

SCOPE ACADEMIC HOUSE

4<sup>th</sup> International Conference  
«ROLE OF NONMATERIAL FACTORS IN ENSURING  
THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITION OF A SOCIETY»

November 10, 2016, Sheffield, UK

Conference Proceedings



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поколения от влияния различного рода вредных идей и идеологий, одним словом, от нравственных угроз является актуальнейшей задачей современности.

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## ART CRITICISM

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### BELARUSSIAN NATIONAL FOLK TOY: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, PRESENT SITUATION

*S. Andryevskaja*<sup>1</sup>

#### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the role of a toy in the national culture of the Belarussians. The toys embodied symbolism of the national culture, aesthetic views of the nation. Here are considered functions and the role of colour symbolism of the traditional toy in the national culture and its place in modern life.

*Keywords:* belarussian national folk toy, the national culture, colour symbolism, functions of the traditional toy.

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The history of a nation begins from the history of a childhood. Traditional culture permits the only way of transition – new generations absorb from the elder their world outlook, life ideals, aesthetic views and so on [1, p. 125]. "Personal" inclusion into national culture begins from the earliest childhood. One of the main means of such inclusion is play and toy.

Toy is a thing used for the purpose of children's play. By introducing real and imaginary objects and images it helps a child to apprehend its environment, it also serves as a means of psychological, aesthetic and physical education. At the same time toy is a kind of folk arts, and its direct function has not always been playing the leading part. Exactly in the toy were revealed the ideas of folk craftsmen about the world, nature and people. Using the minimum resources, they produced bright images that still live and impress us [2, p. 10].

The art of toy-making is one of the most ancient, that is why it demands a thorough study. But belarussian toy is studied insufficiently due to a number of objective reasons: insufficient attention of investigators towards so-called "children" culture; location of the territory in the outlying districts of the states, part of which it had been, and so on.

However, according to archaeological discoveries on the territory of modern Belarus, the first toys made of clay appeared already during the late Stone Age (II-IV centuries BC) [3, p. 32]. Scientists suppose that besides playing function they also performed magic one – protection from evil spirits. The basic motifs were: an egg, a duck or a bird, human and animal statuettes. Subjects like that were made of other materials: bones, wood, horns, later – metals [1, p. 126]. Especially interesting in that relation is the collection of fine plastic arts, found at the banks of the river Dnieper. It includes about a hundred statuettes and fragments, images depicting domestic and wild animals [1, p. 125].

More and more material was found by later excavation. At many sites of ancient settlements of the early Iron Age in Eastern Europe (including Belarus) one can find hollow clay balls, cylinders, eggs with a stone or a clay pea inside. When being shaken they produce muffled cracking. There is no doubt that the majority of such handicrafts were used as children's toys; the holes at the ends indicate that. With the help of the holes the toys were hung in front of a baby. But some of the things do not have such holes; still they were ornamented by different signs. More of it, the things of this kind are frequently

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found together with ritual objects; this fact confirms the supposition about their ritual meaning [4, p. 59].

Among the toys of the XII-XVIIIth centuries one can find abundant examples of shape and decoration. The same clay toys are represented most widely, in Belarus one can also find among them samples covered with green, brown, yellow glaze, of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic shapes.

Summing it up, one may say that toys were illustrating, in their own way, the mythology of Slavonic peasants; their outward appearance was also determined by the mythology [4, p. 47].

The traditions of toy-making are kept till nowadays without considerable changes. The flourishing of traditional toy production was in the XIXth-beginning of the XXth century [1, p. 125]. Just exactly during that time every belarussian fair couldn't do without abundance of bright coloured cocks, sheep, horses, ducks made of different materials. They were cheap and popular amusement for children. But, nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that on the territory of Belarus toy production didn't acquire the character of independent trade, as it took place, for instance, in Russia [3, p. 38].

Till nowadays not many toys were kept, especially made of such short – lived materials as wood, grass, paper, fabric. The reason for that is toy production in Belarus was not considered a serious business, and was cheap. It was easier to make a new toy than to keep an old one.

Today the interest toward belarussian national folk is being revived. In the beginning of the 90ieth in the XXIeth century there were opened Houses as Handicraft – cultural organizations, the aim of which was outlined as support and revival of belarussian national folk handicraft. Modern belarussian toy-makers cooperate with these cultural organizations. There also work single toy-makers, but the number of them lessens. Old hereditary craftsmen die, but they are replaced by young ones. Sure, the youth is not connected directly with traditional culture, but nevertheless they try to create their own things according to accepted "canons". Contemporary craftsmen receive diverse and extensive information, it nourishes creative approach towards work of studies of folk culture. Plastic language of a toy, its artistic image is the reflection of the dialogue of craftsman's hand and soul.

In the creative work of modern belarussian craftsmen one can trace two conventional directions.

The first is archaic. The toys of the direction are deprived of details and individual peculiarities. They reproduce only the most typical features of a character. Such toys represent only distinctive symbol that affords a child to release its imagination. Peculiarities of each part of the toy are emphasized by one or two details: a house has a lissome neck, a ram has curled horns, a duck has a flat beak. Figures are not dismembered, static, frontal. The subjects of this kind of toys are also interesting – they are half horses – half birds, ducks, cocks, bears, eggs, anthropomorphic toys and so on, one can say, classic variants. In such manner, work basically old craftsmen, keeping to ancient traditions.

The other direction is more modernist. What concerns its character, it is naive-romantic. The toys are thoroughly worked out, brightly coloured. The toys of the kind appeared as a response to life. Craftsmen were introducing new subjects (for example, folk tales' characters). Young craftsmen work in such manner. Though the direction is for from new, it appeared at the beginning of the XXth century. The reason of their emerging was the incentive to endure competition with bright and garish toy of neighbouring regions while widening trading conditions. Belarussian toy is not bright, that is in its character, but in order to attract the customer, toy-makers started using unusual colours and subject.

What concerns the subjects of national belarussian toy, their character is close to the subjects of neighbouring and more distant nations. Such internationality of basic toy



subjects was emphasized by ethnographers in the XIX – the beginning of the XXth centuries [5, p. 19]. The outward appearance of the subjects is conditioned by ancient mythological views. Thus, toys looking like birds are connected with calendar agricultural celebrations. Things made of pastry, clay, wood, depicting birds were devoted to the beginning of agricultural season. One of the most popular was the image of a cock, connected with solar (sun) cult. Its images can be found in national embroidery. This fact gives evidence of sacredness of the bird [4, p. 91].

The next subject of belarussian national folk toy – a ram – is very popular in toy-making. The reason of such popularity is unknown, for national folklore frequently mentions a he-gout. It is one of sacred animals of belarussian folk. But perhaps the image of a he-gout in national folk toy was replaced by more decorative image of a ram due to its peculiarities – curled horns and wool. But it may be so that its popularity was connected with the tradition of autumn shearing that was a peculiar ritual holiday. A ram could be depicted because in many rituals its fell was used as a symbol of fertility, wealth and prosperity.

To the mentioned subjects one should add the image of a bear. The character belongs to popular folk arts, its origin is being linked with totemism times. In national folk tales it usually acts as a half-animal – half-human [1, p. 127].

A peculiar group is presented by images bearing anthropomorphic character: a doll and a horseman. Exactly in these images one can feel the influence of time, way of life and taste, though the origin of the images is also connected with mythology and agricultural rituals [2, p. 7].

The subject of a horse or a half-horse – half-bird is undoubtedly linked with solar cult.

It is hard to reveal the meaning of the symbol of egg in the toy, it is likely to symbolize life, the symbol of arrangement of the world. It is the most archaic of the toys.

Here is far from full review of belarussian national folk toy. Interest that emerges to this kind of art emphasizes its urgency and multifacetedness. In spite of multitude of research works devoted to the problems connected with the development of toy production of neighbouring nations, the toy in Belarus remains in many respects uninvestigated. The necessity of its study is conditioned by the fact that until today still work belarussian craftsmen that keep to national traditions.

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