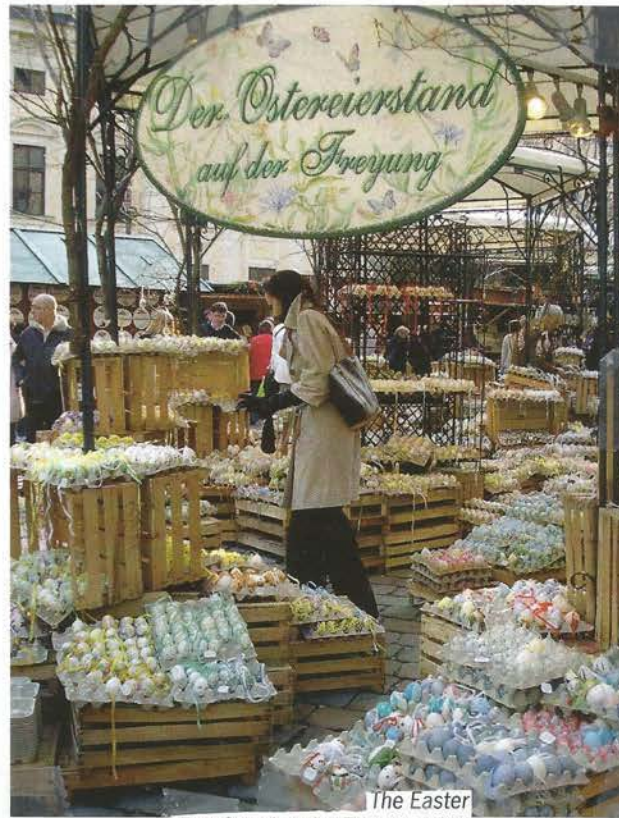


## OSTERSITTEN UND BRÄUCHE / CUSTOMS and TRADITIONS



Roberta, the hen entertains young and old alike at the Schönbrunn Easter Market.



The Easter Egg Stand at the Freyung (sign) (Altwiener Easter Market).

Vienna's famous Museum of Art History at the "Ring," the boulevard circling the "inner city."

There is an Easter egg-hunt, which no child leaves empty-handed, and an Easter rally, in which the kids perform tasks together to win a prize. Kids can create their own marzipan Easter bunny or make marzipan eggs dipped in chocolate, and take them home afterwards. The old Austrian custom of "*Palmbuschbinden*," the binding of willow twigs with spring buds, which are traditionally blessed on Palm Sunday at the Palace Chapel, is learned, as well as the art of making flower arrangements with bows, ribbons, daffodils, and the twigs of forsythia, all under the watchful, if somewhat hectic eyes of *Roberta*, who makes everyone laugh—not only the children.

With everything revolving around the egg—how did this common object become essentially connected to Easter? Whence this century-old fascination of the egg in magic, witchcraft, mythology, and religion? Obviously, form and function of the egg are well suited to symbolize new life and fertility. Thus, the egg prevails in the creation myths of peoples around the globe. Its oval form has no beginning and no end, new life springs from it, and our forefathers even attributed to the egg a hidden life force, which could be passed on to human beings or even to the soil to promote good harvests. Some farmers throw the first egg, laid by their hens in spring, over their roof top, to protect the house against storms and lightning—just one

example of many folk customs related to the egg.

For Christians, it has always been the symbol of the resurrection of Christ, most vividly lived in the Orthodox Church, where red eggs were taken to the graveyards on the Friday after Easter, to share a meal with the dead. From the earliest times of Christianity onward, people traditionally fasted before Easter and refrained from eating eggs, as well as meat. At Easter, or *Pascha*, the eating of eggs resumed. This made double sense, as by then there was a surplus of eggs, as hens are quite active in spring, and the abundance of this food item along with the need to boil it to save it from being spoiled, helped develop the custom of decorating the eggs for even greater enjoyment and as gifts.

Though many of the customs involving eggs faded away with the Reformation, eggs continued to be given as gifts. This was taken to the extreme with the custom of the Russian Tsars to present each other with precious golden eggs with surprises hidden inside like clockwork birds or miniature ships, set with jewels and designed by court jeweler Carl Fabergé. Most ordinary people, though, settle for less costly gifts of chocolate or marzipan eggs, or of hand-decorated ones, and to celebrate the arrival of spring, with the traditional egg-hunt, an egg-rolling contest, or a visit to one of the many Easter markets.

To find out more about the Schönbrunn Easter Market, visit their Website at: [www.ostermarkt.co.at](http://www.ostermarkt.co.at).