka. Virgin Mary stood near the crucified Christ, and her tears dripped onto the stones; these became pysanky.

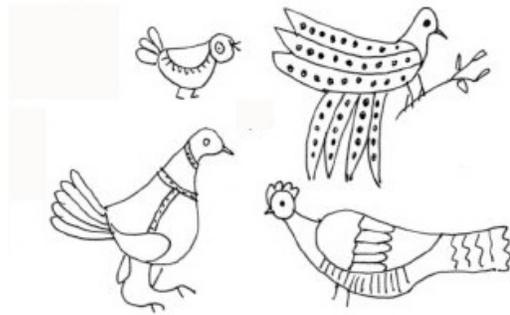
\*\*\*\*\*

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he said to the soldiers who were guarding his tomb, "Go forth and tell all the people that Christ has risen, and here is a sign so they will believe you." With this the Savior took some pysanky from his tomb and gave them to the soldiers. Thus began the custom of making pysanky for Easter.

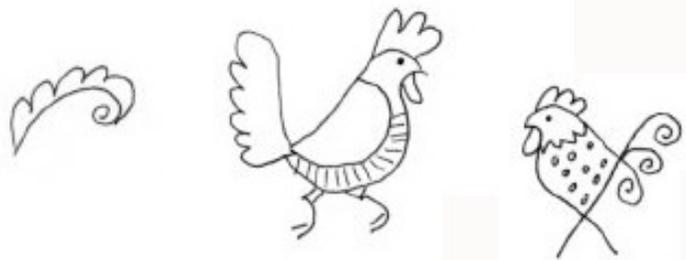
# Symbolism

## Animal Symbols

Birds: harbingers of spring  
renewal of life and nature



Rooster, Rooster's comb: fertility



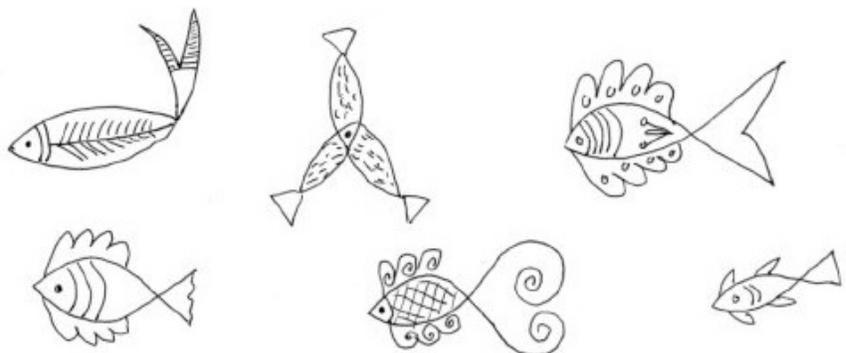
Horse, Deer: sun symbols/Dazhboh  
prosperity, good health



Ram's horns: perseverance



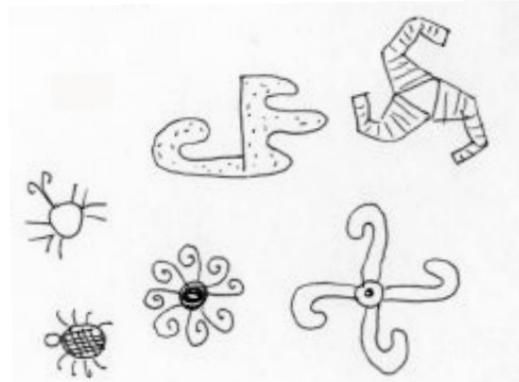
Fish: Jesus Christ



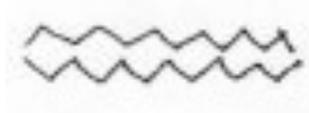
Butterfly: love



Spider, Spider web: good luck



Wolves' teeth: loyalty

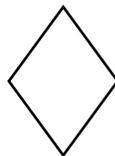


## Geometric Symbols

Triangle: natural trinity: heaven, earth, people



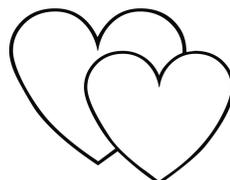
Diamonds: fields



Curls: protection, defense



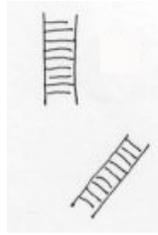
Heart: love



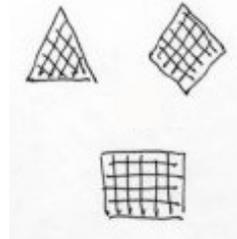


## Household Symbols

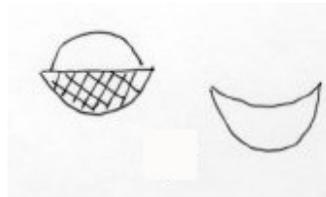
Ladder: prayer



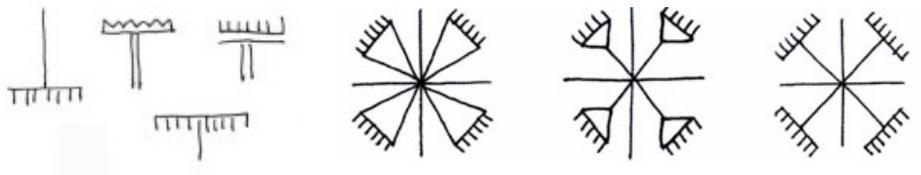
Sieve: separation of good and evil; plowed fields



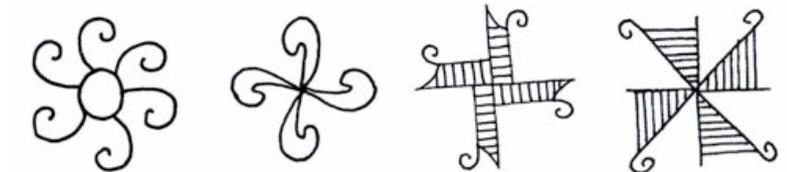
Basket: motherhood, knowledge



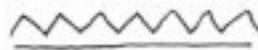
Rakes, combs: rain, water



Windmills: Svaroh, movement of the sun across the sky

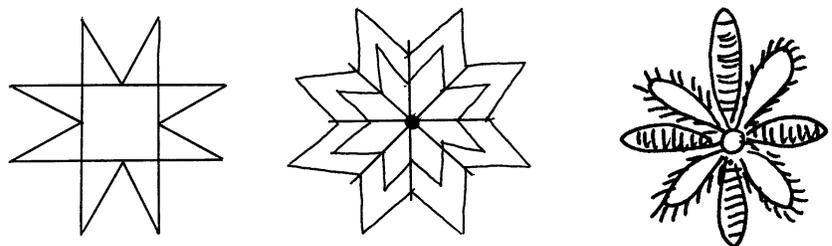


Saw: fire, life-giving heat

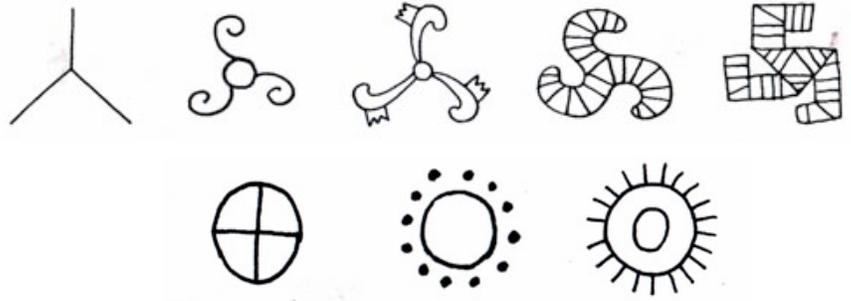


## Religious Symbols

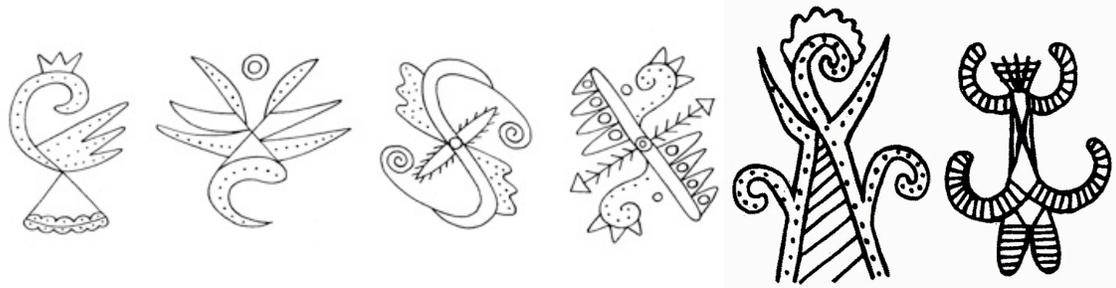
Star/Ruzha : sun (Dazhboh)



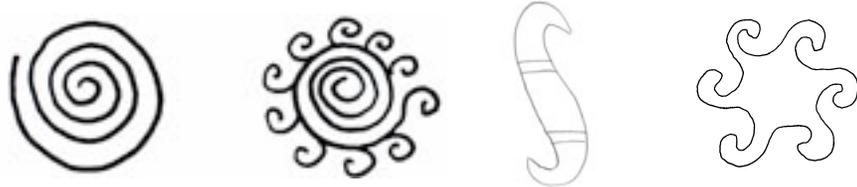
Sun: life, God (Dazhboh)



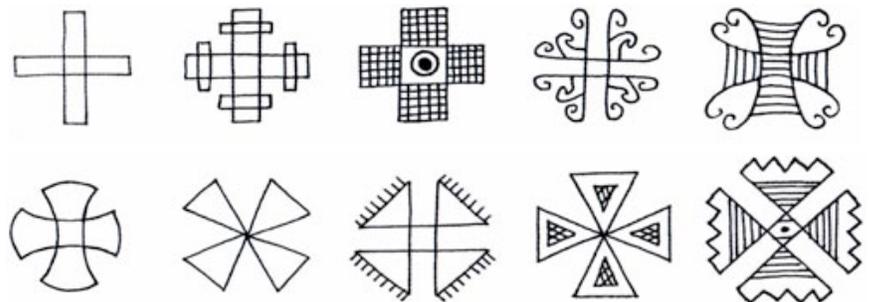
Berehynia (Great Goddess)



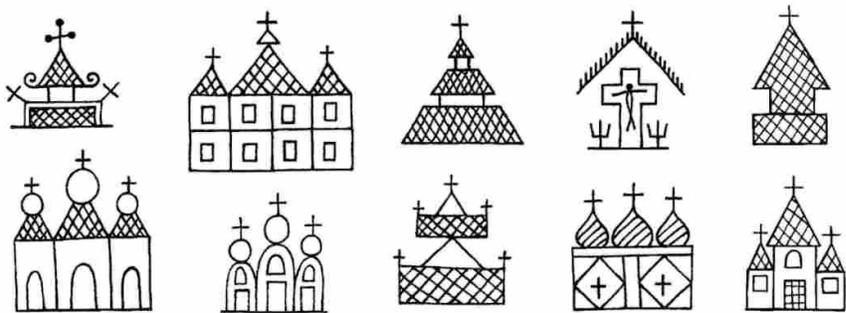
Serpent/Zmiya (Water God)



Cross: Svaroh, Christ



Churches



Meander: eternity



# Writing Pysanky

## What materials do I need?

1. Clean eggs at room temperature, without cracks or blemishes
2. Stylus/kistka
3. Beeswax
4. Egg dyes (aniline or natural)
5. Candle (in a holder)
6. Paper towels
7. Vinegar
8. Pencil
9. Clean Hands!!!

## How do I make a pysanka?

1. Wash your hands very well
2. Using the pencil, draw the main lines of your design; do not use the eraser!
3. Prepare your stylus and write on the egg with wax
  - a. heat the stylus (metal part only) in the flame (count 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8)
  - b. scoop up some beeswax in the large end of the stylus
  - c. heat the tip of the stylus in the flame (count 1-2-3)
  - d. write on the egg with wax until the wax stops flowing
  - e. repeat steps "c" and "d" until you run out of wax
  - f. start again with step "a"
4. Draw in, with wax, all the elements of the design that you wish to remain **white**
5. Put the egg in the vinegar water mix (1 T vinegar to 1 cup water) for 3-5 minutes
6. Put the egg in the first dye (usually **yellow**) for 3-5 minutes
7. Remove the egg from the dye and pat it dry gently with a paper towel
8. Draw in, with wax, all the elements of the design that you wish to remain **yellow**
9. Repeat the dye–dry–write process, beginning with the lightest colors and ending with the darkest colors. The usual order is:

white → vinegar rinse → yellow → light green → orange →  
bright red → final color (black, dark red, dark blue, brown, etc.)

10. Remove the wax: hold the egg next to the flame (NOT over it) until the wax begins to melt (it will look like water). Wipe off the melted wax with a paper towel. Keep repeating until all the wax has been removed