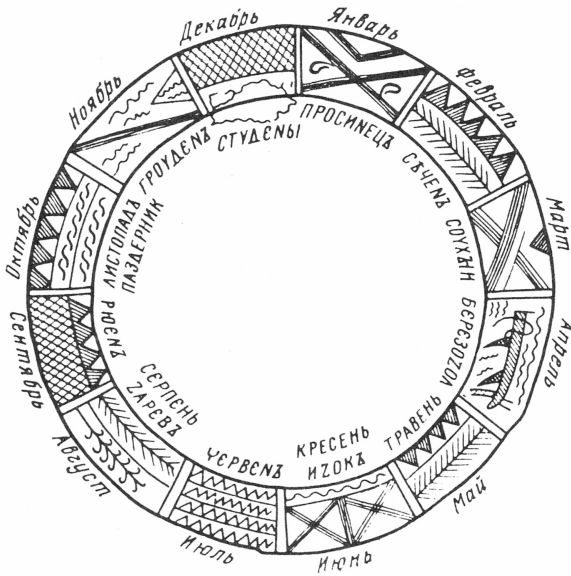


2. The Ultimate Reality and Meaning in the Pre-Christian Religion of the Eastern Slavs.



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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-

