

Pre-Christian culture

1. Ancient Slavic Religion and Mythology.
2. Traces of paganism in Christian festivals.
3. Ancient Greek Settlements in the Ukrainian territory.



1. The Slavs

The Slavs, the largest ethnic and linguistic group of peoples in Europe belonging to the Indo-European linguistic family. It is estimated that the Slavs number over 300 million in the world.



The Slavs

The West Slavs
(the Poles, the
Czechs, the
Slovaks, and the
Wends)

The South Slavs
(the Serbs, the
Croats, the
Slovenes, the
Macedonians, the
Montenegrins,
the Bosniaks, and
the Bulgars)

The East Slavs
(the Russians, the
Ukrainians, and
the Belorussians)

The Slavs under name of the *Antes* and the *Sclaveni* make their first appearance in Byzantine records in the early 6th century. The Slavs were probably dominated in succession by the Scythians and the Sarmatians



Slavic religion

The Slavs were pagans; their supreme god was the god of lightning.

The term *paganism* (with its synonym 'heathenism') is used for any religion where several gods and goddesses are worshipped.

Due to the concerted efforts of both the eastern and western churches, Christianity largely replaced Slavic paganism during the course of the 9th and 10th centuries.

There are primarily three sources of information about Slavic paganism:



written accounts



archaeological
discoveries



ethnographic evidences

The Earliest Slavic Religious Beliefs

It is generally thought that the earliest Slavic religious beliefs were based on the principle that the whole natural world is inhabited and directed by spirits or mysterious forces.



The main constituent parts
of early Slav's religion were:



Animism



Veneration of the dead



Totemism



Polytheism



The Magic

The practice of manipulating and controlling the course of nature by preternatural means. Magic is based upon the belief that the universe is populated by unseen forces or spirits that permeate all things.

Animism

The belief, common among primitive peoples, that all things in the world (including stones, plants, the wind, rivers etc.) are imbued with some kind of spiritual or psychological presence; this may imply that things are 'ensouled' or 'animated' by a universal 'world soul'.

Animism

In ancient Slav's believes animism is represented by such mythical creatures as *mavka* (the spirit of a tree), *lisovyk* (the forest's spirit), *vodyanyk* and *bolotyanyk* (the spirits of rivers and swamps), *domovyk* (domestic spirit) etc.



Veneration of the dead

The belief that the deceased, often family members, have a continued existence and/or possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living.

Veneration of the dead

As a display of veneration of the dead, the early Slavs often buried their ancestors under thresholds (to they can protect alive family members from evil aliens).



Veneration of the dead

Veneration of the dead is represented by such mythical personages as *Baba Yaha*, *Koshchij* (the immortal), *rusalka* (mermaid), *upyr* (vampire) etc.



Totemism

The belief that people are descended from animals, plants, and other natural objects. Symbols of these natural ancestors, known as totems, are often associated with clans (groups of families tracing common descent).

Totemism

Such personages of ancient Slav's mythology as *vovkulaka*, *divchyna-kalyna*, *chuhajster* can be considered as elements of totemism.



Polytheism

The belief in a plurality of gods (usually assembled into a pantheon) in which each deity is distinguished by special functions.



Perun

The supreme god of the East and South Slavs polytheistic pantheon was Perun, god of lightning and thunder. Because he controlled the elements of nature, his aid and protection were strongly evoked at seed time and harvest.



Until the end of the 10th cent. an idol
of Perun existed in Kiev



Svarog

Svarog, a god known to most Slavic peoples, was regarded as the father of the chief deities.



Svarog's sons

Among his sons were Dazhbog, god of the sun, and Svarozhych, god of fire.



Bilobog and Chornobog

Two important gods of Slavic religion were Bilobog and Chornobog. These two, who represented the opposing forces of good and evil, reflected the Slavic belief in the dualistic nature of the universe.



Veles

Veles was worshipped in two aspects: 1) he is god of death and the underworld, god of music, and a sorcerer; 2) he is god of cattle wealth and commerce.



Mokosh

The goddess who both gives and takes life, the spinner of the thread of life, the giver of the water of life.



Zemlya-maty

Various myths and ritualistic data, however, reveal the cults of many other gods and lesser divinities, including the worship of earth goddess – *Zemlya-maty (Mother the Earth)*.



2. Traces of paganism in Christian festivals



Kievan Rus was christened in 988 by **Volodymyr the Great**. The Christian church actively opposed paganism. It supplanted the more popular cults with Christian ones:





Perun



Saint Eliah



Veles



Saint George



Kupajlo



Saint Ioann the Baptist



The seasonal agricultural festivals were also modified and associated with Christian holidays:

The winter equinox became Christmas



The 'Great Day' (*Velykden*) became Easter



The Rusaliji became the Descent of the Holy Spirit



Paganism and Christianity

Each of these festivals retains to this day elements of pagan rites. Gradually the church introduced its sacraments into everyday life – first into baptism and burial, then, finally, into marriage. Some pagan folk customs (caroling, the blessing of wells and fields) that could not be suppressed were simply adopted by the church.

Paganism and Christianity

The expected result, however, was not always achieved: in most cases, Christian and pagan rituals with the same function were practiced side by side. Other pagan customs, such as the harvest rituals, were converted from religious into folkloric practices.



Paganism and Christianity

Traces of paganism were preserved longest in various seasonal folk customs and rites, such as the Christian Eve dinner, carols, the Easter *vesnyanky*, the transfer of livestock to the pasture in the springtime, the Kupajlo Festival, the harvest rituals, and *pomyanky*.



Paganism and Christianity

A number of pagan rites have been retained in the wedding ceremonies. The oldest forms of the Ukrainian folklore, including tales, legends, and aphorisms, originated in the pagan era.



3. Ancient Greek Settlements in the Ukrainian territory

From the middle of the 1st millennium BC to the 3rd-4th century AD ancient city-states existed on the northern coast of the Black Sea in today's southern Ukraine. They were founded as colonies of Greek city-states on sites that had fertile land, were close to good fishing grounds, and facilitated trade with such tribes as the Scythians, Sarmatians, and Maeotians.





The Greek city-states

The other colonies were founded mostly in the 6th century BC: *Chersoneses* (near Sevastopol), *Olbia* (on the Dnieper-Boh Estuary), and, in the Crimea, *Panticapaeum* (now Kerch), *Theodosia* (now Feodosiia), *Tiritaka*, *Nympheum*, and *Kerkinitis* (now Yevpatoriia).



Chersoneses

Chersoneses. Ancient Greek city-state in the southwestern part of the Crimea, near present-day Sevastopol. The city was established in 422-21 BC by Megarian Greek colonists, flourished in the 4th-2nd century BC.

The remaining ruins and the site of the former city were studied and excavated many times, beginning in 1827 and systematically from 1876 (by R. Lener, K. Hrynevych, G. Belov, A. Yakobson, and others).

Chersoneses

Excavations uncovered the remains of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine city walls, residential blocks with rectilinear streets, homes with rainwater reservoirs, workshops, over 50 Christian churches, palaces, a theater seating over 3,000 people, etc. The graves outside the city walls contained a rich inventory of ancient artifacts.



Ancient Greek theater in Chersoneses



Olbia

A major ancient Greek settlement located on the Boh River Estuary in Mykolaiv oblast. Founded in the early 6th century BC by Greek settlers from Miletus and other Ionian cities, Olbia soon became a prominent trading center on the northern Black Sea coast. Olbia reached the height of its prosperity and importance in the 5th-3rd centuries BC as a city-state covering an area of approximately 50 ha.



Olbia

Its inhabitants engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, viticulture, various trades, and trade with the Greek metropolis. Olbia imported wine, olive oil, fine dishes, cloth, art objects, and glassware both for itself and for trade with Scythians, Sarmatians, and other tribes on the Pontic steppe in exchange for grain, cattle, wool, fish, and slaves.

Panticapeum

An ancient Greek colony founded in the early 6th century BC at the site of present-day Kerch, in the Crimea. The city grew quickly and before the end of the century it was minting its own coins. As the leading trade, manufacturing, and cultural center on the northern coast of the Black Sea it became the capital of the Bosphoran Kingdom, which arose in the 5th century. It began to decline in the 3rd century. Panticapaeum was destroyed by the Huns ca 370.

