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# Qualification of Slavic Rodnoverly in scientific literature – neopaganism or ethnic religion

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**ABSTRACT:** Practice so far has shown that Slavic Rodnoverly is inadequately qualified and classified in scientific literature. Authors overlook basic rules of scientific method and arbitrarily qualify Slavic Rodnoverly based on insufficient amount of data. This paper tries to point out some of the methodological problems in scientific literature on Slavic Rodnoverly and propose steps that would lead to solving those problems. Through considering publications on Slavic Rodnoverly of number of authors it has been shown that it is inadequate to qualify Slavic Rodnoverly with terms that are ambiguous and poorly defined. Emphasis of the paper is on terminological lacking of scientific literature. Slavic Rodnoverly became rather convenient topic to make a career by writing papers that are borderline sensationalism, with no field work and by using outdated data or by fabricating data, without any consequences. Removing terminological lackings would solve these and other problems of scientific literature on Slavic Rodnoverly. Paper suggests simple and purposeful solution for mentioned problems.

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**Key words:** Slavic Rodnoverly, paganism, neopaganism, contemporary paganism, modern paganism, ethnic religion, native faith, polytheism, heathenism

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## 1. Introduction

The goal of every scientific work, whether it's an article, study or book is to present to reader (who might be an expert in the field of the work in question or layman, that wants to get a closer view on the field) results of research, experiment, synthesis or analysis in objective, clear and unambiguous manner, while informing (or at least it should inform) the reader about limitations and flaws of given work.

In domestic (Serbian) scientific literature term neopaganism is used for Slavic Rodnovery, by default, as a qualification, and often as a name.[1] Situation is similar in literature in other Slavic languages (Russian,[2],[3],[4],[5],[6], Slovenian,[7] etc.)

In literature in English situation is even more drastic – while, on one hand, it is discouraged to use term such as *neopaganism* and terms like *modern paganism* and *contemporary paganism* are more often used by the scientific community, on the other hand some authors insist on using *Slavic Neopaganism* as a synonym for Slavic Rodnovery. That leads to situation in which all kinds of cults and religions that have nothing to do with Slavs are lumped into Slavic Rodnovery.

Having in mind aforementioned goal, we will discuss if using terms like paganism, neopaganism, contemporary paganism and modern paganism in scientific literature on Slavic Rodnovery is justified and what is more important – purposeful. We will try to investigate suitability of possible alternatives for those terms, e.g. *ethnic religion* and *native faith*. Through analysis of the meaning of definitions for those terms we will show that designating Slavic Rodnovery as paganism, neopaganism or any of the derived terms is not suitable for scientific literature.

## 2. Paganism and synonyms – designation or derogatoriness?

Paganism from Latin *pagus*, *pagani* (country estate, peasant, country dweller) is a term that was used before emergence of Christianity. The term was used to designate those peasants that haven't served in Roman military. This was the meaning of the term *pagan* from II-I century BCE until first half of the IV century CE, when Christianity, which spread primarily in centers of financial and political power, i.e. cities, becomes recognized religion in Roman Empire. Since, as a rule, country population remained loyal to their ancestral beliefs, term formerly used for country dwellers, became (in texts of Christian authors) designation for faiths other than Christianity. Term is primarily used in Germanic and Romanic languages.

However, there is as many definitions of the term “paganism” as there are authors – each has its own definition. Paganism can refer to polytheistic, ethnic religions that predate Christianity in those parts of Europe and North Africa that were under the rule of Roman Empire (Greek, Roman, Egyptian, etc.).[8] It can refer to all European polytheistic, ethnic religions that predate Christianity (Greek, Roman, Germanic, Gallic, Slavic, Nordic, Prussian, Latvian, etc.). According to “Catholic Encyclopedia” paganism is „*all religions other than the true one revealed by God, and, in a narrower sense, all except Christianity, Judaism, and Mohammedanism. The term is also used as the equivalent of Polytheism*“;[9] Oxford English Dictionary defines pagan as „*a person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions; dated, derogatory a non-Christian.*“;[10] Merriam-Webster Dictionary of US English defines pagan as „*1: heathen;*“<sup>a</sup> especially: a follower of a polytheistic

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<sup>a</sup> To be explained later in the text.

religion (as in ancient Rome) 2: one who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures and material goods: an irreligious or hedonistic person".[11] In Qur'an pagans are adherents of Arab ethnic religion, unlike "people of the Book" (Muslims, Christians and Jews).[12] "Lexicon of foreign words and expressions" (in Serbian language) defines paganism as "heathenism,<sup>b</sup> polytheism (expression that emerged because heathenism lasted longest in the villages)".[13] Certain definitions of paganism include or exclude Hinduism, Jainism, Tengrism, Buddhism or some other oriental religions. Some definitions limit themselves on Europe, other on Europe and North America, and some include native religions of Africa. Some definitions of paganism include only polytheistic religions and some include irreligious atheism, etc. Isaac Bonewits<sup>c</sup> when defining paganism writes: „The early Roman Christians used “pagan” to refer to everyone who preferred to worship pre-Christian divinities, whom the Christians had decided were all “really” demons in disguise, based on the habit of rural folks holding on to their old faiths longer than city folks, as well as because the polytheists were unwilling to enroll in “the Army of the Lord.” Over the centuries, “pagan” became simply an insult, applied to the monotheistic followers of Islam by the Christians (and vice versa), and by the Protestants and Catholics towards each other, as it gradually gained the connotation of “a false religion and its followers.” By the beginning of the twentieth century, the word’s primary meanings became a blend of “atheist,” “agnostic,” “hedonist,” “religionless,”

<sup>b</sup> In Serbian “незнабоуство” – faith that has no knowledge of the god, atheism, lack of religion.

<sup>c</sup> We are citing definitions of Isaac Bonewits due to unique academic title he had earned at Berkeley University and special knowledge he had to gather in order to earn it. Also, he had direct contact with adherents of polytheistic religions. Altogether he is probably most influential expert for making this type of definitions.

etc., (when referring to an educated, white, male, heterosexual, non-Celtic European) and “ignorant savage and/or pervert” (when referring to everyone else on the planet).“[14] Michael York understands term “paganism” as now extinct faith of pre-Christian Europe, living native religions, modern religions such as Hinduism and Shinto and new religious movements of contemporary paganism.[15] York views paganism as sort of single, unified religion (religion form which all other religion originated, including Abrahamic religions), rather than umbrella term for multiple different religions. Aitamurto views paganism „as earth-base nature religion that celebrates diversity and thus promotes ethnic tolerance as well“.[16] Spasoje Vasiljev<sup>d</sup> when writing on religion of Slavs uses term *heathenism*,<sup>e</sup> which is rather interesting, since Vasiljev has a lot to say about gods and goddesses of Slavs.[17] Bojan Jovanović<sup>f</sup> (writing from the angle of Eastern Orthodox Christianity) points out that paganism is not defined well enough, however he introduces the phrase “post-Christian paganism” (sr. постхришћанско паганство) thus emphasizing the phenomena that, given appropriate circumstances, paganism reoccurs among previously Christianized populations and that paganism has a feature to occur discontinuously, even after the periods of repression.<sup>g</sup> Jovanović ties the meaning of the term paganism to

<sup>d</sup> Spasoje Vasiljev is Serbian historian and mythologist that lived and worked in first half of XX century. His most famous work is “Slavic mythology” (sr. „Словенска митологија“) published in 1928.

<sup>e</sup> In Serbian “незнабожачка вера” – faith that has no knowledge of the god, atheism.

<sup>f</sup> Bojan Jovanović is Serbian anthropologist, poet and filmmaker. He works as a scientific adviser at the Institute for Balkan Studies of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

<sup>g</sup> It should be noted that Jovanović bravely took on aspect of paganism rarely addressed in scientific literature – feature of its discontinuous occurrence. This aspect is of great importance, among other things, for understanding term neopaganism.

specific application, noticing that the term has different meanings depending on religion which it is applied to, as well as that using the term from the Christianity's point of view erases differences between religions qualified as pagan.[18]

Latin term “pagan” in Germanic languages corresponds to English *heathen*, German *heide*, Dutch *heiden*, from Old English *hæðen*, Old Norse *heiðinn*, Old High German *heidan* – from Goth *haiþno*, which might be translation of Latin *paganus* as “country dweller”.<sup>h</sup> Definitions of this term regularly include remark that it is derogatory term, so Oxford English Dictionary (British & World English) apart the note that term is derogatory and explanation that pagan is “*a person who does not belong to a widely held religion (especially one who is not a Christian, Jew, or Muslim)*” adds following: “*a person regarded as lacking culture or moral principles*”.[19] While Merriam-Webster Dictionary of US English explains *heathen* as “*strange, uncivilized*” and as “*1: an unconverted member of a people or nation that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible; 2: an uncivilized or irreligious person*”.[20] We emphasize that this term is used as a synonym for “pagan”.

In Russian language we have interesting situation where as the analog for the term paganism russ. *язычество*, is used, from Church Slavonic *іазыкъ* – people, kinsfolk, tribe. This term corresponds to Greek *εθνοί* and Latin *gentilis*. Term is much more precise than paganism, because it points to ethnic, folk component of beliefs.

It's easy to see that there is no clear and unambiguous definition of the paganism (and its synonyms) and that meaning of the term varies quite a lot

relative to the region and time period, and often relative to the religious affiliation of the author of the definition. We can notice that the term paganism, in a sense of determining ones denomination, was originally defined from the viewpoint of one religion and its dogmatic religious teachings. In many cases paganism is defined as lack of religiosity – which, by definition, disqualifies this term for application in scientific literature of religious studies. We shouldn't neglect that term paganism often has pejorative meaning. In science – where each phenomenon ought to be approached without prejudice with emphasis on objectivity – it is unacceptable to define one religion through dogmatic views of another religion, which has history of animosity and conflict with religion being defined. Because of the said reasons, ethnologists (and other experts from the field of religious studies) avoid using term paganism and its synonyms. Instead, they use more precise terms like polytheism, totemism, animism, ethnic religion, etc. (depending on religion in question).

### 3. Neopaganism and relatives – you can't please everyone

By adding prefix “neo-” (gr. *νέος* – new, young) to vaguely and imprecisely defined term paganism, term *neopaganism* was created – term even less defined and even less precise than its predecessor. Neopaganism was first used in 1868.<sup>i</sup>

Oxford English Dictionary (British & World English) defines neopaganism as “*a modern religious movement which seeks to incorporate beliefs or ritual practices from traditions outside the main world religions, especially those of pre-Christian*”

<sup>h</sup> It's interesting that Jacob Grimm in „*Deutsche Mythologie*“ introduces the idea that *heathen* might come from Armenian *hethanos*, derived from Greek *έθνος* (people, kin), thus via meaning making it closer to Russian *язычество*, than Latin *paganus*.

<sup>i</sup> In a letter, concerning Hellenic revivalists, written by American philosopher and psychologist William James, on April 5th 1868.

<sup>j</sup> The term “pre-Christian” is also vaguely defined – it can mean before birth of Jesus Christ or before

Europe and North America.”,[21] while Oxford English Dictionary (US English) adds following explanation: “Neopaganism is a highly varied mixture of ancient and modern elements, in which nature worship (influenced by modern environmentalism) often plays a major role. Other influences include shamanism, magical and occult traditions, and radical feminist critiques of Christianity”.[22] Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines neopagan as “a person who practices a contemporary form of paganism (as Wicca<sup>k</sup>)”.[23] “Lexicon of foreign words and expressions” (in Serbian language) defines neopaganism as “heathenism,<sup>l</sup> effort to renew old heathen beliefs and to replace Christianity”.[24]

In literature in Russian language coined term *неоязычество* corresponds to the neopaganism. Quite expectedly, this term also has as many definitions as there are authors. Some of these definitions are given by Victor A. Schnirelmann (*Виктор А. Шнирельман*) – „nationwide religion, artificially made by urban intelligentsia from fragments of ancient local beliefs and customs in order to revive «national spirituality»“;[25] Aleksey Gaydukoff (*Алексей Гайдуков*) – „set of religious, parareligious, political, historical and cultural associations and movements, led by pre-Christian beliefs and cults, rituals and magical practice, interested in revival and reconstruction“[26] and Alexander Gurko (*Александр Гурко*) – „new religions, constructed from polytheistic beliefs, aimed at finding new ethnic identity and/or developing new ideological system“.[27] It’s interesting to note that all three authors view Slavic Rodnovery as religion created at the end of XX century

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advancement of Christianity – which is category that is relative to period and location, i.e. it’s ambiguous and vague.

<sup>k</sup> Wicca is a modern religion created in Great Britain at the half of XX century, based on beliefs taken from European ethnic religions and modern theology and rituals. Usually it’s duotheistic.

<sup>l</sup> In Serbian “незнабоштво” – faith that has no knowledge of the god, atheism, lack of religion.

in Russia and Ukraine, while tendentiously lump under Slavic Rodnovery those religious movements and groups that have no connection with it whatsoever, e.g. Ynglism<sup>m</sup>. [28] It’s not unusual that some of the authors, that are especially critical of Slavic Rodnovery, falsify data they present in their papers, e.g. Schnirelmann, so we have cases of making myths about Slavic Rodnovery among part of scientific community. [29] It’s been shown that these authors deviate significantly from scientific methodology and is something to be taken into account when reviewing and using definitions they provide.

In an effort to introduce some sense of order in cacophony of existing definitions of paganism and neopaganism, Isaac Bonewits introduced new terms:

**Paleopaganism** – “a general term for the original polytheistic, nature-centered faiths of tribal Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, Oceania and Australia, when they were (or in some rare cases, still are) practiced as intact belief systems. Of the so-called “Great Religions of the World,” Hinduism (prior to the influx of Islam into India), Taoism and Shinto, for example, fall under this category”.

**Mesopaganism** – “a general term for a variety of movements both organized and non-organized, started as attempts to recreate, revive or continue what their founders thought were the best aspects of the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or predecessors), but which were heavily influenced (accidentally, deliberately

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<sup>m</sup> Ynglism is new, eclectic religion created by Russian esotherist, ufologist and researcher of paranormal Alexander Hinevich (*Александр Юрьевич Хиневич*). Full name of this religious group is “Ancient Russian Church of Orthodox Old Believers – Ynglings” (*Древнерусская Инглистическая Церковь Православных Староверов-Инглингов*). This religious group is infamous for extremist and racist incidents. Literature that ynglists use is on the list of extremist works in Russian Federation, and Hinevich himself is convicted for “organizing activities of extremist organization”. Name Ynglism is derived from the name of the oldest known Scandinavian dynasty – Ynglings.



and/or involuntarily) by concepts and practices from the monotheistic, dualistic, or non-theistic worldviews of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or early Buddhism. Examples of Mesopagan belief systems would include Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, etc., as well as those forms of Druidism influenced by those movements, the many Afro-Diasporatic faiths (such as Voudoun, Santeria, Candomble, etc.), Sikhism, several sects of Hinduism that have been influenced by Islam and Christianity, Mahayana Buddhism, Aleister Crowley's religion/philosophy of Thelema, Odinism (some Norse Paganism), most "Family Traditions" of Witchcraft (those that aren't completely fake), and most orthodox (aka "British Traditionalist") denominations of Wicca". Bonewits also redefines term

**Neopaganism** – "general term for a variety of movements both organized and (usually) nonorganized, started since 1960 c.e. or so (though they had literary roots going back to the mid-1800's), as attempts to recreate, revive or continue what their founders thought were the best aspects of the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or predecessors), blended with modern humanistic, pluralist and inclusionary ideals, while consciously striving to eliminate as much as possible of the traditional Western monotheism, dualism, and puritanism. The core Neopagan beliefs include a multiplicity of deities of all genders, a perception of those deities as both immanent and transcendent, a commitment to environmental awareness, and a willingness to perform magical as well as spiritual rituals to help both ourselves and others. Examples of Neopaganism would include the Church of All Worlds, most heterodox Wiccan traditions, Druidism as practiced by *Ár nDraíocht Féin* and the *Henge of Keltria*, some Norse Paganism, and some modern forms of Buddhism whose members refer to themselves as "Buddheo-Pagans." Neopagan belief systems are not racist,

sexist, homophobic, etc. There are hundreds of thousands of Neopagans living and worshiping their deities today. As "Neo-Paganism," this term was popularized in the 1960's and 1970's by Oberon Zell, a founder of the Church of All Worlds."<sup>n</sup>[30] Notice that Bonewits doesn't show that he is aware of the existence of Slavic Rodnoverry or restoration of pre-Christian religions of southeastern, central and eastern Europe.

It can be easily seen that (just as in case of paganism and its synonyms) there is no single, clear and unambiguous definition of the term; instead every author gives its own definition in accordance with knowledge, experience and affinities he or she possesses. Religious, ideological and political affiliation of the author often play important role in formulation of the definition. We should point out that the former is applicable onto authors of every denomination, including those members of academic community that are polytheists.[31] Therefore it's understandable that in scientific literature term neopaganism is being avoided – terms like *contemporary paganism*[32],[33],[34],[35] and *modern paganism*[36],[37] are being used instead. Notice that Michael Strmiska uses paganism, neopaganism, contemporary paganism and modern paganism sometimes simultaneously, as synonyms, and other times as different categories[38] (thus further contributing to existing confusion), but when he writes about Slavic Rodnoverry in Ukraine he distinguishes between *paganism* and *native faith*.[39]

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<sup>n</sup> *Church of All Worlds* is an eclectic religious group formed in 1962., in USA. It is in part inspired by a fictional religion of the same name in the science fiction by Robert A. Heinlein. Group acknowledges duotheism, faeries and the deities of many pantheons (but mainly focuses on deities from Greek ethnic religion). Official site of the group: <http://www.caw.org/>

#### 4. Application of poorly defined terms on Slavic Rodnovery – consequences and parallels

Let us consider what happens when some of the terms we've discussed or some of the new terminological constructions like "Russian Rodnovery", "Ukrainian Rodnovery" (and other similar phrases that exist solely in the works of some authors) are applied on Slavic Rodnovery.

One of the consequences of qualification of Slavic Rodnovery as neopaganism is that future authors (and laymen) approach it with prejudice as it's new religion, emerged approximately at time when its name was coined<sup>o</sup> – end of 1970's and beginning of 1980's.[40]

Second consequence is grouping Slavic Rodnovery with new religions, artificially created through eclectic approach and in the spirit of New Age movement.

As third consequence we can observe artificial division of Slavic Rodnovery into Russian Rodnovery, Ukrainian Rodnovery, Polish Rodnovery, Serbian Rodnovery, etc. Although such division doesn't exist in the field, it can be said that in each Slavic country Slavic Rodnovery has certain

specificities that are influenced by social, political, religious and historical circumstances. For instance in Belarus support exists for preserving and development of folklore and national culture on the level of state institutions – support that represents good foundation for promotion of Slavic Rodnovery. In Slovenia documentaries with testimonies of customs and rituals of Slavic ethnic religion are broadcasted via state television channels, while academic circles are very interested in research of folklore and Slavic ethnic religion. In other countries there is no such support or state institutions are even pressured by Abrahamic religions resulting in Slavic Rodnovery being harder to be expressed, scientific (and laymen) papers are of lower quality and occasional unwanted occurrences exists, e.g. certain authors approaching Slavic Rodnovery with dubious intentions and promoting their ideologies under the guise of Slavic Rodnovery. Although these specificities exist among different Slavic countries there is not enough justification to divide Slavic Rodnovery into Bulgarian, Croatian, Slovenian, Czech Rodnovery, etc. – it's the same religion, albeit flavored with some local specificities, but nevertheless joint Slavic religion.

Aitamurto is careful to avoid usage of the term "neopaganism" when she dwells on Slavic Rodnovery, making first steps in proper direction,[41] however in one of her paper she uses terms "Rodnovery", "contemporary paganism" and "Russian paganism".[42]

It might be interesting to point out that certain authors have no problem with tossing Slavic Rodnovery into same group with Wicca, O.T.O.<sup>p</sup> and various other synthetic religions emerged during XX

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<sup>o</sup> Clear example can be found in the papers of Kaarina Aitamurto, where she cites Schnirelmann, thus (apart from copying Schnirelmann's view that Slavic Rodnovery is created in 1970's and 1980's), she propagates erroneous view that Ynglism is part of Slavic Rodnovery. Unfortunately, Aitamurto adopts Schnirelmann's construction "Russian Rodnovery" and shows that she is unaware of the fact that first association of Slavic Rodnovery in Poland "Holy Circle of Worshippers of Svetovid" (*pol.* Lechickie Koło Czcicieli Światowida) was organized in 1921., while first association of Slavic Rodnovery in Ukraine "Native faith" (*ukr.* Рідна віра), was registered in 1934. by Dr Vladimir Shayan (*Володимир Петрович Шаян*). Said authors tend to omit historical and socio-political context, which clearly shows lack of conditions for registering of associations and religious groups of Slavic Rodnovery, and for organized and public activities of adherents of Slavic Rodnovery.

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<sup>p</sup> O.T.O. (*Ordo Templi Orientis* or *Order of the Temple of the East*) is an international religious organization founded at the beginning of the XX century. It's modeled after Freemasonry, while its religious teachings are based on the works of Aleister Crowley grouped into *Thelema*.

century, while at the same time they make artificial division of Slavic Rodnovery into Russian Rodnovery, Ukrainian Rodnovery, Polish Rodnovery, Serbian Rodnovery, etc. and while at it they count as part of Slavic Rodnovery (or regional Slavic Rodnoveries) denominations that are not part of Slavic Rodnovery: RUNVira,<sup>q</sup> Yagnovery, Ladoverly, etc. Strmiska, for instance, although makes clear distinction between adherents of RUNVira and adherents of Slavic (i.e. Ukrainian) Rodnovery at one point, nevertheless in the very same text represents RUNVira as largest group of Slavic Rodnovery. Even if we somehow allow to count RUNVira as part of Slavic Rodnovery said might be true for USA or Canada (where RUNVira has its base), but certainly isn't true for Europe or Asia. Schnirelmann, without any ground, counts Ynglism as part of Slavic Rodnovery. Aitamurto adopts term "Rodnovery" to denote Slavic Rodnovery in Russia, while observing Ynglism as its integral part,[43] but later she uses term Rodnovery to denote Slavic Rodnovery in general (still regarding Ynglism as its part).[44] The end effect is that conclusions derived from "research" of Slavic Rodnovery in Russian Federation are applied to Slavic Rodnovery in general, where "researched" groups are often not connected to Slavic Rodnovery (not to mention that communities, associations and organization of Slavic Rodnovery have publicly denounced Ynglism[45],[46] and vice versa). Some authors (particularly in the West) equate terms "Slavic Rodnovery" and "Slavic Neopaganism", thus equating culture, tradition, customs and folklore of Slavic peoples and various chimeras made of fragments of different religions, esotery, ufology and pure fiction of certain individuals. Reader that is acquainted with situation in the field remains bewildered,

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<sup>q</sup> RUNVira or Native Ukrainian National Faith (ukr. Рідна Українська Національна Віра – РУНВіра) is monotheistic religion created in 1964. by Lev Sylenko (Лев Силенко) in USA.

asking himself where is the science in all that and how it is possible that such amateurish, dilettante and pseudoscientific approach is allowed to be propagated through peer reviewed journals and other academic publications. Said reader will, in disbelief, notice that although certain experts use data fabrication (e.g. such a thing has been shown for Schnirelmann as early as 1999.) their works are still cited as main references on Slavic Rodnovery. Even laymen can understand that tendency to attribute to Slavic Rodnovery in Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia, etc. features of religious groups from Russia or Ukraine – religious groups that are not part of Slavic Rodnovery – is pseudoscientific. Unfortunately, such tendencies have become quite common in scientific publications on Slavic Rodnovery.

Note that very use of the term "Rodnovery" without any designation points to lack of understanding of the term on behalf of the author. Rodnovery can be literally translated into English as *native faith*, i.e. *ethnic religion* and it's determined by the people of group of peoples in question. Apart from Slavic Rodnovery, Rodnoveries of are people and ethnic groups exist, e.g. Latvian Rodnovery – *lat. Dievturība*.

Let us consider hypothetical situation where we would apply aforementioned approach on religions that have most adherents today.

If we were to apply aforementioned approach that a religion or denomination is determined by its name to, lets say Eastern Orthodox Christianity (second largest Christian denomination and denomination with, by far, largest number of adherents among Slavs) we would found ourselves in the following situation. Although Orthodox Christianity has Apostolic succession,<sup>r</sup> which means that (at least in

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<sup>r</sup> Apostolic succession is the method whereby the ministry of the Christian Church is held to be derived from the apostles by a continuous succession, which has usually been associated with



theory of Orthodox Christian theology) can trace its origin to the time of first apostles, the very name for Orthodox Christianity *sr.* православље is created during reforms of Patriarch of Moscow Nikon, between 1652. and 1654. Before that, Orthodox Christianity was know as *sr.* правоверје, so there are no written documents prior to second half of XVII century in which *православље* is mentioned.



**Figure 1.** Menologium published in Kiev, in 1714., in which instead of *православље*, term *правоверје* is used.

Changing the term *правоверје* with term *православље* lasted for almost next 100 years (Figure 1).

The term was introduced to Serbs after Great Serb Migration of 1690., when Russian redaction of Church Slavonic language was introduced in liturgical use of Serbian Orthodox Church through books of the Russian Orthodox church.<sup>5</sup>

According to previously explained principle (which is applied to Slavic Rodnoverly by number of authors in Slavic languages), one could claim that Orthodox Christianity was actually invented in later half of XVII century, which is of course as absurd as claim that Slavic Rodnoverly was created at the end of XX century.



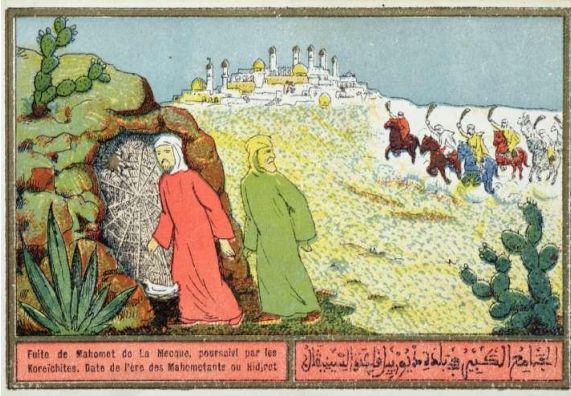
**Figure 2.** Illustration showing prophet Mohammed (on the right) preaching; taken from a medieval-era manuscript of the astronomical treatise "The Remaining Signs of Past Centuries" by the Persian scholar al-Biruni; collection of the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.[47]

If we were to apply principle of dividing Slavic Rodnoverly into Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian, etc. Rodnoverly on Islam, we would found ourselves in the situation in which we should consider Turkish (or Turkic) Islam, Arabic Islam, Egyptian Islam, Maghreb Islam, etc. Notice that one of the alleged dogmas of Islam of ban on pictorial depiction of prophet Mohammed (due to which we witnessed number of violent protests, often with tragic outcomes, in the last few years), is actually and obscure rule of a very specific branch of Islam – rule that doesn't exist in Turkic Islam, Persian Islam (Figure 2) or in Maghreb Islam (Figure 3).[48]

If we would apply kind of measuring tape that used on Slavic Rodnoverly on Roman Catholicism (largest Christian denomination), we would found ourselves in the situation in which we should consider Italian Roman Catholicism, Yucatan Roman Catholicism, Irish Roman Catholicism, etc., in accordance with regional and ethnic specificities.

a claim that the succession is through a series of bishops.

<sup>5</sup> In fear that without enough priests and textbooks to educate them, Serbs in Austro-Hungary might be converted to Roman Catholicism, Serbian Orthodox Church asked and received help from Russian Orthodox Church.



**Figure 3** Hijra – Mohammed's Flight from Mecca in 622 AD; Algerian color postcard from the 1920s or '30s. Mohammed is the figure entering the cave.[49]

We would have every right to point out the dogma of Immaculate Conception, that was officially approved by Roman pope Pius IX in 1854.<sup>t</sup> and acceptance of Theory of evolution from 1950.<sup>u</sup>, to point out that Roman Catholicism is new religion created in second half of XIX century and first half of XX century by reconstruction of older religions and mixing of modern influences and teachings

This is just a miniscule sample of a long list of issues in Abrahamic religions – issues that would suddenly become problems if we are to apply same measuring tape that is used on Slavic Rodnovery in the papers of certain authors.

However, said considerations are not done. The reason is that Abrahamic religions have large influence in society and therefore on academic community. On the other hand, Slavic Rodnovery is marginal religion with number of adherents in the region of statistical error and practically no influence on academic community. Therefore Slavic Rodnovery is rather convenient place to make a career by writing papers that are borderline

sensationalism, with no field work and by using outdated data or by fabricating data, without any consequences.

Let us point out that using term neopaganism as a designation for Slavic Rodnovery doesn't mean that author was driven by unscientific intention (ideological, religious or pseudoscientific), which can be illustrated by example of Piotr Wiench,[50] who dedicated a lot of time and field work investigating Slavic Rodnovery, during which he interviewed number of leaders in Slavic Rodnovery community as well as people that are respected among adherents of Slavic Rodnovery. However it's hard not to notice that every single author that nurtures animosity towards Slavic Rodnovery and writes about it through the prism of its own ideological and religious affiliations denotes Slavic Rodnovery as neopaganism, which can be clearly shown by works of Schnirelmann and likes.

Slavic Rodnovery hasn't yet reached critical mass needed to force the change of the approach on behalf of part of academic community and adhering to scientific research. It's most regrettable that part of scientific community requires outside pressure in order to do their work in compliance with scientific standards.

<sup>t</sup> „*Ineffabilis Deus*“ is Apostolic Constitution issued by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm>

<sup>u</sup> Papal encycle of Roman pope Pius XII, called „*Humani generis*“, issued on August 12. 1950. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12HUMAN.HTM>

## 5. Enough about the problems, let's talk about solutions!

To an ordinary reader (and probably to an expert, also) phenomena that is quite common in scientific literature – an effort to qualify Slavic Rodnovery before it is defined - must seem very strange. It's not quite clear what scientific methodology has the approach in which phenomena is qualified before its definition has been made. A lot of problems and absurd situations, that arisen from nonchalant approach to the basic procedure, which is otherwise implied, would've been avoided if the Slavic Rodnovery was first properly defined, and therefore understood what Slavic Rodnovery is.

So let us introduce a *working* definition of Slavic Rodnovery, that might be (and indeed should be) the very start – Slavic Rodnovery is the restoration of polytheistic, ethnic religion of Slavs, based on written, archaeological and ethnological sources and findings. With this definition there are two limitations or notes attached – one concerning time and one concerning space. These limitations ought to be at all times on mind of everyone that approach Slavic Rodnovery, whether if one is an adherent or not. Sources that Slavic Rodnovery is based upon cover relatively vast time period that stretches over several millennia. Therefore Slavic Rodnovery is not restoration of Slavic religion as it has existed at concrete point of time (e.g. in 626. or in 1168.), but rather a composite made by overlapping currently available data from different time periods. Second limitation is spatial, i.e. there exist certain differences and specificities between beliefs, customs and rituals of four groups of Slavic people. While these differences are acknowledged, in the total sum that is Slavic Rodnovery they are many times overwhelmed by similarities. However, they shouldn't be forgotten. Some authors made those differences into focal points of their work, thus driving insignificant

specificities into extreme. With given working definition we immediately have two qualifications – polytheistic and ethnic religion. Practical application of given working definition we can observe in activities of organizations that engage in Slavic Rodnovery throughout Slavic world, some of them being: information center "Svevlad" (*sr.* информациони центар „СВЕВЛАД“), Serbia;[51] association "Old Believers" (*sl.* Združenje "Staroverci") ,Slovenia;[52] association "Sacrifice" (*pol.* Stowarzyszenie "Żertwa"), Poland;[53] association "Holy grove of native faith", (*sk.* "Svätoháj Rodnej Viery"), Slovakia;[54] etc.

Given working definition enables us to characterize those phenomena that were previously lumped together with Slavic Rodnovery, but are not Slavic Rodnovery, and thus stop the lack of application of scientific methodology one can notice in scientific literature on Slavic Rodnovery.

## 6. Conclusion

We've shown that there is no justification for using term *neopaganism* (and its analog in Russian – *неоязычество*) when addressing Slavic Rodnovery, if the goal of scientific paper is to convey results objectively, in clear and unambiguous way. Using terms that have subjective definitions in scientific literature can be marked as pseudoscience. Therefore we have to emphasize the need to discourage further use of such terms in scientific literature in order to respect scientific methodology.

Qualification and classification of the phenomenon of interest is necessary, so it's important to propose adequate alternative for terms that we've seen are unfit for scientific purposes. As possible alternative one should take into consideration terms such following: *ethnic religion*, *native faith*, *polytheism* and other terms that are unambiguous and properly defined. We propose to qualify Slavic Rodnovery as polytheistic, ethnic religion of Slavs, and to consider branches and divisions of Slavic Rodnovery relative to previously given definition. In that way, numerous ambiguities and problems that were met by researchers of Slavic Rodnovery would be avoided as well as amateurish approach joined with use of terms that guarantee lack of unambiguity and clear conveying of ideas and findings to the reader. Same consideration should be applied on restorations of other ethnic religions: Dievturība, Romuva,<sup>v</sup> Rāmawa,<sup>w</sup>

Mausk<sup>x</sup> etc. and on ethnic religions as well, like: Чимарий йўла<sup>y</sup> and others.

In this paper we've dealt with suitability of presented terms in scientific literature. Whether and if will said terms be used in everyday speech, press releases of some communities and organizations of Slavic Rodnovery (or other ethnic religions), ideological, political or some other sort of publications is not the topic of this paper.

Further research of Slavic Rodnovery should provide systematization of movements connected with it and to investigate their similarities and differences, as well as degree of drift from the definition we've proposed (taking into account limitations we gave) and eventually provide better and more functional definition of Slavic Rodnovery.

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<sup>v</sup> Romuva is a Baltic ethnic religion, restoring the religious practices of the Lithuanian people before their Christianization.

<sup>w</sup> Rāmawa is a Baltic ethnic religion, restoring the religious practices of the Prussian people before their Christianization.

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<sup>x</sup> Mausk is a Baltic ethnic religion, restoring the religious practices of the Estonian people before their Christianization.

<sup>y</sup> Чимарий йўла (*Čimarij jūla*) is the traditional ethnic religion of the Mari people, a Volga Finnic ethnic group based in the republic of Mari El, in Russian Federation.



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