



Ukrainian Easter Eggs. (Left) New style floral design from the Poltava region of Eastern Ukraine. (Center) Pre-Christian design for God of the Sun, copied from clay eggs found in the tombs. (Right) Folk design from the region of Lwow (Lembergh), Western Ukraine, made by Maria Hawrych.



Armenian Cheorig made by Mary Haigazian, an Easter bread served with coffee when friends or relatives make an Easter visit.

## EASTER EGGS AND



Ukrainian woman designing egg

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Swedish Easter Eggs made by Birgid Grefbäck: old style, dressed figures; new style, patterned.

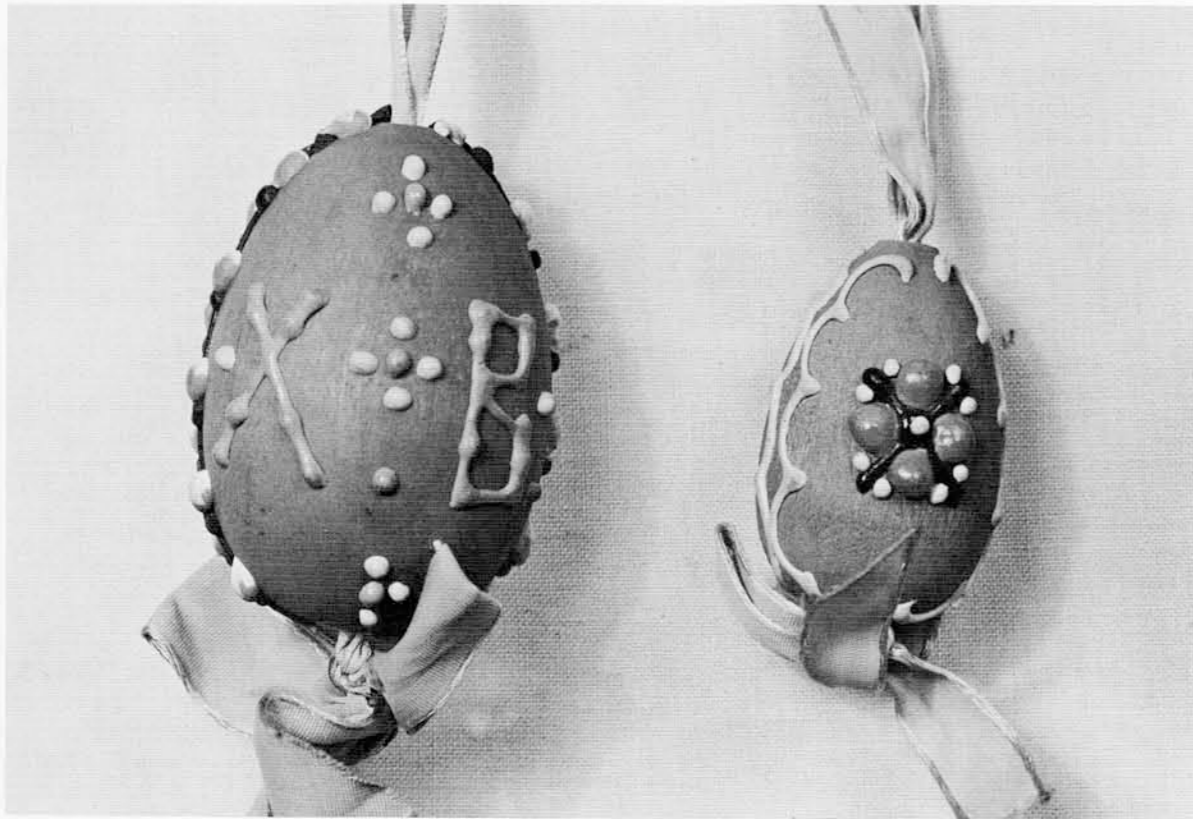
## EASTER BREAD

*of Southeastern Pennsylvania*

By MARGARET L. ARNOTT

Among folklorists it is a well known fact that one does not look in the center to find traditions but rather to the distant places, because it is the people on the edge of any culture who keep that culture alive. So it is that we may look in lands to which people have emigrated to find the traditions growing quietly, yet persistently.

In the Philadelphia area, people of many nationalities have settled. Among the first were those from Sweden. Today the Swedish community of the area still keeps the Easter traditions in which the egg plays a large role. Supper on Easter Eve is the time for eating eggs. One eats, then, as many boiled eggs as possible but



Russian Icon Eggs of wood, painted.



Russian Icon Egg of wax, beaded and painted, from the Russian Monastery at Jerusalem.

seldom touches one during the rest of the Easter season. These eggs, called *påskagg*, are served in the shell, set in small egg cups, and are dyed or painted with water-color faces or designs.

In Swedish Easter tradition, witches also play a large role. In almost every house there is an Easter tree made of branches and twigs of birch hung with small figures of witches riding broomsticks, *påskåringar*, small feathered birds, and colored eggs. This tree takes the place of one which during the days of Lent was decorated with tufts of brightly colored feathers. The birch is used as it is symbolic of the branches which once formed a part of the Good Friday ritual during which members of a family beat each other with birch switches in memory of Christ's suffering.

Reminiscent of the ancient belief that the witches held their annual chapel at Easter on top of the mountain Blakulla, today Swedish children dress as witches on Easter Eve and run around to their neighbors to throw Easter letters, *påskbrev*, on their friends' doorsteps. In an unpublished manuscript in the library of the Swedish Museum in Philadelphia, there is a statement that in the time when this belief in witches was

prevalent, an infallible method of detecting the witches in the community was to place three eggs in the pocket before starting to church on Easter Sunday. These eggs must be the first laid by the young chicken. Part of the witches' creed required them to attend church on Easter Sunday morning. The three eggs in the pocket gave the person carrying them the power to see the witches and hear them read their prayers backward.

Among Swedish people no special bread or cake accompanies the Easter feast but cakes will have a flower design on the icing. However, for dessert on Easter Day it is usual to serve meringue shaped like eggs and put together with whipped cream.

Another group in the Delaware Valley which continues to hold to its ancient traditions is the Ukrainians who have settled mainly in North Philadelphia. These people believe that the fate of the world depends upon the Easter egg, *pysanky*. Should the decoration of the *pysanky* cease to exist, evil, disguised as a vicious monster chained to a huge cliff, would destroy the world by surrounding it. Every year this beast sends his slaves to encircle the globe to count the number of *pysanky* painted. Should only a few be made, the creature's chains are loosened, enabling more evil to flow through the world, but when many are designed, love conquers evil and so the chains are held firm and taut.

An ancient process is used to decorate Ukrainian Easter eggs. The *pysanky* is made by first drawing the pattern on an uncooked clean white egg with melted bees' wax and then dipping the egg into the dye. Each design has a meaning: as the triangle symbolizes air, fire, or water; the sun, good fortune; the flower, love and charity; an endless line, eternity; so other symbols also have a designation. Though the same designs are used, no two eggs are ever exactly alike and each district of the Ukraine has its own pattern.

Within Ukrainian families Easter eggs are given and received, friends give to friends, and a girl's interest in a boy is shown by the gift of an egg. The eggs are blessed by the priest on a blessing table, either in the home or in a central house of the community, or in the church. On this blessing table are the Easter breads—*paska* and *babka*—cheese, sausage, meat, horseradish and the Easter eggs, *pysanky* and *krashanky*. The *krashanky*, which are served at the Easter breakfast, differ from the artistically decorated *pysanky* by being hard boiled and plain colored. After the blessing each family gives one egg, a

*pysanky*, to the priest. This one should have a cross as part of its design. The rest of the *pysanky* are taken away and are given as gifts, or are preserved during the year. When new eggs are made, the ones from the previous year are taken to the cemetery and left on the graves, or placed in the barns with the animals to protect them from bad luck, or put into the bee hives or into the waters for the fish.

Ukrainian Easter breads are of two varieties. The *babka*, a sweet, cake-like loaf, decorated and undecorated, and the *paska*, made of the common bread dough but decorated with dough birds. The tall round loaf of *babka* has a white sugar icing. Around its base are branches of fresh green huckleberry leaves. On the other hand, the flat round loaf of *babka* has a white sugar icing with a colored sugar monogram X B meaning "Christ is risen." This loaf is likewise decorated with branches of huckleberry and has a blessed white candle tied with a bright ribbon stuck into it. The candle was blessed at the Feast of the Purification, February 2nd, when all the candles for house and church to be used during the year, are blessed. The *paska* is also covered with green huckleberry branches and has in its center a blessed white candle decorated with green leaves and bright silk ribbon.

Russians make Easter eggs of wood, plaster, or wax, decorated with spring flower designs and X B or the figure of the Risen Christ. These eggs are made to hang before the icons and are sold at Easter in the churches and monasteries.

Red eggs, Easter bread, and roast lamb symbolize Easter for the Greeks. At the Easter table, the members of the family crack eggs with one another. The Greeks play the game of cracking eggs because they believe that the egg must be broken before the blessings of health and happiness can escape. Each person holds his red egg firmly in his hand, point up, while his neighbor knocks it with one held in a similar fashion. While striking the eggs they exchange the Easter greeting, "Christ is risen," "He is risen indeed" (Χριστός Ἀνέστη — Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη).

The object is to break the other's egg while keeping one's own unbroken. Great is the rejoicing of the victor who is able to keep his egg throughout the Easter season, because it is both an indication of his strength and a foretelling of "good luck" for the coming year. Sometimes this unbroken egg is placed with the household icons where it is kept and used as a boast, "this egg broke all the others in the family." Because it is so desirable to keep one's egg unbroken, many tricks are played to ensure it. Wooden or china



Greek Easter Egg from the district of Mani



eggs, the mixing of hard- and soft-boiled eggs, or the introduction of a tough-shelled duck egg are some of the devices used. This game has given rise to the proverbial saying that something goes "like red eggs at Easter," meaning that one's substance is quickly used.

By tradition Greek Easter eggs are red. Sometimes a pattern is imprinted upon them by placing a small leaf or flower on a clean white egg, tying it with a bit of nylon stocking to hold it in place, and then immersing the egg in the dye. Some dyed eggs have an elaborate design carved on them by scratching with a pin or other sharp-pointed instrument. These decorated eggs are used as gifts only to god-parents or god-children, or are placed before the icon.

The ancient custom of calling upon the Patriarch, the Archbishop, or the Bishop, on Easter Sunday is still in use today. When this visit is made it is recognized in various ways, usually by the gift of an egg. The eggs given by the Patriarch may be elaborately hand painted or they may simply be red, depending upon the Patriarch. Usually the Archbishop gives a golden egg or one gold and one red egg, or again he may give only a red egg.

Many and various are the stories as to why the eggs are painted red. The one most commonly told is that of the skeptic. Meeting her neighbor on the road, she was asked whether she had heard the news. Answering that she had not, in turn she asked, "What is the news?" Upon receiving the reply that Christ the Lord had risen, her immediate response was, "I don't believe it, and I shall not unless these eggs which I carry turn red." Looking into the apron both women saw that the eggs were red. Since that time, Easter eggs have been colored red as a symbol of Christ's resurrection.

The traditional day for baking the Easter breads is Maundy Thursday, sometimes called Red Thursday because it is the day on which the red eggs are dyed. *Tsourekia*, the Greek Easter bread, may be shaped differently, but in general it is braided round or oblong. Some have designs of birds, fruit, and flowers for decoration while others merely have one or more red eggs, and some have only blanched almonds. Almost all are brushed with egg yolk and sprinkled with sesame seed.

Among the Armenians it is customary for every family to knock eggs on Easter Sunday morning after church. In the game of egg knocking all the eggs must come from the same group. Since the aim of the game is to break the

egg of one's opponent, it is necessary to select with great care. One method of testing the egg's strength is to knock it against the teeth. Once the selection has been made, the eggs are held in the two hands, point touching point, and are knocked together, first one and then the other. The broken egg is forfeit. This egg knocking game is practiced not only within the family group, but also amongst friends; therefore it is possible to purchase a dozen dyed eggs at the door of the church and after selecting one, to go from friend to friend offering an egg from the dozen. Each person chooses an egg, then they test their fortune by knocking them together. It is not infrequent to collect a dozen or more eggs in this fashion.

Armenian Easter eggs are traditionally dyed with the skin of the yellow onion. Eggs are boiled with onion skins until they become burnt brown in color. Today the older people hold to the traditional onion-skin egg but among younger people now, all colors are used.

*Cheorig* is the name given to the Armenian Easter bread. There are two methods of preparing Easter *cheorig* which is cake-like yet made with yeast. The two kinds vary in ingredients and in shape. The *cheorig* is eaten through the year but the shortening in the Easter variety is a vegetable or dairy product rather than mutton fat which is used at other times. It is shaped either in small individual buns or in a larger twisted loaf with a hard-boiled gaily colored egg embedded in it.

An "old country" custom which still prevails is that of the Easter visit among friends and relatives. At this time, before the Easter bread is served with coffee, the Easter greeting is given, "Jesus is resurrected from the dead" with the reply "May His Resurrection be a blessed one for you."

On Easter Eve between one and four in the afternoon, Polish people take their Easter food to the church in decorated baskets to be blessed by the priest. At the end of the service a small donation is given to the altar boys who assist with the baskets, but no egg is given to the priest.

The Easter table is an essential part of every Polish household, since open house is kept throughout Easter Day and all who come to visit will first give a toast from the common egg, the onion-skin dyed blessed egg, and then will taste of the homemade delicacies. Traditionally each table holds the onion-skin dyed egg, sausage, ham, homemade horseradish, the Polish *kruczki*, Polish Easter bread (*babka*), salt and pepper.

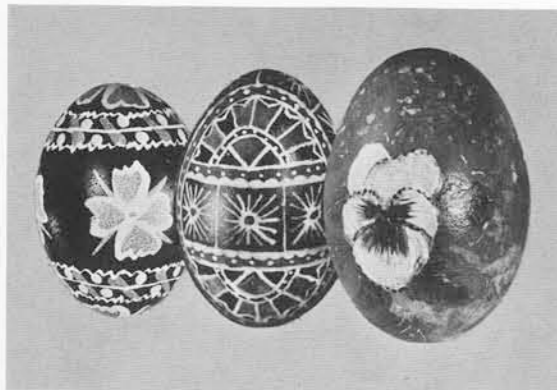


Greek Easter Egg given by the Patriarch of Constantinople



Surrounding the ham and sausage are painted eggs, *malovane joko*, which have not been blessed but will be given as gifts to those who come to visit. The onion-skin dyed eggs, *swiencone joko*, are peeled and are set by themselves. As many *swiencone joko* as will be needed throughout the Easter season will have been dyed and blessed. When they are peeled the shells must be burned since they are holy.

The *malovane joko* received as gifts are kept and used as decoration in the china closet. Children are happy if there are more *malovane joko* than are needed because they will be given one



Polish Easter Eggs. (Left) Design used in the coal district of Pennsylvania; painted by Mrs. Francis Kazalskis. (Center) *Malovane Jako* made by Chester Sychowski. (Right) Prize hand-painted egg by Mrs. Sophie Mendis.

during Easter week and may go about among their friends knocking with others who have had like fortune. One can frequently hear the cry "Got an egg" as one goes about in the district of South Philadelphia where many of the Polish people live.

On the Saturday following Easter there is a congregational supper at the church. For this, everyone gives a *swiencone joko* from his own table. The priest re-blesses them at this supper, then each one present takes a bit of the egg, gives the toast for health before eating it, and then the parishioners give each other the kiss of peace saying "Christ is risen."

Hungarians feast on eggs, ham, and braided Easter bread, *kalács*, on Easter, but for the young people Easter Monday and Tuesday are the days of rejoicing and excitement. On Easter Monday boys go about sprinkling a perfumed water on the girls who give them patterned eggs. On Tuesday the girls return the favor by sprinkling perfumed water on the boys.

A common variety of Estonian Easter egg is that dyed with onion skins. The egg is first wet, then wrapped in yellow onion skins with a few blades of green grass included. The egg is then wrapped in a square piece of white cloth and bound tightly with string wound around and around the egg. Among Estonians, as among Lithuanians, eggs are rolled down an inclined board and those eggs which are struck are forfeit.

Lithuanian Easter eggs are dyed by the wax process. The brown egg is the most typical and is usually dyed with the inside bark of the oak tree, but onion skin and other natural dyes are also used to obtain the lighter colors. Although in Lithuania eggs are knocked by rolling, in this country that custom has given way to hiding eggs followed by a treasure hunt.

The Italians living in South Philadelphia bake Easter bread. Decorated eggs are seldom used, but the common bread is decorated in various ways and given as gifts, dolls of bread with eggs embedded, to the girls, horses to the boys.

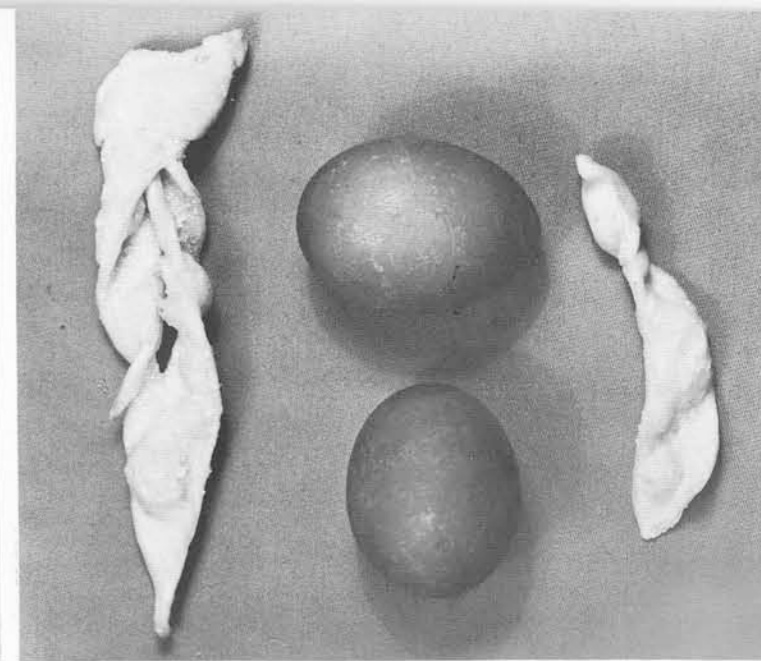
It is the custom for a young man to give an elaborately woven palm branch to a young girl to carry to church on Palm Sunday. On Easter Day she gives him an Easter bread. Sometimes these Easter breads have painted or white eggs embedded in them. The painted ones are done in pastel colors of pink and blue.

*Binsa-graws* eggs are made by the Pennsylvania Dutch. This method of decorating Easter eggs is by no means a new one, but it may soon be an extinct one, as the *binsa-graws* from which the pith is taken is eaten by deer. Today farmers are doing their best to kill this meadow rush by spraying it with a chemical so that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. Not only is the *binsa-graws* difficult to obtain but the blowing of the eggs on which it is used is hard on the eyes. To blow an egg one must make a small hole at each end of an uncooked egg, stir the contents with a small instrument such as a skewer, then blow on one end until the contents of the egg have come through the hole opposite. It takes much strong breath and much patience to make the *Binsa-graws* eggs. The pith of the *binsa-graws*, after being pushed from the rush with a matchstick or some such instrument, is wound around a blown egg in coils. Small pieces of cloth of various shapes and colors are then pasted over the *Binsa-graws* surface.

The Amish women use calico to cover their eggs. Sometimes the entire egg is covered with strips of cloth, but sometimes interesting designs



Lithuanian Easter Eggs by Mrs. Irene Norkus



Polish Kruczki and onion-skin dyed eggs by Mrs. Victoria Gizinski



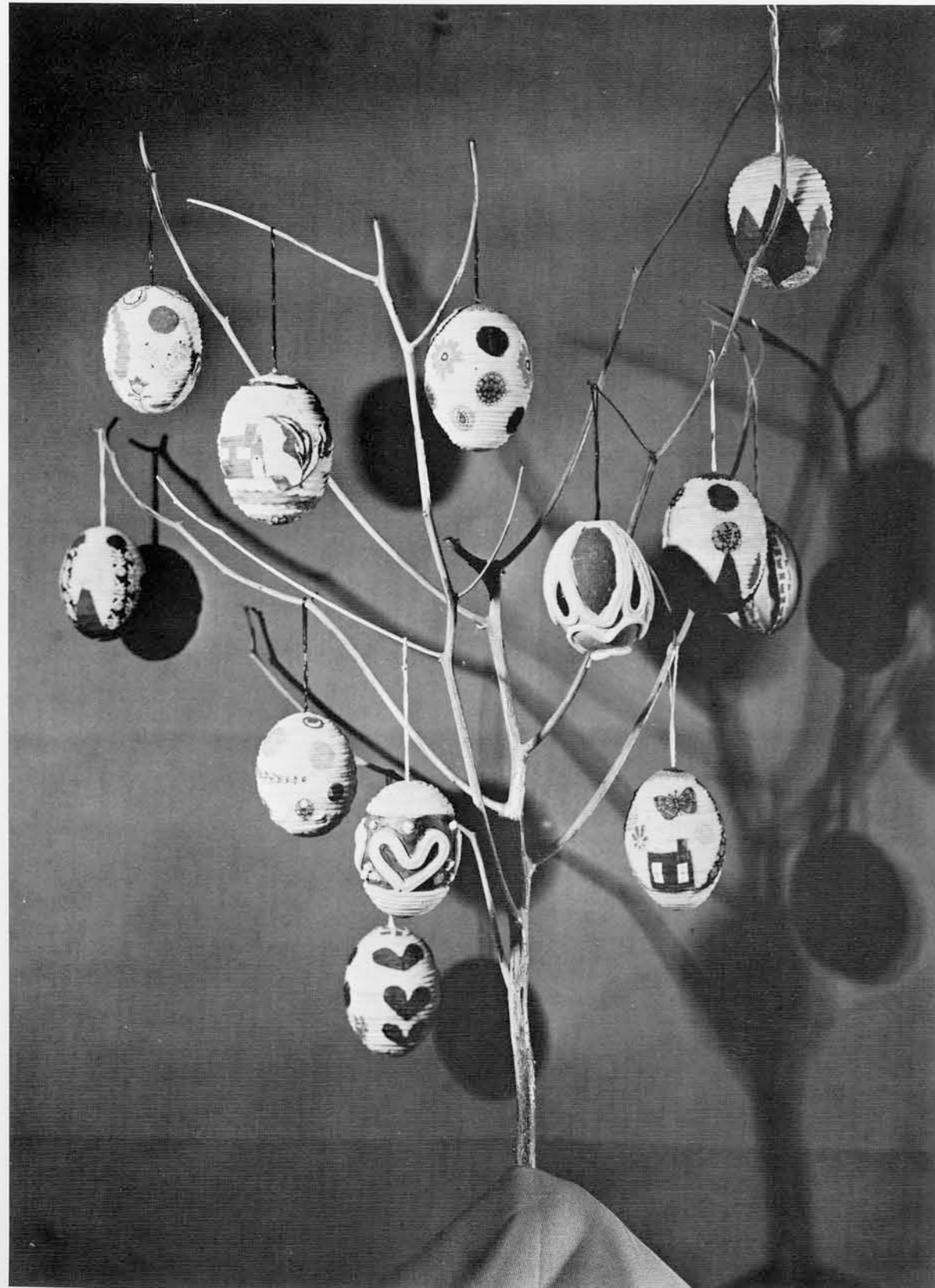
Italian Easter Bread by Mr. Natale Candela, Casa-Italian Bakery.



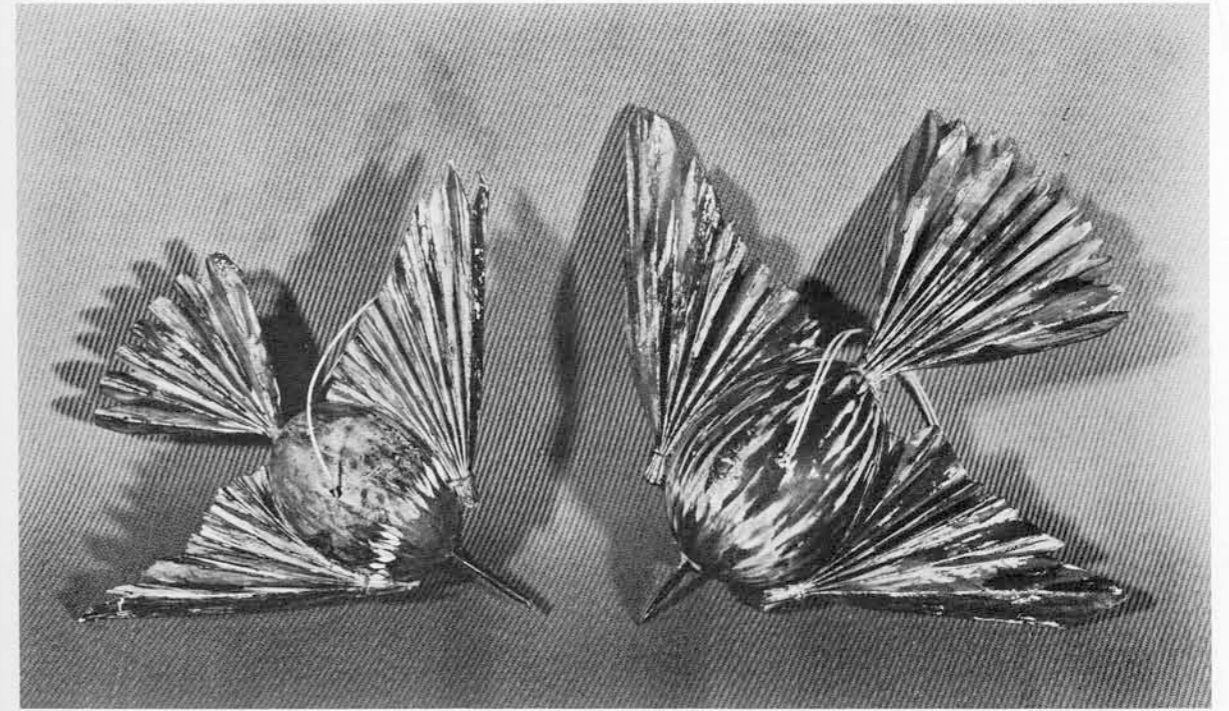
of cloth are pasted on the blown egg and then outlined with *binsa-graws*. Today in the Pennsylvania Dutch country these designs are being painted upon the eggs themselves.

Easter Egg Trees are known in various parts of Europe and in the Dutch country of Pennsylvania as an outdoor custom. Among the Pennsylvania Dutch the first Easter Egg Trees were garden trees or bushes hung with empty egg shells, while in Europe not only is this done, but sometimes branches cut from trees are hung with

decorated eggs and colored ribbons, and carried around by singing processions of children to bring good luck to the house or to frighten away the bugs, but in Pennsylvania the indoor tree has no documentation before 1876 when a Reading, Pennsylvania newspaper commented on the innovation in the home of a druggist. Since 1950 the Egg Tree has become well known in the United States through a children's book, *The Easter Egg Tree*, by Katherine Milhous of Philadelphia.



*Easter Egg Tree hung with Binsagraws eggs*



*Pennsylvania Dutch Easter Egg Birds*

Beside cloth covered eggs, the scratched egg is important. It existed at least as long ago as 1789. These scratched eggs are decorated by means of a sharp pen-knife, the motifs being



*Pennsylvania Dutch Egg. 1901.*

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flowers, trees, birds, rabbits, or geometrical designs on backgrounds of various colors, the most common being yellow or purple.

Egg Birds were perhaps the first mobiles used as a ceiling decoration, and are a common part of Pennsylvania Dutch life, being referred to as

Easter Birds or Easter Egg Birds. These birds are kept in the house swinging in the breeze throughout the summer. The Easter Bird is made from a blown egg which has been colored to suit the fancy of the maker. A beak, wings, and tail are made of folded paper of the same color and pasted on the surface of the egg.

These are customs which prevail in the Philadelphia area in this year of 1960. Each year some of the custom and some of the tradition vanishes. Designing the Easter egg has been modified. This can be plainly noted in the change from pasting calico on the egg to painting it with water color. Baking Easter bread is almost a lost art, in most cases now the art of the bakery. In many instances the custom is kept alive through ethnic societies which have been formed to perpetuate the traditional customs of the ancestral country. In some cases it is only commerce through which it survives. Again and again people who were interviewed said, "Oh yes, I used to decorate eggs when my children were young, but now I'm too busy earning a living." Others said, "My mother did that when I was young but I never learned how." With the lengthening of time from the date of immigration, as people become Americanized, and as the older people die, the custom itself gradually changes and frequently disappears, but here in the Delaware Valley tradition still has a strong hold.