

Yearly Cycle of Slavic Celebrations – Attempted Reconstruction

As a rule, modern Rodnovers use the Gregorian calendar in which the Latin names are substituted with the Slavic ones. The dates of Slavic celebrations come from the Julian (Church) calendar (the **new** and the **old** style), however, the timing differences between them are not taken into account. E.g. modern Rodnovers celebrate Veles Day on the Day of St. Blasius, 11th of Feb according to the Gregorian calendar. In the past, the Day of St. Blasius was celebrated on the 11th of Feb of the **old** style, which corresponds to the 24th of Feb the **new** style. Rodnovers apply the same rule to most of Slavic celebrations – dates come from the church calendar and names are changed. They explain it by the fact that after the Christianization the Christian celebrations overlapped the pagan ones. That is correct, but it doesn't mean that reconstruction of the Slavic traditional calendar can be done by only substituting Christian names. A closer look at the **folk's** traditional calendar reveals that the overlapping was caused not only by matching dates of celebrations but by semantics of Christian celebrations. Correspondence between names and images of Christian saints and Slavic gods played a significant role too such as Veles/Vlasiy & Juriy/Jarila. Moreover, often pagan rituals are linked to different days of the church calendar.

We suggest avoiding linking pagan celebration dates to the church calendar. So, we present our reconstruction of pagan calendar based on yearly natural phenomena and ethnography studies.

Spring

Traditional spring celebrations are not tightly attached to any particular dates. I.M. Snegirev wrote:

“The meeting and the calling of the spring are performed according to climate conditions peculiar to the place at different times and in different ways.”

There are three main folk orthodox rituals that are performed in spring: singing of spring-calling songs which are called zaklichkas or vesnyankas, rituals involving bird cookies (**larks, waders**) and painted eggs. These are linked to various church calendar dates as well as to moveable Christian feasts.

The cookies are baked on the 17th of March, the 22nd of March, in the Russian North on 30th of March and 7th of April.

The painted eggs are related to Easter, Red Hill, Radunitsa, Saint George's Day (6th of May), Nikola Veshny (22nd of May), Pentecost.

Spring-calling covers a wider period – Maslenitsa, 14th of March, 22nd of, Palm Sunday, Red Hill and St. George's day. V.K. Sokolova notes that it was common in Ukraine to start spring-calling in early spring, which lasted until Pentecost, sometimes it was done from Easter to Peter's and Paul's day. In some regions of Belarus first spring-calls happened on Candlemass (15th of February, also called **Sretenie** and **Gromnitsy**).

As we can see, springtime celebrations divide into two parts – early spring (characterized by bird cookies) and late spring (characterized by painted eggs). At the same time both of them involve singing spring-calling songs.

The article «Кликание (Закликание) Весны» (Spring-calling) from the Russian Museum of Ethnography website says:

“Easter celebrations are the culmination of the springtime cycle; they divide the cycle into two most significant periods and determine the character of associated rituals. The first, early springtime period which starts with sending-off winter and welcoming spring on Maslenitsa and March celebrations, consists of the Great Lent period until Easter. The second, late spring, period ends on Pentecost. Oneness of the springtime cycle can be seen in mythopoetic beliefs and characteristics of this period, as in associated rituals”.

The same article characterizes the early and late spring periods:

“The main feature of the early spring period revolves around lots of cleansing, protecting and somewhat producing (aimed at increasing fertility, harvest, etc) rituals and rites. The need to perform these is due to the idea of springtime waking of the earth and nature associated with revitalization of otherworldly (chthonic) and evil powers. At the same time the Christian idea of fasting, cleansing, abstinence, as a way to renew and resurrect the soul became tightly bound in people’s minds to the ancient pagan idea of ritual earth cleansing and renewal. All in all, early springtime rituals can be characterized as rituals of bordering type, related to transitional ritual-mythopoetic composite of transition between new and old agricultural year (...) Easter or Saint George’s Day mark the start of the second springtime period. Its main feature according to mythopoetic beliefs is revival, blossoming and fullness of vital energies in nature and man. That is when spring begins. The goal of this time’s rites is securing the harvest. Magical acts were aimed at the protection of fields from hails, pests and evil powers. The acts were also performed through moleben processions around the fields. In order to help the spring arrive, to help the earth wake and to help increase the fertility of the land, khorovods, swings and Easter eggs games were held”.

Considering this, we have two Slavic springtime celebrations associated with early spring (Larks) and late spring (Red Hill) ritual periods. In Folk Orthodoxy bird cookie rituals are related to the spring equinox. Natural phenomena indicating beginning of spring is the return of migratory birds.

The ancient spring equinox celebration most likely didn’t consist of only one day, since coming of spring is of huge importance. That’s why we suggest celebrating Larks for one week, starting with the equinox (or ending with it – depending on the birds).

The Red hill celebration should be bound to the appearance of green grass – a clear sign of nature’s revival.

Ethnography suggests that Red Hill might have been related to Thomas’ Week (Antipascha), so we assume that the pagan celebration also lasted for a week. We suggest celebrating Red Hill for a week.

Folk Orthodox calendar has a commemoration celebration – Radunitsa which takes place at the beginning of Thomas’ Week (of Red Hill) – Sunday, Monday or Wednesday. We assume that in the past Radunitsa and Red Hill were one celebration.

We believe Radunitsa is to be celebrated on a New Moon (after the appearance of green grass). According to ethnography, the Moon is strongly associated with the otherworld, death and afterlife in folk beliefs. So we assume that our forefathers used moon phases for determining dates of commemoration and therefore Radunitsa should correspond to moon cycles. This day indicates the beginning of nature's revival therefore we assume it must be the new moon phase.

On the other hand, Red Hill is to be celebrated for a week after Radunitsa – during waxing crescent.

Summer

Ethnography suggests that there are two main periods of the summertime celebration cycle. The first one consists of several celebration days close to the summer equinox so called the Pentecost-Kupala cycle: Ascension, Semik, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Kupala, Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The second one is the period of harvest, celebrations are held at the beginning 'Zazhinky' and the end 'Dozhinky, Spozhinky, and Obzhinky.'

V.K. Sokolova in her book **Springtime-summertime rites of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian people** wrote:

“Celebration cycles and certain magical acts of the period from sowing and germinating of winter grains and spring grains to their ripening were bound to different days within different regions, sometimes they would be doubled, moved from one celebration cycle to another. It was caused by climate conditions as well as by influence of the Church (St. Peter and Paul fasting, moveable Easter celebrations). In fact, the main reason why rites could be moved around the period so easily is because they all are to perform one function that is to assure plentiful harvest. Hence, it is difficult to separate springtime and early summertime rites as the line between spring and summer in nature is blurred. The only celebration that has a certain date in folk orthodox calendar is the summer Equinox on which the whole summertime cycle is based. In Russia much of that was moved to Semik-Pentecost – the celebration of the end of spring and the beginning of summer”.

It is clear that of the entire Pentecost-Kupala cycle the Equinox celebration is the one that is authentic. After the Christianization its rites were assigned to various folk orthodox calendar dates – it is shown by general similarity of the Pentecost-Kupala cycle.

The celebration of the equinox lasted for multiple days – the day of the equinox was followed by the Rusal week (the Green week which is called Rusalii in medieval sources). The Rusal week is related to movable Pentecost:

“Within the folk calendar the Rusal week is tied to Pentecost. It is a week before Pentecost and corresponds to so-called Semik or Pentecost week or it begins after Pentecost Sunday – from Whit Monday to the first Sunday after Pentecost. According to Russian folk beliefs the flowering of rye is associated with the increased activity of the rusalkas”.

As mentioned before, Pentecost is one of the **folk orthodox** celebrations that absorbed rites related to the equinox. There is a historical source showing connection between Rusalii and the summer equinox. In his **Book of One Hundred Chapters**, Stoglav mentions:

“Rusalii of the St. John the Baptist’s day and in the evening of Christmas and the Baptism of Jesus, men and women gather for nighttime filthy talks, demonic songs, for dancing around and for sinful acts”.

The St. John the Baptist’s day is otherwise known as Kupala, his relation to the pagan equinox celebration has been accepted in scientific community for a long time at this point.

The first summertime celebration is the Rusal week followed by the equinox. A few notes on their names. There are theories that suggest their foreign origin: Ivan Kupala is the folk variation of John the Baptist (reminder that the Christian baptism includes submersion in water), and the name **Rusalii** originates from the ancient commemoration celebration:

“Rusalii – Slavic remnants of ancient commemoration days (Rosaria, Rusalii, dies rosae). According to ancient sources Rosalia consisted of annual bringing of roses to graves, likely with various rites and singing. From Thracia and Macedonia, Rosalia was borrowed by the Slavs with later local adaptation”.

Of course there are other opinions. A.V. Amfiteatrov:

*“Buslaev derives Kupala not from the verb **kupat** [to wash] as N.I. Kostomarov, Votzel, M.E. Sokolov do it but directly from the stem **kup** possessing similar definitions as stems **yar** and **buy**. First of all, he states that **kup** means white, ardent and wild in the sense of lushly, abundantly growing, therefore in Russian we see: kupaviy – white, kupava – white flower, kupavka – flower bud; also kipet, kipen – white stains and whiteness in general. Secondly, in Sanskrit kup – to glow, to burn, to get angry, to get excited, to lust, to desire passionately, also Latin **cupio**. Considering this and the sources which point out to pleasure-seeking character of Kupala celebrations, similar to those of Jarilo, we can assume that Kupala is one of his names. Other philological explanations include Polish – kupa, Russian – kopna, bunch of brushwood lit up at night on 24th of June.”*

By the way, the first mention of Kupala dates back to XI – early XII centuries.

S.A. Kosharnaya wrote that *Folk dialects rarely use the name Rusalia (...)* Days of rusalkas activity are called the Rusal week (...) and suggests that the word rusalka is cognate to **rusiy** [blond]. Similar mythonims include smolyanka, smolyana, smulyanka – **rusalka from a child**. *If a grown woman dies, she becomes rusalka, if a girl dies she become smulyanka*. Therefore the analysis of mythoconcept suggests that **rusalka** originates from obsolete verb **rusati** – *to become white (be white), to become lighter* – according to the model of productivity of Slavic languages.

We suggest not immersing yourself into this discussion and use those names that are of proven Slavic origin. Rusal week is also called Green Svyatki, and Kupala used to be Jarilo’s day. V.K. Sokolova:

*“Jarilo’s day used to be celebrated almost at the same time as Kupala, usually the day before the Apostles’ Fast. The name Jarilo’s day and Jarilki remained there where Kupala was not celebrated. I.M Snegirev points out that **Ivan Kupala used to be called Jarilo’s day among peasants of Yaroslavl, Tver and Kazan regions**. With almost full confidence we can say that Kupala and Jarilo are one. Kupala is a later name that emerged when Eastern Slavs, as well as other Christian nations, moved the celebration the day of St. John. In those regions where this celebration wasn’t accepted (apparently due to overlaying with fast), the ancient name of Jarilo’s day remained. It was celebrated before the fast. It was a celebration of summer Sun and ripening, not the springtime celebration (words with **yar** stem also are related more to hot summer and orgiastic character of the celebration in ancient times)”.*

Harvest celebrations Zazhinky and Dozhinky are tied to different Church calendar dates as well. Harvest would start on Prokopiyy Zhatvennik (21st of July) or following Elijah’s day (2nd of August) and it would end on the Dormition of the Mother of God (28th of August) or on the Nut Feast of the Saviour (29th of August). Dozhinky rites were performed at the end of spring grains harvest as well as of winter grains, but in some regions of Ukraine and Belarus, Obzhinky was only celebrated at the end of harvest of winter grains, in some others – only of spring grains. Zazhinky was celebrated once in a village of Vologda region, we weren’t able to find instances of Zazhinky being celebrated twice. In different regions harvest times may vary depending on climate conditions, hence the start and the end of the harvest were associated with different dates of the folk orthodox calendar (e.g. in central and southern Zaonejje (Karelia) harvest would begin on the Prophet Micah feast day (27th of August) and end on Nativity of Mary (21st of September).

Dozhinky may have been celebrated for a week:

“Ospozhinky, Spozhinky or Gospozhinky coincide with Nativity of Mary and constitute time closest to it. The celebration is characterized by big revelry depending on harvest. When it is clearly abundant Ospozhinky may be celebrated for a whole week, the bigger harvest there is, the bigger the celebration”.

We suggest celebrating these depending on one’s place of living – on days closest to the beginning and ending of grains harvest. It is important to remember that the best time to start harvest is waxing moon:

“This week sowing, harvesting, mowing and other agricultural works begin depending on what the Moon brings either good or bad weather, since as a rule it changes with waxing moon (...) At some places people would pay attention to the lunar phase preferring to start harvest on new moon”.

At the end of our summertime celebrations chapter we would like to say a few words about celebrations popular in modern Rodnoveriye – Perun’s day and Stribog’s day.

Stribog’s Day is reconstructed based on dates of the folk orthodox calendar related to winds. In Rodnoveriye community Stribog’s Day is celebrated on 14th of July. In folk calendar this day (14th of July old

style/27th of July new style) is known as Dozory [watch] (also Day of Aquila) to which ritual agricultural activities and a tradition to patrol, watch fields is related:

“In the field we were to please polevoy, the master of the field, the invisible spirit. We would leave him porridge near the last row of the field after the harvest, on the row itself we would leave the last bunch of rye – that is a gift for him for the next year. It was the end of July, the weather began to change. Winds and whirlwinds, rain and thunderstorms were all coming to the fields and we had to guard them. Folks believed there was an evil spirit in whirlwind, devil, unholy powers, and that when during rainstorm a lightning strikes him, as it always does, at that moment that devil turns into some sort of poultry, an animal, sometimes a child. That’s why we used to set watch on the fields”.

In the Velesov Krug calendar there are several dates related to Stribog: Winter Stribog – 21st of February, Spring Stribog – 5th of April, Summer Stribog- 8th of August and Fall Stribog – 20th of September. These dates are in accordance with the Gregorian calendar even though in folk orthodox calendar they correspond to dates of the Julian calendar.

We only know of one rite of the Wind worship. It is a date close to midsummer (June 17). In old times, there even was a custom to pray to the wind on St. Mitrophan [4th of June], which is now almost forgotten everywhere. To do this, old women gathered at the outskirts on the evening, after the sunset, and — when the oldest one gave others a sign — they began chanting a spell waving their hands at the same time:

“Wind-Winder! Of the seven Wind brothers you’re the oldest! No need to blow, no need to spit with rain from the rotten corner [from where thunderclouds come], do not drive fires-fevers from non-Rus to Rus! No need to promise, no need to send, Wind-Winder, a fierce plant killing illness to the Orthodox peoples! Blow you, oldest of the seven brothers, with warmth, water, Wind-Winder, to the mother-rye, the spring crops, the field –to the meadow with warm rains and [do it] in time! Would you serve, violent one, to the whole Christian kingdom – for the joy of plowmen, for comfort of small children, for food of oldmen and women and for your, violent one, of the seven brothers, largest, eldest, for your glory!” This spell, according to wise people, had an insuperable power over winds and made them help honest peasant people, who would listen with fear and trembling and would keep an eye out during these dangerous times for every change in weather affecting the growth of grain”.

We suggest worshipping Stribog around the time of Midsummer.

Now to Perun's day. In Christian times, the cult of Thunderer merged with the cult of St. Elijah, therefore modern pagans in Russia, as a rule, celebrate Perun's holy day on July 20 (as usual, taking this date from the Julian calendar and moving it to the Gregorian, without paying attention to the differences between them). In the folk calendar, the feast of St. Elijah is considered the calendar border between seasons when the first signs of autumn appear in nature and behavior of animals, birds and insects changes. Elijah’s day is also one of the agricultural borderlines of the year:

“For the Eastern Slavs, on Elijah’s day, the harvest could begin or end, and also mowing could end; after Elijah’s day, the whole community would go mowing to help widows, orphans and lonely old men, see. This holiday is associated with rains, because before Elijah’s day even priests never pray enough to call rain, but after Elijah’s day even a peasant woman will drive it closer with her apron and thunderstorms, as Elijah’s day was considered the time of the strongest summer thunderstorms and rainstorms.”

The celebration in honor of St. Elijah could last for multiple days. Not only was Elijah’s day itself celebrated, but its eves were very important as well. **Beautiful Thursday** – Thursday of Elijah’s week on which special ritual cookies were baked – **kolob** – a pie with salamakha and **Elijah’s Friday**. It should also be noted that some beliefs are related to the whole Elijah’s week, which is the week with Elijah’s day in it:

“Sometimes Elijah’s week was called of beasts for it was the time when the bear would not let the cattle rest (...) People are afraid of Elijah’s week, they say that vodyanoys kidnap”.

B.A. Rybakov points out that preparation for Elijah’s day was conducted for a whole week. Apparently, in ancient times there was a pagan celebration in honor of Perun that lasted for several days, after the Christianization it was replaced by St. Elijah’s day.

In the folk orthodox calendar, Elijah’s day marks the beginning of a dangerous period of time when thunderstorms, rains and hails can destroy harvest. According to ethnography:

“In many Slavic traditions, Elijah’s day was celebrated in order to avoid thunders and lightning (...) prayers were performed in fields and churches, and chapels dedicated to Elijah the Prophet. In some places peasants fasted all week preceding the day of Elijah. On Elijah’s day, various types of household chores were prohibited. People tried to stop rains by following rules that forbid work on Elijah’s day and mowing near churches and chapels dedicated to Elijah (...) In some places people were trying to please Elijah with offerings. In Vyatka region, on Elijah’s day, peasants would bring a special sacrifice to church, such as a ram leg, honey, ears of fresh rye and green peas. A part of the brought was left in the church, and a part was eaten at home”.

B.A. Rybakov believes that on Perun’s celebration a prayer was performed:

“(...) to stop rains, thunderstorms (...) to protect crops which are growing.”

Apparently, he is right. Therefore we suggest that pagans celebrate Perun’s Week right before Zazhinky.

Autumn

There are several folk orthodox celebrations sometimes called Oseniny – Dormition of the Mother of God (28th of August), Simeon Stylites day (14th of September), Nativity of Mary (21st September) and Feast of the Cross (27th of September). Three of them are clearly drawn near the autumn equinox day and, moreover, are related to the period of harvest end:

“The spring grains harvest ended on Simeon’s day”; “Nativity of Mary along with Dormition was the day when the end of harvest was celebrated, harvest festival”; “Vegetables, flax, hemp harvest ended on the Feast of the Cross”.

These three celebrations are also related to the cult of the Fire. A ritual of lighting a new fire is performed on two of these:

“The custom is to put out all fires except the icon-lamp and lights the New Fire at dawn. In the past they would make the New Fire from dry wood. It was done in the following way: old people rubbed pieces of dry wood, then a young guy or a girl lit the New Fire that would have been used for heating banyas and huts, at the gatherings rushlights and candles were lit (...) Nativity of Mary often fell on the autumn equinox and, just like on the spring equinox, lights around huts were lit anew – the Old Fire was put out and the New Fire was lit.”

The third one – one of possible dates of “barn’s (ovin) name day”, the place of the Svarozhich-Fire cult:

“On the Feast of the Cross barn’s name day was celebrated. The barn had to rest – it was prohibited to heat it; threshers were not working either. If the barn was already planted over, (i.e. all sheaves were stacked inside) the barn owner would take two sheaves and pretended to plant them. On this day the mistress of the household would lay an embroidered towel over the barn window and leave a treat for the barn and the barn master. A feast was held for barn workers as well.”

We can assume these celebrations absorbed rites of the pagan equinox day celebration. It may be that its name was Oseniny. This celebration as well as many others most likely lasted for multiple days – according to data Nativity was celebrated for a week (in Church tradition it’s 6 days).

The natural phenomenon of this time of year is the migration of birds:

“After the Simeon’s cranes leave to the warm land (...) If geese leave on the Simeon’s day the winter is coming early”

We suggest celebrating Oseniny for a week (beginning of the equinox or ending with it – depending on bird migration).

The next folk orthodox holiday that is of obvious pagan origin is the ancestors commemoration day, that is known in Russia as **Dimitri’s Saturday** (Saturday before the feast of Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki, 8th of November), in Belarus and Ukraine – as Dedy. Autumn Dedy in Belarus and in Ukraine is held on the Saturday before the St. Demetrios’ day or before the St. Michael’s day (21st of November). Rites of this day show us its pagan essence. Rites and beliefs of Dedy are based on the idea that it is necessary to welcome and treat otherworldly guests in a proper manner. People believed that those who commemorate their ancestors poorly become targets of their revenge. Cattle disappears all of a sudden, harvest gets ruined, illnesses and quarrels in the family, etc. If no commemoration food is left for the dead, they express their anger with nighttime noise such as knocking, footsteps around the house, appear before their relatives in their sleep and rebuke them for not following the tradition. For Dedy the

mistress prepares an abundant dinner, that includes an uneven number of dishes (five, seven, nine), and necessary consists of kanun, kutia, syta, sometimes oat kissel and pancakes. The first pancake is torn and put on all window sills in the house for grandfathers. At the table, each person has to try every dish at least once, otherwise the dead will be angry. Before the dinner the master of the house opens the oven door, the door or a window, lights up a candle, be smoked the table and dishes with herbs. Everyone would stand still around the table waiting for souls to come, they would try to guess how many souls have come by flickering of the candle flame. The dinner begins with the ritual of souls calling. Facing the window, the master of the house invites grandfathers to the table:

“Righteous parents! Come to us for dinner, yourself, and bring the children too...”

An obligatory ritual during the dinner is souls feeding. A part of the food is put around the house on the window sills or is thrown away through the window; first spoon of kutia is put directly onto the table or under it; an empty bowl is filled with a bit of all dishes; dirty dishes are left overnight. During the dinner it is prohibited to make loud noise, get up and sit down again, use a knife; bread is broken with hands; spoon that falls accidentally is not picked up. In some places of Polessiye right after the dinner grandfathers were sent off. The master of the house would pour water on the floor and say:

“You’ve eaten, you’ve drunk, now go home”

Similar autumn celebrations may be found in other IE cultures. E.g. Celtic analogue of Dedy is Samhain, ancient Scandinavians would make early winter sacrifices to disir – female supernatural beings. The Balts, closest neighbors of the Slavs, had ancestor’s commemoration in October. Wällä-mänes, Wällä-lajks was the Latvian name of October in XVII century according to Paul Einhorn. These names mean month of the dead or time of the dead because for 24 days after the St. Michael’s day commemoration was held. The celebration consisted mainly of a feast for ancestors souls. Lots of various great dishes were put on a table in a locked room, then everyone would leave the room and if the next morning no food was touched the harvest was believed to be abundant, otherwise it was a sign of imminent disaster. During commemoration time it’s forbidden to thresh grains.

We assume that the Slavic autumn commemoration day was celebrated around the same time, when harvest was finished and there was no grass on the fields for cattle. Mentioned above IE analogues allow us to assume that it also lasted for multiple days, and moreover:

“(…) in number of regions commemoration of men, on the Friday evening (in Polessiye called Dedy), and commemoration of women, on Saturay (called Baby) were separate celebrations”.

Folk orthodox calendar contains two more celebrations close to Dimitri’s Saturday and, judging by associated rituals, they are of pagan origin. It’s 10th of November – St. Paraskeva’s day (that is commonly considered by researchers to be a Christian **substitute** for Mokosh) and Saints Cosma’s and Damian’s day – 14th of November. B.A. Rybakov in his work **Paganism of the ancient Slavs** notes that a unique Friday apocrypha was widely known among people, and apocryphas have kept many traces of paganism. Two main Fridays were the ninth and the tenth:

“The tenth Friday is the eldest, together with the ninth Friday, they bring prayers earlier than all other Fridays (...) This commentary is very important for us, let’s take a closer look.

9th Friday – before the Saints Cosmas and Damian’s Day, 1st of November. The date is very close to church’s st.Paraskeva’s feast – 28th of October, but is characterized with no correlation to it.

10th , the main Friday, is celebrated before the St. Michael’s day (8th of November).This period of the end of October and the first week of November begins a new cycle of village women’s work: the hardest part is done with. Harvest is finished; flax is gathered, boiled and prepared for weaving (this takes whole October); from the St. Michael’s day the first sleigh path was made and at the same time long winter gathering began – collective flax and wool weaving. During these gatherings songs were sung, fairytales told, puzzling riddles, which the girls would offer to guys, were answered; sometimes the work was stopped for dancing and playing. Two main Fridays are the beginning of this exciting and fun season. The celebration began with a one-day-woven sheet in the name of the 9th Friday. The girls annually completed the whole cycle of flax preparation and weaving.

It was a certain epigraph to the winter season. The second October-November celebration period was closely related to the theme of matchmaking and marriage.

On St. Cosmas and Damian’s Day (Kuzminki), a bratchina (ritual feast) used to be organized. Everything would be prepared by girls and guys would be invited later. The ritual food for this kind of gathering would be porridge and chicken. This day was sometimes called chicken celebration, chicken name day. (...) Weaving, Flax Friday celebration, girls’ Kuzminki, matchmaking and wedding rituals – all that allows us to consider a week around 1-8th of November to be the week of Makosh. St. Michael doesn’t appear in any of these rites as well as Greek Paraskeva. All rituals are related to female work, beginning of a wedding season and a period of long female gatherings”.

It is important to note that St. Cosmas and Damian’s day was also a peasant celebration of the end of grains threshing, and that at the end of grazing season, there was a celebration for shepherds on St. Anastasia’s Day (11th of November).

All folk orthodox holidays mentioned above are close to each other timewise, they all happen at the time of transition between autumn and winter (from autumn works to winter works). That’s why we believe that in the past multiday Makosh worshipping was a part of autumn commemoration celebration. It is also supported by the fact that commemoration rites in folk tradition usually are a part of bigger complex celebrations (Svyatki, Maslenitsa) or are linked to them (Pentecost Saturday). We suggest using **Dedy** and **Makosh Svyatki** as the names for these holidays.

In our opinion Dedy are to be celebrated on the New Moon. Earlier we’ve mentioned (talking about Radunitsa) the idea of the connection between the Moon and the world of the dead. This particular lunar phase is chosen also because the autumn commemoration (together with the Goddess’s worship)

symbolizes the end of autumn and transition to winter – the new moon too ends a month cycle and begins a new one. Makosh Svyatki respectively is to be celebrated during the waxing moon – we suggest celebrating it for a week following the new moon.

Winter

We'll start this chapter with the day of Marena, celebrated on 21st of November by modern Rodnovers. The date is of the Church calendar – on 21st of November – old style (4th of December – new style) the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated. St. Michael's Day (8th of November – Julian calendar/21st of November- Gregorian) is believed to be the first step of the fair winter, while the day when winter arrives in full force is the Presentation of the Virgin. People used to say that on the presentation day winter is being presented, the presentation is the gate of winter and that the presentation came taking winter along, as they used to believe that it is the day when winter is finally out to the full extent. We suppose it's not at all necessary to assign this celebration to a particular date, so we suggest celebrating the day of Marena after a steady snow cover is set. Modern Rodnovers often connect the image of Marena as a goddess of death and winter to the Moon (not without reason, see above the connection between the Moon and the dead), so it may be worth it to celebrate the day of Mara on the new or full moon. The full moon is at the peak of its power whereas the new moon, according to traditional beliefs, is the time of the dead and is considered overall to be of an extremely unfavorable and dangerous nature similarly to any spatial or temporal border there is (threshold, abuttal; midnight, midday, etc). A person or an animal conceived on that day, according to Bulgarian folklore is not going to live long. Across all Slavic countries it was believed that a child that is born on a rotten day, on abuttals or during the moon's changes (on the full or new moon that is) is going to be infertile, childless. In Polesie they wouldn't do anything on certain empty days: no sowing, no planting, no cattle breeding, no cattle purchasing, no harvest preparation and no setting off on a long journey.

Folk orthodox calendar has retained various midwinter-related rites and beliefs. First of all, of course, is the Svyatki – the period that lasts from Christmas Eve (6th of January) until the baptism of Jesus (19th of January). The connection between Svyatki and the pagan celebration of the winter solstice is universally recognized by modern ethnographic science – for instance, an article on Svyatki on the Russian Museum of Ethnography website says that the roots of most of the Svyatki-period rites, dedicated to the beginning of a new solar year, are of ancient origin and unmistakable pagan in nature, however, due to some problems with the Julian calendar the beginning of Svyatki (25th of December – old style) eventually has moved further from the actual solstice date:

“In year 325, when the Julian calendar was accepted across the Christendom, the spring equinox was on 21st of March, summer solstice – on 22nd of June, winter on – on 22nd of December. But in X century all of these moved for 5 days later, in XVI – for 10 days, in the early XX century it was already 13 days”.

Apparently, rites and beliefs had not only been moving along with the date of Christmas, but they were also assigned to various other dates that are closer to the actual date of the solstice.

24th of December is the day of St. Daniel, Luke and Nikon:

“On this day peasants would light an icon-lamp, begging the sun to come down on the ground and flare up, driving evil forces away. According to folk beliefs, on this day the Sun comes down the golden stairs to the ground, while witches were flying around with their brooms, raising snow whirlwinds”.

25th of December is the Spyridon-Solstice:

“Days of the Spyridon-Solstice last until the 29th of December. The days are the shortest of the whole year. On these days people light up fires, swim in ice-holes to purify themselves, calling up the Sun. Following a tradition, on this day children asked the Sun to come back and rolled a wheel – a symbol of the Sun, down a hill then they burned it near an ice-hole. In honor of this wheel they sang songs about St. Spyridon himself calling up the Sun to the lands of Holy Rus.

On Spyridon there was also a custom to shake apple trees to increase future harvest, feed lots of buckwheat out of the one’s right pocket (literally) to chickens to make them lay eggs earlier, to tell fortunes: for this women cut small cherry tree branches, put them into a flower pot and put it in the Red Corner (sacred place in a house) and watered it every day. If the branches bloom on Christmas then there’ll be garden fruit harvest next year”.

26th of December – St.Eustratius:

“Beginning with 26th of December to the 6th of January it was possible to predict weather for the next year. The weather of each day of this period predicted the weather of a respective month of the next year. People believed that on this day the evil spirits fly around on their brooms, trying to sweep the sun away. They raise whirlwinds. And these whirlwinds chase the shining sun to its halls where it would sleep, cool down and wouldn’t think about the mankind”.

This description contains Svyatki-related ideas – cult of the sun, rites dedicated to securing of fertility, fortune-telling and ideas about rampant evil spirits. It is clear that the pagan multiday celebration complex in the folk orthodox calendar eventually started to be repeated twice, being assigned to both Christmas and the Solstice.

We believe that Rodnovers should celebrate Svyatki considering the astronomical solstice instead of the calendar – begin celebration of the solstice eve, and end twelve days later after the solstice (according to ethnography accounts on duration of Svyatki).

Now let us say a few words about the name of the Solstice celebration. The wide spread among modern Rodnovers name is **Kolyada**, according to formal science, is borrowed. M.R. Fasmer’s etymology dictionary:

“kolyada (...) borrowed from Latin calendae, (...)”.

For this reason we suggest using authentic Slavic names that are Svyatki (Winter Svyatki) and Solntse vorot (Zimniy [winter] solntse vorot).

Next winter folk orthodox celebration that we are going to analyze in this work is the St. Blasius Day (24th of February). Modern scientists consider this saint to be a successor of Veles. B.A. Uspenskiy in his fundamental work **Philological Studies in the Sphere of Slavonic Antiquities** writes:

“Many researchers discussed St. Blasius as a substitute for Veles~Volos; In Novgorod, Kyiv, Yaroslavl in XI century upon the places of pagan worship of Veles were built churches of St. Blasius (...) The connection between Blasius and cattle supports the idea of Veles as a cattle god (...).the St. Blasius’ day used to be called cow celebration (...), the saint himself used to be called a cattle god (...), and cows and cattle in general a kind of Blasius, Vlasyevna [of Blasius – as a patronym], etc (...). Icons depicting St. Blasius were put in cow sheds and cattle barns (...). Blasius is often depicted surrounded by cattle, horned and of various colors (...); worth noting that some icons show Blasius surrounded by horses, cows and sheep (...). A special custom of Novgorod and Vologda churches is to bring cow butter and put it before the saint’s icons on the St. Blasius’ day (this butter even had a special name).”

In the folk orthodox calendar this holiday often merges with Maslenitsa. It is worth noting how Little Russians move the St. Blasius’ day from the 11th of February to Thursday of the Maslenitsa week, meanwhile at Grodno region (Belarus) on Thursday of the Maslenitsa week a celebration of **Volosya** or **Volos’ye** was held, which is clearly related to Veles worshipping. Moreover, there are records of Novgorod region of the St. Blasius’ day (11th of February) being celebrated as a day of Malenitsa. Some even suggest that Maslenitsa comes from an ancient celebration dedicated to Veles. The pagan celebration in the name of Veles, one may assume was held in spring and involved many foods of animal husbandry origin such as meat, fat, lard and butter. It may have been that our ancestors baked pancakes too, because the word **blin** or **mлин** is of ancient origin. Celebration of the St. Blasius’ day that is held by our church on 11th of February quite often coincides with Meat fare Sunday or Maslenitsa, i.e. with old pagan celebrations dedicated to Veles which were held in early spring and involved feasts, fighting and other games peculiar to pagan peoples. We think that this theory is only partly valid. Rites of Maslenitsa, apparently, involve some elements of celebration of the Spring Equinox (sending-off of winter, spring-calling songs, solar symbolism). Perhaps they moved there due to Christian influence – the Equinox in the folk orthodox calendar is on the Great Lent (which starts no later than on 21st of March and no sooner than on 15th of February) – a time not quite suitable for festivities. It also explains why celebration dedicated to Veles was moved to Maslenitsa – 24th of February can as well coincide with the Lent.

It seems that our ancestors had a certain celebration dedicated to Veles which was held in February and was substituted by the day of St. Blasius after the Christianization. Presumably, it was not a one-day celebration, as S.V. Maksimov recorded the St. Blasius’ day in the Russian North being three or more days long. A.A. Korinfskiy writes about the St. Blasius Day being celebrated for seven days.

Now we have to find out why the celebration is held in February specifically. D.A Gavrilov in his book **Time of Gods and time of men; Basics of the pagan Slavic calendar** writes:

“February, regarding folk beliefs and rites, is a month of waiting and longing for spring, preparing for her coming and also the time of calving. Absolutely natural is the fact that this difficult time (and in recent past –time of near starvation) is patroned by the cattle god, Lord of the Underworld Veles“.

Worth mentioning that other IE peoples too worshipped Gods with similar functions during this time. In this regard, Lupercalia was held by the Romans, a celebration of shepherds, guarding cattle from predators. Celtic Imbolc on 1st of February also has somewhat similar meaning; it is often related to birthing and lactation of sheep. Imbolc is considered to be a celebration of hearth that quite well coincides with a Slavic custom to make a special Gromnitsa candle of Candlemas (2nd of February). Purificatory rites of Gromnitsa period have parallels among Germanic and Celtic peoples as well as Romans. On Blasius’ day (11th of February) some of the rituals were to sprinkle holy water on household animals, put willow branches in the corners of cattle barns, burn frank incense and thyme inside of them.

In the folk orthodox calendar Candlemas and the St. Blasius’ day have several common features. Both of these holidays are considered to be transition times between winter and spring. According to traditional folk beliefs on Candlemas winter and spring meet; while Blasius is called the one who warms one’s sides and the one who knocks down the horn of winter. On the St. Blasius’ day a set of rites related to cattle was performed. Candlemas is characterized by purificatory and protection rituals (including those aimed to aid well-being of household animals):

“At midnight we would go to three wells and draw water from them. This water was believed to be healing. It would be sprinkled on ill relatives and cattle; children would be bathed in it and would drink it (...) A person who came to the house [with a Gromnitsa candle] used it to quickly burn their hair lengthwise and crosswise. Then the put-out candle was broken into many pieces that were laid around animal cages and barns to save household animals from sickness”.

At last, both celebrations are related to Cow Death:

“In many regions old people still remember how on the St. Blasius’ day, in the early morning, a ritual of plowing around the village was performed – to shield it from Cow Death, though sometimes it could be done in late autumn; but mostly it was 11th of February. According to folk beliefs, this monster starts wandering around outskirts of a village from Candlemas. On the 5th of February it even dares to come to yards and pity those who have their barns unlocked and these were the ones where the village is not plowed around. The St. Blasius’ day is more terrifying for the monster than anything in the world but it’s even worse for it if on this day all people of the village gather to put it down!”

Moreover, Candlemas, according to the Church, lasts nine days (from 14th to 22nd of February), if the Great Lent doesn’t shorten it. Thus, Candlemas and the St. Blasius’ day are separated by one day only.

We assume that the St. Blasius’ day and Candlemas are Christian successors of one ancient multiday celebration (that mostly has to deal with animal husbandry). It was held at the end of winter during

calving. Its beginning was probably bound to the new moon—during this dangerous, according to folk beliefs, time purificatory and protection rites are necessary.

The moon (a luminary of the dead) is apparently related to Veles, the lord of the underworld. There is a traditional riddle: The field is not measured, the sheep are not counted and the shepherd is horned (the moon and stars); soon after the St. Blasius' day a rite of calling up the stars was performed. It was done to increase fertility of sheep. In the evening, the owner of the herd invited a shepherd to outskirts; then both bowed thrice towards each corner of the Earth. The shepherd, having prayed to Veles – to the shepherd of celestial herds and the protector of earthly ones, stood on wool which was laid near the outskirts fence and said a special call. Here's a record:

“Light up, the bright star, the skies for the joy of christened world! Burn with unquenchable flame for the pleasure of the orthodox people! Come to the yard of (name), servant of the God. Sanctify with unquenchable fire white-haired sheep of (name), servant of the God. As around the skies stars are numberless, so let (name) have even more sheep! Then the owner took the shepherd to his house and lavished him with foods, brought him wine and gave whatever the shepherd wanted so he doesn't leave empty-handed”.

However, Veles wasn't apparently the only god worshipped during this period. Candlemas is also known as Gromnitsa and according to some researchers is related to the cult of Thunderer:

*“As Elijah the Prophet substituted Perun in folk tales and beliefs, so the ancient pagan worship of a goddess of springtime thunder and earth fertility – Freya or Lada was transferred onto Holy Mary. Thus, the Serbs call her Fiery Maria and in songs they call her a sister of Elijah the Thunderer (...) thus when there's Thunder personified as a male there's always Lightning that is a female. Candlemas (2nd of February) is known in Poland as **Maryi gromnicznej**, in Czechia as **hromnice**, in Lusatia as **sveckovnica Maria**, in Croatia as **svecna Marije**, in Carniolia as **svezhnica**, in Slovenia as **svetio Marine** and in Serbia as **cajerno**; in Vilna region church attendees stand with lit up candles that are called gromnitsas and that are kept there for the whole year to protect one's house from lightning strike. L.Y. Zhmud gives the Virgin an epithet Percunateleor Percunija – female form of **Perkunas** (Panna Maria Percunatele); whereas the Finns describe her as raiding across the sky in a fiery chariot”.*

Perhaps at the end of winter our ancestors worshipped Veles as well as Perun (and maybe a goddess of thunder too). Therefore, we suggest worshipping the God and/or the Goddess of Thunder on the first day of the celebration (the new moon) and call this holiday **Gromnitsa** and the following week **Veles's Svyatki** and dedicate it to Veles. The choice of the lunar phase is based on (besides a fore mentioned beliefs of dangers of the new moon) the fact that the new moon is the time of the beginning of a new lunar cycle and the celebration is related to the beginning of calving.

Credits

Krivichi Rodnovery Organization – Provided the original article in Russian upon which this article was built – <http://krivichi.org/zhrec/slavyanskiy-kalendar.html>

Solnce – Translating the article from Russian and gathering information

Stribor – Editing of the translated article and providing the early sketches of the graphs

Ravo – Graphical enhancement of the early sketches

Rübezahl – Polishing up the grammar

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