

THE DEMONIC PRINCE OF UKRAINE:  
A STUDY OF PRE-SLAVIC GODS, DUAL FAITH  
AND NEOPAGANISM IN UKRAINE

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INTRODUCTION

Crossing The Ukrainian Border

I brought my family to live in Ukraine in June of 2002. We were not prepared for the culture shock of living in an Eastern culture, for the depression we experienced, or for the deep emotional issues. But probably the greatest change in our lives was the difference in the spiritual climate between the U.S. and Ukraine. We came to Kyiv to minister with the indigenous church. We were not expecting the spiritual oppression we faced in coming to our host country.

In the summer of 2003, we were in need of a break from the culture shock. We got in our 1995 Ford Windstar van and drove 700 miles to Schloss Mittersill, a Christian conference center located in the Austrian Alps. As soon as we crossed the Ukrainian border into Hungary we felt the pressure leaving us. We assumed it was because we were driving West and closer to our own culture, but it soon became apparent that there was something spiritual to this feeling. For the next week, my wife, myself and each of the kids spent hours soaking up God's word in our personal devotions in a Christian atmosphere. We felt the spiritual burdens of the past year

melting off of us. It was a wonderful mountain top experience and it stayed with us until we drove back to Kyiv. We reached the border, and all the old feelings returned. It was like a dark blanket had been draped over us. We all wondered if what we were feeling was Satan's control of Ukraine. We have since driven in and out of the country again, and the feelings have been the same each time. Several missionaries living in Ukraine agree with us that the spiritual oppression feels like a heavy weight which disappears at the border. This feeling has brought me to the conclusion that Satan has Ukraine in his grip.

### THE "PRINCE OF UKRAINE"

Some people have asked, "Is there a territorial spirit in Ukraine and can we know his name?" The first place we must start in pursuit of the answer is the Bible. I believe that God's Word has authority over personal experiences, cultural information and historical interpretation. I will be using this principle as my foundation for this research.

#### What the Bible says about territorial spirits?

The proof text for this question is in Daniel 10:12-13, 20-21. The New International Version says it this way:

Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one

days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia....So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. (Daniel 10:12-13, 20-21, New International Version)

The passage speaks about princes of different countries which are contending with the angel who has brought Daniel a message from God. Most Bible scholars feel that these verses are not talking about literal earthly princes, but actual spirits who are opposing God. The prince of Persia and the prince of Greece (or Grecia) are mentioned. Michael is also referred to as the angel of God's people, or the prince of Israel. The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament also agree with this interpretation.

The prince (שַׂר) of the kingdom of Persia, briefly designated in v. 21 "the prince of Persia," is not king Cyrus, or the collective kings of Persia, as Häv. and Kran., with Calvin and most of the Reformers think, but the guardian spirit or the protecting genius of the Persian kingdom, as the Rabbis and most of the Christian interpreters have rightly acknowledged. For the angel that appeared to Daniel did not fight with the kings of Persia, but with a spiritual intelligence of a like nature, for the victory, or precedence with the kings of Persia. (Keil 2000: Daniel 10:12-13)

This passage is a rare discussion of the fact that spirits are involved in territorial warfare. We know from other scripture verses that angel and demons are organized with several allusions to army terminology. From this occurrence, I believe we can be certain that there are territorial spirits.

What the Bible does not say about territorial spirits?

It is also important to note that there is no mention in this passage or any other passage of what to do with this information. There is no commendation to pray against territorial spirits or even an admonishment to try to determine their names. Clinton Arnold, director of the Masters of Theology program at Talbot Theological Seminary, has similar thoughts concerning this subject.

The silence of Scripture on the issue of strategy [with territorial spirits] is quite evident. When we consider that the New Testament records the spread of the gospel into pagan lands (Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy) where idols and occultism held sway, it is very surprising to find no mention of a strategy that stresses discerning, naming, and praying down territorial spirits. (Arnold 1997:161)

This does not take away the existence of the Prince of Ukraine and other territories in the demonic realm, but the Biblical record does not tell us to deal with them any differently than we would deal with other spirits.

#### The relationship of the “Prince of Ukraine” to early Pre-Slavic gods

The relationship of the head demon of a territory to the country’s residents is hard to determine. Scripture only gives a few clues in this regard. Idol worship has been common in all countries of the world. The gods which are worshipped all have similarities and differences. But I do believe that understanding the former gods of Ukraine gives clues to the character of its demonic influence. Keil and Delitzsch say,

This spirit of the kingdom of Persia, whom, after the example of Jerome, almost all interpreters call the guardian angel of his kingdom, is as little the nature-power of this kingdom as Michael is the nature-power of Israel, but is a spirit-being; yet not the heathen national god of the Persians, but, according to the view of Scripture (1 Cor 10:20f.), the δαίμωνιον of the Persian kingdom, i.e., the supernatural spiritual

power standing behind the national gods, which we may properly call the guardian spirit of this kingdom. (Keil 2000: Daniel 10:12-13)

The Israelites understood the correlation of idol-worship with demonic worship. It can be assumed that when the king of Judah, Ahaz, offered up his own son as a sacrifice to a local god, he knew that he was appeasing a demon or territorial spirit. The Old Testament view of the world assumed that demons were intimately involved with idol worship (Arnold 1997:156).

There have been people living in the territory of Ukraine for 3,000 – 4,000 years. The people groups who went north from Mt. Ararat after Noah's flood most likely settled in Ukraine. There were diverse groups of people, but they all worshipped idols, gods and the demons associated with them. The remainder of this paper will examine these gods of Ukraine and the present day revival of their worship.

## EARLY GODS OF UKRAINE

A lot of the information concerning the people who lived on the Ukrainian steppe between 2000 BC and 500 BC is vague and hard to rely on as being accurate. The first early reliable archaeological and historical information comes from the Pre-Slavic time period – approximately 200 BC to 500 AD. During the next five hundred years (480-980 AD) of history, we see the beginning of the Eastern Slavic culture and the Kyiv Rus. These are the ancestors of all the Russian people. Until the forced

baptism of the Kyiv Rus people by Prince Vladimir in 980, all of these people groups were pagan (H. Valenko, personal communication, April 29, 2005).

In April 2005, my translator and I asked for a guide to take us through the Pre-Slavic section of the National Historical Museum of Ukraine in Kyiv. Following an enlightening two hour tour, I asked our guide what position she held at the museum. I was shocked when she shared with us that she was the Head Archaeologist of the museum. During our tour Valenko said,

It is very important that we look at this area of Ukrainian history from a non-biased basis. Unfortunately, the Orthodox Church here has been revising our history for the past 1000 years to make the church look better. The founder of the Russian Orthodox Church, Prince Vladimir, wanted power. He knew religion would give him this power. He started by building a pagan temple before he realized that it was Christianity that would give him the most power with the people. This does not look good for the church. (Marina Strelnik, personal communication, April 29, 2005)

There are many ways that the demonic Prince of Ukraine has manifested himself in the past. It would be difficult to discuss all the gods of Pre-Slavic Ukraine, so we will focus on the most prevalent gods.

### Perun

Perun was the favorite god of Prince Vladimir, most likely because he was the god of war. During his reign in Kyiv (circa 960 AD), he tore down the pre-Orthodox church his Grandmother Olga had built several years earlier and used the materials to construct an open air temple to Perun (Marina Strelnik, personal communication,

April 29, 2005). An early twelfth-century writing, *The Tale of Bygone Years*, gives us a description of the prominence of Perun in the midst of the other idols:

There was a wooden idol of Perun, with a silver head and golden moustaches. Then there were Khors, Dazhbog, Stribog, Simargl, and Mokosha. People made sacrifices to them, calling them gods, and led their sons and daughters to them. But it was to demons that these sacrifices went and the earth was polluted by them. (Warner 2002:10)

The recognition that these idols represented demons or territorial spirits is also seen in this early text.

The worship of Perun predated Vladimir's time and was worshipped by many Slavic tribes throughout the region. Several idols to Perun have been found in the Slavic lands. Vladimir's uncle, Dobrynya, also constructed an idol to Perun far to the North in Novgorod in the same year Vladimir built his temple in Kyiv. Not only does he appear to be the god of war, but also the god associated with lightning and thunder. "Procopius in his *History of the Gothic Wars* mentions a supreme god worshipped by the Anti and Slaviny, mercenaries of possible Slav origin, who believed this god to be the creator of lightning and made sacrifices of bulls to him" (Warner 2002:10).



During my personal tour of the National Historical Museum, we saw a replica of a sacrificial altar on the same location which archaeologists found the original altar to Perun. Our guide said they have only found animal bones at the site, but

this does not rule out the fact that human sacrifices were possibly made here (Marina Strelnik, personal communication, April 29, 2005).

### Dazhbog

Dazhbog is another one of the gods mentioned to be in Vladimir's pantheon on the hill of Kyiv. There is very little information concerning this god or demon, but his worship has been revived in neo-paganism today in Ukraine. "As far as Dazhbog is concerned, attempts have been made to construct a complex mythology of fire and sun worship around his name, on the basis of little more than a single ambiguous chronicle entry" (Warner 2002:16). The name Dazhbog probably comes from the combination of the two Russian words *dat* which means "to give" and the word *bog* which means "god." This probably means that Dazhbog was considered to be a benevolent god to those people who worshipped him.

In another twelfth-century text entitled the *Lay of Igor's Host*, there is a reference to Dazhbog; the people of Rus are called the 'grandsons of Dazhbog.' Even though this text was written during the Christian era of Ukraine, there are many mythological and pagan allusions (Warner 2002:13).

### Mokosha

Mokosha (or Mokosh) is considered to be the female deity of Ukraine. Her name means "moist" or "wet" and probably refers to the moist earth. She is the goddess of fertility in more ways than one: both in the connection with the life-giving

earth as well as sexually. Since the Eastern Slavic culture is matriarchal, Mokosha was a very important god. She is also referred to as the saint of women. “Russian scholars have reached the conclusion that she was a goddess of fertility, responsible for both the well-being of crops and protecting a women’s work, especially spinning” (Warner 2002: 17).

Some archaeologists and historians believe that the early Russian Orthodox Church took many of the characteristics of Mokosha and transferred them to the worship of Virgin Mary. This also relates to the dual faith that has developed in Ukraine over the past century.

The Finno-Slavic goddess Mokosh reappears in the figure of the Mother Moist Earth, which in turn reappears as Mary, the Mother of God during the Christian era. As stated, these evolutions occur over such immense time periods that today we cannot say that the original figure of the Great Mother Goddess Mokosh was totally eliminated and then substituted by the Virgin Mary. Rather, the previous effigies have been re-assimilated and adapted to the new ones. Although specific attributes may be discarded, there is a tendency towards retention of ancient symbolic figures in the collective subconscious and their re-emergence in a disguised form. This is the story of the Slavic witch Baba Yaga who embodies the chthonic, fertility, and transformation aspects of the all-encompassing goddess of life, death, and regeneration. These aspects have been eradicated from the persona of the Virgin Mary so that she incorporates only accepted virtues such as virginity and motherhood. (Oleszkiewicz 2002:4)

Mokosha also has very close ties to a character from Russian mythology named Baba Yaga. The stories of Baba Yaga have been told for hundreds of years in many Eastern European cultures. She is a witch-like being who lives in a village hut on chicken legs. She lives in a matriarchal world where she is one of three sisters,

with no husband, but she is the mother of many daughters and no sons (Warner 2002:73). The demonic nature of Baba Yaga is easily seen in some of her tales.

In her least attractive manifestation she is a child-eating ogress, who catches her prey when they are vulnerable, having been left at home on their own or having wandered into the forest. She will entice them by offering an apple, sharpen her tongue to imitate the mother's voice or call the boy, who is sailing his little boat on the river, with the song his mother uses. Once the child is locked up in her house, she intends to eat him or her. However, the child hero, like the adult, always has the cunning to outwit the ogress. He or she may persuade Baba Yaga's daughters to sit on the frying pan, so that when the ogress returns home she eats her own offspring by mistake. (Warner 2002:76)

Most Ukrainians whom I discuss Baba Yaga with, do not acknowledge her Ukrainian origin. Many of my colleagues think she may have come from Russian sources, although there is strong archaeological evidence that her stories were being told before the Slavic culture had begun. Recently, a Russian archaeologist published an interpretation of some wall drawings that were found in Southern Ukraine. These



pictures were found on a wall of a Scythian crypt in Crimea. The Scythians lived in Ukraine before the time of Christ and were predecessors to the Slavic tribes. According to the archaeologist, Sergei V. Rjabchikov, the drawings show a relationship to Mokosha and to Baba Yaga.

I have distinguished a fiery horse, a hut standing on four chicken legs (as in Russian fairy tales!) and a woman (goddess) with the fiery hair. A child is seen in this fairytale hut. These data correspond to the Russian fairy-tales about *Baba-Yaga* (the old woman *Yaga*).

In different sources *Makosh'* (*Mokosh'*) is usually mentioned with two *Rozhanitsa* 'The bearing (goddess).' In fact, in accordance with the Russian fairy-tale *Vasily-korolevich i Mar'ya Yaginishna* (*The Prince Vasily and Mar'ya Yaginishna*) there are the three sisters named *Baba-Yaga*. I conclude that *Baba-Yaga* (*Makosh'*) has an epithet, *Rozhanitsa* 'Bearing', the symbol of the fertility. I think that the Great goddess depicted on an Old Russian fibula and in the Slavonic art is indeed *Makosh'* (*Baba-Yaga*). (Rjabchikov 2001:1-4)

## DUAL FAITH OF UKRAINE

Much of the early pagan worship did not die completely with the introduction of Christianity in 980 AD to Ukraine. Some of the rituals were simply transferred into the new faith by the people. Even to this day, syncretism can be observed in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. “Both Christian prayers and pagan spells were resorted to for the fulfilling of desires. Magic roots, snake skins and skulls were worn in charms next to the Christian cross” (Warner 2002:18).



During my tour at the National Historical Museum, our guide took time to show several items which included both Christian symbols and pagan symbols. On one side of 600-year old talismans appear Mary with baby Jesus (pictured on the left), but on the other side appears a gorgon-like headed god similar to that of the Greek goddess Medusa. These were common pendants to be worn for protection, fertility, blessing, and several other reasons (Marina Strelnik, personal communication, April 29, 2005).

Another example of the dual faith in the Slavic people is how characteristics of Perun found their way into the Biblical character of Elijah. Perun was considered to be the god of war, thunder and lightning. When a thunderstorm was coming, many village people were afraid that Perun was on his way. These beliefs were transferred to Elijah.

As many Russian sayings, beliefs and myths about him testify, Ilya [Elijah] is indubitably connected with the thunderstorm as an instrument of divine retribution. According to peasants, thunder and lightning were caused by the rumbling of the wheels of his chariot as it hurtled across the skies.... According to the folk legend, at the first rumble of thunder heralding Ilya's approach demons scattered in terror and tried to hide: under the caps of toadstools, in trees or stones, in buildings, inside a cow or even a human being. [underlining mine] Ilya was immovable in his righteous anger and sent down lightning shafts against animals and humans alike in his effort to destroy Satan. For this reason, if storm clouds appeared, people would shut themselves up in their houses, pull the curtains over their windows and pray to the prophet for mercy.

The demonic Prince of Ukraine has been active in the history of this region to bring fear into the hearts of its people. As seen above, demonic possession was also one of the tools he used in confusing the people. Today, these thoughts and attitudes can be seen as well.

## THE HOUSE SPIRITS IN UKRAINE

### Current Examples of House Spirits in Kyiv

Kyiv is now a modern city with sky rise apartments, grocery stores, restaurants and malls. Over 3 million people live in Ukraine's capital with hundreds

of new residents every week. Two years ago, our family went through the process of buying an apartment in Kyiv. We met with the owners, our translator, and our realtor several times in order to fill out the paper work and come to a final agreement. Part of the process is to have a final inspection of the apartment with everyone present before the actual exchange of money at the realtor's office. We looked through the apartment and all of us agreed that everything was in order. As we were leaving I waited for the owner's wife to go through the door ahead of me. She apologized to me and said that she must be the last one out of the apartment. I asked why and she replied that she must take her *domovoi* (house spirit) with her, so she needed to be last. Of course, I let her take her house spirit with her because I was not interested in him staying with us.

We have some other missionary friends that had a similar experience. They are renting their apartment and called their landlord to come over and fix some problems. One of the problems was leaky pipes in their bathroom. The landlord tried to fix the leak, but finally gave up. As he was leaving, he turned to our friends and asked them to put a box of open chocolate on the top of the cupboard. Our friends asked their landlord why this would help. The landlord said that they must not be treating their *domovoi* correctly, and this was the reason for their leaky pipes (Doug Stoddard, personal communication, March 5, 2005).

### Domovoi

As mentioned above, Ukrainians still believe in household spirits or household gods. This belief has its roots in paganism. Often the *domovoi* lived near the family icons or the hearth of peasant home. “The *domovoi*’s main function was and remains, for those who still believe in him, to guard the house, the family, its property and farm animals, whose fertility, health and well-being were his particular concern” (Warner 2002:36). Most Ukrainians feel that this spirit is good, but mischievous and unpredictable.

It is also thought that the *domovoi* could look like the previous master of the house. It was very important that if the family was moving that they bring their spirit with them or there could be trouble. It is even possible that two *domovois* could get into a fight and hurts the family. “When the family moved to a new house he was always invited to join them: ‘*Domovoi, Domovoi*, don’t stay here. Come along with our family....There were even spells designed to protect one from the *domovoi* of others” (Warner 2002:37). I believe it is clear from scripture that spirits do exist, and they are either evil or good. It is probable that many evil spirits are disguising themselves in Ukraine as *domovois*.

## NEOPAGANISM IN UKRAINE TODAY

How is the demonic Prince of Ukraine showing himself today? He is using all means possible to keep Ukrainians from a true understanding of the gospel of Christ.

Materialism and other modern philosophies can also keep people from the truth. But he is also using paganism once again.

There has been a new surge of neopaganism in the past 15 years with Ukraine's new found nationalism and independence. Some people have said that one thousand years ago, Christianity was forced upon Ukrainians, and that they now need to go back to their roots. They need to go back to their old way of life and their old gods. A new study completed in March of 2005 has taken a close look at the resurgence of neopaganism or what it also known as, Ukrainian Native Faith. The author of the study, Adrian Ivakhiv, wrote:

Pagan traditions and folk customs are considered by some to have never completely disappeared from the East Slavic world, at least not until the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. While in the Baltic regions organized Paganism survived intact until as late as the fourteenth century, the Christianization of the East Slavic peoples proceeded by adapting Christianity to existing practices, resulting, in rural areas, in what was sometimes known as *dvoviria* (Pagan-Christian "double faith"). The recent resurgence of Paganism and Native Faith, or *ridnovira*, in Ukraine was spawned in the Brezhnev era, but has seen dramatic growth in the last decade alongside an upsurge of ethnic nationalism. (Ivakhiv 2005:8)

There are many Neopagan groups in Ukraine that are focusing on ethnic nationalism. Most of the groups are accepting a set of writings called the *Book of Veles* as their scripture.

For most Ukrainian believers in the authenticity of the *Book of Veles*, the work is seen as embodying the historical memory of the Ukrainian people, its "covenant," so to speak, with its gods, its ancestors, and its land, through times of great difficulty and conflict with neighboring tribes and invaders. To the extent that the *Book of Veles* has a predominant message, it revolves around the questions: "Who are we [Ukrainians/Russians/Slavs]? Where do we come from, and where are we going?" It answers these questions with insistent clarity: we are

children of (the Slavic gods) Dazhboh [or Dazhbog] and Svaroh, and of forefather Or, who have fought and must continue to fight to keep our identity and our land from those who would take both away from us, whether they be Greeks, Romans, Goths, Huns, Khazars, or anyone else. (Ivakhiv 2005:14)

At this time it is very difficult to determine the number of Ukrainians involved in neopaganism. At one meeting in February 2003, there were 41 different groups represented at a Native Faith gathering in Kyiv (Ivakhiv 2005:24). Nationalism is growing rapidly in Ukraine. Couple this with the disillusionment of materialism and dissatisfaction with the organized church; neopaganism will also probably continue to grow.

#### CONCLUSION

God's enemy is organized. He has used many means throughout the ages to keep people from understanding their need for the gospel. The demonic Prince of Ukraine has used many methods over the years to keep people away from Christ. The need for sharing the truth in this wonderful country has never been greater. Hopefully, understanding how the enemy has blinded people in this country will also help us to do a better job in sharing the light.

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