

DROWNING MARZANNA

Forty days before Easter is a time of fasting called Lent. The church has no festivals, but a ritual that is not Christian occurs in rural places during this time. It is called "Drowning Marzanna."

ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT, usually around March 21st, crowds of people, some of them in traditional costume, gather on the riverbanks of Poland. They bring with them large, stuffed dolls mounted atop a tall stick. These are the Marzannas. Some may be straw scarecrows, some may be rag dolls made of fabric. The Marzanna dolls are clothed in traditional costumes like those worn by the women in the crowd. Groups of people form a circle around a doll, and they all sing songs about the departure of the cold winter weather that will allow the spring to arrive. Drowning Marzanna in a river, lake, or pond is accompanied with the singing or saying of the following words: "Marzanna, Marzanna, swim across the seas. Let flowers bloom, and fields turn green." They throw the Marzanna into the river, and this act symbolizes the death of winter. Sometimes they set the straw doll afire before throwing it into the water.



There are other beliefs connected to the Marzanna. In parts of Poland the crowds of country folk hurry home after the drowning of the doll. They think it unlucky to speak or to look back. Some even believe that to fall or trip on the way home means they might die within the year.

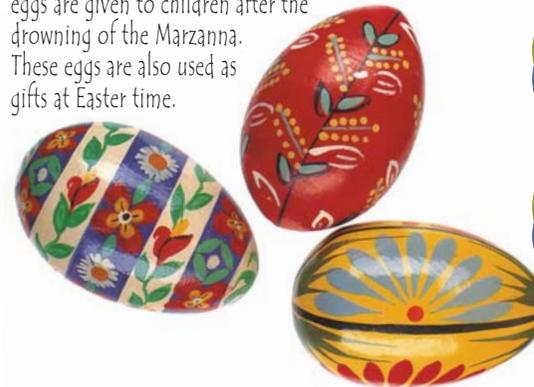


Drowning Marzanna is a very old tradition. Its roots are found in the fears of early farmers who dreaded the long, dark winters experienced in northern Europe. They were very happy when the sun reappeared in the spring.

This ritual is not so widespread now, but it still takes place in little towns and remote villages of Poland.

Nowadays drowning Marzanna is a light-hearted event, often celebrated as part of school activities.

Eggs symbolize new life and growth. Painted eggs are given to children after the drowning of the Marzanna. These eggs are also used as gifts at Easter time.



**GAIK —
SYMBOL OF LIFE**

The branch of a fir tree decorated with ribbons, painted eggs, and sometimes even feathers is also brought to the gathering. This branch is called a gaik. It symbolizes the rebirth of the sun and is believed to bring new life into a village, while the drowning of the doll is said to drive out death and protect the inhabitants from sickness. After the Marzanna, a symbol of winter and death, is thrown into the river, the gaik is paraded around the village, accompanied by groups of singers. Sometimes girls carry the gaik from door to door. Everywhere they stop they are given presents of painted eggs.