

Medieval Solar Carved Decor Motifs in Churches of Western Ukraine

Roman Odrekhivskyi *

Vitalii Kozinchuk **

Ruslan Kundys ***

Oksana Lan ****

Mariana Pelekh *****

Abstract. The purpose of our article is to initiate a complex research of the meaning of cosmological symbols in decoration of Ukrainian churches in Western Ukrainian (Galicia Region). The academic novelty of the research lies in the fact that the article is the first one to cover the issue of the meaning of cosmological symbols in decoration of religious buildings. We have also tested materials of our own scientific research expeditions in the territory of Galicia. Nowadays, we evidence a growing awareness of the necessity to research the reflection of solar cosmological symbols as a holistic phenomenon of the Ukrainian sacral philosophy and culture. In our opinion, it is one of the most important current problems in the sphere of esoteric and religious cosmology. Mythology played a crucial role in traditions of perception of cosmological symbols by our ancestors. Namely, the mythology mainly shaped the image and perception of the transcendental and endless Universe by our forefathers. In ancient times, when the world seemed to be overarching, gods were so easily accessible. However, after the collapse of pagan beliefs about the world, the meaning of many cosmological symbols was lost (star, sun, moon, rosette, etc).

* Doctor of Art Studies, Professor of the Department of Choreography and Art History, Ivan Boberskyi Lviv State University of Physical Culture Lviv, Ukraine; Email: odre2010@ukr.net
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3581-4103>

** Doctor of Art Studies, Professor at the Department of Art Studies and Art Education, Kyiv State Academy of Decorative and Applied Arts and Design named after Mykhailo Boichuk, Kyiv, Ukraine. Email: vitaliikozinchuk@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8518-5686>

*** Candidate of Art, Associate Professor Department of Directing and Choreography Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine. Email: ruslan.kundys@lnu.edu.ua
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6374-4811>

**** PhD of Culture and Art, Associate professor of Department of Directing and Choreography, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine. Email: oksana.lan@lnu.edu.ua ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7550-7269>

***** Candidate of Art, Associate Professor of Department of Graphics and Book Art, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine. Email: marjanna.peleh@gmail.com ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0009-0000-5780-9650>

Cosmological symbols in churches are pictured on walls, in carved and painted decorations of icons, in compositions of icons. However, closer to the beginning of our era their meaning in people's memory faded more and more. And it's really a pity, because their interpretation presented a unity of art and life, a deep symbolics of space.

Renewal of knowledge about the symbolics of cosmological symbols in ancient residential and religious buildings will give us the possibility to better understand the meaning of our life. It is worth explaining the meaning of these symbols and stylization of their artistic presentation in more detail. They are carved or painted on walls of residential or religious buildings, on ancient icons, crosses, etc.

Keywords: solar symbols, symbol, ornamentation, Christianity, art culture, development of religion, carved decor.

Introduction

Cosmological symbols were a part of life of the ancient Ukrainians since olden times. With the advent of the Christianity, they became a decoration in Christian churches. As time passed, people started to perceive these symbols and their meaning simply as a decorative element. In our time, there is a growing interest in understanding their symbolics.

The interest in this problem was sparked in the 1990s. We can see an attempt to interpret the meaning of separate cosmological symbols in the collective monograph "Culture and Household of the Population of Ukraine" (1991)¹. As we can understand from this paper, cosmological symbols traditionally followed Ukrainians on walls of residential and religious buildings, as decorations of household items, etc. Separate issues of interpretation of symbolics of cosmological symbols were examined in articles by R. Odrekivskyi: "Solar Symbols in Decorative Carving of Churches in Galicia"², "Ancient Christian Symbolic Elements in Decorative Carving of Church Interior in Galicia"³. However, the problem still remains insufficiently researched. Therefore, the purpose of our article is to start a complex research on the interpretation of these ancient images. Separate references to the use of solar signs in sacred decoration in Ukraine are given in the article "The Art of Sculpture and the Development of Christianity in Ukraine" (Odrekivskyi, 2024)⁴.

¹ *Culture and Household of the Population of Ukraine*, Kyiv: Lybid, 1991.

² Roman Odrekivskyi, "Solar Symbols in Decorative Carving of Churches in Galicia." *Visnyk kharkivskoi derzhavnoi akademii dyzainu i mystetstv*, Kharkiv, Volume 3, 2011, pp. 128–130.

³ Roman Odrekivskyi, "Ancient Christian Symbolic Elements in Decorative Carving of Church Interior in Galicia." *Visnyk kharkivskoi derzhavnoi akademii dyzainu i mystetstv*, Kharkiv, Volume 4, 2010, pp. 130–132.

⁴ Roman Odrekivskyi, "The Art of Sculpture and the Development of Christianity in Ukraine." *Anastasis*, Iași, Volume XI, No.1/May 2024, pp. 203-210.

1. Methodology and theoretical framework includes systematicity, accuracy, historicism and consistency. The choice of research methods and specifics of sources were determined by the range of problems raised in this article. In the course of examination of research sources, the generally accepted analytical research method was applied. For the purpose of holistic analysis of motifs of cosmological decoration and its meaning in the sacred culture of Galicia people, the complex research method was used.

2. Results of the research

2.1 Dynamics of sacral culture of Ukrainians

The Christianity that replaced paganism met the whole hierarchy of the magi and artistic carving traditions on the Ukrainian lands. What did the world-view beliefs of masters, creators of pagan idols, fetishes, abstract images based on? In the ideological sense – primarily on mythological traditions, in the formal sense – on still understudied high art traditions of artistic wood, stone and bone carving, etc. Therefore, myths played an important role both in the pre-Christian and Christian art, which we will discuss further in the analysis of a range of plots. According to K. Stanislavska, "... a myth is not only the historically first form of culture and the oldest system of values, knowledge and visions of the world. The essence of the myth is the unconscious interrelationship between a human and forces of nature or society"⁵.

For example, the mythological world outlook essentially influenced the character of white-stone carving of churches in the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia. M.Fihol, the well-known researcher of ancient Galicia, notes that "In the 10th-12th centuries, after the adoption of Christianity, new criteria of public conscience were established in the territory of the Ancient Rus – those related to adoption of the Christian faith. However, even before the adoption of Christianity the Slavs that populated Rus had historically shaped moral-ethical and aesthetic standards that were reflected in the ancient folklore. Their mythological and religious world outlook, visions of the world, nature, universe, good and evil were reflected in the ornamental arts and sacred works, the motifs of which – the tree of life, symbolized birds, animals, fish, dragon that had traditional for pagans symbolics and colours (yellow, white, blue, red, black) – later became an organic part of the Christian art."⁶.

⁵ Kateryna Stanislavska, "The artistic and spectacular features of modern television advertising." *Visnyk natsionalnoi akademii kerivnykh kadriv kulturny mystetstv: nauk. Zhurnal*. Volume 1, 2011, p. 101.

⁶ Mykhailo Fihol, *The art of Halych XII - XIV centuries (History, Typology, Artistic features)*: extended abstract of dissertation in support of doctor of science for Art History, specialty: 17.00.05, Kyiv, p. 12.

Although we know almost nothing about the ancient Galician carved woodworks, objects of white-stone carving art give us insight into the fundamental world outlook of the individual creative work of masters of sacral carving in the pre-Renaissance period. As we can assume from the analysis of research of M. Fihol and others, it is primarily represented by the idiom of local masters of Galicia. In times of ancient Rus the level of arts, particularly architecture, icon-painting, sculpture, art of metalwork etc. was “very high”⁷. The masters of Galicia entered into the Christian culture and art with their own traditions of carving methods, plot interpretation etc. Evidently, this was a basis of fundamental world outlooks of the idiom of both folk and guild masters, creators of religious carving traditions in the region. Consequently, the dynamics of sacred culture and cultural memory was based on deep ancient local traditions. In this situation, we perceive the culture of carving masters as a reproductive and creative activity on the basis of our own age-old traditions, inasmuch as creative skills, plots etc. were passed on from generation to generation.

It should be mentioned that the iconographic repertoire of church carving, as well as pictorial art, played a crucial culturological, informational and edutainment meaning, especially in times when many people were not able or did not have a possibility to read books. An example of such meaning is cited by Y. Sabadash: “This is a start of the division of cultures that existed even in the Middle Ages: between those who were able to read manuscripts and, therefore, to critically comprehend religious, philosophical and scientific problems and those who were educated exclusively with the help of icons in a church – selected and processed by their authors”⁸. Thus, symbols and signs played a significant role as a phenomenon of the sacral culture of Ukraine. In the historical continuity of preservation and transmission of cultural values the meaning of certain symbols and techniques of their carving were passed down for generations of masters. This resulted in considerable ontological and axiological importance of church carving and the important role of its creators in Ukrainian culture.

The character of these old solar symbols varies: a simple circle, a rosette flower in a circle or without it, a circle with a sidelong cross in the middle etc. It should be specified that apart from the above-mentioned symbols, we can meet other symbols on the ceramic ware of Cucuteni-Trypillia culture (7th-4th century B.C.): crosses, various rhombuses, semi-circles, triangles, volute-like scrolls etc.⁹. As the researchers believe, geometrical motifs originating from the ancient pagan beliefs and cults are

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁸ Yuliia Sabadash, “Leisure in the mass culture of the modern world (on the example of Umberto Eco's works).” *Visnyk natsionalnoi akademii kerivnykh kadrov kulturyi mystetstv: Nauk. Zhurnal*, Volume 2, 2013, p. 43.

⁹ Iryna Kodlubai; Oles’Noha, *Ancient Ukraine*, Lviv: Ukrainski tekhnolohii, 2000, p. 97.

the oldest ones among these symbols. The rhombus-meander pattern is considered to be one of the most ancient motifs that symbolized the mammoth in Late Palaeolithic art. It is a graphical reproduction of dentin on the section of the tusk of this animal. Re-conceptualized with the course of time, this motif served as an ideogram of fertility in land cults¹⁰.

2.2 Creativity of solar signs in sacred culture

Separate researchers of the Ukrainian history believe that the main ornamental motif in the Trypillia culture was represented by the cross (that in our opinion has a cosmological origin) and assert that artefacts of Trypillia ornaments still remain a sample of the highest pictorial art for future generations. According to this theory, the subsequent form-making that already lasts for nearly five thousand years knows nothing similar among ceramic painted graphical shapes except the repetitions (reproductions) of the well-known Trypillian one¹¹.

Many researchers noted the closeness of symbolics of Trypillia ornaments with cosmic cataclysms. And not only the Trypillia culture, but other cultures of the Copper and Bronze Ages could reflect perceptions of the past cataclysm in the history of mankind¹². Probably, it was a source of inspiration for mythology and above-mentioned ornamentation with cosmological components.

The system of pagan symbols survived in the Christian art. As P. Herchanivska justly notes, "Pagan symbols create firmly established connotative associations that were formed and fixed in the people's consciousness in the course of centuries. The system of Christian symbols that organically entered into the folk Christian art is not only an artistic and stylistic notion, but also a world-view notion connected with peculiarities of mythological thinking of people and determined mythological world outlooks and world perception. It expands the boundaries of the Christian text connecting it with folk traditions. Folk masters integrate traditional elements into the Christian symbolics in their own way... In particular, the pagan paradigm is connected with the idea of a circle in the folk Christian art - a symbol of the sacralised space, image of the world that was established in the spatial-plastic and pictorial form. It should be noted that the centric form was always associated in the people's memory as something related to world creation."¹³.

¹⁰ *Culture and Household of the Population of Ukraine*, 1991, Kyiv: Lybid, p. 185.

¹¹ Orest Khmelovskiy, *Theory of creation of character*, Lutsk: Lutskiy derzhavnyi tekhnichnyi universytet, 2000, pp. 200-201.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 196.

¹³ Polina Herchanivska, "Sign-symbolic nature of folk christian culture," *Kultura i suchasnis*, Volume 2, 2010, pp. 94-95.

Cross-like circles and rosettes symbolized fire and sun god in the ancient times. With the course of time the solar essence of the cross was reinterpreted – it became a symbol of the Christianity¹⁴. The simplest geometrical shapes as the horizontal line and undulated line most probably symbolized the earth and water (ib.). Carved motifs on facades or in interiors of houses performed protective anthropic functions¹⁵. Naturally, this is also the case of sacral buildings. A vivid example of this is the entrance facade of the church from Kryvky village of Lviv region¹⁶ decorated with various flat-and-carved motifs – indentations, rosettes, crosses in circles etc. Entrance doors of some churches have peculiar decorations: “herringbone” in the Church of Saint Michael the Archangel (1832) in Turynske village (Sanok County, Lemkivshchyna, nowadays – Podkarpackie Province, Poland), “rhombic ornament” with a vertical cross in the central rhombus in the Church of Saint Michael the Archangel (1754) in Komarno town (Horodok district, Lviv region) and other churches. There is an interesting decoration on side (northern) doors of the Church of the Annunciation (1927) in Hrebeniv village.

It is decorated with a multi-petal rosette flower in the middle and a panel with a rhombus-like layer of elements in the bottom part. However, sometimes the carving of entrance doors reflects a variety of carved plots of the Christian symbolics similar to the decoration of the holy gates, like on the entrance doors of the Church of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Stryi or the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity (1904) from Drohobych (the beginning of the 20th century).

Thus, the upper panels of the doors of the above-mentioned Stryi church are decorated with a realistic relief sculpture with motifs of grape vine, bunch of grapes and grape leaves, while two bottom panels are decorated with incised carving in the style of the decorated graphics of the beginning of the 20th century: there is a four-petal rosette flower in the middle with a wide leaf on the background on all four sides having an equilateral cross in a circle on every of its four edges. On two upper panels of the main entrance doors of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Drohobych there is a typical motif of the ancient carving of the holy gates – a high-relief carved cup encircled by low-relief motifs of leaves with the Eye of Omniscience underneath.

However, as researchers believe, with the lapse of time the ornamentation of folk art nearly lost its original meaning and its decorative

¹⁴ Ivan Krypiakevych, *History of Ukraine*, Lviv: Svit, 1990, p. 185.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

¹⁶ Located on the premises of Lviv Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life (Ukraine).

function became the most important one¹⁷. Thus, for example, the multi-petal rosette already serves as an abstract image of a flower¹⁸.

In the late 19th century - the beginning of the 20th century, solar symbols in a number of iconostases, especially those made in the Ukrainian style, are presented in the traditional manner of Hutsul or Boyko flat carving. Some vivid examples are the iconostases of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Drohobych or the Church of the Mantle of Our Lady from Ivano-Frankivsk (Kniahynyn), as well as other items of the church interior, in particular the icon-case with the painted icon "Jesus Christ" from the same Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Drohobych. The *rosette* is one of the most widespread solar symbols of Galician sacral carving of the second part of the 19th century – the first half of the 20th century.

Rosette, a symbolized image of a flower, is one of the most popular motifs of the floral ornament that is probably related with the cult of the Sun¹⁹. These solar symbols were very popular with Slavs: they were used in the decoration of houses, furniture, household items and lingered on in art, having lost their original symbolic meaning²⁰. As researchers believe, with the strengthening of the Christianity pagan cults (including cults of the heavenly bodies) gradually disappeared, however, their symbolic images continued to exist; moreover, the same images in the art of the Kyivan Rus could have both decorative and symbolic meaning²¹. Carved rosettes decorate the sarcophagus from the Church of the Tithes (the first part of the 11th century). Each rosette is placed in the centre of a circle-like element of the ornament. Rosettes also decorate various slates in the Cathedral of St. Sophia²². Whirling, cross-like and flower-like rosettes are present in all these decorations.

The presence of cross-like rosettes can be seen as an interpretation of their interrelation with the Christian cult, since the origin of the cross is similar to the origin of solar symbols. This is particularly noticeable in the analysis of carved plates of parapets of the choir loft of the Cathedral of Our Saviour in Chernihiv. The basis of the carved composition of the plate is formed by a rhombus with inscribed rosettes. Four big rosettes are located at the corners of a rectangular plate. Two of them are cross rosettes. Therefore, the circle, the cross and the rosette were combined in a single element in the ancient Ukrainian art. Undoubtedly, this element could have the old meaning of the solar symbol, and now is used simultaneously with the cross, a symbol of the Christianity.

¹⁷ *Culture and Household of the Population of Ukraine*, 1991, Kyiv: Lybid, p. 185.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

¹⁹ *Applied and Decorative Arts: Dictionary: in 2 Volumes*, 2000, Lviv: Afisha. V. 2, p. 175.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 231.

²¹ *The history of Ukrainian art: in 6 volumes* (head. Ed. M. P. Bazhan), Kyiv, URE, 1966–1970. V. 2, p. 231

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 230–233.

According to the published data, the rosette, cross, circle-like rosette and other variations of these elements were present on the Trypillia-Cucuteni ceramic ware (over 4 thousand years B.C.)²³, therefore they existed in the territory of Ukraine already in the pre-Christian period. After the Middle Ages, solar symbols in Ukrainian art revived in the decorative graphic framing of pages of printed publications, carving of icon-cases which received picturesque icons in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Thus, decorative carved ornamentation of icon-cases is sometimes aligned with the graphics of Ukrainian books of the 16th-18th centuries – it is sufficient to compare the ornamentation of framing of Ukrainian icons in the 15th-16th centuries²⁴ and framing of graphical portraits of Basil the Great from the *Ordinarius* as of 1604 from Striatyn²⁵ or St. Calista from the frontispiece of the *Didactic Gospel* as of 1606, from Krylos²⁶. Separate ornamental motifs of this framing resemble the carved motifs of not only icon-cases, but also of the holy gates in churches of Galicia in the 17th century²⁷ or the holy gates from Sopit village²⁸.

A peculiar feature of both above-mentioned engravings is the decoration in the form of the rosette flower in the bottom part. The character of the ornamentation of these printed books is distinguished by an attempt to emphasize the three-dimensional plasticity of the rosette. In the engraving that pictures the face of Basil the Great, the round rosette flower is complemented by images in both bottom corners of the semicircular rosette flower, the same as in the composition of the decorative carving of icon-cases “in the Ukrainian style” of the beginning of the 20th century, in particular in the decoration of the icon-case with the central image of Jesus Christ from the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Drohobych, in Lviv region. Thus, the decorative Ukrainian-style carving of church interior items of the early 20th century is interconnected not only with the Ukrainian decorative graphics of the early 20th century, as written before, and ornamental and compositional systems of the traditional folk art, but also with the graphics of the Ukrainian old printed books, in particular with the graphic image of Basil the Great from the Ordinal from Striatyn of the early 17th century.

It should be emphasized that compositional elements in the form of a circle or semi-circle decorate corners of graphical framings of a number of other engravings of that time, similar to the above-mentioned *Saint Calista*.

²³ Iryna Kodlubai and Oles’Noha, *Ancient Ukraine*. Lviv: Ukrainski tekhnolohii, 2000, p. 97.

²⁴ Yakym Zapasko, *Art of book on Ukraine in XVI–XVIII of century*. Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Lvivskoho Universytetu, 1971, p. 15.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

²⁷ Mykhailo Drahan, *Ukrainian decorative carving in the XVI–XVIII centuries*. Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1970, p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

All four corners of the engraving are decorated by animalistic compositions in a circle. Therefore, on one side the circle is still used as one of the transformed solar symbols (rosette flower, sun etc.) and on the other side the internal filling with animalistic elements continues traditions of the animal-like style popular in arts of other nations and the Ukrainian Middle Ages.

Solar symbols, usually in the form of a rosette flower or head of a flower, were widely used in the sacral carving in the territory of Galicia in Renaissance or Baroque ages in the same places as in ancient books – i.e. in corners. In the decoration of icon-cases they are usually situated above or under columns or pilasters that flank the painted image, as, for example, in a number of icon-cases from Galician Lemkivshchyna: from Banytsia village (1735) and others that are a part of the collection of the regional museum in Nowy Sącz (today – Lesser Poland Province, Poland²⁹). A bit later, the rosette motif in this place was replaced by the *sunflower* motif³⁰. The increasing popularity of the sunflower motif in the church decorative carving went hand in hand with the graphics. Thus, the crucifixion figure on the frontispiece of the Book of Devotions (1646) is flanked with painted compositions framed by sunflowers³¹, similar to painted medallions on the holy gates. Flowers from the page of Kyiv *Apostolus* (1722) closely resemble the sunflower³².

The motif of the rosette flower and sunflower was used in Baroque decorative carving of the holy gates in the 17th-18th centuries. A typical example is illustrated by the holy gates of the first half of the 17th century³³ from Horodok (Lviv region). The rosette flower decorates the centre and the edges of the cross located on the leaves of the gates between painted oval medallions. In the 18th century, rosette flowers interwoven into the fine open-work of both leaves of the holy gates adorn the gates from Dolyna (Ivano-Frankivsk region)³⁴.

With the course of time, the holy gates were more often decorated by heads of the sunflowers, similar to pilaster stands and icon-cross columns, what can be interpreted as further transformation of the rosette as a solar symbol. This is, first of all, the case of the holy gates decorated by the motifs of the Tree of Jesse, like the holy gates of the Church of Saint George (1874), Leshchativ village (doors from the 18th century) of Sokal district, Lviv region. Portrait sculptures of the kings and Virgin Mary with the Baby in the upper part are coming from the horizontally located head of sunflower. The similar location of the sunflower can be seen in the composition of the holy

²⁹Roman Odrekhivskiy, *Carving of Lemkivshchyna*. Lviv: Spolom, 1998, pp. 21, 24, 25.

³⁰*Ibidem*, p. 22.

³¹Yakym Zapasko, *Art of book on Ukraine in XVI – XVIII of century*, Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Lvivskoho Universytetu, 1971, p. 120.

³²*Ibidem*, p. 207.

³³*Ibidem*, p. 61.

³⁴*Ibidem*, p. 62.

gates in the Church of the Holy Trinity (the 20s of the 18th century) from Zhovkva (Lviv region). In Baroque times, the sunflower motif became popular, namely in the decoration of holy gates with the motif of the Tree of Jesse³⁵.

The sunflower motif became especially popular in the period of imitation of historical styles in the late 19th century – the early 20th century. One of the examples is represented by the holy gates from the Church of the Assumption of Mary (1904) from Stryi (Lviv region). Sunflower heads elegantly fit into the harmonic variety of other symbols (grapes, wheat ear etc.). The stylization of the sunflower in the ornamentation of these gates is very generalized and is approached to understand the rosette flower as a traditional solar symbol. The sunflower motif is powerful in the decoration of the holy gates (early 20th century) of the iconostasis of the Onuphrius Church in Lviv (**Fig. 1**).



Fig. 1. *The iconostasis of the Saint Onuphrius Church in Lviv (fragment),*
Photo: Roman Odrekivskyi.

The general principle of the gates composition vaguely resembles the ornamentation of the holy gates in the Church of Saint Paraskeva (1758) from Busk, Lviv region. The floral motif with an interwoven head of the sunflower goes vertically and straight up from the cup.

³⁵ The Tree of Jesse is a traditional image of the family tree of Jesus Christ from Adam to Joseph.

Traditions of adornment of column or pilaster stands with the solar symbol of the rosette flower, as in the decoration of icon-cases of the 17th- the 18th century, survived until the turn of the 20th century, when they were mostly used in the decoration of stands under columns that flank the holy gates or icons of the iconostases or the icon inserted into the icon-case, as in the iconostasis and some icon-cases from the Church of the Assumption of Mary (1901) in Slavske, Skole district, Lviv region. The prevalence of this ornament in the whole territory of Galicia is evidenced by the analysis of iconostases from churches of other regions of this area, for example the same parts of the iconostasis in the Church of Michael the Archangel from Yaremche (Dora) of Ivano-Frankivsk region. By its generalized forms and emphasized silhouette of the circle, the stylization of the rosette flower resembles the iconostasis from Slavske.

In view of the sculptural presentation of iconostases, the interpretation of the rosette flower in both rosettes is distinguished by the high relief of the plastics. Therefore, the rosette flower that decorates the same parts of the iconostasis in the Church of the Assumption of Mary in Yaremche is more planar, the same as the sculptural presentation of the whole carved ornamentation of the iconostasis in this church.

Solar symbols, principally in the form of a rosette, decorate a number of handmade crosses of the late 19th – the early 20th century, primarily the front side with the image of the Crucifixion, as on the handmade cross from the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Sanok. There are also cases of such decoration of the reverse side of the cross with the image of the Virgin Mary, not Jesus Christ. Consequently, cross rosettes decorate all four corners of the reverse side of the handmade cross with the image of the Virgin Mary from the Church of the Transfiguration in Volosianka village of Skole district of Lviv region.

Images of solar symbols prove the interrelation with traditional plots of icons, where solar symbols in stylized forms of the sun, moon and similar symbols were pictured in the upper part of a number of icons, flanking the plot of the Crucifixion³⁶. Evidently, this composition of the icon influenced the composition of the corresponding part of the seven-pointed cross from Maniava analyzed above (**Fig. 2**). The middle part of the Crucifixion image is flanked by the sun on the right and the moon on the left³⁷.

Two opposite heavenly powers - the Sun and the Moon - are pictured on the cross. The problem of their interaction excited the imagination of humans since olden times. As researchers note, these are the symbols and

³⁶ The Crucifixion from Vovche village of Lviv region. End of the 16th century. National Museum of Lviv. Ind. No. 25366/1-1730 and a number of other icons.

³⁷ As on the icon "The Passion of Christ" from Skole, the first half of the 17th century (National Museum of Lviv) No. 36609/i 2278 and many others.

natural forms of the duality in the society – a man and a woman³⁸. Semantics of these and other cosmological symbols and their association with social philosophy present topics for future scientific research. The cult of cosmological symbols could not exist by itself. It had to be connected to the social life, to traditions and laws of everyday life.



Fig. 2. Cross from Maniava. Photo: Roman Odrekhiivskyi.

Planking of the upper part of a composition by symbols of the sun on the right and of the moon on the left side from Jesus can be found in ancient Ukrainian books, in particular on the illustration in “Book on the Priesthood” (1614)³⁹, where the Crucifixion on the cross is flanked by four figures of the Standing, the same as in the carved ornaments on handmade wooden crosses of the second half of the 19th century – the early 20th century. In compositions of handmade carved crosses of the 17th century – the 18th century, the image of the Crucifixion was surrounded by way more figures than on engravings. A typical example is the handmade cross (1683) from the Castle Museum in

³⁸ Orest Khmelovskiy, *Theory of creation of character*, Lutsk: Lutskiy derzhavnyi tekhnichnyi universytet, 2000, p. 197.

³⁹ Yakym Zapasko, *Art of book on Ukraine in XVI – XVIII of century*, Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Lvivskoho Universytetu, 1971, p. 93.

Łańcut⁴⁰. The figure of Jesus Christ in the composition of this cross is flanked by a great number of figures of the Standing. These figures are so schematic that it is difficult to carry out any specific analysis and identify each one of them in accordance with the Gospels. Most of the figures are located behind the row of the front figures. We can see only upper parts and nimbi of figures from the back rows. This diversification is additionally underlined by the height of the relief: the back figures with only upper parts of heads visible are performed in the lower relief.

This versatility and creation of the effect of a great number of people by the difference of heights between the front row and the back row of figures is practically absent in handmade crosses of the second half of the 10th century – the first half of the 20th century. In separate cases, the figure of the crucified Jesus in compositions of handmade crosses from the 17th-18th centuries was flanked only by two figures of the Standing. However, this scene was complemented by multi-figure scenes of the Standing with diversified heights of the relief on other edges of the cross, as for example on the cross from 1678 in the museum of Przemyśl Land⁴¹. In crosses of the second half of the 19th century - the first half of the 20th century, figures in such scenes were pictured more ornamentally and, as a rule, either on the same height or on different heights of the relief as compared to the figure of the crucified Saviour.

Solar symbols also decorate carved crosses on the memorial carved ornaments of Galicia of the late 19th – the early 20th century. Mostly, only the objects of stone carving from that period survived until now. For example, the distinguishing feature of crosses with the Crucifixion from Brusno in Lubaczów County (today Podkarpackie Voivodeship of Poland) is the absence of the traditional cartouche in the upper part of the cross with the inscription INRI⁴². Instead, the cross rosette is pictured in this place having either the bold relief projecting above the background in some cases or the concave relief deepened into the background⁴³. In rare cases, similar to carving of separate handmade wooden crosses, solar symbols in the memorial carving decorate the cross not only above the Crucifixion, but also under it, as on the cross belonging to the same Brusno stone-cutting school (1908, Bobiatyn village, Sokal district, Lviv region). Concave carved rosettes adorn the cross: one – under the figure of the Crucifixion, and two – below the Crucifixion, flanking the cup decorated with the bold relief carving⁴⁴. Therefore, the ancient solar symbols – primarily in the form of the rosette,

⁴⁰ Castle Museum in Łańcut. Ind. No. 12030 (Poland).

⁴¹ Museum of Przemyśl Land. Ind. No. 1534. (Poland).

⁴² Roman Odrekhiivskiy, "The Village of Brusno as a Centre of Stone Crafts." *Mystetstvoznavstvo '2000*. Lviv, 2001, p. 91.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁴ Roman Odrekhiivskiy, "The Memorial Stone Sculpture of Sokal Region, Late XIXth – Early XXth cc." *Narodoznavchi zoshyty*. Iviv. Volume 2, 1999, pp. 252-253.

sun, moon, head of a flower – were widely used in the decorative carving in Galicia in the second half of the 19th - first half of the 20th century.

2.3 The value of the character system

Ancient cosmological symbols accompanied both the everyday life and the religious cult of Ukrainians. They contained a deep philosophical symbolism and symbolized, as we assume, the well-being and success in endeavours. Their anthropoid and other functions are also under-investigated. We share the opinion of other researchers that with the course of time the ornamentation of these symbols lost its ancient meaning and their decorative function came out on top⁴⁵. Thus, images of the star, moon, sun, cosmic nebula have already been perceived as purely decorative elements, although they appeared as cosmological symbols with many above-mentioned meanings and properties and, as we assume, with the applied cult meaning.

Evidently, since the time of origination of the Christianity symbolic symbols (including former cosmological ones) underwent a certain evolution of development. At the early stage of their existence, Christians used secret symbols that “pagans did not understand” hiding from persecutions⁴⁶. Among them there were symbolic hidden crosses (anchor, ornaments with a cross, and cross on the Eucharistic bread)⁴⁷. The cross in pre-Christian images was assessed as a solar symbol, and therefore a cosmological symbol.

These symbols re-emerged in the church carving of the 19th century – the early 20th century, such as the image of the anchor and laurel wreath on the side wall of tetrapods or altars in a number of cathedral (tetrapod - the Church of the Assumption of Mary from Boryslav (Mrazhnytsia), Lviv region, 1929, altar - the Church of Saint Nicholas in Lviv of the early 20th century and others.

At the turn of the 20th century the images of the *anchor*⁴⁸ and *laurel wreath* can be also met in the cemetery memorial carving of many places in Galicia. Thus, hidden Christian symbols from the catacomb times were reproduced at the turn of the 20th century.

After 313 year A.D., i.e. after the official recognition of the Christianity in the Roman Empire, these hidden symbols were no longer necessary (Krekhovetskyi, 2000, p. 45)⁴⁹, and Christians started to use open images, such as the fish, the lamb, the image of Jesus Christ as the God-man,

⁴⁵ *Culture and Household of the Population of Ukraine*, Kyiv: Lybid, 1991, p. 187.

⁴⁶ Orest Khmelovskiy, *Theory of creation of character*, Lutsk: Lutskiy derzhavnyi tekhnichnyi universytet, 2000, p. 35.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Anchor - the hidden cross of Jesus as a symbol of resistance in faith (a boat symbolized the church) from the catacomb times of the Christianity (Krekhovetskyi, 2000, p. 28).

⁴⁹ Orest Khmelovskiy, *Theory of creation of character*, Lutsk: Lutskiy derzhavnyi tekhnichnyi universytet, 2000, p. 45.

as well as the image of the Crucifixion that was not used until the 4th century⁵⁰. In the 4th century, relief carved works and statues with the image of Jesus Christ - the Good Shepherd - appeared in addition to fresco paintings⁵¹.

As P. Herchanivska rightfully mentioned, “in the communicative and transmitting process, the folk Christian culture presents a symbolic system that helps to exchange the religious information between individuals in the spatial-temporal system of coordinates, as well as the connection between a believer and the transcendental reality (God).

This is an open dynamic system that originated and developed on the basis of religious consciousness which contains the Christian, pagan and household components. Syncretism of the Christian and pagan symbolics, generalization and abstractness of meaning of symbols, polysemanticism of their comprehension are the main peculiarities of the symbolic system in the cultural traditions of the Ukrainian people. Notwithstanding certain transformations of separate elements of the symbolic system that took place in time of transfer from one system of coordinates to another, the symbolism as a property of the folk Christian culture remains invariant”⁵².

Conclusions

Thus, cosmological symbols that traditionally adorned the interior and exterior of the Ukrainian churches had a deep symbolical meaning. As a consequence, we can conclude that a number of pagan symbols were gradually, harmonically and organically included into the everyday Christian symbolics, whereas while being in the church an individual stayed in the holistic world, not in the chaotic and controversial one that existed outside the church. In our next research we will provide insight into the interpretation of symbolics of cosmological symbols for the agricultural, hunting and other rituals of the ancient Ukrainians and characteristics of the graphic forms of their images.

List and source of illustrations:

Figure 1. The iconostasis of the Saint Onuphrius Church in Lviv (fragment). Photo: Roman Odrekhivskyi

Figure 2. Cross from Maniava. Photo: Roman Odrekhivskyi.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁵² Polina Herchanivska, “Sign-symbolic nature of folk christian culture,” *Kultura i suchasnis*, Volume 2, 2010, p. 35.

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