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UKRAINIAN NEOPAGANISM AND THE “INVENTION OF TRADITION”

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In this article we made an attempt to consider the phenomenon of Ukrainian Neopaganism in its relation with the popular in the Occident historiography concept of “invented tradition”. Primarily we analyzed the sources that are used by Ukrainian Neopagans for their practices construction and the result of it

Key words: Neopaganism, the “invention of tradition”, traditionalism, rituality, practices.

У даній статті здійснена спроба розглянути феномен українського неоязичництва у його відношенні до концепції «винайдення традиції», поширеної у західній історіографії. Передовсім аналізується те, які джерела використовують українські неоязичники для побудови власних практик і результат якого характеру отримується на виході.

Ключові слова: неоязичництво, «винайдення традиції», традиціоналізм, обрядовість, практики.

В данной статье совершена попытка рассмотреть феномен украинского неоязычества в его отношении к концепции «изобретения традиции», распространённой в западной историографии. В первую очередь анализируется то, какие источники используют украинские неоязичники для

построения собственных практик и результат какого характера получается на выходе.

Ключевые слова: неоязычество, «изобретение традиции», традиционализм, обрядность, практики.

The concept of “invented tradition” (further - the IT) reached by its sources the same-name scientific conferention that was held by British historical journal “Past & Present” in 1983 [2: 7]. The units of articles compilation edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, which summarized the conference work, has already shown the practical (and, it must be noticed, successful enough) using of this concept. It seems, the IT has to be very actual for research of the Neopaganism phenomenon in its Ukrainian and not only Ukrainian variants too. All the more so M. Klimchuk, translator, in the foreword to the articles compilation noticed the “Veles book” as a native analogue of the “poems of Ossian” [2: 10]. However, proposed by the Occident researches concept must be read more attentively, if we want to make direct parallels with the phenomenon of Neopaganism.

For E. Hobsbawm and his followers the IT is a result of the purposeful expropriation of some social practice from the everyday life sphere to the sphere of ideological reproduction with acquiring not inherent for it former functions (primarily it means formalization, ritualization and institutionalization). This concept reminds the “folklorism”, which was described by K.V. Chistov [11: 38-39], but this expropriation is made by the intellectual or political elite “for the new national purposes” [2:18]. The majority of the IT examples described in the collection of articles concerning formal (and even bureaucratic) practices that are weakly connected with ethno-cultural specificity. Whereas in previous studies we proposed a thesis that Ukrainian Neopagans (Ridnovirs), seeking for the pre-Christian identity “reconstruction”, in their practices are oriented on the Ukrainian ethnic cultiue of the XVni-XIX cc. reconstruction [5]. In our point of view, the problem of Ukrainian Neopaganism relation to the concept of the IT can be solved by the analysis of sources, which are used by Neopagans for their practices construction.

During the fieldwork we have distinguished 3 main types of such sources: information that was internalized by Neopagans from ethnographic and historic sources; directly inherited information; information from “alternative” texts of properly Neopagan origin. Let’s try to consider the specificity of each source and summarize, is the IT application to all complex of Neopagan practices rightful.

Calendar rituality is the most demonstrative for the first type of sources. It was widely fixed in the ethnographic literature and in its natural existing also showed itself enough enduring against the processes of entropy. However, it is difficult to define the exact sources, from which Ridnovirs have extracted certain information about the folk calendar rituality. Only one calendar system (that was “reconstructed” by G.Lożko) gives us direct links on the sources [6] (the analogue of this we have also in the Russian calendar system of the society “Veles circle” [10: 341-383], in which there are conspicuous borrowings from the reference book “All the year around. Russian agricultural calendar” edited by the folklorist A. Nekrylova [4]).

Continuous observation of the Neopagan practices attests that Neopagans widely enough used the ethnographic literature and sources for the construction of their practices. That's why the formal realization of such ritual elements usually approaches ceifain local or "generalized" variant, which was fixed by ethnographers. So on Velikden (holiday of the spring equinox) in the majority of the Ukrainian Neopagan streams trashing of the didukh (festive sheaf) prevails. "We haven't found analogues of that in ethnographic literature, but we have a guess that Ridnovirs in such a way reconstruct some certain local variant that was exactly read from the literature. At the same time, authentic rites or their elements became included in the specific religious and philosophical context, acquired new interpretations, become decorated by liturgy elements, analogues of which we cannot find in the historical Slavic Paganism. It can be named contingently the IT, but with the avulsion from its initial definition of the term, because the source of expropriation is not the sphere of everj'day life, but the rituality sphere, and the transformations go not along the line of formalization and institutionalization. Since the early XXI c. Neopaganism become wide-spread more in the cities. We can observe the variants of traditional rural rites adoption to the new environment and the unification of their local features too. Depending on that, how full displayed some holiday rituality in literature, the reconstruction acquires eloquent "folkloristic" features or becomes decorated by new elements. For example, the holiday of Veles (ethnographical St. Blaise's day on the 11* of February in "old style") rituality is reconstructed by the archetype of the "wealth patron", but the holiday of Kupalo (on the summer solstice) keeps the majority of formal and structural elements. We can also observe, how the elements of the global rite code (jack-o'-lantern on the holiday of Svarog that coincides in the Ridnovirs calendar with Occident Halloween) are adopted, which can be qualified as an attempt of their "familiarization", "domestication" by Ukrainian Neopaganism.

The part of directly inherited information naturally consists of at least 3 types. Among 12 Neopagans from different Ukrainian cities that were interviewed only the half answered affirmatively that they had ever used inherited from the parents/grandparents information about folk culture in Ridnovirs' rites. It is interesting that this half is the elder half (born between 1954 and 1980); interviewed persons between 21 and 26 years old denied the presence of any inherited information.

Four persons from that, who answered affirmatively, concretized, in what exactly practices inherited information had been used. Two persons from those, who had answered affirmatively, but couldn't concretize the answer, are the natives of the big cities (Odesa and Kharkiv); previous four persons are the natives of the village of provincial town (Synelnykove).

The content of inherited information that was used by the interviewed people in Neopagan rites varies, but it is typical enough; there are elements of calendar holidays (pysanka painting, home decorating by the bulrush and herbs on Green week, fruits sanctification on Savior holidays, "trees intimidation" during Christmas feasts etc.), elements of wedding and funeral rites, spells from the whammy. It is interesting that the oldest from the interviewed persons, the native of village Tatsyn«

(Lugansk region) couldn't give concrete examples of the used inherited information using, but noticed the "holiday atmosphere" that he remembers from the childhood and attempts to reconstruct now. Also he considers the vyshyvanka made in the beginning of the XX c. from Kyiv Polesia and which was given to him by his wife grandmother (the gap in the local identity he realizes) to be directly inherited attribute he consider.

It is curiously enough that common Neopagans, according to our observations, appeal to using such information in ideological aims (to strengthen the image of their practices authenticity, for example) rarely. However, we can notice an interesting occasion of appealing to own inherited information by the one the Ukrainian Neopagan movement ideologists G.Lożko. In 2011 - 2012 among the societies of the "Ukrainian Ridnovirs Association" there was the discussion about that, how rightful is to sacrifice bread into the fire and about eating the yeast bread at all. G.Lożko summarized her position in the article "The metaphysics of sacrifice in the Native faith", where she claimed not only tradition of yeast bread eating from the Cucuteni-Trypillian culture, but also noticed the recipe of the "Ukrainian yeast" that had been used by her grandmothers in the village in the north of Mykolaiv region [7]. Moreover as a method of own constructions legitimation some Neopagans use *mythical* inheritance. In the Ukrainian context it is concerning primarily 'V.Kurovskiy. Ridnovirs stream, headed by him, "The Family hearth of the Slavic native faith" officially leads itself starting from "the confident group of volkhv families that saved the Jus and the sacred "edic Customs" [8, p. 490]. Further assertion; "Knowledge of the Jus during the latter centuries was hidden from the people, but according to the will of Keepers nowadays they must be return to people. Orthodox volkhvs get the permission for their gradual disclosure" [9], — almost concurs with the New-Age discourse concerning the "sacral knowledge", which is disclosing nowadays; it creates the myth and mysterious halo around the confession.

The third type of the sources we can designate as following. Firstly, the verbal code of Ukrainian Ridnovirs rites (except "The Great fire") is based more on the "Veles book", than on the folklore sources. The image of the direct source of pre-Christian texts seems for majority more attractive, than Christianized folklore heritage (but Neopagans, it was described previously, neglect it too). Hence they began to base their own texts construction on the images of the "Veles book" [7; 276, 306, 381; 3; 247]. Secondly, almost fathomless source for the practices construction 4re ritual universals and mythological archetypes, which were generalized by the XIX-XX c. researches. This usually allows Neopagans to "overcome" an objectively existing gap between their actual social experience (including experience of everyday hfe and labour) and the context of rituality, which is followed by them. So if the fixed in ethnographic literature Ukrainian customs and beliefs of the St. Elijah's day (on the 20* of July in the "old style") concerning main economic work of villains in this time of the year - reaping, haying, harvest protection, Ukrainian Ridnovirs on the 'identified with that day holiday of Perun primarily praise military functions of this šod that displays in the ritual specify. So far as the information of full ritual on the @run's day isn't available Ridnovirs develops their own ritual based on such spread

attributes of the Indo-European Thunderer archetype, as the oak, the sword, the axe, male ritual competition, commemoration of their heroes pantheon (for example, the prince Sviatoslav I Igorevich is very popular among Ukrainian Neopagans). Additionally in Neopagan rituality (particularly in societies of the “Ukrainian Ridnovirs Acoassion”) was incorporated such saved by the ethnography [1] structural element, as a banquet with bull’s meat sacrifice.

In Ridnovirs practices the majority of traditional ritual attributes (korovais, pysankas and crashankas, candles etc.) save their inherent functions although implantation in the new ritual structures. Nevertheless, as in the example with phenomena, researched by E.Hobsbawm, some attributes acquire functions, not inherent previously (although the sphere of rituality as the source of attributes). The bread (primarily circular) is often used as sacrifice, which goes into fire (however, in already mentioned article, G.Lożko tries to prove a long existing of this function [7]). The issues of rushniks and ritual clothes of Ridnovirs for their relation with traditional ritual analogues of Ukrainian were studied weakly. However, it’s not hard to see that Neopagans not rarely decorate them by expressive ideological connotations in the sphere of symbolic as well as in their role in Neopagans’ life.

We can make a conclusion that because of variety sources used by Neopagans for their practices construction, the latter resist for simple identifying with the IT in the author’s definition. Nevertheless, E.Hobsbawm’s remark concerning directly Ukrainian Neopagans: “the appearance of “traditionalistic” or even some movements indicates on the gap [in continuity = inheritance]” [2:21]. That’s why in our point view, we must focus on the more general problems: what are the relations between Ukrainian Neopagans practices and traditional practices of Ukrainian villagers, what are any ethno-cultural reminiscences “on this side” of the gap in the social and cultural experience?

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