

# In Search of Deeper Identities

## Neopaganism and “Native Faith” in Contemporary Ukraine

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the growth of Neopaganism and Native Faith in post-Soviet Ukraine. It traces the historical development of Neopagan ideas and contextualizes their emergence within the cultic milieus of alternative religion and ethnic nationalism. It surveys the main contemporary Ukrainian Neopagan and Native Faith groups and movements, assessing their future growth possibilities and comparing them with more familiar forms of Western Neopaganism. The author argues that these Ukrainian movements have become caught up within a set of ideas which are ideologically right-wing and scientifically insupportable, but that this represents a phase of development comparable to an earlier phase of Anglo-American Neopaganism, at least in its reliance on “alternative” scholarship and on a strong form of “identity politics.” Like those Western movements, Ukrainian Native Faith might overcome its present-day limitations, but this will be difficult as long as the country continues to face the economic and political struggles within which it has recently been mired.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has provided fertile ground for an efflorescence of religious beliefs and practices.<sup>1</sup> In the former Soviet republics of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), which for several decades had been the only officially allowed religious institution, has been challenged by the growth of rival Christian churches and by the proliferation of neo-Christian, quasi-Christian, and non-Christian religions, sects, and movements.<sup>2</sup> Eileen Barker has aptly dubbed the resulting religious turf struggles “the Opium Wars of the new millennium.”<sup>3</sup> Among growing

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non-Christian religious groups are those of an Asian orientation (neo-Hindu, Buddhist, and others), quasi-Theosophical and Esoteric groups, and a variety of forms of Neopaganism or “ethnic religion.”

This article will examine the growth of Neopagan and “Native Faith” groups in post-Soviet Ukraine. Pagan traditions and folk customs are considered by some to have never completely disappeared from the East Slavic world, at least not until the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. While in the Baltic regions organized Paganism survived intact until as late as the fourteenth century, the Christianization of the East Slavic peoples proceeded by adapting Christianity to existing practices, resulting, in rural areas, in what was sometimes known as *dvoviria* (Pagan-Christian “double faith”). The recent resurgence of Paganism and Native Faith, or *vidnovira*, in Ukraine was spawned in the Brezhnev era, but has seen dramatic growth in the last decade alongside an upsurge of ethnic nationalism.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I will trace the historical development of Ukrainian Neopaganism and Native Faith ideas and contextualize their emergence vis-à-vis the broader cultic milieu of alternative religion in Ukraine and the growth of Ukrainian and other European ethnic nationalisms with which they are intertwined. In the second section, I will provide a brief overview of the main contemporary Ukrainian Neopagan and Native Faith groups and movements. Finally, I will assess the position and possible future development of these movements, comparing them with better-known Western forms of Neopaganism. My argument will be that Ukrainian Native Faith, like some other forms of Central and Eastern European Neopaganism, has become caught up within a set of ideas which are ideologically right-wing and scientifically insupportable, but that this represents a phase of development comparable to an earlier phase of Anglo-American Neopaganism, at least in its reliance on “alternative” scholarship and on a strong form of “identity politics.” Like those Western movements, Ukrainian Native Faith might overcome its present-day limitations, but this will be difficult as long as the country continues to face the economic and political struggles within which it has recently been mired.

### **SOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT OF UKRAINIAN NATIVE FAITH**

Contemporary Ukrainian Native Faith derives primarily from the following general sources:

1. Folkloristics and ethnography, including the study of folk beliefs and practices, folk medicine, traditional arts and music, the agricultural ritual calendar, folk tales and demonology, and the like.
2. The study of Ukrainian and ancient Slavic history and prehistory, including scholarship on the religious practices of the ninth- to

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twelfth-century Kyivan Rus' period (officially Christianized by Kniaz' Volodymyr<sup>5</sup> in 988 C.E.), and speculative or "alternative archaeology," including astroarchaeology, decodings of ancient signs and monument markings, debates about the ethnocultural affiliation of the Trypillian, Scythian, and "Aryan" archaeological cultures, and writings on controversial texts such as the *Book of Veles* (*Velesova Knyha*).

3. The specific development of Ukrainian Neopagan and Native Faith ideas in the Ukrainian émigré community, primarily through the writings and activities of Volodymyr Shaian, Lev Sylenko, and their followers.
4. A set of contemporary "cultic milieus" surrounding Neopaganism and *ridnovira*. By "cultic milieu" I mean the cultural context and seedbed within which the ideas and practices of unorthodox or non-mainstream religious groups develop, mix, and spread.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the latter, two or three distinct milieus can be identified in relation to *ridnovira*. The first is a larger and more diffuse interest in occultism, Eastern mysticism, Theosophy, New Age thought, science fiction-based philosophical and cosmic speculation, millenarianism, and interest in traditional folk medicine, magic, and sorcery. The cultural and linguistic specificity of post-Soviet Ukraine, however, has tended to keep the more nationalist and ethnically identified strands of religion separate from this more general New Age and Esotericist set of interests. Much of Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, is predominantly Russophone, although the official state language, Ukrainian, has become widely represented in media and public discourse since the 1991 proclamation of Ukrainian independence. However, the Russian-language book publishing industry has continued to dominate the Ukrainian book market, such that most bookstores that cater to non-Christian spiritual or New Age topics sell very few Ukrainian-language books. As a result, readers interested in Ukrainian Neopaganism generally have to seek out Ukrainian-language bookstores or specialist independent booksellers, including Pagans selling literature on the streets of major cities. Because of this language specificity, the growth of the cultic milieu surrounding Ukrainian Neopaganism has been more constrained than analogous movements in other countries.

At the same time, a second cultic milieu within which *ridnovira* has developed is that of right-wing ethnonationalist movements and groups, both in Ukraine and outside it (to be examined further below).

Third, on a broader scale and overlapping with the latter has been a more widespread and general public concern for the ecological and ethnocultural "crises," which are perceived to have enveloped Ukraine since at least the late Soviet era. In part, these twin concerns culminated

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in the fusion of environmentalism and nationalism, or “eco-nationalism,”<sup>7</sup> which helped precipitate the fall of the Soviet Union in the years after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. These perceptions have also been responsible for an upsurge of interest in ecological philosophy and nature mysticism and for the increasing interest in nationalist ideas of all kinds.

In what follows, I will focus particularly on the second and third of these milieus, with a reference to a fourth—a nascent, inclusive civil society—in the concluding section. The focus of this article will be on the intellectual or ideological development of the Native Faith movement (or set of related movements), especially on its notions of ethnic or national identity, and not on the experience of Native Faith for its practitioners, the phenomenology of its ritual practice, or the role of folk traditions and the arts within Ukrainian Native Faith. As a result, the image presented here will be more intellectualist and less pragmatic, “mythopoetic” or “life affirming” than it is for many of its participants. The interested reader is referred to the abundant writings on Ukrainian and Slavic folklore.<sup>8</sup> Little, however, has been published in English on the recent growth of Ukrainian Neopaganism and Native Faith as contemporary religious and ideological movements, and this article is intended as a first step to remedying this scholarly gap.

### **Nineteenth-century Roots of Ukrainian Neopaganism**

As Ronald Hutton has observed in his history of Neopagan Witchcraft,<sup>9</sup> much of modern Neopaganism can be traced to the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic revolt against classicism, rationalism, faith in science, and Enlightenment universalism. As a cultural and intellectual movement, Romanticism flowered alongside the development of modern nationalism. Fueled by the ideas of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and others, intellectual elites began to assert histories and heritages for their emerging nations. Herder conceived of nations or peoples as organic totalities: each ethnically defined *Völk* had its collective personality, unified through a common language and body of customs, folklore, song, myth, and ritual, and formed through a distinct history of interaction with its climate, geography, and natural environment.<sup>10</sup> Out of the Romantic ferment grew the fields of folkloristics and comparative philology, which, in the hands of Jakob Grimm, Franz Bopp, and others, came to embody a desire for “noble origins”—the shaping of national identities equal, if not superior, to all others and distinct from the universalist claims of both the Enlightenment and Christianity. In spite of the repressive milieu of Tsarist Russia (within which most of modern-day Ukraine found itself at the time), Ukrainian writers, folklorists, and intellectuals pursued this national recovery project with a vigor and enthusiasm equal to that of other emerging

European nations. Under the Tsarist regime, however, Ukrainian nationalism remained the interest of a persecuted minority and did not reach the “fruition” attained by other nationalist movements in Central and Western Europe. In Western Ukraine (and specifically Galicia), which was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, nationalism developed to a greater degree, and this accounts for a marked discrepancy in nationalist attitudes between the country’s East and West today.

Comparative philology, meanwhile, provided a set of ideas by which Ukrainians could identify as one of the Indo-European or, as they were known then, “Indo-Aryan” peoples. The “Aryan” discourse provided a means by which Europeans could distinguish themselves from the biblically-based history of the Semitic peoples, and by the middle of the nineteenth century the Aryan-Semite dichotomy was used as a convenient template onto which many European intellectuals projected their own favored and unfavored traits.<sup>11</sup> Ariosophy, as it became known, was to influence some of the ideologists of the Third Reich, and has since been discredited in part due to that association;<sup>12</sup> however, in the early decades of the twentieth century, non-Germanocentric forms of Ariosophy were in circulation in other parts of Eastern and Central Europe. These ideas were instrumental in the first stirrings of a Ukrainian Neopagan revival in the 1930s.

### **The Twentieth Century: Volodymyr Shaian, Lev Sylenko, and the *Book of Veles***

The first step towards the rebirth of pre-Christian Ukrainian religion was taken by Volodymyr Shaian (1908–1974), a linguist, philologist, and Orientalist-Sanskritologist from Lviv University, who first articulated the idea following a spiritual revelation he described having in 1934 atop Mount Grekhit in the Ukrainian Carpathians. Drawing on many of the Aryanist ideas then in circulation among mythographers and philologists, Shaian delivered a paper at a 1937 Indologists’ seminar in Lviv on the possibility of a “pan-Aryan renaissance,” one that was truly “All-Aryan” in contrast to Hitler’s Germanocentric Aryanism.<sup>13</sup> In 1944 he fled Lviv and spent some time in refugee camps, where he became involved in the founding of the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences. Around the same time, he founded the religio-political Order of the Knights of the Solar God (Orden Lytsariv Boha Sontsia), which he hoped would become an arm of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in its fight against the invading Soviet Red Army. Among the order’s members was Lev Sylenko (b. 1921), who was initiated as “Orlyhora” (“Eagle-mountain”) by Shaian. By the 1970s the two had parted ways, with Sylenko pursuing his own attempts to reform the Native Faith, which were rejected by Shaian. The overlap and rivalry between the two founders of the *ridnovir* renaissance continues to this day. Members of the Volodymyr Shaian

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Institute in Canada have been involved in the RUNVira (Ridna Ukraïns'ka Natsional'na Vira, or Native Ukrainian National Faith) community in Hamilton, Ontario, and the members of the groups examined below still position themselves according to their commitments to the ideas developed by one or the other of the founding fathers. Shaian's writings on Native Faith, pre-Christian traditions, the *Book of Veles*, and other topics continue to be reprinted, read, and discussed by Ukrainian *ridnovirs*.<sup>14</sup>

While Shaian spent most of his later years in London, England, Lev Sylenko immigrated to Canada, and subsequently to the United States, where in 1966 he organized the first RUNVira community in Chicago. Following travels in Europe and Asia, Sylenko synthesized a wide variety of historical, archaeological, literary, and philosophical sources into his *Maha Vira* (The Great Faith),<sup>15</sup> an 11,000-year history of "Orania-Skytia-Rus'-Ukraïna." Not unusual among Ukrainian writers at the time, Sylenko highlighted the Trypillian archaeological culture of 3000–5000 B.C.E. as a formative moment within this prehistory; less conventionally, Sylenko gave it the name "Oriiana" or "Orania" and assumed it to have been the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans and the first true civilization, predating Sumer. (Sylenko claimed credit for substituting an "o" for the "a" in "Aryan" to evoke the connection he believed existed with the Ukrainian word for plowing, *oraty*.)<sup>16</sup> According to the *Maha Vira*, the white racial type, and consequently European civilization, was first formed on the banks of the Dnipro (Dniepr) River at or preceding the time of the Trypillian civilization; and the Oriians-Ukrainians are credited with first developing the philosophy that was to make up the Indian Vedas, written down only after these same people ostensibly made their way to the Indian subcontinent. (The book includes a comparative Sanskrit-Ukrainian-English lexicon.)

Around the same time Sylenko was writing his *magnum opus*, another, more mysterious, text began circulating among émigré Ukrainian and Russian Neopagans and amateur prehistorians. The story of what came to be known as the *Book of Veles* (*Velesova Knyha* in Ukrainian, *Vles Kniga* in Russian) is a fascinating one that can only be summarized briefly here. As the story goes, a collection of wooden boards or tablets covered with a strange ancient script was discovered in 1919 by White Army division leader Fedir Izenbek in a village in eastern Ukraine. Having immigrated to Brussels in the 1920s, Izenbek eventually showed them to Russian-Ukrainian émigré Iurii Miroljubov, who was to spend several years copying the barely decipherable texts before they disappeared, according to Miroljubov, with Izenbek's death during the Nazi occupation of Belgium. Beginning in the 1950s, segments of the *Book of Veles* (taken from Miroljubov's handwritten manuscripts) began to appear in a series of Russian and Ukrainian émigré publications, and by the 1970s these were causing a minor sensation among some Russian writers and

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journalists, who touted the text as a kind of master key to Russo-Slavic identity. In the hands of Aleksandr Asov, for instance, the *Book of Veles* has been turned into a “geopolitical weapon for the next millennium,” by which a neo-imperial and Eurasianist Russia is to take over the spiritual and political leadership of the world from a degraded West.<sup>17</sup>

The *Book of Veles* itself would appear to be a chronologically disorganized collection of texts carved into wood under the guidance of Pagan priests (*zhertsy* or *volkhvy*) in the ninth or early tenth centuries, possibly in the Polissia or Volyn region of northwestern Ukraine, although Russian interpreters tend to locate it much farther east or north. It contains hymns and prayers, myths and legends, sermons, theological tracts, political invectives, and fragments of historical narrative. Historically the text ostensibly covers the movements of the ancestors of the Rusyches<sup>18</sup> or “Oriians” across vast territories between the Indian subcontinent and the Carpathian Mountains over some 1,500 years, with the land of contemporary Ukraine effectively becoming their final homeland. Needless to say, this territorial expansiveness is the kind of thing that makes scholars wary of the *Book of Veles*, but which has appealed to the Ariosophical and nationalist contingents among Ukrainians and Russians alike. Scholars have, in fact, largely rejected the text as a modern forgery, probably created either by the late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century collector and forger of “ancient texts”, A. I. Sulakadzev,<sup>19</sup> or by Miroljubov himself, who intended to use its “ancient wisdom” as a tool in the effort to fight the “demonic and antichristian,” as he perceived it, Soviet empire.<sup>20</sup> The text’s scholarly rejection, however, has hardly detracted from the interest it elicits within the general public. Rather, this lends it the conspiratorially alluring reputation of being “suppressed knowledge,” allegedly stifled in the tradition of Soviet science-by-diktat (or by some “Jewish-cosmopolitan” or other kind of “cabal”). Ukrainian defenders, such as Halyna Lozko, literary historian Borys Iatsenko, archaeologist Iurii Shylov, and writers Valerii Shevchuk, Serhii Plachynda, Ivan Bilyk, and Iurii Kanyhin, add a nationalist twist to the tale. The *Book of Veles*’ critics, they argue, have primarily been Russians eager to defend, at all costs, the Russocentric-imperialist version of history, according to which the three “brotherly East Slavic peoples” descended from a common ancestor with a single East Slavic language. The *Book of Veles*, its Ukrainian defenders claim, shows that the southern Rusyches, that is, the ancestors of today’s Ukrainians, have a history at least 1500 years older than their northern “brethren,” and that they have more in common with the western and southern Slavs as well as their Indo-European counterparts to the southeast (i.e., the presumed writers of the Vedas) than with today’s Russians. The *Book of Veles* has thus become a contested text even among its defenders, with rival Russian and Ukrainian nationalists vying over its proper interpretation and meaning.

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Whether it is a ninth-, eighteenth-, or twentieth-century document, the *Book of Veles* has now become a religious text, in use as a holy book by more than one religious community, and (despite its scholarly rejection) has also achieved a certain degree of popular acceptance within Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> Among Ukrainian Neopagans, the *Book of Veles* offers a seeming vindication of the Paganism that Prince Volodymyr rejected when he converted the Kyivan Rus' state to Christianity in 988 C.E. If the *Book of Veles* is to be believed, Christianity was not responsible for bringing writing to the Slavs; rather, Neopagans assert, Christianity was responsible for destroying the glorious culture that preceded it. For most Ukrainian believers in the authenticity of the *Book of Veles*, the work is seen as embodying the historical memory of the Ukrainian people, its "covenant," so to speak, with its gods, its ancestors, and its land, through times of great difficulty and conflict with neighboring tribes and invaders. To the extent that the *Book of Veles* has a predominant message, it revolves around the questions: "Who are we [Ukrainians/Russians/Slavs]? Where do we come from, and where are we going?" It answers these questions with insistent clarity: we are children of (the Slavic gods) Dazhbog and Svaroh, and of forefather Or, who have fought and must continue to fight to keep our identity and our land from those who would take both away from us, whether they be Greeks, Romans, Goths, Huns, Khazars, or anyone else. As such, the text fulfills a need to define Ukrainian identity today, and provides a cosmology and a set of ethics (centered around warriorship, honor, communalism, and the preservation of group identity) and religious practices (mainly prayers and invocations) to aid that effort for Ukrainian Neopagans today.

### **Alternative Archaeology, Ariosophy, and the Cultic Milieu**

The prehistory of Eastern Europe, and especially that of Indo-European-speaking peoples, remains vigorously contested terrain. Where mainstream scholarship concedes many unknowns, popular writers fill these gaps in with their favored theories and imaginings. Nationalism has been a constant companion of many national archaeological traditions,<sup>22</sup> and in the post-Soviet world, nationalist agendas have staged a comeback within archaeological and historical circles.<sup>23</sup> Ukrainian *ridnovir* beliefs include many elements that are taken for granted or at least considered plausible by scholars. Other elements, however, are more controversial or unaccepted. It has been left to popular writers and to a small coterie of academically trained prehistorians to develop the more nationalist and pro-Pagan interpretations of the distant past.

Among scholars, the archaeologist Iurii Shylov has led this movement. In a series of books, each less restrained and more polemical than the last, Shylov presents a portrait of prehistory according to which

the present-day territory of Ukraine is the cradle of civilization: here, in the Lower Dnipro Basin, the world's first writing system developed at least two millennia before Sumer (it was allegedly discovered at Kamiana Mohyla by Shylov himself and deciphered by the linguist Anatolii H. Kifishyn); here, the world's first great civilization and state flourished (the Trypillian-Cucuteni, which he names "Ariana"); and here, the Aryans emerged in the fourth or third millennium B.C.E., before supposedly moving eastward towards India and writing the Vedas.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Shylov has developed a "spiral-shaped" theory of world history, in which God is reconceived as an Informational Field, *Homo sapiens* mutating into *Homo noeticus*, and the Indo-Europeans of 8,000 years ago as the originators and carriers of the "Savior" archetype later appropriated by Christianity. Ukraine, for Shylov, is to be the geopolitical center of an impending new age, the source from which the Neopagan renaissance begun by Swami Vivekananda, Nicolai and Elena Rerikh, and others, is to spread.<sup>25</sup> The main force opposing this spread is the "parasitic internationalism" of "Judaism-Zionism-Bolshevism-fascism."<sup>26</sup> The old Aryan-Semite duality thus makes a reappearance in the influential writings of a trained archaeologist.

Questions about the Indo-European and Indo-Iranian "homelands," the ethnocultural identity of the Trypillian-Cucuteni archaeological culture, and the existence or non-existence of the "Aryans," continue to vex prehistorians, and Shylov's narrative can only be seen as a highly selective one, consisting of a mixture of the plausible, the improbable, the speculative, and the fantastic.<sup>27</sup> The equation of a language group with a "race," however, is scientifically indefensible, yet, this is precisely what occurs in the more popular realm of Ukrainian alternative prehistory, as represented, for instance, by the semi-glossy tri-annual magazine *Perehid-IV (Transition-IV)* and the journal and publishing house *Indo-Ievropa (Indo-Europe)*. The latter set out in 1991 with a mission aimed at the "rebirth of our destroyed ethnosphere,"<sup>28</sup> while the former, calling itself the "Journal of the Spiritual, Administrative, Business, and Professional Elite," publishes lengthy dissertations on "raceology" and on the impending millennial transformation in which Ukraine is to play a central and messianic role as "the leading edge of the evolution of the White race and of all humanity."<sup>29</sup> Similar ideas have been picked up by prominent writers and have begun to filter into broader public discourse, especially into the larger cultic milieu of cosmo-ecological and post-Theosophical movements.<sup>30</sup> The latter include the Ukrainian Spiritual Republic (Ukraïns'ka Dukhovna Respublika), most closely identified with science-fiction writer and mystic Oles' Berdnyk;<sup>31</sup> the Living Ethics (Zhyva Etyka) and Agni-Yoga of Nikolai and Elena Rerikh and the organizations that continue their work; and the Ariosophical and (so-called) Vedic movements, which propagate the theory that Ukrainians, or all Slavs, are descendants of prehistoric Aryans.

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Contemporary Ukrainian Neopaganism and Native Faith have emerged within a broader milieu in which these various currents mix and hybridize. At another end of this broad spectrum, the followers of Porfyrii Korniiiovych Ivanov, founder of a “system” of natural health and philosophy that has its center in rural eastern Ukraine, represent a more strictly nature-centered movement. Russian, East Slavic, and pan-Slavic Native Faith currents can be found in Ukraine as well, though these tend to be diffuse and, in any case, fall outside the parameters of this overview.

### THE CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN NATIVE FAITH MOVEMENT

Though interest in pre-Christian religion can be found in various periods of the pre-Soviet and Soviet eras, Neopaganism and contemporary ethnic religion emerged in Ukraine primarily in the aftermath of the Gorbachevan *perestroika*, or period of “restructuring,” and have undergone their most dramatic growth since the early and mid-1990s. The most clearly discernible form of this broader phenomenon is that of *ridnovirstvo* or *ridnovira* (literally, “Native Faith-ism” and “Native Faith”), which includes such groups as Pravoslavia, Obiednannia Ridnoviriv Ukraïny, Sobor Ridnoi Viry, Triitsia, and others. Most, though not all, of these also identify themselves as *yazychnyks*, the term customarily used for pre-Christian animist and polytheistic (Pagan) practices. Related to these is RUNVira, the largest of the organized religious movements loosely identifiable as Neopagan. Although the latter is distinctive in its monotheism and its orientation around a charismatic founder, and is rejected by other Neopagans as not authentically “Native” or “Pagan,” it is more properly a form of “reformed” Paganism and should be treated alongside the others as, at one and the same time, a spin-off and an influential chronological precursor. In any case, followers of RUNVira, in one or another of its offshoots, generally consider themselves to be *ridnovirs* as well, and, for that reason, the term *ridnovir* is the most appropriate term by which to encompass all the groups examined herein. The distinction between *runvists*, *ridnovirs*, and *yazychnyks* is not always clear-cut. In what follows, I will begin with the first category, associated with Sylenko’s RUNVira, and will proceed towards the more strictly Neopagan revivalist groups in Ukraine.

In terms of social profiles, Ukrainian *ridnovirstvo* tends to find its main base of adherents among nationally oriented ethnic Ukrainians of higher than average educational levels.<sup>32</sup> It also tends to be characterized by a somewhat higher average age than many Western Neopagan movements, but this may be changing as the movement grows.<sup>33</sup> No reliable figures exist on the number of Ukrainians involved in *ridnovirstvo* or Neopaganism of one or another sort. Sociological estimates range

from 1,000 Neopagans for the entire country to 0.2 percent of the population, or some 95,000 in total, although it is not clear how either figure was determined.<sup>34</sup> The actual figure depends on one's definition, but active and ongoing membership in *runvist*, Pagan (*yazychnyk*), and other *ridnovir* congregations is likely to be in the range of between three and ten thousand. There is a much broader interest in topics related to Paganism and Ukrainian prehistory, however, and in the revival of folk calendar customs connected to pre-Christian practices. In Kyiv, for instance, the decades-old choral group Homin conducts annual midsummer Kupalo festivities on the Dnipro River, although they celebrate two weeks after the actual solstice according to the Christian Julian ("old") calendar, which many *yazychnyks* take as being calendrically incorrect. Similar celebrations of Kupalo, Koliada (Yule), and other holidays are conducted across the country, sometimes within an explicitly Christian context and sometimes less so.

### **RUNVira**

The earliest formed of contemporary Ukrainian Neopagan organizations is also among the least characteristic of such groups: RUNVira is a monotheistic religion founded in North America by Lev Sylenko, whose 1,427-page book *Maha Vira*, which purports to be an 11,000-year history of Ukraine as well as a prophetic message for a new era, is considered by followers to be the Bible of the movement. (Three editions have been published in Ukraine since 1991.) Beginning in the mid-1960s, small groups of *runvirtsi* or *runvists* were established in Ukrainian émigré communities in the United States (the first in Chicago), Canada, Britain, and Australia, as well as a center, the Temple of Mother Ukraine, or "Oriiana," near Spring Glen in New York State's Catskill mountain area.

In the early 1990s, RUNVira began to spread in Ukraine, its first congregation being registered by Kyiv authorities in 1991. By the end of the decade there were about fifty officially registered and at least another dozen unregistered RUNVira congregations across the country, ranging in size from a couple of families to over a hundred members. A split in the international RUNVira movement has been mirrored by a similar divergence among Ukrainian *runvists*, resulting in the coexistence of at least three associations of *hromadas* (congregations, or literally "communities") that draw on Sylenko's teachings to varying degrees. The largest of these, consisting of some 38 registered congregations, is OSID RUNVira, which has followed the group of one-time Sylenko disciples who broke with their teacher and now control the Oriiana temple in New York State.<sup>35</sup> The smaller OSIDU RUNVira (with about eleven registered congregations) has maintained a direct link with Sylenko himself.<sup>36</sup> The precise status of and relationship among these rival organizations, along with a third (centered around Lviv-based Volodymyr

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Chorny) and a more autonomous Vinnytsia-based Sobor Ridnoii Ukraïns'koi Viry (Council of the Native Ukrainian Faith, SRUV), remain in flux. Sylenko himself, now in his eighties and in poor health, reportedly lives in the Catskill mountain area, but not at Oriiana. As the Sylenkoite OSIDU RUNVira is most directly related to Sylenko himself, I will begin my examination with it.

#### **OSIDU RUNVira (Sylenkoite)**

The Association of Sons and Daughters of Ukraine of the Native Ukrainian National Faith (OSIDU RUNVira, headed by Bohdan Savchenko) claims some twenty-six congregations within Ukraine, and accepts Sylenko as their prophet and his *Maha Vira* as their Bible for a new age. Sylenkoite *runvists* consider themselves a “reformed” Native Faith, a transformation and completion of the original Ukrainian polytheistic faith in favor of a scientifically grounded monotheism centered around Dazhboh, an impersonal representation of the life-giving energy of the cosmos—in Sylenko’s words, “Light, Endlessness, Gravitation, Eternity, Movement, Action, the Energy of unconscious and conscious Being.”<sup>37</sup> (Dazhboh literally means “Giving-god” or “giver of being”; the name is taken from a Slavic pre-Christian deity.) Although he uses the term monotheism, Sylenko’s conception could equally be called pantheist<sup>38</sup> or panentheist<sup>39</sup>—as the *Maha Vira* proclaims, “I am Dazhboh, I am in all things and all things are in me”<sup>40</sup>—with elements of deism, messianism, and Theosophy. His “reformation” of Paganism is seen as analogous to the Buddha’s reformation of Indian religion or of Muhammad’s reformation of Arab religion.<sup>41</sup> As such, Sylenko’s followers generally reject the term *yazychnyk* (Pagan), preferring to see themselves as both a *new* religion and a distinct tradition within the broader category of Native Faith.

The *Maha Vira* presents a systematic intellectual construct, grounded in the premise of Ukrainian ethnocultural primordialism (or essentialism). As part of its evolution, according to Sylenko, the human species has naturally divided itself into distinct ethnocultural groups, *ethne* or *ethnoi*, each of which undergoes its own life cycle, flourishing or perishing according to its developmental process. Without such a division, Sylenko argued, humanity would be far too fragile; the division allows for a diversity of experiments, some of which will thrive better than others, but which will not all perish together. According to Sylenko, every *ethnos* or nation has its own particular religiosity, language, and set of worldviews and customs that have evolved as part of that culture’s interaction with its environment. Other cultures have already undergone the developmental processes according to which their primal worldviews were transformed into more systematic, and (according to Sylenko) generally monotheistic, religious systems. Ukrainians constitute an

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ancient *ethnos*, according to the *Maha Vira*, but one which has not done that yet. Hence the need for the new rationally grounded nationalist religion of RUNVira.

OSIDU RUNVira is organized in local congregations, or *hromadas*, headed by RUNfathers and RUNmothers (with about 85 percent of the leadership being male), which meet weekly and on festive occasions, sometimes outdoors when weather allows. The Soniachna (Solar) community in Kyïv includes several dozen members and publishes the bimonthly newsletter *Slovo Oriïv* (*Word of the Orians*). In general, RUNVira seems to appeal more to an older population (upwards of 40 years old), though younger members sometimes take on leadership functions. Membership overlaps to some extent with folk revival groups, nationalist and ultra-nationalist political groups, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the UNA-UNSO (Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian People's Self-Defense), and most distinctly with the Traditional Association of Ukrainian Cossacks (*Zvychayeva hromada ukrains'kykh kozakiv*), a body created in 2001 with its own leader, or *hetman*, and founding members in nineteen Ukrainian provinces.

Regular practices of *runvists* include a weekly Holy Hour of Self-Realization (*Sviashchenna Hodyna Samopiznannia*, or *Sviahos* for short, also known as *Nabozhenstvo*), which includes readings from *Maha Vira*, commentaries and sermons, commemoration of ancestors, prayers and hymns, and which customarily ends with the singing of the Ukrainian national anthem. National symbols, such as the trident and the flag, are prominent, as is the repetitive refrain of "Glory to Dazhboh! Glory to Ukraine!" Ritual implements include a chalice with water from a local river, a box or chest containing earth from sacred ground (such as that near the village of Trypillia, after which the Trypillian archaeological culture was named), candles, the *Maha Vira*, wheat-sheaves, herbs, and flowers. Feast days are sometimes celebrated with other groups, including non-RUNVira groups and individuals. Kyïv's Soniachna community, for instance, has in the past concelebrated the Midsummer Kupalo festival with the Neopagan group Triitsia, amid traditional folk singing, bonfire jumping, circle and spiral dancing, burning and/or drowning the deity-effigies of Kupalo and Marena, and meeting the sun's first rays the next morning. Some congregations are active in organizing events for the wider public. Kharkiv's Ariiana community, for instance, is involved in creating *rai-sady* (paradise-gardens) and in organizing a regular Ecology and Spirituality festival.

### **OSID RUNVira**

The largest denomination within the Native Faith movement, OSID RUNVira includes between thirty and forty congregations across Ukraine. It is directly affiliated with the RUNVira temple in Spring

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Glen, New York, controlled by former Sylenko followers who broke with their teacher in the 1980s, rejecting his ultimate authority and seeking a more multilateral approach to the task of reconstructing a Ukrainian Native Faith. Retaining the RUNVira name, this group used legal means to take over the RUNVira temple in Spring Glen in the late 1990s, after what they perceived to be a hostile takeover attempt by Sylenko's Ukraine-born secretary and confidante, Tetiana (Svitoslava) Lysenko. OSID RUNVira is currently administered by a Holy Council (Sviashchenna Rada), headed by Kyiv-based Bohdan Ostrovs'kyi, a professional *kobzar-bandurist* (folk musician). Ostrovs'kyi is widely credited with forming the first RUNVira-based congregation, the Dazhbozha *hromada*, in Kyiv in 1991.

OSID RUNVira recognizes Sylenko as the one who made the first step toward the rebirth of Ukrainian Native Faith, but sees the subsequent steps as being taken independently of him. Similarly to OSIDU RUNVira, OSID members conduct a weekly Holy Hour and mark out special feast days. But these feature a more eclectic mix of sources, including readings from the *Book of Veles* and from sources not traditionally considered religious, such as the writings of the national poet-bard Taras Shevchenko. The importance of reviving calendrical ritual traditions is more prominent in OSID than among Sylenkoite followers. Services include traditional symbols and objects such as a *didukh* (braided wheat-sheaf) and objects representing fire, water, and earth. As with most Native Faith groups, commemoration of ancestors is central. The ritual calendar of OSID RUNVira includes feast days ranging from de-Christianized holy days (such as Christmas of Dazhboh's Light, Easter of the Eternal Resurrection) and Pagan seasonal holidays in honor of the deities Kupala, Perun, Lada and Dana,<sup>42</sup> to commemorations of Ukrainian national heroes, both those widely known (Cossack *hetman* Bohdan Khmelnytsky, writers Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko, philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda) and those whose identities are more nebulous and specific to the Native Faith subculture, such as the Holy Father Arii (Iarii, Iarylo, Iurii, Or'), the Great Prince Bohdan Kyi (Attila) and his brothers Shchek and Khoryv, Tarhitai the First Ancestor of the Ukrainian Rusyches-Skolots, Velymyr the Great Prince of Scythia-Rus'-Ukraine, as well as abstract concepts such as the Day of Ukrainian Ancient Literature and the Day of New Ukrainian Literature.

### **Council of the Native Ukrainian Faith (Sobor Ridnoi Ukraïns'koï Viry, or SRUV)**

This represents a more eclectic mixture of *ridnovirstvo*, which draws on Sylenko alongside several other writers, including Shaian, Shkavrytko, Kokriats'kyi, Orion, Lisovyi, and others. The SRUV emerged in 1994 in Vinnytsia in right-bank Ukraine, under the leadership of Oleh

Bezverkhyi, an author of several quasi-scholarly pamphlets on Ukrainian Native Faith, mysticism, “raceology,” and related topics. It now includes between seven and eleven congregations in Ukraine, the largest being in Vinnytsia.<sup>43</sup> Though espousing a monotheism similar to RUNVira, Bezverkhyi has criticized the artificiality of RUNVira and argued for a greater emphasis on mysticism and the development of an “authentically Ukrainian” theology.<sup>44</sup> The SRUV considers Podillia, a province of right-bank Ukraine, to be the “heart” of Ukraine, as it was the place where the largest Scythian temple was located, where the famous Zbruch “Svitovydy” Pagan image was found, and where Ukrainian Paganism was defended the longest, ostensibly as late as 1620 by the Bolokhivs’ki princes.<sup>45</sup>

### **Native Orthodox Faith (*Ridna Pravoslavna Vira*, or RPV)**

A more recently emerged organization, whose complete name is “Ancestral Fire (*Rodove Vohnyshche*) of the Native Orthodox Faith,” grew out of a group of Cossack magical and martial arts practitioners in the right-bank Ukraine region of Podillia. At a June 2003 gathering atop Mount Bohyt, believed to be the site at which an ancient four-faced Pagan statue known as “Svitovydy” or “Sviatovydy” (“World-seer” and “Holiness-seer,” respectively) once stood, the organization decided to announce formally the creation of a new denomination of *ridnovirs*. The term *Pravoslavia*, commonly translated as “Orthodoxy,” was chosen as a reclamation of the term used by the Eastern Rite branches of Christianity, emphasizing its Slavic meaning of “right-worship” (*-slavia*) over the Greek meaning of “right-belief” (*-doxos*). The organization has grown rapidly, encompassing twelve congregations across the nation by the end of 2003, including a few groups from the Council of the Sobor (SRUV), all under the leadership of an Advisory Council (*Viche Radeteliv*) headed by Supreme Magus (*Verkhovnyi Volkhu*) Volodymyr Kurovs’kyi. In contrast to both RUNVira and the *yazychnyky* described below, the RPV emphasizes in its theology the distinct and personal nature of the deities of the Slavic pantheon, who are seen, however, as deriving from a single origin (referred to by the name of the deity Rod or Rid, which is also the Ukrainian word for lineage or ancestry).<sup>46</sup>

### **The Native Faith Association of Ukraine (Obiednannia Ridnoviriv Ukraïny, ORU) and Pravoslavia**

The earliest-formed group in Ukraine to embrace explicitly the term *yazychnyk*, or Pagan, was the Ukrainian Pagan Community “Pravoslavia.” Formed in 1993 and taking its modern founder to be Volodymyr Shaian,<sup>47</sup> the organization has more recently begun to take the *Book of Veles* to be its

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holy writ. The community's leader is Halyna Lozko (Volkhvynia Zoreslava), a philologist, folklorist, university lecturer in religious studies, and author of numerous books and articles, among them scholarly monographs on Ukrainian Paganism and ethnology.<sup>48</sup> After her 1993 initiation at the hands of Hamilton, Ontario-based Elder of the Native Faith and Sylenkoite RUNfather Myroslav Sytnyk, Lozko proceeded to found the Svitovyd Center for the Rebirth of Ukrainian Culture, the School of the Native Faith (in 1995), the Museum of the Book of Veles (founded in 1996, but closed by local authorities in 1998), and the journal *Svaroh*, which since 1995 has been the most glossy and impressive of all Ukrainian *ridnovir* publications. Lozko's activism has achieved the highest public profile among Ukrainian Neopagans, her fiery personality both attracting many newcomers and alienating many co-religionists; she remains (alongside Shlyov) the scholarly leader in Ukrainian Neopaganism. In 1997, the former Sylenkoite *ridnovir* community in Hamilton recognized Kyïv as its spiritual center and accepted the authority of the Kyïv Pravoslavia Community under Lozko's leadership.

To coordinate *ridnovir* activities throughout Ukraine, Lozko and others founded the Native Faith Association of Ukraine (Obiednannia Ridnoviriv Ukraïny, or ORU) in 1998. In its founding statement, the ORU blames the cause of the world's spiritual, political and economic crisis on the "mixing of ethnic cultures" and the consequent "ruination of the ethnosphere, which is part of the biosphere of planet Earth."<sup>49</sup> In 2001 the Religious Centre of the ORU was officially registered as a Pagan religious organization. It now includes five registered congregations, as well as a dozen or so unregistered ones, throughout the country. In addition, the ORU has been most active in ecumenical pan-Pagan and pan-ethnic activities, especially in the World Congress of Ethnic Religions (previously called the World Pagan Congress), a European-dominated organization with which the ORU shares much of its worldview, including a strong critique of "cosmopolitan globalism" and the "new world order." If Sylenko's RUNVira is the most comprehensive and systematic attempt to create an intellectually coherent synthetic new religion from Pagan and ethnic religious strands, Lozko's activities on behalf of Ukrainian *yazychnytstvo* constitute the most comprehensive articulation of a more traditional Native Faith. Lozko herself is a vehement critic of Sylenko, calling him a "false prophet" and accusing him of attempting to lead ethnic Ukrainians "into the quagmire of cosmopolitan monotheism." "Monotheistic ideas," she writes, "are the fruit of Judaic religions which aim for global world domination."<sup>50</sup>

Pravoslavia and the ORU have been very active in reviving and/or creating and promoting a cohesive system of calendar ritualism, which they call the Kolo Svarozhe (Svaroh's Circle), and in disseminating prayer and ritual manuals. Neopagans have naturally been at the forefront of the revival of Ukrainian folk traditions associated with the

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agricultural calendar, which results in a colorful poetic and evocative tapestry of ritual and communal practices. While some of these folk practices (such as harvest songs) have continued, in modified form, through both the Christian and Soviet eras, and some (such as the *vertep*, or Yule pageant) have been widely revived in recent years outside of any explicitly Neopagan context, Neopagans have aimed to revive a complete annual calendar that is as free as possible of Christian elements. The ORU *ridnovir* community even follows a lunar calendar, which results in some years having thirteen months, though divided into quarters by the solstices and equinoxes.

In contrast to many non-Ukrainian forms of Neopagan religiosity, however, the central role of the *Book of Veles* adds an element of bookishness to the ORU. Lozko's recent edition of this text, complete with her theological commentaries, is perhaps the most impressive attempt to make sense of it and present it as a living system of myth and imagery.<sup>51</sup> In Lozko's interpretation, Ukrainian Native Faith, as laid out in the *Book of Veles*, is henotheistic; it sees God as simultaneously unitary and multiple, with many deities emerging as hypostases or emanations of the pervasive divine force known as *Svaroh*, although she also traces the root "heno-" to "geno" in the sense that it is concerned with the lineage (*rodovid*) of gods and of humans. Harmony with nature, for Lozko, is attainable only in the relationship between an ethnic group and its land base.

### **Other Groups, Inter-group Activities, and Native Faith Ecumenism**

Independent congregations of *ridnovirs* and *yazychnyks* exist in several Ukrainian cities. These include the Kyiv-based Triitsia (Trinity), headed by respected elder Voleliub (Ievhen Dobzhans'kyi), Perunova Rat' (Perun's Host), the Lytsari Ordena Sontsia (Knights of the Order of the Sun), and devotees of the goddess Berehynia, alongside more pan-Slavic groups such as the Khara-Khors Slavic-Vedic movement and the Zhytomyr-based Velykyi Vohon' (Great Fire). Some streams of *ridnovirstvo* are found more in writing than in group practice; such appears to be the case with Ladovira, articulated by Oleksander Shokalo and other authors in the magazine *Ukrains'kyi svit* (*Ukrainian World*). With *ridnovira* being a relatively small niche in Ukrainian religious culture, interaction is frequent among different groups. In Kyiv, for instance, there has been substantial porosity of membership between at least four different groups. This results in an interchange of ideas and the development of a sense of broader community. Books, such as those by Sylenko, Lozko, and Shylov (a member of Triitsia), are read by members of various congregations, and their interpretation has resulted in some evolution of ideas, as well as the carving out of rival identities based on theological differences or divergences in leadership styles.

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Despite the apparent hostility between leaders of some of the larger denominations (notably OSID RUNVira, OSIDU RUNVira, and the ORU), an impressive spirit of ecumenical cooperation among *ridnovirs* has been building over the past three or four years. This process has culminated in two important meetings in Kyiv. Initiated by Petro (Sviatoslav) Ruban, Ievhen (Voleliuv) Dobzhans'kyi (head of the Kyiv's independent Triitsia congregation), and Iurii Shylov, the First Forum of Ukrainian Ridnovirs, held in February 2003, gathered together 41 delegates from *ridnovir* congregations across Ukraine as well as another 38 registered guests, and elected Ruban as the Forum's president. Participants discussed issues of significance to the *ridnovir* community and produced two substantial proclamations, one to the President, Supreme Council, and Government of Ukraine, urging the protection of sacred sites and objects, the other to all Ukrainians urging resistance to the government's plans to privatize agricultural lands. This was followed ten months later by the Second Council (*Viche*) of Ukrainian Ridnovirs, which featured 51 delegates and 46 participants from sixteen Ukrainian provinces, in addition to 26 other guests. A Coordinating Council was created, headed by Ruban and including the RPV's Volodymyr Kurovs'kyi and Triitsia's Ievhen Dobzhans'kyi as two of its four vice-heads. These two, along with Oleh Bezverkhyi of SRUV, have been especially active in this movement of conciliation, while the leaders of the major congregations (notably, OSID RUNVira, the ORU, and the Lviv-centered "western branch" of OSIDU RUNVira informally headed by Volodymyr Chorny) have been noticeable by their absence. Nevertheless, the Second Council proclaimed those absent congregation leaders to be members of a Council of Elders "subject to their approval." The Council of Elders also includes prominent figures such as the archaeologist Shylov, writer Serhii Plachynda, *kobzar*-musician Volodymyr Horbatiuk, and Parliamentarian and one-time political dissident Levko Lukianenko.

### UKRAINIAN NATIVE FAITH IN INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

As Andrew Wilson has put it in a valuable recent study, Ukrainians appeared as an "unexpected nation" on the world stage with their 1991 declaration of independence from the imploding Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> For various historical reasons, Ukrainian national identity had not developed to the degree achieved by the more successful state-building European nations, such as Germany, France, England, or Poland, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Post-Soviet Ukraine has therefore faced the task of forming a national identity appropriate to a modern state within a larger context that appears to harbor multiple threats, from the East and from the West. The perceived Eastern threat is

represented by the potential revival of a Russian-dominated, post-Soviet Slavic or Eurasian bloc; and it is one that is easily identified with Russian imperial and Soviet historiography, which nationalist Ukrainians accuse of complicity with the destruction of Ukrainian historical memory. The Western threat, on the other hand, is perceived as a ceaseless pressure to join the cosmopolitan, relativizing and competitive market-dominated liberal West, on terms unfavorable to newcomers and threatening to their cultural traditions and national identities.

In such a situation, it is understandable that some Ukrainians have turned to national mythmaking and the “invention of tradition” of a sort that resembles the romantic nationalisms of nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>53</sup> Most, if not all, of the Native Faith groups examined above share the assumption of an ethnocultural essentialism, that is a view—outdated by Western scholarly standards—according to which an *ethnos* constitutes a primordial and fundamental building block of human history and, indeed, of evolution. Halyna Lozko, for instance, writes that an *ethnos* is a “natural phenomenon,”<sup>54</sup> “a blood-related collectivity which has its native land, its native language, and its native faith.”<sup>55</sup> By analogy with animal species, she argues that intermarriage among human *ethne*, and all the more among races, is a “disintegrative (destructive) factor” for ethnic survival.<sup>56</sup> The concomitant idea that each *ethnos* has its particular place on Earth, its territory or *lebensraum* (not necessarily in the expansionist sense of the term as used by the Nazis), in which it has evolved and to which it is most harmoniously fitted, bespeaks of a desire for an “ecology of culture” whereby human communities can rediscover the harmony they once had with their natural environments. But it also solidifies a decidedly primary distinction between us and them, natives and foreigners.

These characteristics of Ukrainian Neopaganism and Native Faith mark these movements out as different from the better-known Western (especially North American) forms of Neopaganism. Unlike many Western Neopagan groups, which have tended (although not without exceptions) toward a countercultural and vaguely leftist political identity consistent with post-1960s feminism, environmentalism, pacifism and anti-nuclearism, Ukrainian Neopagans, to the extent that they identify themselves politically, are almost always found on the political right.<sup>57</sup> The biographical statement in Lozko’s edition of the *Book of Veles* explicitly hails her as “ideologue of the Ukrainian radical right movement.”<sup>58</sup> Claiming that Christianity is “absolutely left,” “fruits of the same field” with Communism, Lozko’s calls for a Ukrainian New Right have found supporters in an electronic project called “Ukrainian Empire on the Web.” This rightward trend is not merely a reaction against the legacy of seventy years of ostensibly leftist Soviet rule. The more politically engaged Ukrainian *ridnovirs* and Ariosophists often draw their inspiration from the *organic* or *integral nationalism* developed in Ukraine in the 1910s and 1920s by Dmytro Dontsov.<sup>59</sup> At times this appears to take on

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a form of neo-fascism, although that term is rejected in favor of terms like “solidarism” or simply “nationalism.”

Some *ridnovir* writings betray the influence of Russian and other European radical right movements, which have been growing in the last two decades in response to perceived globalization, Westernization, and Americanization, and which fall into a tradition that has been called “radical” or “revolutionary conservatism.”<sup>60</sup> Tomislav Sunic identifies an explicitly “pagan conservative” strain within this tradition, one which includes such well-known figures as Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Jung, Martin Heidegger, Vilfredo Pareto, Oswald Spengler, Indo-Europeanist scholar Georges Dumézil, and the Italian fascist mystic Julius Evola (references to whom are not uncommon in Ukrainian and Russian Neopagan writings).<sup>61</sup> This tradition has re-emerged into European political discourse most forcefully through the French movement known as the Nouvelle Droite centered around the Groupement de Recherches et d’Etudes pour une Civilisation Européenne (GRECE) and its leader Alain de Benoist.<sup>62</sup> The writings of Lozko and others echo many of the themes of the Nouvelle Droite, including its anti-liberalism and anti-egalitarianism, its hostility to Christianity (and its muted anti-Semitism), and its advocacy of a return to an ethno- and eco-centric Paganism explicitly defined or equated with an ancient Indo-European past. Ukrainian *ridnovirs* fault Christianity for having taken away Ukrainians’ original traditions and values, “enslaved” Ukrainians and clouded their minds, turning them into “sheep” and making them easy fodder for foreign overlords, whether imperial Russian/Muscovite, Polish, Soviet Communist, or most recently “Jewish-American.”

As argued by Liudmila Dymerskaya-Tsigelman and Leonid Finberg and by Victor A. Shnirelman, the “Jewish question” hovers over much of the Ukrainian Neopagan and Native Faith milieu.<sup>63</sup> Most Ukrainian Neopagan publications make at least occasional derogatory references to Christianity as a foreign and “Jewish” religion, and frequently castigate it as a tool of “internationalism and cosmopolitanism,” terms recognized by Jewish scholars as code words for an imagined conspiracy of “international Jewry.”<sup>64</sup> Perhaps most disturbingly, although there is otherwise hardly a word about Jews in Halyna Lozko’s Neopagan prayer manual *Pravoslov*, the final page features ten “Pagan commandments,” among them “Don’t fear!” “Don’t be lazy!” and “Don’t lie!” with the last of them being “Don’t get involved with Jews!”<sup>65</sup> This perspective ties in directly to the movement’s anti-globalism. *Slovo Oriiv*’s editorial on the tenth anniversary of Ukrainian independence declares, “Today we’ve simply divided up our [former] total dependence on Moscow among Moscow, Washington, Israel, Europe, and god knows who else.”<sup>66</sup> Ukraine is seen as having been handed from one oppressor to another: “Jehovah’s chosen’ nation and the ‘global police force’ ruled by them—the USA.”<sup>67</sup>

Many parallels exist, therefore, between the ideas of Ukrainian Ariosophists and *ridnovirs* and the ideas espoused by the European New Right, and these in turn can be seen as an expression of right-wing anti-globalism comparable to the likes of one-time presidential candidate Pat Buchanan in the United States. At the same time, however, the *ridnovir* focus on lifestyle, family, community, and ritual practice, is rarely matched by the more politically motivated theorists of the European New Right. Many *ridnovirs* are attracted especially by the ethical principles underlying their faith, with its emphasis on honor, continuity with and responsibility before one's ancestors, and a land-based work ethic, all of which are seen to contrast to the principles that guided the Soviet era and those which are perceived to be flowing in today from the West.

### **Aryanism and Native Faith**

One might ask why the "Aryan" thread is such a prominent one within the Native Faith milieu. To answer this would require an analysis of the alternative options for a post-Soviet Ukrainian national identity. Neopagans and *ridnovirs* explicitly ally themselves with a past that is thought to be more pure, whole, uncorrupted, and glorious than the present or, indeed, the last one thousand years. Neither the Soviet Union, nor the Russian empire, nor the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before them is seen to offer an advantageous base on which to build a Ukrainian identity (although the early modern Ukrainian Cossack state is part of most *ridnovirs*' privileged historical narrative). With the rejection of Christianity, what remains is the long-distant past. The name Rus', historically identifiable with the powerful Kyiv-based medieval empire, has unfortunately become too tightly linked with Russian identity; according to nationalist Ukrainians, it was "stolen" by the empire-building Tsar Peter the Great, who replaced the name "Muscovy" with "Russia" to capitalize on the reputation of medieval Rus'. The next deeper identifier would be *Slavs*, but that, too, has become too broad, identified as a family name for all Slavic-speaking peoples, and has also been appropriated by Russocentric historiographers with their theory of the three "brotherly" Eastern Slavic peoples (Russia/Great Russia, Ukraine/Little Russia, and Belarus/White Russia). Digging deeper, other potential identifications become nebulous: the Antes, the Scythians (who offer at least a more attractive image, but are taken by most prehistorians to have been Iranian-speaking and darker-skinned), the Trypillians, and so on. By contrast, the figure of the "Aryan" stands out as a powerful, indeed momentous, name, with an image that has historically been associated with supposedly superior Indo-Europeans and the "white race." The existence of plausible scholarship supporting a Ukrainian Indo-Aryan, or at least Indo-European, "homeland" provides working materials with which to build such an identity, and any non-acceptance

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of this thesis readily becomes fodder for conspiracy theories that blame the Russians, the Soviets, the Jews, the West, or others, for oppressing the honest and hardworking Ukrainian Slav.

### **Public Perceptions and Future Prospects**

The perception of Ukrainian Native Faith by others in Ukraine today is a mixed one.<sup>68</sup> Among conservative Orthodox and Catholic Christians, the rise of alternative religions in general is viewed with some alarm. Within the largely secularized mainstream, however, one finds many Ukrainians who are spiritually “searching” and interested in the distant past—as the popularity of the books of Iurii Kanyhin and others testifies; but this rarely translates into direct involvement with a religious organization. The profile of Native Faith groups is not large enough to have much influence, and they do not appear to have much sympathetic coverage in the mass media. More importantly, the more educated and intellectual classes tend to view Native Faith groups as a fringe element of the ultra-conservative end of the political spectrum, one tinged with anti-Semitism and intolerance. To the extent that it aligns itself with the Ariosophic dream of an organic, integrated and hierarchical society of peasants, soldiers, and spiritual-political leaders (as suggested by Dumézilian Indo-Europeanism),<sup>69</sup> Ukrainian Native Faith will continue to be perceived as an ally of ultra-conservative and neo-fascist political ideologies. It should perhaps not be at all surprising to find such a religious-ideological development in Ukraine, a country in which economic and political conditions have wobbled between marginally promising and resolutely dire for the past thirteen years. And it should be underlined that Aryanism and Native Faith remain relatively marginal and unaccepted by most Ukrainians, and their likelihood of mass acceptance anytime soon remains slim. This contrasts somewhat with Russia, where Paganism has become more widespread, especially among numerous small far-right political parties. It is also apposite to mention that more “developed” countries such as France, Italy, and Germany feature larger and more influential New Right movements, and that these too include analogous ethnonationalist religious tendencies.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, such a situation bodes ill for the future development of Ukrainian Native Faith as a respectable option within the multicultural society that is contemporary Ukraine.

In a sympathetic recent assessment of the RUNVira movement, Ukrainian religious studies scholar Anatolii Kolodnyi concludes that the prospects for RUNVira surviving the death of its founder (which should be expected to occur in the near future) are slim.<sup>71</sup> It is still too early to judge Kolodnyi’s prediction. However, it should be clear by any standard that the prospects for Native Faith more generally are brighter, and it is to be expected that new combinations and hybrids of Neopaganism,

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RUNVira, and related religious tendencies will emerge, just as similar movements have developed in other countries.<sup>72</sup> Today's *ridnovirs* appear fixated on defining a Ukrainian identity based on ethnonationalist discourses that are considered discredited by Western scholars. This is a situation that is somewhat analogous to Anglo-American Neopaganism of the 1970s and early 1980s, when Neopagans, Wiccans, Goddess worshippers, and others staked their identities on claims that they were reviving prehistoric religions rooted in ancient Goddess worship, religions that had been viciously persecuted during the Christian Inquisition, leading to the deaths of millions of witches, most of whom were women. In a sense, these claims dovetailed with the rising identity politics of the day, as these developed within race-, gender-, and sexuality-based liberation movements, to which one could now add the movement to liberate "witches" from centuries of oppression. Serious scholarship has since found the more extreme claims to have been baseless, or at least drastically overstated (the number of witches killed during the Inquisition was closer to 50,000 than to the nine million some had claimed, and no evidence for a worldwide "Goddess civilization" is recognized by more than a handful of archaeologists). Over the past twenty years, Anglo-American Neopagans have by-and-large dealt with this information by incorporating it into their religious narratives, and by placing greater emphasis on the creative nature of their religious practices and beliefs. Indeed, the majority of Wiccans now recognize that their religion is less than a hundred years old (even if some elements of it are much older), yet Anglo-American Wicca and Neopaganism have grown steadily in numbers over the past few decades. In principle, there is no reason why Ukrainian *ridnovirs* could not develop a similar measure of self-reflexivity, which would allow for a recognition that their tradition may be in part an invented one, and that it is a religious option that requires neither a glorious Aryan origin nor a conspiratorial Judaeo-cosmopolitan cabal as its enemy for its flourishing.

**CONCLUSION**

It is possible, then, that Ukrainian Neopaganism may follow a similar trajectory as Anglo-American Neopaganism, in the process becoming both more modern (i.e., more scientifically informed) and postmodern (self-reflexive and aware of its creative nature). To do that, it will need to develop greater contacts with Western scholarship, with Neopagans informed by Western scholarship, or, for that matter, with Ukrainian scholarship, assuming the latter were to rise from its current state of catastrophic underfunding and consequent public invisibility in a civil society that is unfortunately growing all too slowly and fitfully in post-Soviet Ukraine. The prospect of building such a society remains of greatest urgency. To date, Ukrainian *ridnovirs* have tended to interact most with

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similarly minded Neopagans in Russia and, to some extent, in other countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Ideologically, they have been most exposed to writings circulating within the milieu of European ethnonationalist and New Right discourse. If *ridnovira* is to evolve to be a tolerant religion, one that is comfortable within the existing multicultural society of twenty-first century Europe (including, one hopes, twenty-first century Ukraine) and that is perceived to be acceptable by majority (or influential minority) public opinion in Ukraine, it will need to transcend these milieus and find itself anew within a thriving and broader-based civil society. Recent events have shown that such a society may be developing rapidly; it is up to Native Faith to respond to the challenges it will afford.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this material were presented at meetings of the International Congress of Ukrainian Studies (Chernivtsi, 2002), the Association of American Geographers (New Orleans, 2003), and the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (Halifax, 2003). Research was made possible by a grant from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Faculty Development Program. I am grateful also to the *ridnovirs* and *runvists* who shared their time and thoughts in conversations with me, especially Vasyl' But, Ratyslav, Halyna Lozko, Bohdan Ostrovs'kyi, P-i Vira, and members of the Soniachna community. I would also like to express my thanks to Catherine Wessinger, Rebecca Moore, and three anonymous reviewers for their many useful comments and suggestions on this article. All translations from Ukrainian are my own.

<sup>2</sup> I take these classificatory terms from Nadia Dudar and Liudmyla Fylypovych, *Novi relihiini techii v Ukraïni (New Religious Currents in Ukraine)* (Kyïv: Naukova dumka, 2000). See also Z. I. Tymoshenko, ed., *Novitni ta netradytsiini relihii, mistychni rukhy u suspil'no-politychnii sferi Ukraïny (New and Nontraditional Religions and Mystical Movements in the Sociopolitical Context of Ukraine)* (Kyïv: Vydavnytstvo Evropeis'koho Universytetu, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Eileen Barker, "The Opium Wars of the New Millennium: Religion in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," in *Religion on the International News Agenda*, ed. Mark Silk (Hartford, Conn.: Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, 2000), 39–59.

<sup>4</sup> The most direct Ukrainian translation of "Paganism," *pohanstvo*, is customarily rejected by contemporary Pagans as a derogatory Christian usage. Neopagans' preferred term, *yazychnystvo*, has no adequate English translation, though terms such as *Paganism*, *ethnic religion*, *heathenism*, *polytheism*, and *animism* all have been applied to pre-Christian Slavic beliefs and their more recent revivals. Although the World Council of Ethnic Religions, which includes two Ukrainian Pagan groups, prefers the term "ethnic religion," "Paganism" has become accepted within English-language popular and scholarly discourse, and therefore I will

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use it here. I will not distinguish between “Paganism” and “Neopaganism,” though such a distinction could be made between different groups of *yazychnyks*. Note that I will use the term *ridnovir* rather than the more awkward “Native Faithier,” but will anglicize the endings so that the Ukrainian plural *ridnoviry* will be written *ridnovirs*, *yazychnyky* will be *yazychnyks*, etc.

<sup>5</sup> See the Glossary for explanation of common Ukrainian terms used in this article.

<sup>6</sup> The term was proposed by Colin Campbell to mean “the sum of unorthodox and deviant belief-systems” that is “continually giving birth to new cults, absorbing the debris of the dead ones and creating new generations of cult-prone individuals to maintain the high levels of membership turnover.” See Colin Campbell, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,” *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972): 121–22, 134. Taking the lead from the first part of that definition, Michael Barkun interprets it as “the domain of rejected and stigmatized knowledge.” See Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 243, 247–79. My preference is to follow the second part of Campbell’s definition, with its emphasis on the rhizome-like interaction of groups and the fertile productivity of ideas. A cultic milieu is what Jean E. Rosenfeld calls “the dynamic seedbed of novel interpretations of sacred matters out of which new religious communities take shape.” See Jean E. Rosenfeld, “The ‘Religion’ of Usamah bin Ladin: Terror as the Hand of God,” part 1, *The Public Eye* (2001), <<http://www.publiceye.org/frontpage/911/Islam/rosenfeld2001-01.html>>. For other uses of the term, see Jeffrey Kaplan and Helène Löföw, eds., *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Jane Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> A good scholarly overview of folklore sources is Mark Kulikowski’s *Bibliography of Slavic Mythology* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1989). See also Adrian Ivakhiv, “Scholarship on the Ancient Eastern Slavs: A Bibliographic Overview,” *Ethnic Forum* 15, nos. 1–2 (1995): 162–75, especially the section on folklore; and Adrian Ivakhiv, “The Cosmos of the Ancient Slavs,” *Gnosis* 31 (1994): 28–35. For the related tradition of Russian folklore and magic, see William F. Ryan’s excellent study, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Ronald H. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 1784.

<sup>11</sup> Alan T. Davies, “The Aryan Myth: Its Religious Significance,” *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 10, no. 3 (1981): 287–98; Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), ch. 4; Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (London: Sussex University Press, 1974), 183ff.; Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Stefan Arvidsson, “Aryan Mythology as Science and Ideology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (1999): 327–54.

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<sup>12</sup> German and Austrian Ariosophists, such as Guido von List (Guido List) and Lanz von Liebenfels (Adolf Josef Lanz), combined race-based Völkisch thinking with Theosophical ideas about prehistory, supercontinents such as Atlantis and Hyperborea, and other themes of nineteenth-century occultism. See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890–1935* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Halyna Lozko, "Volodymyr Shaian: Osnovopolozhnyk vidrodzhennia Ridnoï Viry," *Svaroh* 9 (1999): 6.

<sup>14</sup> Collected in Volodymyr Shaian, *Vira Predkiv Nashykh (Faith of Our Ancestors)* (Hamilton, Ontario: Society of the Ukrainian Native Faith, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Lev Sylenko, *Maha Vira* (New York: RUNVira, 1979). I am told that the title means "Great Hero" in Sanskrit and is the title by which the founder of Jainism is known, however, Sylenko's agenda of connecting Ukrainian to Sanskrit makes the translation the "Great Faith" (*vira* meaning "faith" in Ukrainian) a more compelling one.

<sup>16</sup> Lev Sylenko, *Hist' z khramu predkiv (The Guest from the Temple of the Ancestors)*, ed. Svitoslava Lysenko (Kyiv: Oberehy, 1996), 141.

<sup>17</sup> Hryhorii Klochek, *Svit "Vesovoï Knyhy" (The World of "The Book of Ves")* (Kirovohrad: Stepova Ellada, 2001), 27ff.; Aleksandr I. Asov, "Ieshche raz o tainakh 'Knigi Vesesa'" ("One More Time on the Secrets of *The Book of Ves*"), *Nauka i religiia* 5 (2000): 57. See also Aleksandr Asov, ed., *Sviato-Russkii Vedy. Kniga Vesesa (The Holy Russian Vedas. The Book of Ves)* (Moscow: Fair-Press, 2002); and for a scholar's critique, Hryhorii Hrabovych, "Slidamy natsional'nykh mistyfikatsii" ("In the Footsteps of National Mystifications"), *Krytyka* 5, no. 6 (2001): 14–23.

<sup>18</sup> The Rusyches were the inhabitants of medieval Rus', which Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians all take to be part of their historical heritage.

<sup>19</sup> L. P. Zhukovskaia, "Poddiel'naia dokirillicheskaia rukopis'" ("Forged, Pre-Cyrillic Manuscript"), *Voprosy iazykoznaviia* 2 (1960): 143.

<sup>20</sup> O. V. Tvorogov, "Chto zhe takoe 'Vlesova kniga'?" ("So What Is This 'Book of Ves'?" ), *Russkaia literatura* 2 (1988): 100. Tvorogov has carried out the most careful, exhaustively detailed, and convincing linguistic and contextual analyses of the *Book of Ves*; see his "Chto stoit za 'Vlesovoi knigoi'" ("What Stands Behind this 'Book of Ves'"), *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 16 July 1986, 5; and "Vlesova kniga" ("Book of Ves"), *Trudy Otdela Drevnerusskoi literatury* 43 (1990): 170–254. For a summary, see Maya Kaganskaya, "The Book of Vles: Saga of a Forgery," *Jews and Jewish Topics in Soviet and East-European Publications* 4 (1986–87): 3–27.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, Halyna Lozko's edition of the text was recently named a "Peak" of Ukrainian literature by the literary review *Knyzhnyk-Reviiu*. Some educational circles have approved the *Book of Ves* for teaching in schools as an ancient Ukrainian text; see Dmytro T. Fedorenko, *Vesova Knyha–naïdavnishyi litopys Ukraïny. Navchal'nyi posibnyk z Ukraïnoznavstva i ridnoï literatury (Book of Ves, The Most Ancient Ukrainian Chronicle: A Teaching Manual for Ukrainian Studies and Ukrainian Literature Curricula)* (Kyiv: Biblioteka Ukraïntsia, 1999); Hryhorii Klochek, *Svit 'Vesovoï knyhy' (The World of "The Book of Ves")* (Kirovohrad: Stepova Ellada, 2001); Hrabovych, "Slidamy natsional'nykh mistyfikatsii" ("In the Footsteps of National Mystifications"), 23. The first volume of the ambitious

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ten-volume *Istoria Relihii v Ukraïni (History of Religion in Ukraine)*, edited by Anatolii Kolodnyi, president of the Ukrainian Association of Scholars of Religion, and approved by the Religious Studies Section of the Ukrainian Academy of Science's Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, B. Lobovyk, *Dokhrystiians'ki viruvannia, pryiniattia Khrystianstva (Pre-Christian Beliefs and the Reception of Christianity)* (Kyïv: Ukraïns'kyi tsentr dukhovnoi kul'tury, 1996), treats the *Book of Veles* as authentic and includes it among a set of excerpted historical documents.

<sup>22</sup> See Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Victor A. Shnirelman, "Alternative Prehistory," *Journal of European Archaeology* 3 (1995): 1–20; Pavel M. Dolukhanov, "Archaeology and Nationalism in Totalitarian and Post-totalitarian Russia," *Nationalism and Archaeology*, ed. John A. Atkinson, Iain Banks, and Jerry O'Sullivan (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1996), 200–31.

<sup>24</sup> Iurii Shylov's books include *Kosmicheskie Tainy Kurganov (Cosmic Secrets of the Kurgans)* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1990); *Prarodina Ariev (Homeland of the Aryans)* (Kyïv: SINTO, 1995); *Praistoriia Rusi-Ukraïny (Prehistory of Rus'-Ukraine)* (Kyïv: Ukraïns'ke Kozatstvo, 1998); *Sviatyni. Roman-eseia z dvokh povistei (Sanctuaries: A Novel-essay in Two Narratives)* (Kyïv: self-published, 2001); and *Dzherela vytokiv ukraïns'koï etnokultury XIX tys. do n.e.–II tys. n.e. (Wellsprings of Ukrainian Ethno-Culture, 19000 B.C.E.-2000 C.E.)* (Kyïv: Aratta, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Shylov, *Dzherela*, 251.

<sup>26</sup> Shylov, *Dzherela*, 250.

<sup>27</sup> On the Indo-European "homeland" problem, see Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987); James P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); and David W. Anthony, "The Archaeology of Indo-European Origins," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 19, nos. 3–4 (1991): 193–217. On Cucuteni-Trypillian culture as non-Indo-European, see Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); for critiques of Gimbutas see Lynn Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas, and 'New Age' Archaeology," *Antiquity* 69 (1995): 74–86; and Brian Hayden, "An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm," *Pomegranate* 6 (1998): 35–46. Some archaeologists and linguists identify the "Aryans," or at least the Indo-Iranians, with the Yamna (Pit-grave) archaeological culture area (e.g., Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*), while others position them much farther to the east, e.g., Michael Witzel, "The Home of the Aryans," *Anusantatyai. Fs. für Johanna Nartenzum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Almut Hintze and Eva Tichy (Dettelbach: J. H. Roell, 2000), 283–338, online at <<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/AryanHome.pdf>>, accessed 1 November 2003; C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, "Archaeology and Language: The Indo-Iranians" and responses, *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 1 (2002): 63–88; and P. P. Tolochko, ed., *Etnichna istoriia davn'oi Ukraïny (Ethnic History of Ancient Ukraine)* (Kyïv: Instytut Arkheolohii Natsional'noi Akademii Nauk Ukraïny, 2000), 34–35.

<sup>28</sup> Vitalii Dovhych, "Perednie slovo do hromady" ("Opening Word to the Community"), *Indo-Ievropa: Etnosfera. Istoriosofia. Kul'tura* 1 (1991): 5.

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<sup>29</sup> From the Spil'na Diia website, <<http://www.sd.org.ua/>>, accessed 1 November 2003. Spil'na Diia (Collective Action) is the political-organizational wing of *Perekhid-IV*.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Iurii Kanyhin's *Vikhy sviashchennoi istorii: Rus'-Ukraina* (*Landmarks of Sacred History: Rus'-Ukraine*) (Kyiv: Ukraina, 2001), and *Shliakh Ariiv: Ukraina v dukhovnii istorii l'udstva. Roman-ese (Path of the Aryans: Ukraine in the Spiritual History of Humanity, A Novel-essay)* (Kyiv: Ukraina, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> An eclectic mixture of Christianity, Vedism, Zoroastrianism, Theosophy, and cosmism, Berdnyk's cosmology and attempts to create a Ukrainian Spiritual Republic have waned since their heyday in the early 1990s and are no longer a prominent element within Ukrainian alternative spirituality. They have nevertheless had an influence in this context, attracting followers who have gone on to play active roles in Ukrainian Neopaganism and Native Faith.

<sup>32</sup> See Dudar and Fylypovych, *Novi relihiini techii v Ukraini*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Based on my own observations in Kyiv, confirmed in interviews with participants, the average age in regular weekly gatherings can hover in the forties or even early fifties, while festival occasions tend to attract a higher proportion of younger participants. This has been explained to me by *ridnovir*s as being a result of the Soviet Union's poor level of religious education (older people were not well indoctrinated within mainstream Christian groups, so have less resistance to a new religion) combined with a recent upsurge in Western-style materialism among youth (which has kept their numbers down) (interview with Ratyslav, 5 August 2002; other informal conversations), and as being due to Ukrainian Neopaganism's concern for *simeistvoennist'* (family life), as opposed to Russian Neopagans' greater focus on *ihrovysycha* (ritual games) (interview with Halyna Lozko, 7 August 2002). Native Faith also appeals to those for whom nationalism is the primary value, and for whom Christianity is not part of the solution but part of the problem.

<sup>34</sup> The first figure is an estimate by religion scholar Lyudmyla Filipovych, presented in Anatoly Kolodny, Lyudmyla Filipovych, and Howard Biddulph, eds., *Religion and the Churches in Modern Ukraine* (Kyiv: n.p., 2001), 71. The second is from a chart ascribed to <<http://www.adherents.com>> and cited in Dudar and Fylypovych, *Novi relihiini techii v Ukraini*, 117.

<sup>35</sup> Anatolii Kolodnyi, *RUNVira (Ridna Ukraïns'ka Natsional'na Vira)* (Kyiv: Svit znan', 2002), 34. This brief monograph is the most complete scholarly study of RUNVira to date.

<sup>36</sup> I take these figures for *runvir* and *ridnovir* groupings from Anatolii Kolodnyi, "Tablytsia zmin merezhi relihiinykh orhanizatsii Ukrainy" ("Table of Changes in the Fabric of Religious Organizations in Ukraine"), *Relihiina Panorama* 3 (2002): 46–47, slightly modified from more recent discussions with representatives of these groups.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in Ihor Kichak, "Khrystianstvo chy pothanstvo?" ("Christianity or Heathenism?"), *Derzhavnist'* 1–2 (2002): 33.

<sup>38</sup> Kolodnyi, *RUNVira*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Włodzimierz Pawluczuk, *Ukraina: Polityka i mistyka (Ukraine: Politics and Mysticism)* (Krakow: Nomos, 1997), 173ff.

<sup>40</sup> Sylenko, *Maha Vira*, 22:111.

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<sup>41</sup> *Slovo Oriiv*, June 11001 YD. [Year of Dazhboh] [2001], 5. Note that Sylenkoite publications date themselves according to his own idiosyncratic calendar. For instance, the first five issues of the Oriiana community's *Samobutnia Ukraïna Rus'* (*Originary Ukraine Rus'*), dated themselves back to the year 9000 B.C.E. (i.e., 1999 C.E. was 10999 YD.). With the sixth issue, the dating system was changed to another, derived from prehistorian Mykola Chmykhov's writings; see *Samobutnia Ukraïna Rus'* 7, dated the summer of 7508 YD. [2000].

<sup>42</sup> A diversity of deities was recognized by the Eastern Slavic peoples before Christianization. By the late ninth century C.E., the most important among them included Perun (god of thunder and lightning), Svarog or Svaroh (a sky god), Dazhbog or Dazhboh (a solar god), Veles or Volos (god of cattle, wealth, and the underworld), Stribog or Stryboh (god of winds), and Mokosh or Makosh (the only major female deity in Kniaz' Volodymyr's pantheon before the latter's conversion to Christianity). Folkloristics identifies certain personages as more relevant to the peasant ritual calendar; these include Kupalo (masc.) or Kupala (fem.), after whom the summer solstice was named. Lada and Dana are among a series of apparently female deities, although little is known for certain about whether and how they were worshipped. For overviews and further reading, see Roman Zaroff, "Organized Pagan Cult in Kievan Rus': The Invention of Foreign Elite or Evolution of Local Tradition?" *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 2 (1999): 47–76; Marija Gimbutas, *The Slavs* (London: Harper and Row, 1971); and Mark Kulikowski, *Bibliography of Slavic Mythology* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> Kolodnyi, *RUNVira*, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Oleh Bezverkhyi, *Ridna Vira (Native Faith)* (Vinnytsia, Ukraine: self-published, 1996); *Visnyk Soboru Ridnoï Ukraïns'koï Viry (Annals of the Council of the Native Ukrainian Faith)* 1 (2001).

<sup>45</sup> A. M. Kolodnyi and P. L. Yavorskyi, eds., *Istoriia relihii v Ukraïni (History of Religion in Ukraine)* (Kyïv: Znannia, 1999), 649.

<sup>46</sup> Informatsiyno-analitychnyi viddil RV RPV, "Rusyns'ke (Ukraïns'ke) Ridnoviria Siohodni" ("Ruthenian [Ukrainian] Native Faith Today"), *Rodove Vohnyshche* 1 (7512 [2004]): 12–15; Volkhv Mezhyr, "Chomu zvevosia pravoslavnymy" ("Why We Are Called 'Orthodox'"), *Dukhovnyi Visnyk Ridnoï Pravoslavnoï Viry* 1, supplement to *Tryhlav* 4, no. 6 (25 November 7511 [2003]): 3.

<sup>47</sup> Volodymyr Shaian, *Vira Predkiv Nashykh (Faith of Our Ancestors)* (Hamilton, Ontario: Obiednannia Ukraïntsv Ridnoï Viry, 1987).

<sup>48</sup> Halyna Lozko, *Ukraïns'ke yazychnytstvo (Ukrainian Paganism)* (Kyïv: Ukraïns'kyi tsentr dukhovnoï kul'tury, 1994); Halyna Lozko, *Ukraïns'ke narodoznavstvo (Ukrainian Folkloristics)* (Kyïv: Zodiak-EKO, 1995); Halyna Lozko, *Etnolohiia Ukraïny (Ethnology of Ukraine)* (Kyïv: ArtEk, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Obiednannia Ridnoviriv Ukraïny, "Vidovza Pershoho Vseukraïns'koho Soboru Ridnoï Viry do Uriadu Ukraïny ta do vsikh ukraïntsv v Ukraïni y poza ii mezhamy" ("Response of the First All-Ukrainian Council of the Native Faith to the Government of Ukraine and to All Ukrainians in Ukraine and Beyond its Borders"), *Svaroh* 9 (1998): 4.

<sup>50</sup> Halyna Lozko, *Etnolohiia Ukraïny*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Lozko, ed., trans. and comment., *Vesova Knyha: Volkhovnyk (The Book of Veles: Ritual Manual)* (Kyïv: Taki Spravy/Svaroh, 2002).

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<sup>52</sup> Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000). See also Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> Lozko, *Etnolohiia Ukraïny*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Lozko, *Etnolohiia Ukraïny*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> Lozko, *Etnolohiia Ukraïny*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> One should remember, however, that the terms “left” and “right” carry a somewhat different inflection in the former Soviet Union than in the West. Some Neopagan writings indicate sympathy or identification with the Soviet era, e.g., Budymyr, *Vidrodzhennia svitohliadu: Velyke ukraïns’ke vidvoivannia (Rebirth of a Worldview: The Great Ukrainian Resistance)* (Kyïv: self-published, 2001), or with Russia’s current post-Soviet situation, e.g., Yaromysl, “Pro Moskoviiu i Moskovytiv” (“On Muscovy and Muscovites”), *Slovo Oriïv* (Oct. 2001), 8–9. Most, however, are strongly critical of Soviet Communism, but also critical of Western liberalism, capitalism, cosmopolitan internationalism, and multiculturalism. *Ridnovirs* have therefore not taken a clear position on the political events that have recently engulfed Ukraine. While many have voiced strong criticism of the administration of President Leonid Kuchma, some *ridnovirs* have expressed support for opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko, while others have criticized his pro-Western “cosmopolitan” leanings and declared a preference for the Socialist Party or for one or another of the many fringe parties. See, for instance, the debates on the electronic bulletin board at <<http://alaty.fastbb.ru>>, accessed 7 December 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Lozko, *Velesova Knyha*, 366.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., Dmytro Dontsov, *Natsionalizm (Nationalism)* (London: Ukraïns’ka Vydavnycha Spilka, 1966), originally published in 1926.

<sup>60</sup> Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson, and Michalina Vaughan, *The Far Right in Western and Eastern Europe* (New York: Longman, 1995); Sabrina Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Goran Dahl, *Radical Conservatism and the Future of Politics* (London: Sage, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Tomislav Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); Tomislav Sunic, “Marx, Moses, and the Pagans in the Secular City,” *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 24 (1990): 2.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Wegierski, “The New Right in Europe,” *Telos* 98–99 (1993–94): 55–71; Michael Torigian, “The Philosophical Foundations of the French New Right,” *Telos* 117 (1999): 6–42; Paul Piccone, ed., *Telos* 98–99 (1993–94), Special issue on the French New Right; Sunic, *Against Democracy and Equality*; Pierre Taguieff, *Sur la Nouvelle Droite: Jalons d’une analyse critique* (Paris: Descartes, 1994); Alain de Benoist, “Monotheism vs. Polytheism,” trans. and ed. Tomislav Sunic, *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture* (April 1996): 20–23; Thomas Sheehan, “Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist,” *Social Research* 48 (1981): 45–73.

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<sup>63</sup> Liudmila Dymerskaya-Tsigelman and Leonid Finberg, "Antisemitism of the Ukrainian Radical Nationalists: Ideology and Policy," *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism* 14 (1999), <<http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/14liud.html>>, accessed 1 November 2003; Victor A. Shnirelman, "'Christians! Go home!' A Revival of Neopaganism between the Baltic Sea and Transcaucasia: An Overview," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17, no. 2 (2002): 197–211; Shnirelman, "Alternative Prehistory," 1–20.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Mstyslav, "Na chomu spravzhnie tabu?" ("Taboo on *What?*"), *Slovo Oriiv*, August 10001 Y.D. [2001], 6.

<sup>65</sup> "Ne mai spravy z zhydom!" Halyna Lozko, ed., *Volkhovnyk. Pravoslav (Ritual and Prayer Manual)* (Kyiv: Svaroh, 2001), 138.

<sup>66</sup> Editorial, *Slovo Oriiv*, August 10001 Y.D. [2001], 1.

<sup>67</sup> Yaromysl, "Pro Moskoviyu i moskovytiv" ("On Muscovy and Muscovites"), *Slovo Oriiv*, October 11001 [2001], 8.

<sup>68</sup> The comments that follow are my own fairly cursory observations and are not based on any detailed analysis.

<sup>69</sup> For contrasting accounts, see C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Jarich Oosten, *The War of the Gods: The Social Code in Indo-European Mythology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); Dean A. Miller, "Georges Dumézil: Theories, Critiques and Theoretical Extensions," *Religion* 30 (2000): 27–40; and Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), ch. 6.

<sup>70</sup> On Russian Neopaganism, see Victor A. Shnirelman, "Russian Neo-pagan Myths and Anti-Semitism," *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism* 13 (1998), <<http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/13shnir.html>>, accessed 1 November 2003; Victor A. Shnirelman, "Vtoroe prishestvie ariiskogo mifa" ("The Second Coming of the Aryan Myth"), *Vostok* 1 (1998): 89–107; Victor A. Shnirelman, "Perun, Svarog and Others: Russian Neo-paganism in Search of Itself," *Cambridge Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (2000): 18–36. The situation in other Central European countries appears somewhat more moderate (i.e., less clearly aligned with ultra-nationalism) than the Russian and Ukrainian situations; see Scott Simpson, *Native Faith: Polish Neo-paganism at the Brink of the Twenty-first Century* (Krakow: Nomos, 2000); and Piotr Wiench, "Neo-paganism in Central Eastern European Countries," *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Irene Borowik and Grzegorz Babinski (Krakow: Nomos, 1997), 283–92.

<sup>71</sup> Kolodnyi, *RUNVira*, 58.

<sup>72</sup> E.g., Simpson, *Native Faith*; Wiench, "Neo-paganism in Central Eastern European Countries."

**GLOSSARY**

<i>hetman</i>	Cossack ( <i>kozak</i> ) military-political leader.
<i>hromada</i>	Congregation, community.
<i>kniiaz'</i>	Commonly translated as "prince," though by the eleventh century the function of <i>kniiaz'</i> had evolved from tribal leader to something more akin to monarch.
Kyivan Rus'	The state which grew around Kyïv (Kiev) in the ninth and tenth centuries, with authority consolidated under the <i>kniiaz'es</i> of the Riurykovich dynasty, and then collapsed in the twelfth century from internecine conflicts and Mongol invasions. Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian historians have all claimed it as part of their heritage. Ukrainian claims for a special relationship to Kyïvan Rus' are based on the territorial coincidence of Kyïvan Rus' and modern Ukraine, but these had been suppressed under Tsarist and Soviet rule and, while flourishing in the Ukrainian diaspora, have only re-emerged in Ukraine since 1991.
Pravoslavia	Literally, right-worship, orthodoxy; the name of the <i>yazychnyk</i> congregation/community led by Halyna Lozko.
<i>ridnovir</i>	Follower and practitioner of the Native Faith.
<i>ridnovira</i>	Native Faith.
<i>ridnovirstvo</i>	Native Faithism.
<i>runvist</i>	Believer/member of the Native Ukrainian National Faith RUNVira.
<i>yazychnyk</i>	Pagan, heathen, polytheist.