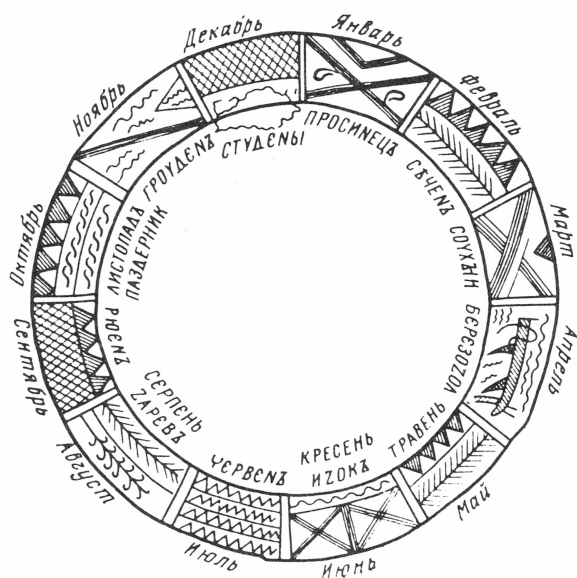


## 2. The Ultimate Reality and Meaning in the Pre-Christian Religion of the Eastern Slavs.



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## 1.2.4.1

# The Ultimate Reality and Meaning in the Pre-Christian Religion of the Eastern Slavs

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### 1. SOURCES

For the study of Eastern Slavic pre-Christian religion, mythology, religiosity and *Weltanschauung* (Ilarion, 1965; Meyer, 1931; Mansikka, 1922; Afanas'ev, 1865-69) there are four sources available.

*First*, the most ancient source is provided by archaeology, that is, statues or 'baby' on the mounds, burial sites with various artifacts, statues of different deities, 'kapyshcha' or places of worship, sacrifices, and displays of idols under the open sky, etc.

*Second*, the most ancient written sources are remarks in works of authors from other lands with respect to the religion and religious practices of the Eastern Slavs (Procopius, 1914-40; Garkavi, 1870; Kawerau, 1967). To this category can also be assigned the records of the treaties between the Greeks (actually Byzantines) and the Rusychi. These have been preserved in the Primary Chronicle of the Kievan Rus'. It seems that these were originally composed by the Greeks, and later translated into Old Slavonic (*RPC*, 1953; *PVL*, 1950).

*Third*, 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 sermons and other writings which were polemics against the ancient pre-Christian beliefs and practices (*Pershi*, 1973; Gal'kovskii, 1913; Nikiforovskii, 1875). 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. (Ilarion, 1949; Zenkovsky, 1963; Fedotov, 1966; Maknovetz', 1967).

*Fourth*, the most unreliable sources (from the scholarly point of view) are contemporary (or recent) folklore and rituals which purport to preserve some elements of the ancient ones. To this category belong also descriptions of folkloristic elements and rituals which are not extant today, but were recorded with assiduous precision in the nineteenth century (Odarchenko, 1984; Kolessa, 1963; Miroljubov, 1982 and 1981; Alexander, 1975).

Each of the four categories has its strengths and weaknesses; each, alone, cannot supply sufficient material for a reconstruction of the religious beliefs, practices, rites and religiosity of the Eastern Slavs in the pre-Christian era. (Cherepanova, 1983; Borov-

s'kyi, 1982; Gieysztor, 1982; Rybakov, 1981; Znayenko, 1980; Brückner, 1980; Głosik, 1979; Lowmiański, 1979; Gediga, 1976; Matic, 1976; Pascal, 1976; Pomerantseva, 1975; Ivanov, 1974; Osieglowski, 1971; Ledič, 1969–1970; Vyncke, 1969; Onufriichuk, 1966; Kravtsiv, 1966; Fedotov, 1966; Petrov, 1964; Rybakov, 1962; Drahomaniv, 1961; Miller, 1957; Schwenck, 1953; Kravtsiv, 1952; Meyer, 1949; Petrov, 1949; Urbańczyk, 1947; Cross, 1946; Mal, 1940; Wienecke, 1940; Haas, 1939; Sokolov, 1938; Jakubowski, 1933; Fischer, 1928; Zelenin, 1927; Vovk, 1927; Brückner, 1926; Niederle, 1926; Gorondtsov, 1926; Niederle, 1924; Brückner, 1918; Kagarov, 1918; Machal, 1918; Potebnia, 1914; Anichkov, 1914; Bulashev, 1909; Dakariv, 1903; Leger, 1901; Leger, 1985; Machal, 1981; Krek, 1887; Famitsyn, 1884; Nechui-Levytskyi, 1875; Potebnia, 1865; Kostomarov, 1847.)

Since the Eastern Slavs lived on an open plain between Asia and Europe with few natural boundaries, we must take into account the constant movement of 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. This is attested by an enormous literature on the pre-historic and early historic period of Eastern Europe (Ren Boykowych, 1983; Mishko, 1981; Liashevskii, 1977; Dragan, 1976; Lisovyi, 1976; Pasternak, 1975; Vernadsky, 1969; Minns, 1965; Chubaty, 1964; Paramonov, 1963; Dvornik, 1956; Dvornik, 1949). Therefore only by combining all four classes of sources mentioned above, and of the geo-political and historical situation of the Eastern Slavs is it possible to reconstruct an approximate content, shape, and history of the ancient religious scene of Eastern Europe (Magocsi, 1985; Tesla-Tiut'ko, 1980; McEvedy, 1967).

## 2. PRE-CHRISTIAN EASTERN SLAVIC WORLD VIEW

### 2.1 *General Characteristics and Religiosity*

All scholars studying Eastern Slavs agree that their foremost general characteristic is an intense emotionality. The lives of Eastern Slavs, and especially their religious lives, are dominated by emotions to such an extent that the proper 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 (Janiw, 1974; Ianiv, 1966; Fedotov, 1966; Hrushevs'kyi, 1962; Lypyns'kyi, 1935).

The religiosity of Eastern Slavs was not modelled on a *phobos-type* of religion; there was no fear of the deity or of nature-forces. There was only reverential awe before deity and before mysterious created reality. It was, at least partially, an *eros-type* of religion, or one based on love, fertility, and posterity. As we shall see, at the centre there was the archetype of 'mother,' the Great Goddess, and the fertile soil. Eastern Slavic *eros-type* religion is very closely connected with the *agape-type*. This is based on mutual and social love, and ultimately reveals itself as a *gens-religion*, one based on a solidarity of the