

## **The Sacredness of Museum Spaces in Activities of the Pagan Community Rus'ke Pravoslavne Kolo (Community of Rus' people who praise gods)**

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the activities of one of the Native Faith organizations of Ukraine, the Rus'ke Pravoslavne Kolo (Community of Rus' people who praise gods, hereafter CRLG). This organization was founded in October 2007. The center of the community's activities is located in the city of Zaporizhzhia, located on the banks of the Dnipro River. The riverbed is divided by the island of Khortytsia, the largest island on the Dnipro, the pride of Ukraine and a national reserve. The island also contains important historical and archaeological sites. They are part of the CRLG's religious and ritual activities. It should be noted that the island of Khortytsia and its objects (the complex of cromlechs of the Eneolithic period, the sanctuary of the Bronze Age, and the "Scythian Camp" tourist-memorial complex are important components of the religious self-identification of many contemporary Ukrainian Pagans. They give a feeling of belonging to antiquity, to spiritual sources. But it is the representatives of the CRLG, due to the geographical proximity to the museum space of the island of Khortytsia, who most actively use it in their religious and spiritual practices. Contemporary Pagans themselves also create museum spaces that have become part of the culture, such as the Rodovid wandering museum. In 2014, Bereginya<sup>2</sup> Yana (Yasna) Yakovenko became its ideological inspirer and organizer. The museum

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2. The highest spiritual title of a woman in the CRLG, roughly equivalent to high priestess.

exhibits are based on Yana Yakovenko's collection of embroidered shirts (*vyshyvankas*). The Rodovid Museum began its active work precisely due to people's interest in the traditions of embroidery. Yana Yakovenko lectures at schools in Zaporizhzhia and conducts appropriate master classes. Today, the exhibits of this museum are in her home. The museum is "wandering" because it does not have a special room for its exhibits, but in 2020 Yana Yakovenko has officially issued documents for museum activities.

Keywords: Community of Rus' People who Praise Gods (CRLG); Rodovid museum; contemporary Paganism; Ukrainian Paganism; Native Faith; Khortytsia

### *Introduction*

Initially, Ukrainian Pagan associations and groups were ideologically based in nationalism, in line with public sentiment in Ukraine in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was also a necessary condition for the development of conceptual foundations for the activities of contemporary Pagans. And the younger generation of Ukrainian contemporary Pagans, who either came out of the originally existing communities or formed independently of them, have more liberal views. Religious and ideological tolerance is also more pronounced, with even in some places indifference to Christianity itself. Representatives of the younger generation of Ukrainian Pagans are characterized by an orientation towards satisfying their personal spiritual needs; communicating with like-minded people; studying history, folklore, and cultural studies; visiting sacred places; and organizing and holding various ethnic festivals, holidays, music festivals, environmental events, etc. The contemporary Pagan movement in Ukraine is represented by various movements and communities: the Union of the Believers of Ukrainian Native Faith (RUNVira), the Ancestral Fire of Slavic Native Faith, the Great Fire, the Cathedral of the Native Ukrainian Faith, Community of Rus' People who Praise Gods (CRLG), the Association of Pagans "Native Faith," the Spiritual Center "Religion of Nature," the Society of Ukrainian Native Believers, etc. As a rule, they act separately, although there have been and are attempts to unite into more branched structures to hold activities – holidays, socio-political or environmental actions, and so on. There are also followers of contemporary Paganism who are not part of organized structures, but prefer an independent path of spiritual development in this

direction. Represented in Ukraine are such trends as Scandinavian contemporary Paganism and Wicca.

Researchers indicate many reasons for the emergence and spread of contemporary paganism in Ukraine. Among them are both Pan-European (more broadly, actually European and North American), and specifically Ukrainian factors. For European countries (those that at one time were not under the direct control of the USSR), the main reasons for the emergence of modern Paganism were feminism and environmental problems, as well as the crisis of Christianity and the search for a new religion, whereas for the post-Soviet countries, the key issue was the search for national self-identification and an orientation towards their own historical and cultural tradition. As for the Ukrainian variant of modern Paganism, its originality also lies in the fact that the organizational design and development to certain institutional forms took place among the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States and Canada. The foundations for the revival of ancient Paganism in the form of the Native Faith were laid by Volodymyr Shaian in 1934 when he witnessed the ancient rite of the Hutsuls, an ethnic group of Ukrainians, in the Carpathian Mountains. That is, the idea was born in Ukraine, but it was brought to life chiefly elsewhere. And then it managed to get a “second wind” in the independent and sovereign state of Ukraine after 1991.

In her studies of Ukrainian contemporary Paganism, Mariya Lesiv focused on the conceptualization of this movement in Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora as an alternative way to build a national identity in a dramatically changed socio-political situation<sup>3</sup>. The researcher Adrian Ivakhiv was also interested in Ukrainian contemporary Paganism. He compared it with the forms of Western contemporary Paganism, analyzing the stages of development of contemporary Paganism in the context of the socio-cultural and political situation both in the post-Soviet space and in the Western world.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the problem of contemporary Paganism in Ukraine – its diversity, areas of activity, ideological, worldview, and religious features – has already become the subject of research by scholars.

3. Mariya Lesiv, “Glory to Dazhboh (Sun-god) or to All Native Gods?: Monotheism and Polytheism in Contemporary Ukrainian Paganism” *The Pomegranate* 11, no. 2 (2009): 197–222, <https://doi.org/10.1558/pome.v11i2.197>.

4. Adrian Ivakhiv “Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism: An Environmental Ethic of the Religious Right?” *The Pomegranate* 7, no. 2 (2005): 194–225, <https://doi.org/10.1558/pome.2005.7.2.194>.

And this article, devoted to the consideration of sacred spaces in the activities of one of the contemporary Pagan organizations in Ukraine—the Community of Rus’ People who Praise Gods—will continue to familiarize readers with this issue.

Museum space is a multifaceted and multivalent concept. The perception of the museum space through the cultural and religious prism is important in the context of our research. And also as a part of personal perception, as an important component of the everyday practices of Ukrainian contemporary pagans. Awareness of one’s spiritual choice is an indispensable component of self-awareness of Ukrainian contemporary Pagans. One of the elements of religious and spiritual identification is the veneration of “places of power.” Very often such “places of power” are museum spaces. According to the CRLG magus Svitovit Pashnik, “Places of power in my understanding are places endowed with divine power. When you come to such place, you should feel a majestic space. We are part of the universe and must find our place in it. When a people goes to this place, they see beauty, certain features that attract and inspire them, give strength to create. After visiting such places, any work is carried out with inspiration, a people understand that they help to create the world.”<sup>5</sup>

I propose to single out two types of museum spaces that are used by contemporary Pagans in Ukraine. The first is the existing museums, usually state-owned. These are historical, regional, archaeological, and natural history museums, as well as museums dedicated to famous cultural figures. For example, the grounds of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in Kyiv are used by contemporary Pagans for their rituals. In 1907, the researcher Vikentiy Khvoyka, on the excavations of Starokyivska Hill, discovered what was believed for a long time to be a Pagan temple of the eighth to ninth centuries. At this site, as a result of excavations, other important and interesting artifacts of ancient history were discovered. The study of Starokyivska Hill was compared to the excavations of the Roman Forum. Karl Bolsunovsky (a colleague of Vikentiy Khvoyka), suggested that this is the sanctuary of the god Svyatovid. However, the results of subsequent studies have refuted this assumption. Nevertheless, not far from the entrance to the museum there is a

5. Rozyhan Oleksandra, “Khranytelka enerhii pokolin,” *Svarha*. Portal Ridnoi Viry (Keeper of the energy of generations, Svarga. Portal of the native faith), last modified August 30, 2018, <https://svarga.dp.ua/xranitelka-energiii-pokolin.html>.

reconstruction of a temple (sanctuary), where contemporary Pagans perform their rituals and hold various holidays and meetings.<sup>6</sup>

The second type is the museums created by the contemporary Pagans themselves. As a rule, the latter are based on ethnographic and archaeological interpretations by Ukrainian Pagans of certain historical periods in the history of our state. And also they based on the practical component of the activities of today's Pagans, such as the observance of appropriate holidays, ceremonies, and rituals. An important part of the activities of such museums is educational and popularization activities, for example, the Historical and Archaeological Museum *Pradaivnyia Aratta-Ukraine*.<sup>7</sup> Also an interesting format—ecospace and ethno-space. A family educational and health center, the ecological space *Teterivskiy Kish* (Teteriv camp) is known in the Native Faith circles. The purpose of its activity is the revival and development of ancient Slavic customs, as well as the practices of the Cossack mages.<sup>8</sup> *Teterivskiy Kish* is located on the bank of the Teteriv river, near the village of Gorodske, Korostyshivsky district, Zhytomyr region, in a picturesque pine forest. Another ethno-space “Farm in the reeds,” founded by a Pagan couple, Alena and Valentin Dolgochub, is located in the village of Maryanivka, Berezivskiy district, Odessa region.<sup>9</sup>

Over the past few years, the island of Khortytsia itself has become more than an attractive place for lovers of the Cossack period of Ukrainian history. The island is a sacred and museum space for admirers and followers of ancient religious and ideological traditions. For the residents of the city of Zaporizhzhia, Khortytsya is a place not only for rest and walks away from the bustle of the city, but is shrouded in a mass of legends, myths, and mystical stories. The island-museum and the island-legend are not just a sacred place of Ukrainian Pagans. It is a “place of power” and a place of pilgrimage and venue of religious ceremonies and rituals. For CRLG, due to

6. “Yazychnytske kapyshche, “Natsionalnyi muzei istorii Ukrainy (Pagan temple, National museum of history of Ukraine), <https://nmiu.org/qr-codes/2262-yazichnitske-kapishche>.

7. “Muzei onlain” (Museums online). *Ukraina Incognita*, accessed January 11, 2021, <http://incognita.day.kyiv.ua/museums/trypillia/>.

8. “Ekoprostir Teterivskiy Kish” (Eco-space Teterivsky kish), *Discover Mandru Ukraina*, , <https://discover.ua/locations/ekoprostoranstvo-teterevskiy-kosh>.

9. “Ethno-prostir Khutir v ochereti,” (Ethno-space farm in the reeds), <https://www.facebook.com/hhutir/>.

its geographical location, the island of Khortytsia is also a place for various aspects of activity, which will be discussed further.

*A Move toward Polytheism in Ukrainian Paganism.*

For the active and successful activity of Pagan communities and associations, the personality of the leader or leaders plays an important role. The CRLG is headed by the magus Svitovit Pashnik (b. October 3, 1967). He began to take an interest in religion during his school years. It all started with a teacher's remarks about his hair-style. There was a strict dress code in Soviet schools. The male students were required to have short hair. Svitovit wore long hair. He repeatedly heard the remark "Why do you look like a priest?" in other words, a priest of the Orthodox Church. Svitovit in response, when he entering the classroom, said "Lord, have mercy!" in a drawn-out voice, like a priest. This response prompted him to study of religion in its Soviet version.

At that time Soviet atheistic literature was available. Svitovit came to the conclusion for himself that the Christian religion did not suit him as a spiritual guide. But he was impressed by the understanding of God as Nature. In the 1990s, the last years of the USSR, Svitovit became interested in political activities. The rise of national self-awareness, interest in the study of national history, culture, religious traditions, and the native language was characteristic of that time. In 1990 Svitovit visited the Carpathian region and took part in celebrating the Day of Unity of Ukraine. This is an important date in the history of Ukrainian statehood. Officially, it has been celebrated in Ukraine since January 22, 1999. For Svitovit Pashnik, this event and communication with like-minded people became a kind of starting point. He switched to the Ukrainian language, imbued with the Ukrainian spirit.

Also, among the nationally oriented intelligentsia in those years, spiritual searches were widespread. After decades of Soviet "militant atheism," people sought to find a spiritual foundation in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. But Svitovit was not interested in this idea. In the early 1990s among the Ukrainian intelligentsia, the ideas of the Pagan ideology of the Ukrainian Western Diaspora – those of Vladimir Shayan and Lev Silenko, for example – were already popular. In Ukraine there were already communities of RUNVira (The society of Ukrainian Native Faith, founded by Lev Sylenko). As Svitovit Pashnik recalls, in those years he was a member of the

split of the independent Ukrainian youth of the city of Zaporizhzhia. Many issues were discussed. Among them was religious ones. It was decided to create a RUNVira community. The constituent assembly of the community was held on December 12, 1992.

At that time, Svitovit and his like-minded people had already managed to get acquainted with other clergymen of the RUNVira, and had time to accept initiation. On July 4, 1993 Svitovit Pashnik was initiated into RUNVira in Kyiv. The question of who would be a clergyman in Zaporizhzhia arose sharply because at that time it was already necessary to go to a new level of religious activity. It was not enough just to get together and read *Maga Vira* (the book by Lev Silenko) or other literature. It was already necessary to conduct divine services and for it were tried different options.

The choice fell on Svitovit Pashnik. He was still working at a factory at the time. It was difficult to combine such work with religious activities. But he conducted weekly worship, with the script was written on a piece of paper. The first head of the community was Svyatoslav Shcherbina. Svitovit Pashnik's has led the community since 1994. At first, the activities of the community were supported by the Ukrainian diaspora. Ukrainians abroad financed the publication of the newspaper *Light of Oriyana* and trips to Kyiv from Zaporizhzhia to communicate with fellow believers. At the end of 1994 the question arose that someone should fully devote himself to the affairs of the community. Svitovit Pashnik became such a person, and in January 1995 he received initiation from Bogdan Ostrovsky (1923–2000), a well-known figure of the Pagan movement in Ukraine. This man greatly influenced Pashnik's spiritual development.

In 1995 Svitovit Pashnik officially changed his given name, Viktor, to Svitovit. Meanwhile, RUNVira at this time began separate into different groups and directions. Svitovit, who read the books of various representatives of Ukrainian Paganism (for example, Volodymir Shayan, Lev Silenko, and Galina Lozko), began to think that "pure monotheism" does not exist in the world. There are different currents. But all the same, people return to polytheism. RUNVira proclaimed the One Lord Dazhbog, the Sun God. But Svitovit was inclined to believe that there are various forces of Nature: Water, Wind, Fire. That is, God is one, but manifested in many ways. He suggested that Bogdan Ostrovsky switch to polytheism. After all, modern Pagans celebrate Kupala and Perun, and this is no longer monotheism.

Meanwhile, in 1998, Oleg Bezverkhy (who today heads the Cathedral of the Native Ukrainian Faith in the city of Vinnitsa) created an initiatory group and organized a training center. Bezverkhy created a distance school for RUNVira believers. Other RUNVira figures, such as Peter Ruban, Svyatoslav Shcherbina, and Bogdan Ostrovsky, did not like the activity of this group. The process of internal strife began. As a result, Svitovit Pashnik and a group of people who studied at this school as a sign of solidarity with Oleg Bezverkhy left RUNVira. In 2000 they created their own organization, the Cathedral of the Native Ukrainian Faith. Even before that, in 1998, Svitovit created his RUNVira community Dazhbozhie Zaporizhzhia in Zaporizhzhia. Svitovit himself had by that time turned to polytheism.

There were two centers of the Cathedral of the Native Ukrainian Faith, the western in the city of Vinnytsia and the eastern in the city of Zaporizhzhia. The western center professed monotheism – faith in Dazhbog – whereas the eastern center was more polytheistic, but at that time they were still pondering which god was supreme, Svarog or Veles? In 2003 Svitovit Pashnik met Volodymir Kurovskiy, another religious leader. By that time, Kurovskiy already had his own organization, consisting mainly of young people. Svitovit Pashnik also thought about creating his own religious organization. Together they created the Ancestral Fire of the Native True Faith. But soon their paths diverged due to various circumstances. And the communities in Zaporizhzhia and Nikopol decided to create another Pagan organization.

At this Svitovit Pashnik wrote his article about the World Egg: “The entire Universe in the form of an Egg is called the Highest Clan. People on Earth represent the Earthly Genus, it is a reflection of the Almighty. The clan is divided into a man and a woman and their children. From the upper part of the World Egg, the Celestial Firm is created – Father Svarog – and from the lower, the Earthly Firm – Mother-in-labor. From the yolk their son is born – Sun-Dazhbog, from the protein, the daughter – Water-Mokosha. The Sun and Water are brother and sister; at the same time they designate marriage symbols for the Father and Mother.”<sup>10</sup>

10. Svitovyt Pashnik, *Ridna Vira dlia ditei* (Native faith for children), (Zaporizhzhia: Ruske Pravoslavne Kolo, roku Bozhoho 7527 (2019), 39. [https://www.svit.in.ua/kny/Pashnik/Pashnik\\_dytyna.pdf](https://www.svit.in.ua/kny/Pashnik/Pashnik_dytyna.pdf).

On October 6, 2007, CRLG was created in the city of Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk region. Initially, it included communities from Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro), and Nikopol. Later, the community from Kharkiv joined. In Kyiv, a community called “Tree of the Rod” was created. There were also communities from Vinnitsa, Lutsk, and several regional centers. The CRLG was headed by the magus Svitovit Pashnik. He is also a member of the Council of Religious Organizations in the Zaporizhzhia city administration. Representatives of the CRLG popularize their activities through television, radio, newspapers, and the internet.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth saying a few words in more detail about the island of Khortytsia itself. This is the largest island of the Dnipro River. Khortytsia is one of the Seven Wonders of Ukraine. In 2007, the project “Seven Wonders of Ukraine” was implemented, where out of one hundred applicants, according to the results of Internet voting and a survey of one hundred historians, culturologists, and scientists of other industries, Khortytsia entered this seven. Moreover, according to the results of internet voting, the island was in first place. The geographical location of Khortytsia influenced the formation of nine natural-territorial complexes on the island. Nowhere else in Ukraine can you find a place where, in a relatively small area (23.5 sq. km), there is such a large concentration of historical monuments of different eras. In 1965, a historical and cultural reserve was created on Khortytsia, and in 1993 it acquired the status of a national reserve.<sup>12</sup> The Khortytsia National Reserve consists of Khortytsia Island proper, the adjacent islands of Baida, Tri Stoga, Dubovoy, and Rozstebin, the rocks Srednyia, Twins and the Vyrva tract, as well as the Kamenska Sich National Historical Monument in the Kherson region.<sup>13</sup>

Somewhat similarly, other natural objects have received legal status. For example, in New Zealand in 2017, the government declared one of the rivers a legal entity. Similar precedents are

11. Svitovyt Pashnik, “Zhyttia u viri” (Life in faith), November 28, 2020, video, 38:55, posted by Velesova Stezia, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAebBTomfQ4>.

12. “Perelik zapovidnykiv – kerivnytstvo, kontaktna informatsiia, Ministerstvo kultury ta informatsiinoi polityky Ukrainy” (List of reserves: management, contact information, Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine), last modified March 1, 2021, [http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/officialcategory?cat\\_id=244905579](http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/officialcategory?cat_id=244905579).

13. Pro nas, Khortytsia: Natsionalnyi zapovidnyk (About us, Khortytsia: national reserve), last modified October 12, 2020, <https://ostriv.org/pro-nas/>.

also known in the United States, Ecuador, and Canada. The idea of treating a part of nature (an animal, a river, a lake) as a subject begins to become popular in the world. The essence of this idea is not only for a river or other object to receive a protected status. This is a statement that people are not masters of the Universe and do not rule over Nature. It testifies to a much more complex relationship between people and their environment.<sup>14</sup>

It is also necessary to briefly dwell on the functions of the modern museum space. Already in the twentieth century, the social component becomes the predominant function of the museum. It turns into a universal archive and a tool for working with mass consciousness. The content of the museum and the interpretation of the exposition must meet the needs of the current time and often the interests of certain groups of society. We can talk about the following functions of a modern museum space:

1. ideological (the museum space continues to play the role of incorporating certain cultural and semantic attitudes into the minds of visitors);
2. cultural and educational (museum as a means of organizing leisure time, entertainment center, one of the elements of urban recreation);
3. aesthetic function (continues the museum tradition of the Renaissance, individualized museums).<sup>15</sup>

Based on the above classification of the functions of modern museum space, I will analyze the island of Khortitsia as a museum space that plays an important sacred and practical role in the life of the CRLG.

### 1. The Ideological Function

According to the magus Svitovit, the island of Khortitsia, in the minds of our ancestors, was a huge ship that transported the souls of the dead to Paradise. Therefore, there are many graves on the island, including those in the form of barrows. The island also helps the

14. Selena Ross, "In Canadian First, Quebec Whitewater River Declared Legal 'Person' with Its Own Rights," CTV News, last modified February 24, 2021, <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/mobile/in-canadian-first-quebec-whitewater-river-declared-legal-person-with-its-own-rights-1.5321268>.

15. Kseniya Surikova, "Forma i funktsiya v muzeynoy arhitekture XX veka" (Form and function in museum architecture of the twentieth century), *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta. Filosofiya i konfliktologiya. Iskusstvovedeni2* (2015): 81–83.

living – it is a means of overcoming the hardships of life. The island itself is dedicated to the god Hors (Khors).<sup>16</sup> Hors for CRLG Pagans is the god of the Moon. He had various guises, appearing in the form of a ship or boat, a cart, a horse, or a carrier to another world. That is, Hors is the otherworldly Sun. All the holidays associated with the Moon are dedicated to Hors. In sanctuaries and ship-type temples, Hors' places are in the western part of the stern.<sup>17</sup> Magus Svitovit devotes a lot of time to the study of Khortitsia, its natural uniqueness, historical and archaeological finds, and monuments on the island's territory. He put forward a version of the spiritual significance of Khortitsia as closely related to the strength of the warriors. Based on the interpretation of the name "Khortytsia" by various scientists and researchers, Svitovit comes to the conclusion: the name "Khortytsia" is most likely associated with the name of Hors as "the night Sun," that is, the Moon. And also this name is associated with the wolf into which, according to the legends, the warriors turned. In these views, we see similarities with the Scandinavian berserk warriors.

Also, Svitovit connects the spiritual significance of the island for Ukraine with its divine fertilizing male principle, which inspired the warriors of antiquity to great accomplishments for the sake of their future life. Yet the modern Dnipro hydroelectric power station Dniproges, built on the Rocks of Love, evokes associations with a chastity belt. That does not allow giving new life. Accordingly, Dniproges has become a symbol of spiritual destruction. And it is the return to the natural state of the Dnipro Rier that will allow the full-fledged existence of divine entities for the good of the race.<sup>18</sup> However, such a desire looks utopian. And the romanticization of the historical past, its spiritual component in these convictions, is a characteristic feature of the Native Faith movement in Ukraine.

The territory of the island is a storehouse of unique archaeological sites. For example, in 2015, an archaeological expedition led by Oleg Tuboltsev discovered a complex of the "pit culture" period

16. Svitovit Pashnik, *Ruska Pravoslavna Vira u pytanniakh i vidpovidiakh* (Rus' native faith in questions and answers), (Zaporizhzhia: Ruske Pravoslavne Kolo, 2021), 64–65.

17. Svitovit Pashnik *Vesova Knyha. Uporiadkuvannia, pereklad, komentari Svitovyt Pashnik* (Book of Veles. trans. and ed. Svitovit Pashnik) (Zaporizhzhia, 2019), 183.

18. Svitovit Pashnik, *Sviashchennyi ostriv Khortytsia* (The sacred island Khortytsia), (Zaporizhzhia: Ruske Pravoslavne Kolo, 2021), 10, 14–15, 24–25.

with the burial of a man (third millennium BCE).<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century there were 129 Scythian burial mounds on Khortitsia. Today, twenty-eight of them have survived. In 2011, not far from Khortitsia, a fisherman retrieved an ancient sword from the Dnipro. During the restoration process, it turned out that the sword of the ninth to eleventh centuries. There are no more than 170 such swords in the world. Only a warrior of the highest rank could own such a weapon. Also, according to one version, Prince Svyatoslav the Brave died near these places in 972.<sup>20</sup> The image of the prince is highly revered in contemporary Pagan circles, not only by his military prowess, but also by his Pagan religion. All these events (the recovered sword, the death of the prince) have been woven together in our time: the sword is sometimes called “the sword of Prince Svyatoslav.” This version is very popular among contemporary Pagans in Ukraine. And there is an important component of the ideological development of community leaders and organizations.

Archaeologists have also discovered unique cult complexes of various eras on the island. One of them is an observatory sanctuary. It was discovered in 2005 during the construction of the historical and cultural complex Zaporizhzhya Sich. During 2006–2008 archaeological research of the find was carried out. Twelve cromlechs were identified and studied: ring stone structures and six stone inlays of various sizes. Remains of a sanctuary were discovered near the cromlech complex. Scientists have put forward the assumption that the discovered finds are part of a giant sacral complex, which is more than 5,500 years old. It was reconstructed at the level of the modern earth’s surface. Now the complex is available for inspection by tourists.<sup>21</sup> And this is not a complete list of the most interesting and unique archaeological sites of different eras and purposes, concentrated on the island. All of them are an important ideological

19. Olena Zaporozka, “Khortytsia: zapovidnyk, sviatylyshche i mistse syly” (Khortytsia: reserve, sanctuary and place of power), *Ukrinform*, last modified December 09, 2017, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/2361220-hortica-zapovidnik-svatile-i-misce-sili-rus.html>.

20. Nataliia Ponedilok, “Khortytsia. Zapovidnyk sered mista” (Khortytsia. Reserve among the city), *Ukrainer*, last modified February 2, 2019, <https://ukrainer.net/hortytsya-zapovidnyk-sered-mista/>.

21. “Kromlekhy doby eneolitu” (Cromlechs of the eneolithic), *Natsionalnyi zapovidnyk Khortytsia*, last modified December 20, 2019, <https://hortica.zp.ua/ua/guide/north/90-kromleh>.

component of the activities of contemporary Pagan communities in Ukraine.

As for the CRLG, the practical religious activity of this organization on the territory of Khortitsia is closely connected with the sanctuary-observatory that was discovered by archaeologists in 1993. The sanctuary was built in 3000–2000 BCE.<sup>22</sup> Before the reconstruction, the stones at the sanctuary were mostly hidden underground, at a depth of up to half a meter. Some of them were sticking out of the ground. In this glade there was even a low mound, which was initially mistaken for a burial. Before the work of archaeologists, as Svitovit recalls, he and his associates loved to visit this glade, walking around the island. Archaeologist Maxim Ostapenko decided to explore this place. And in 1993 archaeologists, together with a group of contemporary Pagans (they were invited to help as volunteers), began excavations in the meadow. But, having excavated part of the territory, they were surprised by the lack of a skeleton. There was ochre, there were items of the Bronze Age, but without any burial.

Due to the lack of official permission to excavate the burial mound, archaeological work has continued only since 1998, but these excavations did not reveal human burials. Scientists call this sanctuary Bragarnya from the name of the highest point of the northern Khortitsa. The open terrain and altitude made it possible to accurately track the movement of the Sun throughout the year. Archaeologists believe that the complex has been used for thousands of years as a cult object, as a sanctuary, as a place of worship and veneration of heavenly bodies, primarily the Sun. The sanctuary is oriented towards the rising of the sun on the day of the summer solstice. In the process of research, archaeologists have discovered a large number of religious items. The architectural design of the sanctuary is such that it is often compared to Stonehenge, only of a smaller size.<sup>23</sup>

After studying the object, Maxim Ostapenko invited Svitovit Pashnik to lay out the stones extracted from the ground in accordance with their location underground. Thus the ancient sanctuary

22. "Sviatylyshche-observatoriia" (Sanctuary-observatory), Visnyk ridnovira, last modified December 7, 2020, <http://ridnovir.in.ua/index.php/novyny/389-sviatylyshche-observatoriia>.

23. "Shcho take "Khortytskyi Stounkhendzh" ta chym vin unikalnyi" (What is Khortytsky Stonehenge and what makes it unique?), January 27, 2020, video, 2:02, posted by TV channel TV5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVCjGyrd5WU>.

was recreated. On Thursday, September 17, 1998, this idea was brought to life. And already on September 20, on Sunday, the first worship took place at the sanctuary. The archaeologists themselves proposed to contemporary Pagans to do this, so that the sanctuary would regain its spiritual strength. And since then, the sanctuary is not only an archaeological monument, but also an active Pagan cult place..

If you look at the sanctuary from above, you can see that it has the shape of a kobza, which is an ancient Ukrainian musical plucked instrument of pear-shaped form. At this sanctuary, the CRLG Pagans held worship every Sunday, now less often. The sanctuary is used for the consecration of children and adults, for weddings, and various modern Pagan holidays. Also, native believers demonstrate their ceremonies and rituals to tourists. Magus Svitovit considers tourism to be an important part of educational activities because together with the local history and the ancient religious worldview, people can see a ceremony or ritual with their own eyes.<sup>24</sup> Thus the rich archaeological, historical, and natural heritage of the Khortitsa National Historical and Cultural Reserve plays a very important role in the CRLG 's practical activities. Also, this legacy is an important component of ideological views in the teachings of the CRLG.

## **2. The Cultural and Educational Function.**

This function is closely intertwined with the ideological one. The territory of Khortitsia, its mystical halo, legends, and unique history influence the carriers of the contemporary Pagan worldview. Every cave, rock, mound, and tree attracts today's Pagans, symbolizing the connection with the ancient gods and ancestors and with nature. The island has modern sculpted wooden images of Pagan gods, created by the sculptor Vadim Litvinov. He also heads the "Veles' grandchildren" community. His whole life is on Khortitsia. For several years, he distributed among tourists and all comers books written by Svitovit Pashnik, along with postcards, amulets and souvenirs on Pagan themes, his own works. Initially, all this was located in a special cart, stylized as a *Chumak* cart (magic cart). The cart was woven from vines. Then Vadim Litvinov made a wooden cart for his handicrafts and books. But, unfortunately, at the end of February 2018, unknown persons burned down the souvenir shop.

24. "Sviatylshche na Khortytysi" (Sanctuary on Khortitsia), *Visnyk ridnovira*, last modified December 05, 2020, <http://ridnovir.in.ua/index.php?start=7>.

Now he offers his products on a small folding table adjacent to the former shop location. The arson of a souvenir shop is far from the only case of the destruction of something associated with the activities of the CRLG. In the early 2000s, when contemporary Pagans began to organize their sanctuaries with wooden idols of the gods, not everyone liked it. Acts of vandalism against the wooden idols peaked in 2008-2010. Then the wooden images of Perun, Mokosha, Veles were destroyed and disfigured.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, it is too early to talk about a high level of religious tolerance.

However, the Pagans of Zaporizhzhia, appearing on Khortytsia for their religious ceremonies and rituals, as well as for holding various holidays, festivals, and educational lectures, have already become a kind of tourist highlight for residents and guests. A souvenir photo near wooden idols is almost an obligatory element of visiting Khortytsia. Moreover, Svitovit Pashnik even dreamed of building the Hors temple complex on the island, which would be open for visiting by both believers and tourists. For the cultural and educational activities of the CRLG, it is important to hold holidays of the calendar cycle. They not only unite believers around a common idea. And they also attract just strangers who become witnesses of this action. Moreover, in the conditions of the popularity of social networks, it became possible to very quickly disseminate information about your events. Especially bright and crowded holidays take place during the warm season.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the scope of such festivities. But, nevertheless, people do not lose interest in the holiday, for example, Kupala, which is celebrated on the day of the summer solstice. The longest day and the shortest night of the year are covered with a mass of legends and myths that are interesting today. Khortytsia on Kupalo turns into a place where people plunge into the world of legends and beliefs and participate in a mystery: they dance in round dances, jump over cleansing fires, and throw wreaths into the water. The rituals are performed by Svitovit Pashnik, Yana Yakovenko, Vadim Litvinov, Nikolai Kardach, and Yarina Yanina. They as leaders direct, but everyone is welcome to

25. Olesia Niedielina, "Palaiuchi Bohy: Yak u Zaporizhzhii tryvaie "nevydyma" relihiina viina" (Burning gods: how the "invisible" religious war continues in Zaporizhzhia), *Depo. Zaporizhzhia*, last modified March 15, 2018, <https://zp.depo.ua/ukr/zp/palayuchi-bogi-yak-u-zaporizhzhii-trivaye-nevidyma-zagalu-religiynaviyna-20180312740428>.

take part in the action. At the same time, folklore and musical groups and historical re-enactor clubs are often present. Thus religious holidays are organically intertwined with cultural events: fire shows, the performance of folk and original songs around the fire, and various sports competitions. Also, excursions are held not only to “places of power,” but also to the Museum of the History of the Zaporizhzhia Cossacks, the historical and cultural complex Zaporizhzhya Sich. For the CRLG, an important component of the worldview is a very respectful attitude towards the warrior-defender. Therefore, the CRLG are actively involved in various patriotic actions. For example, in July 2014, the All-Ukrainian training camp *Jura-2014* was held in Khortytsia. *Jura* in Ukraine were the young assistants of experienced Cossacks. At the same time, representatives of the CRLG spent a week of Perun in Khortytsia. And at the ancient sanctuary for five evenings they received the participants of the *Jura-2014* training camp.

The spiritual leaders of the CRLG, near the sacred fires at the sanctuary, surrounded by lighted torches and the sound of a tambourine, immersed those present in the world of ancient religious beliefs. Participants underwent cleansing by the four elements, combining their strength by walking in a circle of the sanctuary.



Figure 1: Kupalo on Khortytsia, June, 2016. Photo by Olexiy Tolmachov.

Prayers sounded to Perun mixed with calls for the unity of the Family and love for the Motherland.<sup>26</sup> Also Magus Svitovit Pashnik and Bereginya Yana Yakovenko are frequent guests on local television channels and give lectures and master classes in educational institutions, libraries. The CRLG has its own online publication “The native faith’s herald,” which highlights its activities, their events, interviews, various speeches, etc. Also, communities and individual CRLG activists have their own pages on social networks, where there is a lot of information, including related with the museum space Khortitsi in the life of the CRLG.

### 3. The Aesthetic Function.

The Aesthetic function organically absorbs the ideological, cultural, and educational functions. For example, the aforementioned Vadim Bozhevoy was ordained a Pagan priest on March 20, 2016 on the island of Khortitsia. Since childhood, he has been engaged in woodcarving and painting. The first image of Perun was carved in Khortitsia, in the Muzychina gully on July 19, 2007. He made more than twenty large Slavic gods from wood in the Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kharkiv regions.<sup>27</sup>

The island of Khortitsia as a museum space and as a sacred space for contemporary pagans can be viewed through the work of Mircea Eliade in such works as *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957).<sup>28</sup> Eliade’s “religious man” “lives on a myth.” “In eternal return” he renews his integrity and naturalness. This person is in search of integrity. Meaning in human existence is brought by regular reunions with the sphere of the sacred, mythologizing the environment.<sup>29</sup> The term “hierophany,” which Eliade introduces to denote the manifestation

26. “Peruniv tyzhden na Khortytsi” (Perun week on Khortytsia), Visnyk ridnovira, last modified July 22, 2014, accessed January 10, 2021, <http://ridnovir.in.ua/index.php/ridna-vira/29-peruniv-tyzhden-na-khortytsi>.

27. “Litvinov Vadym Olehovych”, *Zhrets Vadym Bozhevoi Litvinov*, ast modified April 10, 2016, [http://vadim-bog-litvinov.blogspot.com/2016/04/blog-post\\_34.html#more](http://vadim-bog-litvinov.blogspot.com/2016/04/blog-post_34.html#more).

28. Mircea Eliade, *Sviashchenne i myrske*. (The sacred and the profane), (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Solomii Pavlychko «Osnovy», 2001 [first French edition 1957], 116.

29. Denys Korol, “Retsenziia na knyzhku Eliade “Traktat z istorii relihii” (Review of Eliade’s book “A treatise on the history of religions”), trans. Oleksiy Panych, (K Dukh i Litera, 201520 c., *Historians*, last modified September 9, 2016, <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/novi-knizhki/1993-denys-korol-retsenziia-na-knyzhku-eliade-traktat-z-istorii-relihii-per-z-fr-oleksiia-panycha-k-dukh-i-litera-2016-520-s>.

of the sacred, very accurately characterizes the worldview of today's Ukrainian Pagans. The hierophany of the island of Khortytsia for Ukrainian native believers is in itself – as in a natural object, as in a historical locus, as in a “place of power.” Its sacred dimension is from the planetary through the ethnic and cultural to the individual and personal. The island itself corresponds to the model of the sacred center. This is evidenced by its metaphysical origins; the originality of the embodiment in the physical, landscape dimension; the presence on the island of places filled with deep mythopoetic, ritual meaning; preservation of the sacred perception of Khortytsia in the Ukrainian culture for centuries.<sup>30</sup> Khortytsia is filled with aesthetic meaning for a contemporary Pagan – it is beautiful as an object of nature, as a “place of power,” as filled with the spirit of antiquity and divine manifestations. All of its objects are filled with information content, attractiveness and expressiveness for the native. I would especially emphasize the expressive nature of the museum space of Khortytsia in the Pagan perception. The entire history of the island, its role in the life of a contemporary pagan dweller evokes involvement in certain events, phenomena, artifacts.

Contemporary Pagans themselves also create museum spaces. They can be both for internal use, and for a certain circle of people, their like-minded people. So they were created to popularize their activities, their worldview. That is, for the practical implementation of the idea of actualization in the modern world of archaic symbols, rituals, ideological attitudes. One example is the itinerant Rodovid Museum.<sup>31</sup> In 2014, Yana (Yasna) Yakovenko, the Bereginya (high priestess) of the CRLG, became its ideological inspirer and organizer. The museum is based on Yana Yakovenko's collection of embroidered shirts. *Vyshyvanka* is the modern name for national or stylized national clothes. These are made, as a rule, of natural fabric (cotton, hemp) and decorated with embroidered patterns.

The Rodovid Museum began its active work precisely in connection with the interest of a certain category of people in the traditions

30. Yurii Zavorodnii, Maksym Ostapenko, “Sakralnyi vymir ostrova Khortytsia (do postanovky pytannia)” (The sacred dimension of Khortytsia island), *Kulturolohichni studii*2 (1999): 248.

31. #mandrivnyimuzeiRodovid, (#travelmuseumRodovid) last modified March 11, 2021, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%80%D1%96%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B9%D0%BC%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B4>.



Figure 2: Svitovit Pashnik and Yana Yakovenko. Photo courtesy of Yana Yakovenko.

of embroidery. Yana Yakovenko lectures at schools in Zaporizhzhia and conducts appropriate master classes. For example, since 2019, the World Day of the Ukrainian shawl is unofficially celebrated. And in December 2020, Yana Yakovenko, in the program *Mystical Zaporizhzhia*, talked about the traditions of women's hats, wreaths, and shawls.<sup>32</sup> Earlier, in December 2020, she held an online master class on how to properly tie a shawl on your head. Yana Yakovenko and her associates take part in ethnic festivals. There they often demonstrate elements of the rituals of the calendar cycle (Kupalo, Christmas, Great Day, Spas), and conduct dance rituals and round dances.

32. "Uliublene Zaporizhzhia. Mistychne №38 'Khustka' (Favorite Zaporizhzhia. Mystical №38 'Scarf') 20.11.2020, December 07, 2020, video, 18:23, posted by Telekanal ALEX UA - Avtorskie proektyi, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g55qtj6QyOE>.



Figure 3: *Didukh*, a decorated sheaf of wheat for a festival. Photo courtesy of Yana Yakovenko.

In Zaporizhzhia since 2015 Pagans have held classes for everyone who wants to make *didukhs* (decorated sheaf of wheat). They are made for moral and spiritual support of the armed forces of Ukraine in the fight against Russian aggression. The *didukh* is a Ukrainian Christmas symbols, closely associated with the agrarian cult. In December 2019, Bereginya Yana and the magus Svitovit visited the Solovushki children's club in Zaporizhzhia. Children and parents wove little *didukhs* together and listened to stories about ancient Ukrainian Christmas and New Year traditions; they sang carols and spoke out wishes for the happiness of the family. On the same day, another master class was also held at the Zaporizhzhia Regional Universal Scientific Library, where a craft charity fair was held.<sup>33</sup>

33. "Didukha do narodu!" (Didukh to the people!), Ridna Vira. Ruske Pravoslavne Kolo, last modified December 22, 2019, accessed January 21, 2021, [https://rpkolo.blogspot.com/2019/12/blog-post\\_22.html?m=0](https://rpkolo.blogspot.com/2019/12/blog-post_22.html?m=0).



Figure 4: The Rodovid Museum at the All-Ukrainian Festival of Home Preservation, September 14–15, 2019. Photo courtesy of Yana Yakovenko.

The museum's presentation was greeted with interest by visitors to the All-Ukrainian Festival of Home Preservation, which has been taking place in Zaporizhzhia since 2015. In addition to viewing the exhibits, those who wished had the opportunity to try on embroidered shirts and hats, hold a photo session, and listen to interesting stories about Ukrainian folk traditions.<sup>34</sup> Often ceremonies, rituals and holidays at the sanctuary of Khortitsia, especially massive ones, with the participation of more people, include the opportunity to try on authentic clothes and order a photo session. As Yana Yakovenko herself shared, in her museum activities she does not strive, at least for today, to exact historical and ethnographic reconstruction or authenticity. Therefore, the various outfits combine elements from different regions of Ukraine. But it is important, first of all, to awaken people's interest in their cultural origins. A deeper and more comprehensive immersion in tradition is already a serious process that requires time, effort and desire of the person himself. And pop culture does not. The CRLG representatives themselves believe that

34. "Mandrivnyi muzei 'Rodovid' na festyvali "Zaporozkyi Spas" (Rodovid traveling museum at the festival "Zaporizhzhia savior"), August 13, 2019, video, 3:54, posted by Svitovit Pashnik, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDcH7B6k0A4>;

"Mandrivnyi muzei "Rodovid" (Rodovid traveling museum), *Visnyk Ridnovira*, last modified September 16, 2019, <http://ridnovir.in.ua/index.php/ridna-vira/309-mandrivnyi-muzei-rodovid>.

the process of reviving ethnic religious traditions is extremely long and laborious. Therefore, it requires gradual steps, evolutionary, without revolutionary upheavals. Cooperation with the leadership of the Khortytsia National Historical and Natural Reserve and the desire to take an active part in the life of the city of Zaporizhzhia all contribute all these are important milestones in to the development of the prospects of the Community of Rus' People who Praise Gods both as a religious organization and as an interesting cultural and educational brand.

Today, the exhibits of this museum are in the house of Yana Yakovenko. The museum is "wandering" because it does not have a special room for its exhibits. But in 2020 Yana Yakovenko has officially issued documents for museum activities The main activity of the itinerant Rodovid Museum "is active communication between the visitors of the museum, its founder, and her assistants, museum exhibits and the space in which these exhibits are located at one time or another.

Such active communication corresponds to the theory of museum communication by the Canadian scholar Duncan Cameron. According to this theory, a visitor to a museum is not a passive consumer of museum exhibits. He becomes a full-fledged participant in communication, involved in a dialogue with the museum space.<sup>35</sup> The modern mission of museums is communication in time. In the process of this "time travel," each person can become a part of the time in which he or she is immersed with the help of a museum exhibit and a guide, to assimilate knowledge that contributes to social realization. In such communications, various human senses are involved, not only verbal contact. Contemporary museum communication (preservation-study-communication) implies exhibition, publishing, and educational activities of the museum. Nowadays, the commercial use of cultural practices or natural landscape is extremely relevant.

The concept of the experience economy is gaining popularity. All this, combined with a fascination with neo-archaic people, stirs up interest in the contemporary Pagan movement. The CRLG, in addition to religious practices, focuses its activities on popularizing

35. Cameron Duncan F. "A Viewpoint: The Museum as a Communications System and Implications for Museum Education," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 11, no. 1, (1968), 33-40, Wiley Online Library, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.1968.tb00883.x>.

itself and its worldview. CRLG leaders also strive to be active participants in the social and political life of their city. And interaction with the museum space of Khortitsia, as well as the creation of its own museum brand, contribute to these goals.

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