

# “The Religion of Trypillia”: Peculiarities of the Formation of an Original Religious Community in the Context of the Processes of Institutionalization of the Native Faith in Ukraine

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## Abstract

The publication takes the example of one of the native faith religious movements of modern Ukraine. It highlights the peculiarities of its spontaneous emergence, development, self-identification, and guidelines for religious activity. The article also briefly examines the origins of this community, the sources of its doctrine and name, the peculiarities of searching for its own religious identity, the main points of reflection on the sphere of the sacred, understanding the “idea of God”, the representation of religious symbols and art, the organization of ritual and cult practice, and the directions of religious activity. At the same time, the peculiarities of forming such a religious community are considered not in isolation, but in the context of interaction and mutual influence with other native faith confessions of Ukraine.

## Keywords

Institutionalization, Neo-Paganism, Paganism, Natural Faith, “Religion of Trypillia”, Trypillia Culture, Native Faith, Ukraine

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## 1. Introduction

One of the trends in the religious life of the modern world is the emergence and spread of various neo-pagan religious movements whose activities are aimed at the revival or reconstruction of autochthonous, pre-Christian religious beliefs. As the Ukrainian religious scholar A. Kolodnyi correctly observes: “Today there

is a revival of the pagan faith in the world. The number of pagan communities is constantly growing. And it is growing in different countries. Against the background of the world's dominant secular and Christian cultures, there is a revival of pagan spirituality. But we have to note that the line of inheritance of the pagan beliefs is not a continuous one. Paganism appears in a modified and modernized form, therefore it is called "new (neo)paganism" (Kolodny, 2013: p. 106)."

The modern neo-paganism movement experienced its rapid growth in the 1990s. This was largely due to the spread of the Internet and the crisis of Christianity in many parts of Europe and North America (Strmiska, 2005: p. 43). In 1991, after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, freedom of religion was legally established throughout Russia and a number of other newly independent states, including Ukraine. This contributed to the growth of both Christian sects and neo-pagan movements. According to surveys, there are about half a million neo-paganism followers in the United States and other English-speaking countries today (Gaidukov, 2016). Worldwide, the number of adherents of the new pagan religious movement is 5 million or more (Modern paganism).

In Ukraine the above-mentioned religious trend has its own peculiarities. In order to identify it in the Ukrainian context, researchers use such terms as "Ukrainian neo-paganism" or "Ukrainian native faith". The latter usually coincides with the generalized self-identification of followers of neo-pagan religious movements in Ukraine. It is worth noting that from the very beginning of its emergence, the Ukrainian native faith has been organizationally differentiated into several different independent trends. These trends have never formed a coherent entity. For example, almost simultaneously on the territory of independent Ukraine professors of monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic neo-paganism appeared with their own community names and individual names of Gods or their understanding ("Native Ukrainian National Faith", "Great Fire", "Orthodoxy", naturalists, sun worshippers). It began as a worldview movement. After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, it began to take an institutional form. Today, there are more than fifteen native faith organizations. At the same time, some of them, such as "Yahnovira" and "Ladovira", ceased to exist without ever having achieved their final institutionalization, while others, such as "KRUK", function as unregistered religious organizations. In addition, officially registered denominations, which is a natural phenomenon for a significant number of new religious movements, also undergo internal transformations related to changes in doctrine, religious practice, self-naming and areas of religious activity.

The diversity of native faiths existing in Ukraine will not be listed and described in this publication. Instead, we would like to note that the research conducted so far has shown that the process of institutionalization of the native faith movements in Ukraine is taking place in two main directions:

- *eclectic*, characterized by an arbitrary mixture of heterogeneous components

of pre-Christian beliefs, certain elements of Hinduism, ideas and practices of the “New Age” movement, and a pronounced emphasis on individual spiritual search, personal mystical experience;

- *ethnic*, whose representatives try to reconstruct ancient polytheistic beliefs and archaic ritual practices and bring them as close to authenticity as possible, based on the principle of searching for their own ethno-religious identity (Bazyk, 2015: p. 290).

It should also be noted that the vast majority of native faith denominations can be attributed to the latter type of institutionalization. Therefore, we will focus our research on the example of one such religious organization. It has long functioned as an original, officially unregistered religious community of co-religionists. In different periods of its existence, its followers called their faith differently: “The Religion of Nature”, “The Religion of Trypillia”, or “The Religion of Trypillian Civilization”. The last two names themselves refer to the spiritual heritage of the Trypillian culture. The Trypillians lived on the territory of present-day Ukraine between 5500 and 2750 BC. (Trypillia Culture). The peculiarities of the formation of such a religious community are discussed in this publication in connection with the processes of the institutionalization of the native faith in Ukraine.

In this paper the authors have considered previous studies concerning native religious movements in Ukraine, namely: D. Bazyk, O. Zavalii (2022) «Reception of trypillia heritage in native faith movement of Ukraine in the context of ethno-confessional identity»; D. Bazyk (2016) «The phenomenon of Ukrainian native religion: essential characteristics, features of formation and development»; D. Bazyk (2021) «Peculiarities of the ethno-confessional self-identification of native faiths of Ukraine»; O. Smorzhevska (2021) «Religious identity of Ukrainian native believers under the conditions of globalization»; D. Bazyk (2019) «The ideologeme of pan-Slavism in the native faiths of Ukraine».

## 2. Founding a Denomination

The original religious community began its activities in 2000. Its founders set out to revive the authentic ancient religious beliefs that existed in the past on the territory of Ukraine. In the early 2000, private and public collections of Trypillian antiquities were actively developed in Ukraine. More and more information materials and scientific works were published. The “Trypillia fashion” entered even some political circles with the then Prime Minister and later the third President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko. It was he who became a good ambassador of Trypillia at the state level. He set a certain tone for the intelligentsia of that time. In the same years, the two-volume “Encyclopaedia of the Trypillian Civilization” was published, summarizing 130 years of research on the Trypillian culture (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization). Thus, the self-organization of the religious community, which did not yet have a separate name, was a certain reaction to the trend of interest in Trypillian culture at that time. According to the followers of this native faith denomination: “the foundation of the religious community was

also dedicated to the new millennium”, which, according to the believers’ world-view, symbolized the time of the change of epochs and the beginning of the spiritual enlightenment of humanity.

The community began to hold its meetings in a private house near Kyiv, which is still functioning today and is called by believers “Religious (or Spiritual) Center” (*Description of the Symbol “Tree of Life” in the Religious Center, 2017*). V. Perehinets, one of the founders of the denomination and co-owner of the private house where the founders began their religious activities, said in an interview that the place chosen for building was not chosen by chance. In his words, “special attention was paid to the natural landscape in which the sacred building was to be erected. The building site was located in an oak grove. It was like being inside a conditional circle of ancient trees, in the center of which the future building appeared”. Today, the Spiritual Center is surrounded on all sides by giant plants, and V. Perehinets and his associates are proud that not a single tree was destroyed during the construction of the building. He notes: “For the believers of the community, these are sacred trees, symbols of a “living cult” whose restorative functions have been seen in the healing of not only one native believer”.

Let’s add some details about the peculiarities of the location of the Spiritual Center of the denomination. The eastern part of the world is almost bordered by a river that seems to originate from this very place. Some native believers note: “On equinox mornings, a “sunny path” runs along the water’s blue surface to the center of a circle of ancient oaks”, where the modern sacred building was built. This natural feature of the landscape and the sunlight effects that unfold in this area at the equinox attracted many followers of other native faith denominations. As a result, the Spiritual Center became a center of religious dialogue between various native faith denominations in Ukraine.

### 3. Wording the Name of a Religious Organization

For a long time, however, the existence of a faith-based community of like-minded people was marked without a formalized name. Over time, however, the need to institutionalize the community arose. Interestingly, in 2017, two names emerged almost simultaneously for the religious community under study: “The Religion of Nature” and “The Religion of Trypillia”, which appeared simultaneously in the information space of Ukrainian native faith. In particular, “Religion of Nature” – from 01.02.2017 (*Religious Community of Native Faith “Religion of Nature”, 2017*), while “Religion of Trypillia” – from 22.06.2017 (*The Religion of Trypillia, 2017*). The variability of names for essentially the same denomination probably originally arose from the motives of attracting neophytes with different views on the development of the Ukrainian native faith to join the new religious organization. In particular, the name “Religion of Nature” is a reference to the imitation of Western-style religious movements that developed rapidly in Great Britain in the early 2000. At the same time, the denomina-

tion was prompted to choose this name by the peculiarities of the location of its religious building (Spiritual Center). This is where the first congregational meetings actually began. On the one hand, such a place evokes certain emotional associations and aesthetic preferences. On the other hand, it emphasizes the ecological orientation of the values of the followers of this religious movement, which are based on a sense of deep respect for the environment.

As for the name “Religion of Trypillia”, it was determined, on the one hand, by the circumstances of the rapid development and popularization of the Trypillian culture in Ukraine, and, on the other hand, by the peculiarities of the search of the believers of the religious institution for their own ethno-religious identity and attempts to reconstruct the religious beliefs and world view of the representatives of the ancient Trypillian culture. Turning to the terminology that defines the concept of “Religion of Trypillia” spread by the studied native faith organization, we see that the organization’s name is identified with the spiritual heritage of ancient Trypillians. Specifically, the official YouTube channel used by the religious community states the following: The “Religion of Trypillia” is an autochthonous, traditional religion of the ancient gene pool of European civilization, dating back to 7 thousand years ago. It was naturally formed and professed by the people themselves. It developed through the evolutionary transition of the European population from an appropriating to a reproducing economy (agriculture) and was kept in the orbit of the primary spiritual intelligentsia. The lands of modern Ukraine were the territorial core of the development of this spiritual tradition. These ancient ancestors of Ukrainians are called Trypillians by their contemporaries. Their culture is called “Trypillian civilization” (*The Religion of Trypillia*, 2017). The official information space where this community promotes its activities is a YouTube channel called “Religion of Trypillia”.

As we can see, the religious community under study has actually been operating since 2000. However, the main variants of its name, which would distinguish it from other denominations in the public sphere, can only be recorded since 2017.

#### **4. Features of Religious Self-Identification**

Despite the fact that since 2021 the name of the denomination “Religion of Trypillia” has become dominant, pushing the name “Religion of Nature” to the background, but communication with its followers can be convinced that the name of the organization is not an “unshakable truth” that directly affects the self-identification of believers. After all, they often call themselves “natural believers”, some “sun worshippers”, or simply follow natural religions. At the same time, the self-designation “paganism” is quite common for the professors of the studied religious organization, which is a characteristic feature of communities of the ethnic direction of institutionalization of Ukrainian neopagan communities. At the same time, such self-identifying concepts as “nature faith” and “paganism” are inherently synonymous in the self-understanding of many native believers.

## 5. Understanding the “idea of God”

If we talk about the peculiarities of the reflection on the sphere of the sacred and the understanding of the “idea of God” among the followers of the “Religion of Trypillia”, they practically do not use the subjective naming of God’s name, which is inherent in many traditional religions. In the opinion of natural believers, it is inappropriate to divide a single round of sacred existence by individual names of Gods. They are of the opinion that “the cosmic evolution and the infinite forces that are the origin of life on earth have no need of a personal name such as that of a human being. On the contrary, the concept of the universal should be defined by the general terminology of the human linguistic apparatus, which will not continue to separate religions by the names of Gods on the mental level”. This position testifies to the pantheism of the believers of the “Religion of Trypillia” and the postulation of the idea of an impersonal sacred principle. In other words, the understanding of the “idea of God” is at the abstract level. Moreover, having no theological works or religious doctrines, the believers of the organization are adogmatic.

## 6. Representation of Denominational Symbols

Denominational adherents pay considerable attention to the representation and interpretation of their own religious symbols.

The main religious symbol of the “Religion of Trypillia” is the “Tree of Life”. It occupies a central position in the main ritual hall of the Spiritual Center, which is located in a country house near Kyiv (Ukraine) (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.** Fragment of the mural “Tree of Life” from the “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center (artist V. Kryzhanivskyi, 2000, the size of the painting is 5 × 5 meters).

The entire composition of the painting begins with a living fire, a stylized altar, over which a huge, detailed painting is actually depicted. A detailed study of the painting/confessional symbol of the “Religion of Trypillia” reveals that the lower part of the mural, at the roots of the “Tree”, depicts purely ritualistic Trypillian utensils. This seems to emphasize the origin of the entire composition. The roots of the mythological Tree depict the germ of a golden grain (a symbol of the “Golden Age”), from which a grain-growing ear of wheat stretches, which, higher up in the composition, seems to break through to Ukrainian symbols, connecting the past with the present (*The Light of Our Ancestors*, 2010). At the center of the entire composition are male and female beings, Father Heaven and Mother Earth, who entered into a sacred marriage to form the human universe also depicted in the painting.

The symbol of fertility is depicted on the forehead of Mother Earth or Mother of the World. In the artistic representation, it’s also the image of the Father. If you look closely at this detail of the painting, this sign seems to be manifested by an amulet pendant around the Father’s neck, but at the same time this symbol appears on the forehead of Mother Earth. This artistic effect was created by the native artist V. Kryzhanivsky. It was intended to emphasize the sacred unity of the two cosmogonic components of the universe. In the right hand of the Goddess there is the “Horn of Plenty” (a symbol of agricultural self-sufficiency derived from the archaic cult of Taurus), in the left hand there is a ritual bowl filled with water. This depiction of the Mother Goddess is consistent with the myth in which she is both the earth and the river, according to the owners of the painting. At iconographic manner, the “waters” released from the ritual bowl flow to the mythological “Tree”, thereby reinforcing the myth of the “Tree of Life” from which the full-flowing “river of life” originates. The adherents of the “Religion of Trypillia” believe that the river flowing from the foot of the Spiritual Center building is the “Water Shrine” (although the denomination honors all natural sources).

Father Heaven in the painting “Tree of Life” is represented with the corresponding male celestial symbols. At the top of the picture there is the symbol of the Trident, the modern coat of arms of Ukraine. The denomination believes that the Ukrainian coat of arms is derived from the Bident of the chronicler prince Sviatoslav Ihorovych (Sviatoslav the Brave or Sviatoslav I) and that its sources, in turn, come from the Trypillian world from the image and cult of the Urus Heaven (Bull God). That is why in the painting “Tree of Life” this symbol is placed in its highest part, on the head of the Father, emphasizing the aspects of “height” and “horniness” of one of the oldest religious symbols of the Ukrainian land. It should be added that the religious community “Religion of Trypillia” also honors the state symbols of Ukraine. At the same time, it popularizes such world symbols as the “Bident of Sviatoslav”, the “World Tree” and the “yellow-blue” flag.

The Father in the painting “Tree of Life” holds objects that are intended to protect and enlighten people. In his right hand he holds a sword raised to the mountain and entwined with garlands of flowers (the sword of justice), and in his left hand he holds a torch with the heavenly fire of enlightenment. The mythological

image is enhanced by flaming motifs, which serve as a non-verbal message to the believers of the sect about their heavenly origin from the cosmic-heavenly fire.

A Swarga or circle of fire and space uniting the two halves of the cosmogonic essences of heaven and earth is depicted at the top of the “Tree”. This Swarga resembles the Trypillian ritual ceramic scrolls, only in a more modernized form. For the denomination, such a symbol is a manifestation of a natural order, a sacred reality, and a natural orderliness in which humanity, in its ontological dependence, is one with a transcendent source that the denomination calls “Cosmic Order, the Law, or God”.

It’s worth mentioning that the existence of the “Sacred Tree” cult in autochthonous archaic cultures is confirmed by a sufficient number of archaeological finds. Its sacred meaning is based on agricultural cults of plant worship and fertility.

Another important sacred symbol of the denomination is the “Sun of the Year”. For example, since 2000, in the main ritual hall of the “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center, namely in its ceiling part, there has been a composition of the sun made up of ten equal parts of rays, from which a sun-fire Swarga seems to unfold (**Figure 2, Figure 3**).



**Figure 2.** The symbol of the “Sun of the Year” from the ritual hall of the Trypillia Religion community (view from below).



**Figure 3.** The symbol of the “Sun of the Year” from the ritual hall of the Trypillia Religion community (view to the east).

Each of the rays is visually enhanced and illuminated by the lamp. The center of the Sun consists of three conventional circles, each of which is highlighted in yellow. This “Sun of the Year” also has a hidden symbolism: in the darkness, a luminous hidden sign of the Sun begins to appear – seven circles, which for the followers of the denomination mean the number of births. “In this way, we wanted to express the metaphor of the Year in the newly built Religious Center, but for financial and technical reasons, we did not have the time to finish everything”, the ideologues of the community reported. According to the plan, the lamps were to be turned on alternately in a circle. This would correspond to the movement of the Sun during the Year. The first lamp is on the conventional east-west line. It’s at the point of the vernal equinox, the confessional New Year. As the Sun moves visibly northeast toward the summer solstice, the lamps should be lit in turn around the circumference of the religious installation. When the light of a balanced autumn day (the time of the autumnal equinox) breaks into the apse of the ritual hall, the lamp oriented to the east-west axis of the world in the western part of the installation should be lit accordingly. Then, according to the Sun’s movement to the southeast at the time of the winter solstice, the “Solar Circle of the Year” should illuminate the Year’s path in sync with time and space. Natural believers associate the light of all ten lamps with the full circle of the year. Before the spring equinox, the confessional New Year, all the lights are turned off, and at the sacred time of the rebirth of Nature and the Year, the first lamp of the New Year is lit and a fire is made in the altar (actually a fireplace) under the painting “Tree of Life”.

Also, the denomination “Religion of Trypillia” has another significant symbol of the Eneolithic agrarians. This is the symbol of “Two-Horned Urus” which is popularized in the modern religious organization under the coat of arms of Prince Sviatoslav Ihorovych (the Brave) of Kyiv, the so-called “Bident of Sviatoslav”. The community gives detailed arguments in favor of the fact that the sources of the Sviatoslav the Brave sign should be sought in the mental and psychological connection with the sacred Trypillian sign “Urus”. The official logo of the “Religion of Trypillia” is a sacred tree combined in one composition with the Two-horns, the coat of arms of Kyivan Rus at the time of Sviatoslav Ihorovych (**Figure 4**).



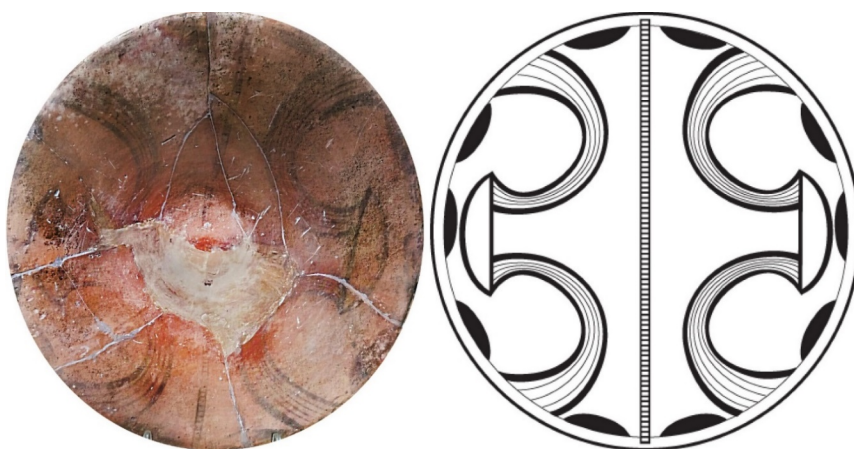
**Figure 4.** The official logo of the “Religion of Trypillia”.

Since 2017, when it began to be popularized in various videos on video hosting sites, the community's logo has become well known. The community's printed materials are also distributed with this logo.

## 7. Calendar and Cult Practice

It is important to note that the Religion of Trypillia community uses its own calendar of holidays (based on the Trypillian “Nebelivka disk” (Zavalii, 2023)) to honor the astronomical dates of equinoxes and solstices, and when the sun enters the ritual hall of the Spiritual Center of the denomination on these days, it symbolizes the most solemn events of the year for the believers. The “Nebelivka disk” is an important religious object of the religious community and is considered by the believers as an authentic “Trypillian Circle of the Year”. According to scientific reconstructions, it contains a decimal system (the hypothesis of a Trypillian Year of ten months or ten conditional periods). In its center there are three separate lines. The annual record of the “Nebelivka disk” was probably kept in a circle. It was filled with chips according to the course of the year. This is quite comparable to the modern symbol of the “Solar Circle of the Year” of the “Religion of Trypillia” community. It's worth noting that the opening of the “Nebelivka disk” was at least twelve years apart from the opening of the Spiritual Center of the native believers. This may indicate a predictive factor in the activities of the ideologues of the religious association. However, it is possible that the relevant model of year perception has been the subject of study and borrowing by the denomination from other Trypillian calendar-type artifacts known since the XX century. A Trypillian calendar-type artifact displayed in the community's Spiritual Center is a good illustration of this idea (Figure 5).

The “Sacred Dish” presented clearly conveys the symbolism of a circle, which the ancient Trypillians used to mark the year. Such a circle is divided in half by a “ladder”—a symbol of passage, which is also a rather recurring theme in the



**Figure 5.** A Trypillian artifact of calendar significance. It is exhibited at the “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium BC.

Trypillian world. Ten semicircles are depicted on the large crown of the plate, probably reflecting the ten months or periods of the archaic year, which can be compared with the study of the authentic Trypillian calendar, the “Nebelivka disk”. It is noteworthy that the Year is divided into two half-years with corresponding stories by the image of a “ladder” above the conditional circle. Therefore, it is likely that the Trypillian heritage, which was in the private collection of the community at the time of the creation of the Spiritual Center, was a model for the creation of material counterparts in the architectonics of the country house.

The religious community attaches great importance to the cult of vegetation and the sacred tree. The veneration of the tree is perhaps the most important feature of the “Religion of Trypillia”. For example, the religious community has a tradition of planting trees after the birth of a child. The baby is blessed with the help of a tree of the same age. This “Tree of Life” is planted over the child’s placenta. This is organized on a modern level in the denomination. After the birth of a new life, the ancestral place of mother and child is not discarded, but legally transferred to the parents (professing Christians or sympathizers), who perform the ritual of planting the Family Tree, usually near the home or family center. These Trees are planted at sunrise. The water used in the child’s blessing ritual is poured under the plant. The denomination’s YouTube channel promotes a motivational video in which a child of the religious movement’s leaders tends to his or her own “Family Tree”. “My navel is hidden under my “Family Tree”. This is my homeland”, says the child. “These are the symbols of my family”, the child points to the symbol of the denomination while holding an authentic Trypillian pot with the iconography of the sacred “Tree” (*Trypillia Heritage Shapes My Life! 2021*). This video shows how the denomination’s ideologues try to convey the essence of the sacred symbol, which dates back to Trypillian times. According to one of the community’s followers, this symbol “unites the reality of the past with the reality of the present. The artistic symbol of the Tree embodies the sacredness of the living world (one reality represents the other)”.

The image of the sacred tree in the community “Religion of Trypillia”, given its exceptional archaic and mythological significance, enters the realm of multifaceted religious ritual. For natural believers, the Tree is the central image of the universe, the embodiment of the elements of existence, which connects human generations with the sacred reality of their ancestors and an unbroken cultural tradition. Natural believers consider trees to be a kind of transcendent phenomenon because of the long-life span that these living creations of nature can achieve, representing the collective wisdom of generations. Near the oaks (the trees that surround the Spiritual Center), religious celebrations, meetings, services, and even weddings are held. There is a tradition of taking acorns from the oaks of the center and planting them at the birth of children. They

are also used as amulets by the believers. Sprouts of oaks from the foot of the “Trypillia Religion” Religious Center are planted near various sacred sites in Ukraine and even abroad. It is known that near the site of the Nebelivka Temple there is already a small tree, and in 2015 the leader of RUNVira, Runmama Svitanna (O. Svyrydenko), took the land, river water and oak fruits from the naturalistic faith center to the Shrine of the Mother of Ukraine in the United States.

The Tree, as the archetype and double of human life, is also used in the community in the process of performing the rite of passage and burial of the deceased. The denomination practices cremation, similar to the ancient Trypillians. The ashes are ritually placed under the tree chosen during life or under one’s own “Family Tree”. The ritual, taking into account the position of the sunrise on the day of burial, is performed towards the eastern side of the world. The remains of the deceased have a cosmogonic significance in the denomination and must be united with the cosmogonic tree, an image of universal Nature and a symbol of cyclical rebirth. There is a story about the posthumous incarnation of a beloved in a viburnum bush in the Slavic song tradition. Moreover, viburnum seeds look like a heart. Life and its highest goal, immortality, are hidden in the heart of the “Tree of Life” in Eastern Slavic mythology and folklore. Let’s remember the Slavic mythological figure of the Koshchii the Immortal and his death hidden under an oak tree. Thus, the cosmogonic and popular beliefs of the Slavic and Indo-European peoples are reflected in the tradition of placing the ashes of the deceased in the Tree. The denomination believes that a living plant symbolizes the continuation of the life of the deceased’s soul. It is also the place where the family’s collective memory is preserved. The denomination’s funeral rite reflects the values of archaic heritage and modern environmental morality, and is both a religious and a social and communicative act. This reflects the ideological transition from the native Tree, under which “blood and flesh” are hidden, to the deification of the native Mother Earth, into which the “root of the Family” grows. This symbolizes the universal kinship of the human and natural worlds.

Since this tradition and denomination began to develop in the 2000, not all fellow believers have their own “Tree of Life” or “Family Tree” from birth. Therefore, after being initiated into the believers of the “Religion of Trypillia”, they can choose their own “Plant Double” at their own discretion.

It is noteworthy that the tradition of the planting of trees on the graves has also been recorded in the Ukrainian ethnography. It is known that after the death of a person certain plants were planted on the grave in accordance with their symbolic meaning, and on memorial days the graves and these green spaces were in order. Green vegetation has always surrounded Ukrainian cemeteries. Graves were not covered with stone slabs or granite monuments in ancient times. There was also a custom of planting of a tree in memory of a person. For example, the “Shevchenko Oak” in Poltava (Ukraine) is a living monument to

Taras Shevchenko, the oak of M. Zalizniak or the chestnut of P. Mohyla (*The Tradition of Landscaping Graves*, 2015).

## 8. Community Religious Activities

The “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center has a Trypillia Museum, which houses a collection of spiritual treasures of ancient agrarians. The Trypillia culture, which is presented as a national symbol, is scientifically promoted by the organization. The uniqueness of this museum lies in its relative openness. The exhibits are in the area of “accessible contemplation”, rather than hidden behind showcases. The main ritual hall of the center, where the denominational celebrations and sacred ceremonies are held, also houses Trypillian ritual artifacts. This enhances the role and significance of the events. Representatives of the denomination, under the close supervision of the museum’s curators, allow children visiting the museum to touch the artifacts of their ancestors. The ideologists of the organization popularize the museum artifacts in the public domain on their own YouTube channel. This makes the museum collection completely open, understandable and accessible. The collection’s owners have this to say: “Indeed, an organized museum is very important for all of us and our supporters, but we are of the opinion that Nature itself is the most important museum whose collection must be understood and preserved”.

In 2019, a religious organization conducted a model experiment to recreate the basic concepts of the Nebelivka Temple of the Trypillian culture. Leading scholars of Trypillian heritage participated in the experiment together with believers (Zavalii, 2020). Authors of the model: V. Perehinets, O. Zavalii. Execution of the temple roof: L. Kuznetsova. Artistic design: L. Kuznetsova, S. Lutsiv. Scientific consultant: archaeologist, professor M. Videiko. The temple model was presented on December 7, 2019, at the “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center (*Presentation of the Layout of the Nebelivka*, 2019). This event brought together pagans, natural believers, Christians, scholars, and people interested in ancient history. The experiment used the exact dimensions of the building according to archaeological excavations on a scale of 1:30 and the maximum permissible parameters of wood (no more than 4-4.5 meters in real Trypillian house building). This outlined certain visual realities of the building. It was built with a partially open roof over the space of the main ritual hall. A circular balcony was organized around the perimeter of the hall, and the supporting wooden columns of the structure were placed in such a way as to emphasize the main temple symbol.

Since 2020, on the basis of the “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center, a workshop has been established to produce copies of Trypillian artifacts. According to the community’s followers, such products are made in exact accordance with the original artifacts using ancient technologies: the addition or pressing of grain into ritual items, covering with engobe, glossing, the use of natural paints, etc. The products are sold in a variety of sizes. The denomination

was one of the first to produce a reconstruction of the authentic Trypillian calendar, the “Nebelivka disk”, and began to popularize it widely.

Also, during the Spring Equinox of 2021, the “Religion of Trypillia” Spiritual Center for the first time conducted an experiment using the “solar corridor” of the Nebelivka Temple, taking into account all the features of building construction. The experiment confirmed one of the purposes of the sacred building. The center of the building was illuminated by the light of the morning sun on a balanced day (*Cosmic Liturgy of the Trypillia Temple: Reconstruction for the Equinox, 2021*).

The goal of the denomination is to revive the ancient Trypillian Nebelivka Temple in its authentic location. For the sake of this religious project, the natural believers are already recreating some temple artifacts. These artifacts will be placed in the revived temple space. Since 2020, pilgrimage tours have been organized from Kyiv to the site of the Nebelivka Church. Propaganda and informational materials are published. According to the denomination’s ideologies: “The Nebelivka Temple will certainly become a historical monument of world significance and a center of domestic and international tourism” (*Let’s Revive the Trypillia Temple Together! 2021*).

The “Religion of Trypillia” denomination also cooperates with native faith communities of monotheistic, polytheistic and henotheistic worldviews, i.e. with the adherents of other native faith movements, which recognize a single root of the deep religious phenomenon of the Ukrainian nation dating back to Trypillian times. For example, the fact that leaders of various native faith denominations conducted joint prayer activities around the model of the Temple together with Christians was recorded during the included observation at an event organized by the confessors of the “Religion of Trypillia” on December 7, 2019, in their Spiritual Center. This fact from the religious life of the organization is a proof that the idea of honoring and reviving the spiritual heritage of the Trypillians can be one of the factors in the creation and establishment of constructive intra-confessional dialogue and overcoming of the current inter-confessional contradictions in the religious movement of modern Ukraine.

## 9. Conclusion

Thus, we have studied the peculiarities of the formation of one of the native faith denominations of Ukraine, which today presents itself under the name “Religion of Trypillia”. Its origin is connected with honoring the ancient pre-Christian religious heritage, which took place on the territories of Ukrainian lands. It is also connected with the desire to revive authentic ancient religious beliefs, which existed in the past on the territory of Ukraine.

It is worth noting that the process of institutionalization of the religious organization was not a one-time act, but was carried out gradually over the years. This is consistent with the peculiarities of the search for their own ethno-reli-

gious identity by the founders and followers of the native faith. In particular, the religious institution had two names for a certain period of time:

- “The Religion of Nature”, which reflects the ecological orientation of the values of the followers of this religious trend, based on a sense of deep respect for the environment;
- The “Religion of Trypillia”, according to the main direction of its religious activity, is focused on the reconstruction and revival of authentic religious beliefs and world-view preferences of representatives of the ancient Trypillian culture, which existed on the territory of modern Ukraine between 5500 and 2750 BC.

To this day, the final name of the studied native faith denomination is “The Religion of Trypillia”. This name adequately characterizes the strategic vector of the spiritual aspirations of its believers, which consists in the sacralization, reconstruction and revival of the religious heritage of the ancient Trypillian culture in the context of modernity.

The religious organization of the native faith of Ukraine, which is the subject of this publication, has a number of characteristic features:

- its followers identify themselves in quite different ways, calling themselves “native believers”, “natural believers”, “sun worshippers”, “pagans”, and so on;
- understanding the “idea of God” occurs within the worldview concept of pantheism, lacking any subjective name for the name of God;
- believes in the continuity of the Ukrainian spiritual and cultural tradition, the foundations of which were laid in the days of the Trypillian proto-civilization;
- the believers of the denomination pay great attention to the representation and interpretation of their own religious symbols, which is manifested in the symbols of the “Tree of Life”, the “Sun of the Year” and the “Bident of Sviatoslav the Brave”, which is considered to be a manifestation of the sacred Trypillian sign “Urus”;
- for the religion of the native believers of Trypillia, the tree is a sacred image of the universe, an embodiment of the elements of existence that connects human generations with the sacred reality of their ancestors and the continuity of the cultural tradition. That’s why the tree is associated with the confessional rites of childbirth, the consecration of babies, marriage and funeral rites.

It is also worth mentioning that the development of creative self-realization of individual believers of this native faith is supported by the presence of a confessional workshop where copies of Trypillian artifacts are made.

In general, it can be said that the activity of the “Religions of Trypillia” Spiritual Center is not isolated. It becomes a center of constructive religious dialogue between various native denominations of Ukraine and Christians.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this

paper.

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