RECEPTION OF TRYPILLIA HERITAGE IN NATIVE FAITH MOVEMENT OF UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Abstract. One of the topical issues in modern religious studies, requiring a proper coverage, is the study of the Trypillia spiritual heritage perception by representatives of modern neo-pagan religious organizations (usually called in Ukraine as native faith or native beliefs, originally "ridnovirski" from the Ukrainian words "native" and "believe" that identification clearly indicating the autochthonous characteristics of beliefs, customs and rites represented by a particular confession). Today in Ukraine there exist a number of different religious confessions and several communities, which differ significantly from each other in their beliefs and religious practices. Despite the fact that the vast majority of native faith communities in Ukraine are patriotic and nationally oriented, historically there is a certain "chronological paradox", in that the first mention of the name "Ukraine" appears in the Kyiv chronicle in 1187, while officially the process of Ukrainian lands (that time called "Rus") christianization began in 988. Such dissonance naturally actualizes the issue of searching for an alternative ethno-confessional identity in the native faith environment, as the vector of modern native believers religious activity targets at reviving autochthonous pre-Christian beliefs and spiritual values, that is, towards an older chronological retrospective, among which objects quite often there appear the Trypillia spiritual heritage. Trypillia culture (also called Cucuteni-Trypillya) – is a Neolithic–Eneolithic archaeological culture, whose name comes from the name of the village of Trypillya in Kyiv.
region, it flourished between 5500 and 2750 BCE, was located between the Carpathians and the Dnieper in modern Ukraine, Moldova and Romania (Trypillian culture). The novelty of this work is that for the first time in this research perspective, the issues of both the reception of the spiritual heritage of ancient Trypillia by modern natives of Ukraine and the problem of ethno-confessional identity in the Ukrainian native movement are considered. The methodological basis of our study relays upon the conceptual work of the French philosopher Vincent Decombe (Decombe, 2015, 281 p.). In particular, the concept of "ethno-confessional identity" is a component of the collective identities concept developed by the researcher, i.e. those that formulate answers to the question: "Who are we?". At the same time, this term represents the situation of ethnic and confessional identities integration, which in the context of understanding the religious processes of the native-faith movement in Ukraine do appear as an actual phenomenon of religious life in its inseparable integrity. The research publication highlights the problem through the prism of the most prominent religious confessions and communities in the religious field of Ukraine, which render certain visions regarding their own reception of the ancient Trypillians spiritual heritage.

**Keywords**: Trypillia culture, native-faith religion, ethno-confessional identity, Native Ukrainian National Faith (NUNF or RUNVira), Association of Native Believers of Ukraine (ANBU or ORU), Religion of Nature (Nature Religion).

**Main study presentation:**

As early as in Soviet times, in period preceding the proclamation of Ukraine's independence and shortly before the beginning of the process of native-believers movement creation and institutionalization in its territory, in 1985 a public organization called "Trypillia Brotherhood" was founded in Ukraine. Its doctrine was called "Dobroslav'ya" ("Blessing"). The moral and ethical category of "Good" was considered as the highest deity. The religious doctrine was based on the Trypillia culture perception as proto-Ukrainian one, thus recognizing the Ukraine as the basis of the Indo-European community of peoples. Despite the fact that the “brothers” activities were stopped by the repressive Soviet authorities, the main ideas of "Trypillia brothers" were highlighted much later in a modified form and conceptualized in the work of Ivan Mulyarchuk "Dobroslav’ya" (Mulyarchuk, 2010, 424 p.).

Despite the fact that the public organization "Trypillia Brotherhood" due to objective historical circumstances has not been institutionalized as a native faith
religious denomination, it should be noted that both in the elaborated doctrine and in the organization’s name for the first time was formulated an example of the new religious movements representatives’ subjective ethno-confessional identification with the ancient autochthonous historical community, which once existed on the territory of modern Ukraine.

The first organization of that kind officially registered in independent Ukraine was the Native Ukrainian National Faith (RUNVira), which was officially registered on September 25, 1991. However, as a religious organization, it emerged much earlier in the United States and Canada Ukrainian diaspora in the 60ths of the twentieth century.

The ideologist and founder of RUNVira, Lev Sylenko, who considered himself the Trypillian descendant (Sylenko, 1996, p. 242), defined the basic provisions of religious doctrine he created with the following formulation: "RUNVira" is a modern faith, although combined with the Ancestors’ roots (Trypillia) (Sylenko, 1995, p. 334). In his book "Maha Vira" ("Powerful Faith"), which starts with historical retrospectives, he often focuses on the spiritual heritage of Trypillia. Referring to authoritative scientific sources, he cites evidence of the farming initial origin location namely in Ukraine, during the high noon of Trypillia culture, appealing to the civilizational primacy of the Ancient East / Mesopotamia (Sylenko, 1979, p. 80). Here the ideologue of RUNVira gives evidence of the important role of the Trypillians in the early Slavonic peoples formation (Sylenko, 1979, p. 110). Further Sylenko points to the high level of religiosity development in the Trypillia culture, which he calls a "diamond" one (Smorzhevska). The author writes "It was a simple-minded faith that adored the elements and forces of nature, and at the same time a courageous and cheerful faith" (Sylenko, 1979, p. 420). His "Maha Vira" even presents some reconstructions of Trypillia society ritual practices, such as: "In the Trypillians" settlements in the spring, our ancestors arranged solemn ritual dances, which reflected the struggle of two forces (Spring and Winter battle) for their establishment on earth (Sylenko, 1979, p. 162). Or: "Organized cemeteries have been found near Trypillian settlements. Examining them, we see: the dead are buried in rows. There are rows where great-great-grandparents are buried. And there are
rows where great-grandparents are buried" (Sylenko, 1979, p. 1324). L. Sylenko himself emphasized that "in some rites of RUNVira the rituals of our Ancestors Trypillians are clearly felt" (Sylenko, 1995, p. 329). It should be noted that although the above ritual practices in modern studies of Trypillia culture are not sufficiently substantiated with scientific evidence, they do clearly indicate a direct subjective identification of this religious organization representatives and their religious activities with Trypillia spiritual heritage.

The religious denomination founder also calls the ancient Trypillians "Oriyans" (ibidem Aryans, the Indo-European race languages’ creators according to Sylenko), which, according to the author's interpretation came from Trypillia (namely the Trypillian Ukraine, from the Dnieper river banks) to India and brought there their definition of concepts and beliefs, and the oral language of the "Vedas".

It is noteworthy that in "Maha Vira" the RUNVira founder reports that the early Oriyans / Pelasgians (also known as Trypillians) while migration processes moved to the Aegean coast, to Crete five thousand years ago. Here the local peoples learned from the settlers a way of building temples (Sylenko, 1979, p. 95). At the time of writing the "Maha Vira" (1964-1979) no one knew about the oldest agricultural temples of Trypillia civilization, and the first of these sacred complexes was discovered only in 2012 after excavations near the village of Nebelivka, Kirovograd region (On the eastern border of Old Europe, 2015, p. 7). Therefore, we can talk about the proper prognostic abilities of L. Sylenko, who in his work stood several decades ahead of the discovery of new data, which were later confirmed by archaeological science. Here we should add his mention of the "Trypillian calendar" which knowledge, according to the author’s statement, the Trypillians / Oriyans arrived on the shores of the Indus, Tigris, Euphrates. And so the Sumerians in Sumeria, the Orians in India, the Trypillians in Oriyana (Ukraine) celebrated the New Year in March (the same as in Trypillia) (Sylenko, 1979, p. 423-424). Moreover, the first archaeological discovery of the astronomical Trypillian calendar took place together with the discovery of the Nebelivka Temple in 2012 (Museums of Ukraine) (this finding, among domestic scientists is called the Nebelivka Disk).

In addition, it is significant that in Sylenko’s "Maha Vira" the words
"Trypillia", "Trypillia culture", "Trypillians" occur more than a hundred times, which repeatedly testifies to the subjective ethno-confessional identification of RUNVira ideologue with the spiritual heritage of ancient Trypillia.

In his poem "Guest from the Temple of the Ancestors" L. Sylenko first of all emphasizes: "I came from the Temple of the Ancestors, from Trypillia" (Sylenko, 1996, p. 7), then "We, Trypillians, the people who gave Europe a divine serf, the first myth" (Sylenko, 1996, p. 17). In the work by L. Sylenko "Holy Doctrine. Sylenko's Faith in Dazhbog" the following statement appears: "Kievan pre-Christian faith, in which nature and its phenomena are worshiped, is a direct continuation of the Trypillian (agricultural) faith" (Sylenko, 2006, p. 139).

It is also worth noting that the main religious symbol of RUNVira – the Triunity ("Trisuttya") in the Sun, present in every shrine of this religious movement, according to L. Sylenko, was a God-symbolizing sign in the Trypillia culture (Pavlyuk, 2013, 397). In this way, the followers of RUNVira try to prove the longevity of the autochthonous spiritual tradition and emphasize the idea of their own if not identity, then at least preemption, i.e. continuity or at least some involvement of the newly created religious symbols in the deep sacred meanings of Trypillia culture.

Another religious organization is the Association of Native Believers of Ukraine (full name: Religious Center of the Association of Religious Communities of Native Ukrainians of Ukraine; abbreviated hereinafter as ORU), whose representatives position themselves as continuing the tradition of Kievan Rus ethnic religion (Association of Native Believers of Ukraine). At the same time, in the process of pre-Christian beliefs reconstruction, this confession’s representatives do not miss the remnants of Trypillia culture spiritual heritage. This is especially evident in the reconstruction of the pre-Christian calendar, the so-called "Svarog’s Circle" (Kolo Svarozhe) – the annual cycle of ORU holidays. According to Wikipedia, the Svarog’s Circle is a scientific development of Halyna Lozko, ORU founder (author's certificate № 9592, issued by the State Department of Intellectual Property on March 19, 2004) (Kolo Svarozhe). In the center of such a calendar circle a well-known drawing of the Trypillian plate is located (published in the
"Encyclopedia of Trypillia Civilization", 2004), which probably represents of the annual solar circle. From such a central Trypillia plate of "Svarog’s Circle" the similar Trypillian-style lines, curls and symbols unfold, which in a holistic picture make up the graphic reconstruction of the ancient Slavic calendar. To be noted is that the four largest solar holidays at the "Svarog’s Circle" fall on the equinox and solstice, and when linking with the scientific reconstructions of the temple relic "Nebelivka Disk" as authentic ritual and astronomical Trypillian calendar, it evidently coincides with the archaeological artifact. In addition, the chronology of the "Svarog’s Circle" is carried out on the solar path, in a circle from left to right (Svarog, 1996, p. 39), which is the actual iconographic characteristic of objects bearing the Trypillia civilization calendar features. The time at the ORU Slavic calendar is counted from the Trypillia times (as of 2021, currently year 7529). Therefore, the so-called “ancient Slavic” ethno-religious calendar used by ORU is more like the example of the Trypillia period reconstruction than the ancient Slavic period one.

Analyzing the "Faith of Our Ancestors" (1987), one of the main theological works of ORU principal ideologue, Ukrainian philosopher and sanskritologist V. Shayan (presented among the ORU believers as the Great Magus of Ukraine) we can see that founder of the Revival of the Ukrainians Native Faith (Shayan) does not mention the term of Trypillia culture in the literal sense of this word at all. There are mentions of Indo-Europeans, Indo-European religion, Indo-European language and peoples, Indo-European roots, and so on (Shayan, 1987, p. 190, 216, 227, 805, 833). The work also uses the term "prehistory" to denote the depth of research. At the same time, the pages of the religious-historical and scientific-cognitive magazine "Svarog" (published by ORU) contain many publications dedicated to Trypillia. For example, these are articles entitled "On the religion of Ukrainians 7-5 thousand years ago" (Svarog, 1995, p. 17), "Trypillia religion" (Svarog, 2004, p. 33), "Trypillia culture and Ukrainian language" (Svarog, 2010, p. 61-63). We even find the following ideas in the confessional magazine of ORU: "Taking the Trypillia civilization as the proto-Ukrainian religion starting point, we can only roughly say that the Ukrainian [calendar] is more than 7.5 thousand years old" (Svarog, 2001,
p. 27). In this way, the unification of ORU religious communities in their religious activity fills the gaps in the beliefs of its founder V. Shayan regarding the existing ethno-religious identity with the Trypillia spiritual heritage.

Also we should note that in the Ukrainian native faith movement the denomination "Religion of Nature" ("Nature Religion") positions itself quite clearly and its religious activity is maximally focused on the reconstruction of religious beliefs of Trypillia times. The association official website states the following: "Religion of Nature" is an autochthonous, traditional religion of the ancient gene pool of European civilization, which dates back to 7 thousand years ago. It was naturally formed and professed by the people themselves, developed through the evolutionary transition of the Ancient Europe population from the appropriating to the reproducing economy (agriculture) and was kept in the orbit of the primary spiritual intelligentsia. Such spiritual tradition development territorial core was the modern Ukraine lands, where the best conditions for agriculture are concentrated. Those ancient ancestors of Ukrainians are called Trypillians, and their culture is known as "Trypillia Civilization" (Nature Religion). As to God concept doctrinal interpretation, the confession ideologues postulate the following statement: "The oldest concept of God manifested in the Cosmic Law and in the Cosmic Order is a concept that has been formed since Trypillia times" (Nature Religion). In the article "What is the Religion of Nature: the Spiritual Center commentary", we find: "The Cosmic Order / Law / God unfolds and manifests itself in its highest cosmo-essences of Parental and Maternal origins. In Trypillia religion, as in the "Religion of Nature", these are Father Heaven and Mother Earth, which are united by a sacred marriage and give rise to a third cosmological force: the Sacred Tree (which conventionally constitutes the "natural" Trinity)» (What is the "Religion of Nature").

Worth to mention is that the "Sacred Tree" cult presence in the Trypillia culture is confirmed by a sufficient factual archaeological base and in its sacred meaning this symbol is based on agricultural cults honoring plants and fertility.

Thus, the basic postulates of "Religion of Nature" confession appeal to the interpretation of the reconstructed remains of Trypillia cultural heritage.

In addition, in 2019, the religious organization "Religion of Nature" staged a
scaled model experiment of the Trypillia Temple (based on the reconstruction of the Nebelivka Temple archaeological excavations results) (Zavalii). The experiment used the exact dimensions of the building at a scale of 1:30 and the maximum allowable parameters of wood (not more than 4-4.5 meters in the actual housing of Trypillia period), after that certain visual realities of the building were reproduced. During the spring equinox of 2021, the mock-up experiment based on the Religion of Nature center allowed arguing that the sacred structure was designed so that during the annual solar equinoxes, light from the morning sun enters the main ritual hall. Moreover, the beam of sunlight lingered for some time on the main temple symbol, the Sacred Tree (or World Tree in modern research interpretations) ("Space Liturgy" of the Trypillia Church). That experiment results were disseminated to the general public on the "Religion of Nature" confession’s YouTube channel.

The religious denomination followers are also engaged in making ceramic copies of the Nebelivka Disk (Trypillia Calendar) in their own workshop and have included it to the list of sacred artifacts of the Religion of Nature religious association (Secrets of the Nebelivka Disk).

Finally, the website of "Religion of Nature" religious organization contains a section where the relevant materials selection entitled "We, the Trypillians" (We, the Trypillians) is present that is an indisputable evidence of their perception of Trypillia spiritual heritage as their own, native thus providing a manifestation of ideological ethno-confessional identification of this religious denomination followers with the Trypillia culture.

Thus, on the example of "Religion of Nature" confession we can to the maximum extent observe the phenomenon of ancient farmers’ spiritual heritage reconstruction in the modern context. In addition, this publication authors witnessed the included observation, when leaders of different faiths conducted joint prayer activities around the model of the Trypillia Temple on December 7, 2019 at the "Religion of Nature" confession Spiritual Center. This fact from the organization religious life gives evidence that the idea of honoring and reviving the Trypillia spiritual heritage can be one of the factors in building and establishing a constructive intra-confessional dialogue and overcoming the current inter-confessional
contradictions in the native faith movement of modern Ukraine.

**Conclusion:**

We have considered some aspects of the religious activity of the main religious denominations of Ukraine, which appeal to the spiritual heritage of Trypillia culture. As we can see, it is an important source of reconstruction of religious beliefs, symbols and elements of religious practice of the above-mentioned religious organizations.

The represented reception of Trypillia spiritual heritage in the modern native movement of Ukraine testifies to the retrospective vector of religious activity of the vast majority of Ukrainian natives, focused on the reconstruction of autochthonous archaism in the context of modernity, ie search, revival, preservation and reproduction of own ethnoreligious. In other words, for Ukrainian natives, the native land is sacred, and therefore, all the achievements of predecessors who at different times were on the native land, including the spiritual heritage of ancient tribes and nationalities who lived in this area acquire a special status, and sometimes and sacred significance.

A characteristic feature of the reception of Trypillia heritage by modern natives of Ukraine is its correlation with the results of professional archaeological research and their simultaneous addition to their own, sometimes mythological concepts and interpretations. This feature fits perfectly into the trends of modern religion, because the construction and declaration of new religious myths based on new scientific discoveries, concepts or hypotheses are an integral part of the vast majority of new religious movements.

The perception of the Trypillia spiritual heritage in native faith movement of Ukraine results in the phenomenon of ethno-religious identification with it, the essence of which is to subjectively identify the ethnic and religious component of the new denomination with the beliefs of the long-vanished archaic community and their genetic identity.

The retrospective vector of ethno-religious identification of Ukrainian natives influences the specifics of the reconstruction of autochthonous religious beliefs, symbols and cult and has its manifestation in the following features:

1) creation of alternative names to the representatives of ancient nationalities and their own interpretation of their semantic load;
2) ethnocentrism, emphasizing the precedence of cultural achievements of the ancient ethnic community;

3) idealization of religious beliefs of indigenous peoples.

The perception of Trypillia heritage as its own, native, source, which reaches its time span of about 7,000 years, contributes to the fact that in real conditions of the interrupted autochthonous religious tradition outlined in the publication, plays a fundamental role in determining his worldview and the formation of a religious "self-concept".

In addition, the characteristic principle of the religious worldview of Ukrainian natives works, which can be formulated as follows: "The older, the holier." Strengthening the retrospective component of ethno-religious identification of Ukrainian natives, he in turn actualizes a sense of piety to the reconstructed religious system of values, which is consistent with a sense of pride in the successes, achievements of their ancestors. This is extremely important for the preservation of the reconstructed religious tradition in a situation where the Ukrainian native is in a quantitative minority among believers of other denominations or individuals with different worldviews, such as the fairly common phenomena of practical atheism or consumerism, which do not capacious trends of modern secularized society.

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