

**PAGANISM AND NEO-PAGANISM OF THE 20-21st CENTURIES:  
ON THE TERMINOLOGY OF SLAVIC VARIATIONS  
OF “INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS”**

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A burst of religions, which blew in spiritually dormant Russia in the last decades of the 20th century, flashed with a new force in the new millennium. Kaleidoscope of religious affiliation of Russians is very diverse and currently is represented by the widest range of movements both of local and of foreign origin (Бурдо, Филатов, 2005-2008). One of hundreds of “religious projects”, existing and developing in modern Russia, is a religious and socio-political phenomenon of Slavic paganism. It is surprising that it has attracted hearts and souls of part of the national society and has caught an eye of scholars and the common people in the 20th century, but even in the 21st century there is still no universally accepted terminology applied to the phenomenon. At the heart of the problem there are rival groups represented by a block of an academic community, representatives of the media, researchers of other faiths, and, finally, by leaders of Slavic paganism. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that each of the parties involved usually describes the phenomenon in a biased way, seeing it through a prism of their religious, political, ethnic and other commitment. “Numerous studies on the subject [of modern paganism] differ in their areas of analysis and methodological strategies. Precisely because of this omni-focused study so far it seems to be difficult enough to fix exactly the essence of this phenomenon, to implement the categorization of its key characteristics and the basic patterns of operation” (Михеева 2009). As a result of this terminological split within the mentioned groups, there are new interpretations of conventional (established) definitions. In addition, completely new terminology is being created on the basis of both foreign borrowings and on the encyclopaedic knowledge of specific researchers.

In the first place the existing shortcomings of domestic classifications must be associated with a too specific, too narrow approach to the problem. This accounts for the frequent use of one or two terms that do not allow creating a complete picture of this phenomenon, and developing its concep-

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tual framework. Another important disadvantage to be recognized is peculiar “definitional radicalism” of interest groups. In most cases, a researcher simply ignores the hypotheses of alternative terminology or presents definitions of opponents in a preconceived unfavourable way. The third kind of shortcomings is that of the degree of ideological influence which makes impact on almost all groups of researchers, who hold an unambiguous evaluation principle based on dichotomies “bad-good”, “white-black” in their publications on this Slavic religious movement.

In order to get rid of such one-sided views on the problem and to create (or to choose from already existing) a more correct “terminological baggage” we need to give up applying the different concepts in accordance with professional, political and, naturally, religious predilections of researchers, which has frequently happened in the historiography of the issue. Using the “impersonal” mass of definitions (but not a system of arguments), we can escape our unconscious evaluative pressure. In addition, it is necessary to emphasize the ambiguity and complexity of Slavic paganism of the 20-21st centuries. In our opinion, in connection with this circumstance noted by domestic experts (Чрева 2004; Гайдуков 1999; Фаликов 1999), a set of concepts used for a given social and religious phenomenon should include some vestiges, thus enabling to take into account views of all sides. This can be explained not only by a purely scholarly, objective definitional base, but also by an elementary sense of tact.

### **The term *paganism***

The term *paganism* (*язычество* in Russian) is one of the most frequent terms of national historiography used to name followers of an ancient Slavic faith. All interested groups of researchers use this term, although with completely different meanings. It is noteworthy that the term *paganism* is recognized and defended by some authors interested in the issue. They use this term because of its recognisability, well-known associations and long history. Other part of experts on the topic who follow the same line of arguments comes to a completely opposite evaluation of the term and considers it unacceptable in connection with the phenomenon in their reasoning. For example, modern spiritual preferences of part of the Slavic ethnic group are described by the concept *paganism* in works of O. Aseev, L. Zhukova, M. Yakupov, A. Schypkov, S. Markov, D. Kopysov, in a joint three-volume survey of Russian and British scholars “Atlas of modern religious life in Russia” (Асеев 1999; Жукова 2001; Якупов 2009; Щипков 1998; Марков 2002; Копысов 2000;

Бурдо, Филатов 2005) and many other publications. Some supporters of the term are comfortable with such a name of their worldview and include the word *paganism* into their general lists of acceptable terms (Родослав 2006; Емельянов 2005; Верея 2006). Some titles of pagan literature are very typical: "Paganism is like magic", "To Russians from pagan Alexei", "Manifesto of the Pagan Tradition", "Pagan Dawn - the prospect of the pagan movement", "Russian pagan manifesto", "The Pagans are responsible" (Доброслав 2005; Щеглов 2001; Васильев et. al. 1997; Васильев, Потапов, Сперанский 1999) etc. This term can be found in some names of unions of supporters of pantheistic views: the Moscow pagan community, the Nizhny Novgorod regional pagan community, the Circle of Pagan Tradition (Субботин 1992), etc.

Reflecting on origins of the word *pagan* and its meaning, in the first place supporters are trying to find and develop all possible positive aspects of *paganism*. This approach is typical of ideological leaders of national movements A. Dobrovolsky (Dobroslav), N. Speransky (Velimir) and I. Cherkasov (Veleslav), representing three generations of paganism of the 20-21st centuries. An idea common to "pagan Patriarchs" has been suggested by hermit Dobroslav from Kirov, who believes that fundamental, basic bonds of people with their ancient worldview are reflected in the term: "What is Paganism in terms of lore? Languages are folks. Paganism is the folk, natural religion of one's own... The concept *paganism* reflects an ancient sense of triumph of the people (language) and their worldview" (Доброслав; Белов; Велимир 2006).

At the present time the term *paganism* has become sufficiently widespread in the form of various combinations. As a rule, *paganism* is completed by twin-concepts, e.g., "traditionalism", "natural belief", "religion of natural revelation", "native faith of the Slavs" (see below), or by adjectives that are used to give more specifics to the term. In this case clarifications can be reduced to two principal positions. The first concerns an ethnic component and, accordingly, decorates *paganism* with adjectives *Slavic* or *Russian* (Велимир. 2006; Здоровец, Мухин 2005; Филатов 1996), thereby separating the autochthonous variant of the movement from similar foreign counterparts. The second is about chronological and conceptual amplifications. In their definitions of the socio-religious phenomena, the advocates of this position tend to use phrases *resurgent paganism* (Заседателева 2003; Асеев 1999; Балагичкин 1994), *modern paganism* (Сперанский 1996; Иеромонах Виталий (Уткин) 2001; Свистунов 1991; Прокофьев 2002; Здоровец, Мухин 2005; Зобнина et al). In addition, there are joint options that combine the two positions, e.g., *modern Russian paganism* (Солдатов; Гайдуков 2004; Копысов 2000).

As already has been noted, researchers, who defend the point of view that the use of the term *paganism* is incorrect (according to Belov, the bulk of Slavic adherents of this movement should be added to them – Белов), refer to a stereotype attached to the term and its historical origins as their main argument: “We have looked for a precise definition many times, but we have not found one yet. The term *pagans* is not correct enough because of a tinge of contempt (“those who did not accept the true faith”). A Western term *pagan* (from the Latin *paganus* - alien, in the sense of opposing the Roman world, barbaric, pagan) has not caught on because of quite clear associations...” (Якутовский 2008). E. Yagafova’s arguments about the terminology used to describe religious beliefs of the Chuvash people are quite revealing in this context. Recalling the same negative etymology of terms, the researcher believes that negativity of the term *paganism* is associated “with the socio-political context that accompanies the introduction of the term into academic literature” (Ягафова 2007). E. Yagafova believes that the term was created by Orthodox missionaries and church that fought against traditional faith of the Chuvash people. Making references to views of some anthropologists (S. Tokarev, G. Matveev, A. Salmin), the author concludes that a cautious and conditional use of the term *paganism* is needed (Ягафова 2007). In many respects writer V. Avdeev shares identical views. Using words *stranger*, *outsider* and *other* as synonyms for *paganism*, he equates Pagans with the most inferior people (Авдеев 2006). The weak certainty and folksy meaning of the word *pagan* are described by V. Istarhov, who blames Christians (Judeo-Christians) for the appearance of this concept (Истархов 2001). A. Nakorchevsky, researcher of Ukrainian Slavic neo-paganism, suggests giving up generally academic use of the term *paganism*, citing the same “causal set”: the lack of general acceptance among followers and indoctrination of the concept (Накорчевский 2008). Obviously all groups that in one way or another relate themselves to the “paganism”, but due to the enumerated stereotypes prefer to use other self-definitions should be added to the category of parties disapproving of the term.

Other large group of experts does not recognize this term because modern paganism, its presentation and content sort ill with primordial, historical analogies. According to a point of view of this group, the term *neopaganism* is acceptable for description of paganism of the last two centuries. Before proceeding with the definition, we will try to find out whether the use of the term *paganism* is appropriate for description of worldviews of certain parts of Russian society. It seems that works of foreign leaders of paganism dedicated to the term can provide significant assistance in this matter. Briefly

tracing historical changes of semantics of the concept *paganism* from an irreligious Latin term *pagus* (“rural district”) up to this day, Gus Di Zeriga, one of the ideologists of Wicca, has noted: “So, despite its origins, the word “Paganism” has become a common term for a special type of spirituality. I want to emphasize these aspects of the word, focusing on connection with the earth, ancient traditions and spiritual practices” (Ди Зерига 2002). Leader of French legal philosophy Alain de Benoist shares a similar position. According to the author of the monograph “How to be a Pagan”, yesterday’s pejorative form of the term *pagan* is a thing of the past, as the word has firmly embedded in everyday language. Expressing disagreement with an opinion of a famous Italian philosopher J. Evola, who has considered the term as offensive, Alain de Benoist says: “This view seems to us hardly acceptable, not only because this word has been sanctified by use and over time acquired a new meaning, but also because there were cases when certain movements turned contemptuous nicknames given to them in honor ...” (Бенуа 2004).

Thus, the Western nations fully rehabilitated the term. It is common among native pagan groups. In our opinion, the clearest argument in support of *paganism* has been formulated by one of leaders of the community “Kolyada of the Vyatichi”, magus Velimir. He believes that the term is scholarly neutral and enables modern followers to claim continuity between pagan past and present: “Today there is no way to determine which side of the theological discussion has put forward the term – it is equally acceptable to both parties. It is stupid to consider it invented by Christians for the humiliation of the Gentiles so as to consider the word *monotheism* offensive to Christians. This is a completely neutral academic term, which very clearly and correctly distinguishes between traditional beliefs and artificial one-sided “author’s” religions. The word *pagan* has nothing abusive to pagans. The fact that today Christians maintain that it is vituperative, only contributes to Christian propaganda (*propaganda* in Latin means exactly *ideological work* among the pagans) ... It is necessary to use the term *pagan* or the phrase *Slavic paganism* in all official documents – statutes, names of communities, etc. Otherwise, the possibility of creation of Russian confession and of acceptance of historical continuity between modern paganism and pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavs will be dismissed. For any theological expert examination, appointed in such cases in accordance with applicable law, the whole our movement is only a set of small isolated sects attributable to various new faiths that are unrelated to the ancient Slavic religion (Slavic paganism) and, therefore, does not belong to the traditional religions in Russia. Registered names of the communities must include a word *pagan*. The sooner we can get to universal acceptance of this

term that directly corresponds to the objectives of our movement, the better” (Велимир).

Of course, in our opinion, *paganism* as a term that characterizes the religious worldview of part of the Russian society has its right to exist and be used in special studies. The notion is universal. Taking into consideration all its evaluations, we should admit that the term has clear associations, and is used by both supporters of the movement, and its zealous opponents in modern Russia. In order to describe and characterize this phenomenon of Russian religiosity and to explain an object to the mass of ordinary readers in a simple way, the research team has to resort to the word *paganism*. Naturally, depending on the purpose of a work and ideological choices of its author, *paganism* is complemented by accompanying words, enters into a list of religions or even forms a basis for a separate classification. The most successful phrases that have this concept as the basis are *modern paganism*, *modern Slavic paganism* and *resurgent paganism*. These terms should satisfy the whole interested community. The adjective *modern* emphasizes novelty of the religious movement. The young age of modern paganism is a problematic topic that is vigorously discussed in academic, journalistic and religious communities. On the one hand, according to research audience that has negative attitudes, “spiritual innovations” of adherents of paganism cannot relate the present paganism to the traditional one (Шнирельман 2005; Алексеев 2001; Строев; Филатов 1996; Кавыкин 2007). On the other hand, Russian pagans themselves are not inclined to talk about their worldview as a stagnant thing. In their understanding, stagnation is not a typical feature of paganism – it mutates and evolves. Hence, the term *modern paganism* can be considered quite acceptable. *Contemporary Slavic paganism* further specifies the phenomenon. Adding of “ethnic particularities” to the term helps to distinguish the paganism under consideration from a mass of similar contemporary socio-religious manifestations. At the same time the national-oriented nature of communities and associations that hold pagan beliefs is stressed. The concept *resurgent paganism* emphasizes existence of a period of “historical decay” of Slavic paganism, as well as reports on current attempts to “reanimate” it.

### **The terminological discussions of *neo-paganism***

*Neo-paganism* (неоязычество in Russian) is the most widely used term of domestic humanities that one way or another concerns the issue of Slavic paganism of the last two centuries. Currently the term plays a role of universalizator that best reveals the essence of this religious phenomenon.

However, apparent clarity and particularity of *neo-paganism* conceal pitfalls that do not allow putting the concept on a par with a number of terminological standards in the context of research on modern Russian paganism. The most obvious disadvantages of *neo-paganism* are its foreign origin and a related minded focus on “specialization of the definition”, the ambiguous meaning, the lack of clear criteria for the concept, a partial monopolization of the term by scholars and religious authors that are critical of the Slavic paganism of the 20-21st centuries.

Considering the history of emergence of this definition in their monographic work “History of Pagan Europe”, Nigel Pennick and Prudence Jones pay attention to following features of the term: *neo-paganism* “is often used especially by American commentators, for all modern pagan practices. But originally, and rather pejoratively, artists of Pre-Raphaelite art movement were called like this. Only later a group appeared whose members call themselves “Neo-pagans”. It was founded in CAMBRIDGE in 1908, and it included among others the artist Gwen Reyvret and poet Rupert Brooke” (Пенник 2000).

Over time, the English term with initial negative and narrow artistic meanings has been transformed and filled with a modern sense. Encyclopaedia Britannica associates neo-paganism with nature religions. Implying that almost any spiritual movement of Europe and the Middle East, which tries to restore an ancient polytheistic religion, is neo-paganism, the authors of Britannica see the main reason to separate neo-paganism of ritual magic and modern witchcraft because of pursuits of followers of the former to restore authentic pantheons and rituals of ancient cultures: “Neo-Paganism differs from them, however, in striving to revive authentic pantheons and rituals of ancient cultures” (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The encyclopaedia states that a spiritual movement that is closest to neo-paganism, although distinct from it, is Wicca – contemporary witchcraft. However, ideologists of modern witchcraft, in particular Scott Cunningham, Anode Judith, Gus Di Zerigi, do not separate neo-paganism and Wicca. Witchcraft is considered as a analogue of neo-paganism or one type of the movement (Каннингэм 2003; Юдит 2004; Ди Зерига 2002). In addition, when defining neo-paganism (a new paganism, according to S. Cunningham – Каннингэм 2003), Western advocates of nature religions appeal to ideas that clearly do not fit and even clash with the national concept of Slavic paganism. So, A. Judith thinks that neo-paganism is a religion (rather than ideology) (Юдит 2004). S. Cunningham speaks of pagan religions of the modern world as newly emerged, and G. Di Zeriga claims that Christian culture has made a huge impact on the new Gentile and that pagan tradition has been interrupted (Ди Зерига 2002).

The significant differences, both terminological and ideological, between the modern Slavic and Western paganism were taken into consideration by magus Velimir (N. Speransky) from the community “Kolyada of the Vyatichi”: “Our paganism should not slide into selfishness. There is an example. To a large extent, Western paganism (in Britain, France, Germany, USA) exists as a selfish magical doctrine, claiming to know the truth. This doctrine gives an opportunity to a Western pagan to live as he/she wishes, without requirement to follow norms of society: not to have a family and children, to have unnatural sexual relations, to behave provocatively while being nobody in reality” (interview with N. Speransky 10/10/2010). In spite of its European origin and significant differences in the semantic context, the term *neopaganism* has penetrated both into environment of Russian followers of nativism and into the circle of Russian researchers of this socio-religious phenomenon. In regard to “the neo-pagan question”, contemporary representatives of this phenomenon are divided into supporters of this term (naturally in its “new European meaning”), and the most ardent opponents of it.

One of the first persons, who used the term *new pagans* in the 20th century, was Russian writer L. Gomolitsky. He devoted his several short stories, poems, articles, and essays to Slavic neo-paganism (Gomolitsky). However, as in the case of Western ones, *new paganism* was only a literary image and device for Gomolitsky (Миролюбов 1984). Ideologist of modern polytheism A. Dobrovolsky (Dobroslav) also applies the term in its present form in his work. Dobroslav does not see anything wrong in this term and its use by native Slavic neo-pagans. According to him, its semantic content is virtually identical to the definitions of Western representatives of nature religion, where neo-paganism is seen as a traditional worldview, adapted to modern life. “Neo-paganism, i.e. new paganism, is not a return back, an artificial reconstruction or blind imitation of the past, but, on the contrary, a victorious step Forward, “Remembering the Future”, a new round of a meaningful development of precious ancestral heritage” (Доброслав 2005:15; Доброслав 70; Доброслав 2004:30).

This point of view has been developed by A. Scheglov in his work “The Return of the Gods”: “A prefix neo is indeed justified in the case of paganism, since we deal not with a certain system of relations, inherited by continuous transfer from some social agents to others, but with a conglomerate of deliberately constructed and reconstructed beliefs, rituals, polemical theses, objects of worship and all things that turn a group of ordinary citizens into followers of a new faith” (Щеглов 1999). The author admits that *neopaganism* is an acceptable term, but nevertheless believes that in the future its meaning will

be simplified, modified and will return to its origins. Neo-paganism will become accustomed paganism (Щеглов 2001).

An article on the terminology and the relationship of terms *neo-paganism* and *Slavic neo-paganism* has been written by A. Shiropaev. According to him, these self-designations refer to radically different modern Pagans. The neo-pagans should be taken as a separate community, critical of of the group known as *Slavic neo-pagans* (about the term see below). “A carnival style” of Slavic neo-pagans and their attempts to create a “quasi-ecclesiastical” structure are a matter of criticism too. In contrast to Slavic neo-pagans, Neo-pagans (or, according to Shiropaev, “Pagan futurists”) uphold an integral worldview. They can be characterized by a total rehabilitation of life, unity of worldviews, aesthetics and socio-political ideas. According to the author, neo-paganism is a masterful racial and revolutionary vanguard of the revival of European paganism (Шиropaев 2007). As in previous studies, A. Shiropaev thinks that the main criterion for using of the prefix *neo* is the impossibility of reproduction and repetition of an ancient tradition primarily due to the loss of it. In general, the position of supporters of *paganism* with the prefix *neo* differs from the stand of the camp of nature religions, and can be conveyed by capacious words of French philosopher Alain de Benoist: “new paganism must be really new” (Бенуа 2004).

On 20 February 2005, in Tsaritsino Park in Moscow, leaders of 12 groups of pagans, opponents of the term *neo-paganism*, made a public appeal entitled “On “neo-paganism” and modern paganism. Against clericalization of humanities”. Recalling the view of church leaders and clerically-minded writers, who assert that Russians lost the traditional (pagan) philosophy long ago, and, hence, the term *neo-paganism* is perfectly legitimate, the authors of the appeal have provided following counter-arguments: “We are aware of the basis of our faith. It is not a ritual (liturgy, initiation, sacraments), but a relationship with ancestors and descendants, with our Gods and all of Nature, both inside and outside. ... We live in Russia and keep an uninterrupted tradition of kinship, language and the shared deep symbolic meanings from the times of our remote ancestors to this day” (Круг Языческой Традиции 2005). In addition, the pagan leaders noted that the use of the term facilitates the introduction of misconceptions about connection of modern Slavic pagans with right-wing movements into the mass consciousness. The authors paid attention to the foreign origin of the term, fairly implying the “public process associated with the preservation and restoration of elements of ancient natural beliefs and ethnic cultures of Western Europe and America” (Круг Языческой Традиции 2005). The word *pagan* was explained as derived

from the medieval definition of commoners, and, accordingly, the Russian *paganism* (язычество) from the root *yazyk*, meaning *the people, the tribe*. On the grounds of these circumstances of appearance of the terms *neo-paganism* and *paganism* members of the Circle of the Pagan Tradition stand for the unacceptability of the term *neo-paganism*.

Besides the direct analysis and criticism of the concept *neo-paganism*, “Appeal of Tsaritsyno” contains a list of self-definitions permissible by pagans of Russia. It includes *paganism* and *modern paganism*. It is noteworthy that the authors recognize existence of pagans and “Neo-pagans” in the Russian pagan environment of the 21st century. For the authors of the appeal, Neo-pagans are people who search for new forms of embodiment of elements of traditional culture, uncritically operating theological terminology and trying to build a new tradition of their own (Круг Языческой Традиции 2005). Rodoslav (A. Zinchenko), one of the elders of the Russian polytheistic movement, also holds the opinion about Neo-pagans as a group interested in tradition, but understanding the pagan worldview very superficially. In “The tortuous paths of Tradition”, Rodoslav names a “book-learning” as the main distinctive feature of the *neopagan* movement (Родослав 2006). Thus, unlike true, “natural” pagans, Neo-pagans comprehend the tradition by the books and restore the native faith according to a variety of written sources and literature. G. Botsenyuk (Prince Ogin), a leader of a spiritual movement “Great Fire”, uniting pagans from other Slavic countries, shares this stance. According to him, Neo-pagans are reenactors who try to revive Slavic folk beliefs using scholarly means and such attempts are doomed to failure. Here the essential factors are the political pressure that in one way or another has affected the whole academic research and turned notions of researchers into dogmas, as well as the lack of direct transmission of a pagan tradition (interview with G. Botsenyuk 10/10/2010). It should be noted that the Slavic neo-pagans have been accused of the same “sins” by the defender of the new paganism A. Shiropaev (see above).

An anonymous article “Russian spirit and its defamation”, published in a newspaper of ethnic revival “Tree of Life” in 2007, contains a very important addition to the term *neo-paganism*. The author, sharing the opinion expressed in the appeal, points out the exact date of occurrence of the unacceptable term – 1999. Furthermore, he draws attention to the low awareness of issues of contemporary Russian paganism among the academic community. The consequences of such a faulty view on the problem were an introduction of terminology that was contemptuous of differences, and blended all movements of Russian paganism into one group called by the unacceptable and insulting term *neo-paganism* (Русский дух и как его шельмуют 2007).

In their joint article “Analysis of modern myth-making in the latest research on paganism” S. Zobnina, D. Georgis, D. Gavrilov, and V. Vinnik refer to the current “monopolization of terminology” in academy, the existing shortcomings of the term, and disadvantages of researchers who use it (in particular V. Schnirelman). The academic world rejects other possible terms: *ethnic beliefs*, *tribal beliefs*, *Slavic neo-paganism* for description of modern paganism (Зобнина et al). Referring to “an absurd phrase” *neo-paganism* and replacement of it with a Russian analogue, a new paganism, magus of the community “Rodoljubie of Kolyada of the Vyatichi” Mezgir asserts that both terms are incorrect. According to Mezgir, the prefix *neo* is typical of conceptions of authors belonging to monotheistic religions. As an example, the sorcerer cites an episode of national history, which is associated with the split brought by reforms of Nikon that has divided the Russian Orthodox Church into Old Believers and “new believers”. “Reforms of Nikon fundamentally ruined ceremonies and customs of the Church and caused a massive popular unrest. What kind of continuity can you speak of? Most Old Believers still have not recognized “converts” and continue to live according to their own rules” (Мезгирь 2002).

Thus, at present the domestic pagan movement has not developed a single, definitive perspective on the issue of legitimacy of the term *neo-paganism* or *new paganism*. The problem remains unsolved, both in terms of recognition of *neo-paganism* as a universal “self-identifier” and in terms of approbation of using the term in the scholarly works and pseudo-scholarly literature written by pagan leaders.

The majority of academic community, media representatives and theologians of various denominations, studying the problems of modern paganism, are inclined to use the term *neo-paganism*. Their main arguments in favour of the term are as follows:

1. The Slavic pagan tradition in its authentic form has disappeared, and therefore there is no direct line of reproduction that allows considering the modern movement to be a new (neo-) paganism (Копысов 2000; Лобазова 2007; Меравильд 2002);
2. The presence of various religious and philosophical doctrines in the Slavic paganism of the 20-21st centuries (Шелбанова, Болотова 2005; Шиженский 2009; Чрева 2004);
3. Inclination to diversity, constant development, division of pagan groups and modernization, syncretism and eclecticism, the lack of stability factors as characteristics of the Slavic pagan community (Мчедлов 2002; Бундина, Козлов, Мухин 2001; Гурко 2001; Чрева 2004);

4. Attempts of modern adherents of polytheism to reconstruct, revive and design Old Slavic rites and rituals are seen as an evidence of novelty and artificiality of their practices (Копысов 2000; Кавыкин 2007; Гайдуков 2004; Асеев 1999);
5. Specific attitudes of representatives of ethnic religiosity towards historical processes, ideology and the state policy, and Abrahamic religions, as well as development of neo-pagan national patriotism, environmentalism, and anti-globalism in connection with these views (Балагичкин 1994; Кавыкин 2007; Ярцев 2009);
6. The dominant urban prevalence of the movement (Копысов 2000; Шнирельман 2001; Здоровец, Мухин 2005).

It is natural that these features combined with the already discussed shortcomings of the investigated term cannot contribute to the recognition of the term *neo-paganism* as a leading self-identification by majority of members of community to which the term is applied. Modern pagans do not acknowledge the existence of a temporary gap in continuity of tradition. The overwhelming majority of Russian nativists will not agree with a commitment to foreign religious doctrines attributed to them.

Particularity of the term *neo-paganism*, which confirms the ambiguity and lack of clear criteria for definition, manifests itself in frequent confusion of terminology both by researchers and by pagans themselves. Despite the fact that the words *modern* ("belonging to the same time, one era to the present time, to the present era") and *new* ("first created or made, recently appeared, re-opened") are different in most cases, *neo-paganism* most often is replaced with the phrase *modern paganism* (Коскелло 2005; Бундина, Козлов, Мухин 2001; Якутовский 2008). On the other hand, both terms can mean "belonging to the present time". Many authors use both words for description of the phenomenon under consideration. As a result of such elaboration in the literature on the newly established paganism, one can observe not only the replacement of *neo-paganism* by *modern paganism*, but also the simultaneous use of *modern neo-paganism* (Чудинов; Шнирельман 1998; Асеев 1999), *modern Slavic neo-paganism* (Прокофьев 2002), *modern neo-pagan parties*, etc. Thus, if we consider that both words have the same meaning, we will get the following phrase: *new neo-paganism* or *new new paganism*. In the case of recognition of semantic differences of *modern* and *new* we will get the following: *present newly emerged paganism*. The first option is inexpedient to use because of a linguistic and semantic pun. The second interpretation, emphasizing the novelty and recent origin of the phenomenon, once again underlines the lack of continuity between the old paganism and the modern one.

In our opinion, both phrases are used by certain academic, pseudo-scholarly audience in order to exaggerate a one-sided, obviously biased attitude towards the Slavic paganism of the 20-21st centuries.

## Conclusions

The whole variety of arguments for rejection to use the term *paganism* suggested by researchers can be reduced to several principal propositions and proposition about an interruption of the polytheistic tradition for several ages and a consequent forced resurrection of this tradition should be stressed. Such an obvious reluctance of Russian pagan leaders to include the term into their terminological set and, on the contrary, very frequent use of the term for self-identification by fellow North American spiritual seekers, are likely related to different initial meanings of the term. Among other reasons, the difficulty of research and evaluation of the phenomenon under consideration rests on its consideration as a phenomenon of the Russian religiosity that accounts for predilection for word-creation in scholarly and religious literature.

Summarizing the discussion of the term *neo-paganism*, it is necessary to focus on arguments that emphasize its bias. First, neo-paganism (a new paganism) is a concept that emerged in European culture, originally denoting artists of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Secondly, in terms of its fundamental ideological basis, the modern interpretation of European neo-paganism seriously differs from the modern Slavic pagan movement. Third, the concept has different and often mutually exclusive semantics both among proselytes of Russian paganism and in academy. Fourth, since its inception to the present *neo-paganism* (and especially its Russian equivalent) is a term that has distinct negative connotations. In our opinion, these facts inhibit us from using this term when describing the modern Slavic pagan movement in Russia.

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**Roman Shizhensky, O. Tyutina**

**Paganism and neo-paganism of the 20-21st centuries (on the terminology of Slavic variations “Indigenous religions”)**

### **Abstract**

One of hundreds of “religious projects”, existing and developing in modern Russia, is a religious and socio-political phenomenon of Slavic paganism. There is no universally accepted terminology applied to it. There are different terms used by the academic community, representatives from the media, theologians of other faiths, and, finally, by leaders of the Slavic paganism: *paganism, resurgent paganism, modern paganism, modern Slavic paganism, contemporary Slavic paganism, neo-paganism, new paganism*, etc. The whole variety of arguments for rejection to use the term *paganism* suggested by researchers can be reduced to several principal propositions and proposition about an interruption of the polytheistic tradition for several ages and a consequent forced resurrection of this tradition should be stressed. An obvious reluctance of Russian pagan leaders to include the term into their terminological set is likely related to an initial meaning of the term. The term *neo-paganism* has distinct negative connotations as well as different and often mutually exclusive semantics both among proselytes of Russian paganism and in academy.

Keywords: Slavic paganism, terminology, paganism, modern paganism, resurgent paganism, neo-paganism, ethnics, traditionalism.