

The Art of Wood Carving in Carpathians

Ukrainian master of aesthetics from Boikivshchyna

Oleh Bolyuk

Abstract. Based on one of the most important theoretical approaches – systematic – it was considered creative and emotional activity of masters-carvers in Boikivshchyna. As the result of this work became artistic and aesthetic products for household, ceremonial, religious and other purposes. The main attention is paid to the types of woodcarving, local artistic preferences and product range of Ukrainian highlanders in one of the parts of the Ukrainian Carpathians. Chronological retrospective made it possible to trace individual sustainability of creative ideas and their modern interpretation.

Keywords: wood carving; master; aesthetics; Boikivshchyna; Ukrainian Carpathian mountains.

1. Introduction

Woodworking – one of the oldest areas of human activity. Even in modern progress in nanotechnology utility of this material is quite broad. In addition to environmental friendliness and practicality wood disposes several other properties, among that, important is the aesthetic appeal. As a result of implementation successful artistic ideas is exquisite ornamentation and plastic surfaces of wooden objects, that are the reasons of original works. Those that contain unique natural texture, distinct surface, elegant tectonics, or even additional surface finishing, are a valuable result of human creativity, collective artistic ideas of dynasty, ethnos or nations [Liep 2001, 6]. These art products, made by talented people help to develop sense of taste both the authors and the users.

Special virtuosity in the art of wood carving reach masters for whom raw materials are readily available, have at least the minimum conditions for engaging in favorite business and the environment. The environment that would properly evaluate products, honor the work of the author and promote him to manufacture these products. Masters gain experience through their self-study and activity, on that reason, works of art even of one author visually differ with respect to time from their own manufacture.

The Ukrainians of Carpathian mountains, slopes of which are still rich in forests own creative potential and appropriate conditions for artistic woodworking. These mountains inhabited by three ethnic groups of Ukrainians – Boykos, Hutsuls, Lemkos – which, despite a number of common national traits are carriers of individual features of the local culture. The differences between them are seen, in particular, in the artistic woodworking.

1.1. Object of investigation.

The purpose of the article is the popularization of Boykos aesthetic preferences, which are reflected in their expressive works of artistic woodworking. This paper is the first part. The next two parts author intends to devote to aesthetics manufacture of wood products by Hutsuls and Lemkos, who are neighbors of Boykos.

Defining features of Boikivshchyna Highlanders aesthetics received from art analysis of wood products, including traditional range and specific decor. The object of study is wooden items that contain elements of artistic woodworking of highlanders-masters of ethnographic Ukrainian Carpathians.

1.2. Experimental details

To complete the task and achieve the designated goal it was used the method of formal analytical comparison of Boykos art wooden works that reflect personal creative experiments of their authors, the collective aesthetic tastes of users, specific artistic preferences. The scientific value of this paper is a supplement knowledge about cultural heritage of one of the three Ukrainian ethnographic groups in social, anthropological, cultural and art dimensions. The received information is practical push to promote traditional art of Boykos as a marker of ethnic identity in the modern process of total globalization.

1.3. State of study

Ukrainians, as many other ethnoses tend to use wooden products almost daily. The complex of aesthetic and ecological properties of wood and

its sacralization in the spiritual and material life of each nation was the main strong motivation to create unique products. It is written hundreds of scientific papers, popular articles and mentioned online sources about the phenomenon of collective creativity [Leroi-Gourhan 1964–1965; Gell 1998; Hallam, Ingold, Donner 2007].

The first mention of the use of wood in the everyday life of Ruthenians reflected back in the Galician-Volhynian and Kyiv chronicles [Laurentian Codex 1872, 23].

The original pagan belief of Ruthenians, formed over many centuries left influence of the perception of the world, vision and understanding of the environment, natural phenomena, which are reflected in the symbols printed on the details of Christian places of worship [Kyssil 1995, 209–212]. Images of symbolic sign, element on the plane or spatial form carved attribute became firmly strong in ritual objects, life of ancient Ukrainian at over vast areas of autochthonous territory. Elements of universal carved ornamentation (circles, rosettes, carved bands etc.) have not lost sacred significance during Christianization, although the main attention was focused on the symbol of the cross.

In the Ukrainian scientific literature carving was mainly seen in the context of building decoration, craft products, souvenirs and exhibition products of the centre or eminent personalities [Bolyuk 2018, 543–592; Bolyuk 2018, 517–542; Budzan 1960; Stankiewicz 2002; Taras 2007; Zaharchuk-Chugai 1979].

The artistic woodworking has been developed differently on the Ukrainian ethnographic region of the Carpathian landscape. The emergence, development and extinction (transformation) of artistic phenomenon – are natural periods in art related to favorable climatic conditions and available material resources, social and political events, prevalence of the major sectors of creativity in the region and demand of their works in public. A similar recurrence is peculiar to artistic woodworking.

This general conclusion derived from the study of special literature, archival sources, and based on numerous field studies of the author's complex scientific expeditions in 1998, 2001, 2013–2016 and after individual art trips [Bolyuk 2019, 63].

1.4. Main part. General remarks

Wood carving is the kind of creativity that belong to arts and crafts, and at the same time is the technological sector of artistic processing of natural materials, which is classified into types of carving by technical parameters and plastic figures.

Generally, Ukrainians know except carving, such technological sectors of woodworking industry as carpentry, cooperage, wood joinery and wood turnery [Stankevych 2002, 29]. Products manufactured through these branches, masters sometimes decorated with carvings. Ukrainians from Carpathians know all techniques of carving: flat, relief carving, counter-relief carving, chip (delicate), carving in the Round (volume).

The Ukrainian lexicon use language definitions of «Hutsuls carving» and «carving of Hutsulshchyna», «Lemkos carving» and «carving of Lemkivshchyna» which have to be distinguished. They emerged in publicism in the late XIX – early XX centuries. In particular, they happen as synonyms by the authors of the first regional studies, in the special literature and oral narratives. We will consider them in details in the following parts of the paper, which cover carving of Hutsulshchyna and Lemkivshchyna.

As regards the expression of «Boykos carving», it almost did not happen for various reasons. Sometimes it seems that Boyko haven't practiced this kind of work. This general opinion prevails due to a number of factors, among which should be called socio-anthropological: individual mentality of master Boyko, collective mentality of Boykos, and, at the end, poor promotion of this kind of art, especially among tourists and holiday-makers, even in the present.

2. Aesthetics of Carving in Boikivshchyna: archaic and monumentality

Boyko is still conservative, compared with its neighbors – Hutsul and Lemko. He formed his pragmatism on the basis of it, including a practice of carving. In Boyko's culture even recently you could encounter established, mostly elsewhere forgotten features of creative tradition. The Boykos are the guardians of the archaic that can be find only in Polishchuks on the north of Ukraine, but those prevailing other accents of aesthetic preferences.

Aesthetics of carved crafts items and decoration of dimensional structures in ethnographic Boikivshchyna are generally characterized by the following features as pithiness in the use of decor; limited number of the most common motives in carving; frequently expressed geometric forms and patterns, but avoiding explicit geometry in composition sometimes seems as certain negligence. However, the actual last characteristic indicates that Boyko carver is an artist, not only a originator of fragments of universal ornament, which is typical for accurate Hutsul. This kind of «picturesque» in graphics of Boiko wood carving is particularly noticeable in small nuances of decor.

This is the motive of one of the oldest technical kind of flat carving – contour, line, «girdle». Generally, scratched line that is formed with a simple tool (knife or cutter), in a narrow socket in the thick material, is not only one of the simple

elements of decoration, but an expression of aesthetic taste, talent, skill hands of its author.

Contour carving (other names – «dry», «clean», «linear») is peculiar for decorated products of all Ukrainian ethnic groups. Boyko master-carver kept it as a leitmotif of any decorated wooden product. Even in conjunction with other technical kinds of flat carving – notched, like a nail, triangular-notched – contour played an important role, and even was dominated in the composite solutions of decor on the plane. Boyko loved to decorate not only the small everyday things by simple linear motif, but magnificent temple structures, known far beyond the borders of the land. Actually, among all specialties of woodworking, Boyko is consummate woodworker, especially in building churches and homes. Luka Snigur (1853–1928) was the most famous among carpenters from the village Pohar, Skole district, Lviv region. He left a remarkable heritage of Boykos construction – more than half hundred of residential and public buildings, carved iconostases.

We did not encounter anywhere else in the Carpathian Mountains such a magnificent authentic church architecture as in Boikivshchyna. Churches that have stepped towers with «zaloms» were repeatedly mentioned by researchers and compared with Chinese pagodas or geographically opposite Scandinavian architecture [Grabar, 1911].

The harmonious striving upwards as the outline exterior of wooden church and unexpected abruptness of «rise into the sky» during the transition from dim pryтвор «babinets» to the nave – only a few virtuous and favorite techniques used by Boyko carpenter. No wonder, that the Church of the Holy Virgin (St. Vlmch. Demetrios) 1838, Matkiv village, Turka district, Lviv region and Archangel Michael Church 1745, Uzhok village, Velykoberezhnyansky district, Transcarpathian region among 16 Ukrainian churches belong to the UNESCO World Heritage [Wooden Churches of Ukraine – UNESCO World Heritage]. It is in the Boyko churches feels archaic of ancient Rus-Ukraine.

Perfect knowledge of the construction business and consideration of overall calculation, allowed Boyko-carpenter to create not only structurally sophisticated structures, but also to make certain liveliness forms or architectural object, or household products. For example, ends of grated half logs («plenytsya», «polovitsa») when they made in the frame, carpenters not leveled them to the «crown», but left different lengths. Accordingly, the corners of buildings formed fancy picturesque silhouettes. This figurative picturesque of the walls of Boyko houses was in harmony with high thatched roofs and in the imagination created the image of the boy with a hat. Boyko-creator is in love with the simplicity of line – more precisely, in its naturalness, which he derived from the natural environment.

Boykos ability to combine the monumental forms with the simplest carved motif convince their housing. A clear example of it is the portal of Boiko gallery house 1910, Tukholka village, Skole district, Lviv region. (Exhibit of the Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life of Clement Sheptytsky). The straight horizontal lines are carved there, they seen in the composition as pozem (land) and spiral curls that resemble curly stems with leaves of a plant – the basic elements of portal decor. Only by certain accents serve notched sixpetalous rosettes and small radiant flowers. In the interpretation of this composition is a double reading: carving reflects the floral and cosmogonic worlds. An arched entry hole, convex scallops and junctions of structural elements only enhance the light-shadow game scratched by cutter contour of carving. The list of exquisite artistic ideas of anonymous Boyko carpenter refer to decorated with notched rosettes and «twisted» spirals columns of galleries, dotted with rosette portal of porch, which crowned with equilateral cross, profiled brackets of the roof.



Fig. 1. Portal of Boiko's house 1910, Tukholka village, Skole district, Lviv region. Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life of Clement Sheptytsky. Boikivshchyna sector. Photo made by Oleh Bolyuk.

This example shows that Boykos paid special attention to the home or temple entrance. Decorated door portals reflect a long old tradition: the entrance to the house understood as a border of public and private, in the church – worldly (profane) and divine (sacred). Accordingly were decorated the

structural elements of portal – the frames, the posts above the threshold by profiled forms and carved motifs, by informative inscriptions.

An important material source of a long tradition are six posts-portals in the form of bow and convex slots which were found by M. Rozhko in the well of the defunct rock fortress Tustan, in the village Urich, Skole district, Lviv region. [Rozhko 1996, 104]. One of them-profiled bulges which seem like curtains.

Another sacred element of the mountain people housing is considered ceiling beam («grahar» «drahar») – a beam that rests on the walls along the room, and serves as a support for boards, ceiling beams. On the lower visible side of drahar in almost every house carved cross, sixpetalous rosette that is sometimes supplemented with notched teeth, the date of construction completion, the name of the master.



Fig. 2-3. Table-box with notched and contour carving (fragment). House of 1812, Lybohora village, Turka district, Lviv region. Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life of Clement Sheptytsky. Boykivshchyna sector. Photo made by Oleh Bolyuk.

Among home arrangement Boykos decorated wooden tables, chests, or their double functional analogs that spread in the nineteenth century – tables, chests, shelves for dishes («mysnyky») «lozhechnyky» (for storage of kitchen and table utensils). Boyko masters competed among themselves, not in ornamented density of planes, as it was typical in Hutsul carving, but in the smooth surface of the product. Therefore, on the products carefully smooth often seen modest ornamental compositions, geometric elements are not identical among themselves, but only likened.



Fig. 4. The ceiling beam (detail) with carved signs. House 1886, the village of Polyana Synevyrska, Mizhirsky district, Transcarpathian region. Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life of Clement Sheptytsky. Boykivshchyna sector. Photo made by Oleh Bolyuk.

One of the favorite subject for decoration were salt shakers and food capacities, consecrated on Easter – «svyatylnychky» («bamboroky»). On the surface of contouring techniques, notched, triangular-notched carving were performed sixpetalous rosettes («sonichka»), linear-ribbon or centric «teeth», which form a double-row offset «snake». The central element, except rosettes, could be a four-, six-, seventh ended or «blooming» crosses. These ornamental motifs usually emphasized forms of the construction or even their deliberately fictional profiled elements.

It should be emphasized that the main sacred symbol of Christianity carved on the wooden monuments of Boikivshchyna – the cross, usually has laconic lines and the motifs of ornaments that decorate it usually are «teeth», «cross-hatching» (writing with a needle) or smoothly made by cutter planes. Solar rosettes still dominate on the houseware products, which complement four-armed crosses of Latin or «Cossack» types [Hoshko 1983, 281–282].

Figurative plastic known as plastic of secular and religious art comes from Boikivshchyna. However it was saved in a little. The bulk of these works will remain forever without a specific definition of authorship as masters only in some cases put their signatures on the product.

One of the surviving ancient monuments is a candlestick XVII century in the form of a lion sitting on the hemisphere, which originated from the former handicraft village Stara Sil, Sambir district, Lviv region. The author of this torch is unknown, but believed that it is the work of local craftsmen. Polychromatic surface of the product assures author's awareness about the craft of church carving. This surface was covered in red, blue, green colors,

gilded and silvered. Colours were deposited on the levkas (an application of a special smooth background) [Hoshko 1983, 286].

On the territory of Boikivshchyna occurred carved wooden sculpture of one or multiple images. Especially popular were the patrons of St. George and the Dragon, St. Archangel Michael, St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, and at most – Crucifixion (Jesus with Mary and John the Evangelist or with instruments of torture) that were installed in the interiors of churches, chapels and near roads. The lack of academic knowledge of human anatomy, ideological system of the environment and personal sense of masters aesthetics were the important criteria that influenced the outcome of the product's manufacture.



Fig. 5. Roadside Cross (Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life of Clement Sheptytsky). Photo made by Oleh Bolyuk.

It's quite problematic to identify features of Boiko original sculpture among similar dimensional Hutsuls and Lemkos plastic by topics and techniques of carving. All wooden carvings of three ethnic groups are characterized by generally simplified interpretation of the human figure, the dynamics of movement, gesture or emotional expression or vice versa – by static silhouette convention, brought to simple schematic. In both cases, compositional

techniques, invariance of iconography that reflect the aesthetics of the master generally talk about common features of carvers from Boikivshchyna, Hutsulshchyna and Lemkivshchyna. Restraint colors or even lack of them on the surface is peculiar to dimensional carved sculptures of Boikivshchyna. Many of Hutsuls works tends to diversity in polychromy. Lemko sculpture is characterized by carefully done cutter planes, brought to realistic forms, often in a reduced scale. This detailing of dimensional products rarely occurred in the area of Boikivshchyna.

It is a new stage of development of the woodcarving art in Eastern Galicia and ethnographic Boikivshchyna with the perception of new technologies and techniques of local craftsmen [Bolyuk 2019, 91]. In the first third of the twentieth century extends contour carving on the tinted surface (oil processing, varnishing, polishing). The final stage of this kind of flat carving is filling contours with aniline colours, it is actually pattern deep into the thick material. Usually dark brown, rarely – black, and dark brown background clearly highlights the colorful carved and painted ornamentation. It is likely that this innovation among Boyko carvers was alternative to Hutsul inlay-«inlet» of colored beads – «koralykiv» («patsorok»).

Contour carving on the toned surface quickly gained popularity and entered into life of highlanders and in public buildings, especially in churches equipment [Bolyuk 2015, 424–432]. Ukrainian national symbols are known by this rare carving examples (trident and flag), approved by the Central Council of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1918. Time range of products is determined by period of national liberation struggle, struggle of conscious Ukrainians with Polish chauvinism, Moscow Bolshevism during 1920–1930 mid. – end of XX century, and eventually gain independence of Ukraine in 1991. Motifs of carving associated with near-geometric polychrome embroidery in Galicia, Bukovina, Podilia as one of the regions of Ukrainian ethnic identity. This change in the aesthetics of art works due to indicative for Ukrainians political events, new materials in the industrial sector, obtaining special education by talented masters, who become professionals and gradually come to place of self-taught folk artists.

The realities of the Soviet period from the late 1960s to the late 1980s led local artists, most of whom acquired profession of woodcarver, produce souvenir products that have little to do with genuine aesthetics. Accepted norms and standards in the souvenir shops of Stryj, Skole, Verkhnye Synyovydyne and other towns in Western Ukraine obliged masters to make boxes, greeting addresses, album-covers, sets for writing, pictures, sharpening buttons, pepper shakers, boxes, etc., using contour-cutting on the tinted with polychrome surface, intarsia, painting that was not typical for this region.

Since the mid. of the XX century first Boiko carvers (Michael Bumba, Bogdan Demian) and then most of the masters assimilate wood engraving

on tinted and varnished board, made bas-relief panneau (a wooden panel) [Demian 1991, 314–319]. Among the topics of images were dominated various compositions, primarily associated with known historical figures (B. Khmelnitsky, O. Dovbush, T. Shevchenko, I. Franko, O. Kobylanska, Lesia Ukrainka), which were a continuation of the tradition of portrait of the first half of the twentieth century. Carvers were forced to produce portraits of the leaders of the Soviet period, corresponding symbols of contemporary totalitarianism (hammer and sickle, five-pointed star emblem and flag of the Soviet Union), supplemented with laurel leaves – a sign of virtually all existing empires in European history. In this case glorified Moscovite empire, which is defined in the art of «Stalinist empire».

One of the favorite topics for relief plaques and engravings were tinted images of mountain landscapes, sometimes with a waterfall, deer, bears. Generally animalistic genre prevailed in carving. Sculptures of realistic images of wild animals or characters of fables were quite popular. Such products can often be seen in the interiors of houses of Ukrainian Highlanders. Boiko masters made in some cases stands «tartschen» (shields) in the twentieth century. Their purpose was to serve as a support for trophy horns (at least – hooves) roe deers, deers and stuffed heads of animals killed through trophy hunting or even stuffed figures of birds. Sometimes such exposure products were used as hangers for various objects. They were usually made for earnings.

Apparently hunting theme came in wood carving of Ukrainian Carpathians from the West (Alps) thanks to the wealthy who liked to enjoy hunting «tartschen» usually in the form of shields (cartouches) that surrounded with carved branches of trees and hunting weapons. The tradition of equipping interiors with stuffed animals did not take place in Boikivshchyna as an objective minimalism of the environment that bordered with strict asceticism and complete harmony with nature were among the basic philosophical beliefs of inhabitants of this land.

The last decade of the XX–XXI century is a period of individual carving practices. Professionals obtained them at specialized training programs and productive facilities. The present stage of artistic carving in Boikivshchyna is an experimental search. It is the use of modern tools, the implementation of ideas that do not always reflect the specific region, and often oriented on the demands of society, including tourists. As a proof of this can be specific souvenir products, overall space carved characters, scenes or abstract shapes of hotels and tourist complexes.

3. Conclusions

Consequently, wood carvings of masters from Boikivshchyna dispose several local art features, which express the aesthetic tastes of the author. There

are ancient motifs of ornaments, including linear elements, solar rosettes, triangular shapes on the surviving monuments of arts and crafts made by Boykos in the last century. These geometric patterns known from the period of Kievan Rus existence, convince of their archaic forms. The centuries of established continuity of images shows the conservative artistic ideas in decoration and at the same time universal reasons that are clear and acceptable for many generations.

Boyko individual elements of the building (portals, window frames, columns and parapets of galleries) are decorated by contour, relief and notched carving, are distinguished from the Hutsul and Lemko housing in folk architecture.

Minimalism of decoration on the surfaces of Boyko products indicates the dominance of pragmatism in the artistic conception of the master. The expediency of making the subject, its practical use, brevity of lines and shape in decor – are the main criteria that were characteristics of wooden products of Boikivshchyna. Lack of a clear scheme of ornaments, certain arbitrary interpretation of geometrical motives are outstanding features of Boiko carving.

4. Bibliography

Bolyuk O. 2015, *Wooden products and their flat carvings on the toned surface in the Ukrainian church, topography and motives in the interior ornaments in History of Religions in Ukraine: Research edition. Lviv Institute of Religious Studies – a branch of the Lviv Museum of the History of Religion*, Lviv: Logos, 424–43.

Bolyuk O. 2019, *Contour polychrome carving as a local ethnic identity marker of western Ukrainians*, Conferință științifică internațională «Patrimoniul cultural de ieri – implicații în dezvoltarea societății durabile de mâine» (ediția I), proiect 19.00059.06.20F / MS, Direcția strategică «Patrimoniul național și dezvoltarea societății », Chișinău: 91.

Bolyuk O. 2018, *Small architectural forms in Church art of Ukraine* in 3 vol. Kharkiv: Folio. Architecture. Monumental art, 517–542.

Bolyuk O. 2019, *Methods of studying the art of wood during complex expeditions 1995–2017 on the territory of Western Ukraine in Sixth Platonic reading on the memory of academician P. Bielecki (1922–1998) devoted to the 20th anniversary of the death of P. Bielecki*, Kyiv: Ukraine Ministry of Culture; The National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, 63.

Bolyuk O. 2018, *Profiles and carving arts in: Church art of Ukraine* in 3 vol. Kharkiv: Folio. Architecture. Monumental art, 543–592.

Budzan A. 1960, *Carving in the Western Ukraine (XIX–XX)*, Kyiv: Printed USSR.

- Demian G. 1991, *Boikivshchyna talents*, Lviv: Kameniar.
- Gell A. 1998, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hallam E., Ingold T., Donner H. (eds.) 2007, *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, Berg Publisher.
- Hoshko Y. (ed.) 1983, *Boikivshchyna: historical and ethnographic studies*, Kyiv: Scientific Thought.
- Grabar I. 1911, *History of Ruthenian art*, Moscow: Ed. I. Knebel, Ed. 8.
- Kyssil I. 1995, *Ivan Ohienko about pre-Christian beliefs and their impact on the Ukrainian ethnic psychology*, «Ethnology notebooks», 4: 209–212.
- Laurentian Codex in 1872, *Publishing of Archaeological Commission*.
- Leroi-Gourhan A. 1964–1965, *Le geste et la parole*, 2 vol. Paris: A. Michel.
- Liep J. (ed.) 2001, *Locating Cultural Creativity*, London–Sterling: Virginia.
- Rozhko M. 1996, *Tustan – Ancient rock fortress*, Kyiv: Scientific Thought.
- Stankevych M. 2002, *Ukrainian wood art of the XVI–XX centuries*, Lviv: Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.
- Taras Y. 2007, *Sacral wooden architecture of Ukrainian Carpathians, cultural and traditional aspect*, Lviv: IN NAS.
- Wooden Churches of Ukraine – World Heritage Site, https://ua.igotoworld.com/ua/article/682_derevyannye-cerkvi-ukrainy-yunesko.htm
- Zaharchuk Chugai R. (ed.) 1979, *Shkribliak's Family: Album*, Kyiv: Art.

