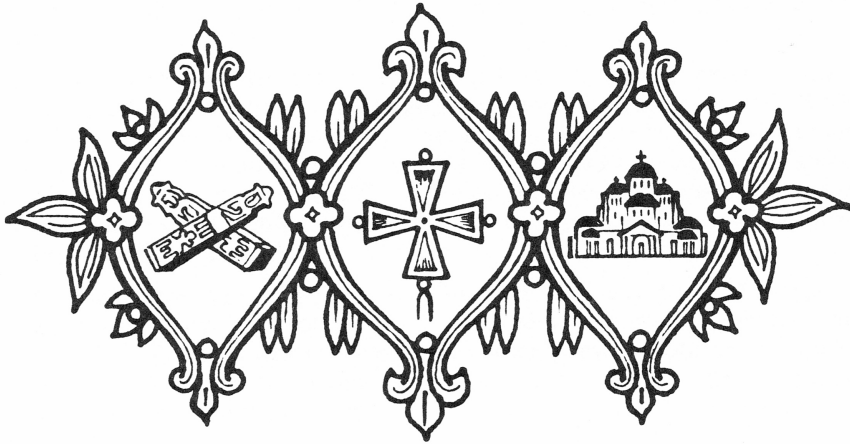


3. Search for religious identity by Eastern Slavs, IX - XII centuries.



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There are three categories of sources for the study of Eastern Slavic mythology and its religious **Weltanschauung**:¹

First, the most ancient sources are remarks in works of authors from other lands with respect to the religion and religious practices of the Eastern Slavs.² To this category can be assigned the records of the treaties between the Greeks and the Rusychi; these have been preserved in the Slavic chronicles. However, these were originally composed by the Greeks, and later translated into Old Slavonic.³

Second, there are writings from the Slavic Christian period which mention ancient pre-Christian beliefs, rites, and the names of ancient deities. Such remarks are to be found in the Kievan Chronicles, in sermons⁴ and other writings which were polemics against the ancient pre-Christian beliefs and practices. To this category, also, belongs the most important medieval witness, **The Lay of Igor's Campaign**, by an unknown author, who wrote it between 1185 and 1187 A.D.⁵

Third, the most unreliable sources (from the scholarly point of view) are contemporary (or recent) folklore and rituals which purport to preserve the ancient ones. To this category belong also descriptions of folkloric elements and rituals which are not extant today, but were recorded with assiduous precision in the nineteenth century.⁶

Each of the three categories has its strong and weak sides; each, alone, cannot supply sufficient material for a reconstruction of the religious practices, rites and religiosity of the Eastern Slavs in the pre-Christian era.⁷ Furthermore, we must take into account the constant movement of the alien tribes and nations throughout what is the contemporary Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia; this occasioned both ongoing destruction of and contribution to the records of religiosity in those lands.⁸ Hence, only by combining all three classes of sources (mentioned above) is it possible to reconstruct an approximate content and shape of the ancient religious scene.

The foremost general characteristic of Eastern Slavic religiosity is an intense emotionality.⁹ The lives of the peoples are dominated by emotions to such an extent that the functioning of the intellect and will is overshadowed. Their emotionalism, sentimentality, exaggerated delicacy of feelings and lyricism find expression in their aestheticism of folklore, their ritualism, embroideries, music and song. This emotionalism creates an aura of profound introversion, which explains why Eastern Slavs readily display incredible enthusiasm, and then cool down even more quickly. These ethnopsychological traits also contribute to their profound religiosity.¹⁰

