

## The Origin of the Easter Egg and Bunny

### *The Egg*

Many stories relate that at sunset the sun descends into those mysterious waters of chaos out of which the universe was created, and in the midst of which floats the World Egg.

Few Christian historians seem to have any clear ideas about the origin of the Easter egg.

The egg in religious iconography is accepted as a symbol of fertility and immortality, so it is easily seen why it goes with Spring when things sprout back to life. Yet, the Easter egg takes us back—way, way back—to some of the oldest known civilizations on earth; to ancient Egypt and India, where the symbol of an egg plays an important part in mythical accounts of the creation of the world. According to religious scholars, the ancient Egyptians, Persians, Phoenicians, Hindus and others believed that the world was a cosmic egg. Hindu mythology also tells us of the World Egg which was formed in the “waters of chaos” before the universe and time had begun. We can find the World-Egg symbol in Western mythology also. The egg appears as one of the main symbols in Orphic mythology of ancient Greece and a major symbol in Gnosticism, representing rebirth and gnosis. (See the picture of the Gnostic Mary Magdalene holding up an egg.)

Eggs are a result of being fertile and a life source, as well as a holder of mystery. In the Greek Orphic tradition, the Goddess of Night became pregnant by the God of the Wind and the world was hatched from the egg she laid. In this tradition the egg is a symbol of the mystery of life, creation and resurrection. The Celtic Druids have the cosmic egg of the serpent, Egyptians the cosmic egg that belonged to the sun god Ra. An egg represents potential, because what's within can't be seen; yet the secret life inside continues to grow until it's ready to be born. Eggs are also the food with a round sun suspended in the middle. In the Middle Ages eggs were dyed red to represent the color of life. Thus, the egg is a symbol of death and life alike. It is a symbol of death in so far as it is a shell or tomb in which the life-germ is imprisoned; it is a symbol of life in so far as it is the source of a new creature.

Thus, it is by no mere flight of fancy that we are able to associate our Easter egg with this mysterious World Egg, this original germ from which all life proceeds, and whose shell is the firmament (the ancient word for the limits of space, which our own scientists believe to be curved).

Eggs in popular tradition have long been associated with Easter as a symbol of new life and Jesus' resurrection. From the Christian perspective, Easter eggs are said to represent Jesus' emergence from the tomb and

resurrection. Easter is, of course, a religious holiday, but some of its customs, such as Easter eggs, are again linked to earlier pagan traditions. Thus, the egg, an ancient symbol of new life, has been associated with pagan festivals celebrating Spring. Eggs have been viewed as symbols of new life and fertility through the ages. Eggs, like rabbits and hares, are fertility symbols of antiquity. It is believed that for this reason many ancient cultures, including the Ancient Egyptians, Persians, and Romans, used eggs during their Spring festivals. Since birds lay eggs and rabbits and hares give birth to large litters in the early Spring, these became symbols of the rising fertility of the earth at the Vernal Equinox.

### *The Bunny*

Folklorists give us some information as to the origins of the Easter Bunny. Because the word Easter comes from the ancient celebrations of Ēostre, the coming of Spring, rebirth and fertility of new life, some folklorists hold that the story of the fabled hare is historically tied to the Mother Goddess of Ancient European lore and came to be associated with the Northern European Goddess of Spring, Ēostre. Her symbols were the hare, egg, bird and flower, representing the fertility of Spring. The hare is known to be most commonly associated with the moon (“the hare in the moon”), rebirth, rejuvenation and resurrection, as patterned on the cycles of the moon. In

Celtic lore, hares are associated with lunar deities and are shapeshifters traveling easily between the worlds. Hare bones and figurines were buried in ritual pits as they represented rebirth and immortality in the Goddess.