

Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography (Kunstkammer)

Russian Academy of Sciences

As a manuscript

Andrei Tiukhtiaev

**Zhane River Valley as a Pilgrimage Site:
New Age Spirituality, Performance, Authenticity**

Dissertation Summary

for the purpose of obtaining degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Culturology

Academic Supervisor:

PhD in History

Sergei Shtyrkov

Moscow, 2020

Statement of Research Problem

This study focuses on the worshipping of natural and archaeological sites (dolmens) in the Zhane River valley located in the village Vozrozhdenie in the Krasnodar region. Among the pilgrims in this place are people with attitudes and ideas derived from New Age spirituality and esotericism, and the main effort to develop the pilgrimage infrastructure comes from the "Anastasia" movement and neopagan activists.

The **research object** is pilgrims and tourists who come to the Zhane River valley to attend events at Voskhozhdenie recreational center, as well as to worship the dolmens located in the valley. The **subject** of the analysis is the ways of sacralization of this locus. This work **aims** to analyze how the Zhane River valley is transformed by certain people into a pilgrimage center.

The following **objectives** can be identified 1) who participates in the sacralization of the Zhane River valley; 2) which narratives, symbols, and practices give a special status to this locus; 3) which categories of pilgrims can be identified; 4) what ways of veneration of sacred objects exist in the pilgrimage; 5) what forms of representation of this sacred place applied in public and media spaces?

The **relevance** of the study comes from the fact that pilgrimage is one of the key practices for esoteric culture. It presents a specific configuration of private and public, individual and collective. The opportunity to better understand what is New Age spirituality in the case of particular practice, and how this phenomenon fits into modern trends of (de)secularization in Russia makes this work interesting for social theory in general and anthropology of religion in particular.

The Degree of Elaboration of the Problem

For this dissertation, three theoretical contexts and concepts have special relevance. Among these concepts are secularization, the sacred, and esotericism or New Age spirituality. In secularization studies, Max Weber's long-established thesis of

modernity as a "disenchanted world"¹ was developed in the works of Peter Berger² and Thomas Luckmann³ and created the vision of the secular world as a pluralistic market of ideas, where religious and secular actors compete for clients and consumers on the regular basis. Religion in this perspective is considered as a personal matter, i.e. a part of private space, while the public sphere is occupied by secular actors.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Islamic Revolution in Iran, the increasing role of the religious factor in inter-ethnic conflicts, and the rise of Evangelical Protestantism led to a revision of the classical theory of secularization. Another significant factor that influenced religious studies was the popularity of esoteric beliefs and the growing New Age movement that led to appearance of sociology of esotericism⁴.

Jose Casanova suggested a concept of public religions to define those religious groups that can influence politics and gain social significance under conditions of secularity⁵. Casanova meant by them first of all "traditional" religions such as Catholicism and Protestantism, considering New Age and other counter-cultural movements the opposite types of religion — private ones. In many ways, this is why today many researchers interpret New Age spirituality as a "private religion," that view was also promoted by Thomas Luckmann himself⁶.

New Age spirituality in this perspective is an expression of modern individualism and consumerism, as noted by researchers such as Wade Roof⁷, Kimberly Lau⁸, Adam

¹ Weber, M. Science as a Vocation // Weber M. Selected Works. M.: "Progress", 1990. P. 707-735.; Weber, M. Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. M.: Higher School of Economics Publishing House, 2016. 448 p.

² Berger, P.L. The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969.

³ Luckmann, T. The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society, London: Macmillan, 1967.

⁴ Tiryakian, E. A. Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture // American Journal of Sociology. 1972. Vol. 78. No. 3. P. 491-512.

⁵ Casanova, J. Public Religions in the Modern World, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁶ Luckmann, T. Shrinking transcendence, expanding religion? // Sociological Analysis. 1990. Vol. 51. No. 2. P. 127-138.

⁷ Roof, W.C. Spiritual Marketplace: Baby-Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.

⁸ Lau, K. J. New Age Capitalism: Making Money East of Eden. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

Possamai⁹, Jeremy Carrette, and Richard King¹⁰. However, sometimes New Age can be considered quite influential religion for Late-Modern society, despite the individualism of its followers, as Paul Heelas does¹¹. In the case of Steve Bruce, Heelas's opponent, New Age does not provide material for criticizing secularization theory because the number of its followers remains small¹².

The concept of New Age spirituality as "private" and syncretic (or bricolage) spirituality has been challenged by many researchers, for example, Steph Aupers, Dick Houtman¹³, Guy Redden¹⁴, Veronique Altglas¹⁵. They call for abandoning the simplified model of "spiritual supermarket" and looking for regularities in the construction of New Age spirituality as collective phenomenon. The conditions of the bricolage are limited by historical reasons and are determined by how and for what purpose the Western intellectuals have adapted and reformulated the elements of pre-Christian and non-Christian traditions, which formed the ideological basis of esotericism. Narratives, symbols, and epistemologies established in Western esotericism became elements of specific socialization in New Age practices.

⁹ Possamai, A. *Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism // Culture and Religion*. 2003. Vol. 4. No. 1. P. 31-45.

¹⁰ Carrette J., King R. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. London: Routledge, 2005.

¹¹ Heelas, P. *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Oxford, Blackwell, 2009.

¹² Bruce, S. *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. P. 106-107.

¹³ Aupers, S., Houtman, D. *Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality // Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 2006. Vol. 21. No.2. P. 201-222.

¹⁴ Redden G. *Revisiting the Spiritual Supermarket: Does the Commodification of Spirituality Necessarily Devalue It? Culture and Religion*. 2016. Vol.17. No. 2. P. 231-249.

¹⁵ Altglas, V. *From Yoga to Kabbalah Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Wouter Hanegraaff¹⁶, Colin Campbell¹⁷, Christopher Partridge¹⁸, Olav Hammer¹⁹, Michael Barkun²⁰ analyzed epistemological and discursive settings of Western esotericism. Matthew Wood²¹ and Stephen Sutcliffe have drawn attention to the social context of modern New Age spirituality²². Both authors noted that there is still no universal theoretical framework to analyze New Age as a social phenomenon, and empirical data usually is extremely limited.

¹⁶ Hanegraaff Wouter, J. *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Leiden, New York, Köln: EJ Brill, 1996.; Hanegraaff W.J. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

¹⁷ Campbell, C., McIver, S. *Cultural Sources of Support for Contemporary Occultism // Social Compass* 1987. Vol. 34. No. 1. P. 41-60.

¹⁸ Partridge C. *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Vol. 1: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, London: T&T Clark, 2004; Partridge, C. *Truth, Authority and Epistemological Individualism in New Age Thought // Handbook of New Age*. Ed. by D. Kemp, J. Lewis. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007.

¹⁹ Hammer, O. *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*. Ed. by O. Hammer. Leiden: Brill, 2003; Hammer, O. *New Age on the Discursive Construction of Community // Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies*. 2005. Vol. 1. P. 111-127.

²⁰ Barkun, M. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013. Barkun M. *Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge // Diogenes*. 2016. P. 1-7.

²¹ Wood, M. *W(h)ither New Age Studies? The Uses of Ethnography in a Contested Field of Scholarship // Religion and Society*. 2010. Vol. 1. No. 1. P. 76-88.; Wood, M. *Possession, Power and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies*. Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2013.

²² Sutcliffe, S. *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices*. NY, London: Routledge, 2003.; Sutcliffe, S. *Re-thinking "New Age" as a Popular Religious "habitus": A Review Essay on "the Spiritual Revolution" // Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*. 2006. Vol. 18. No. 3. P. 294-314.

Sacred spaces in Russian New Age spirituality were analyzed by Yulia Andreeva²³, Victor Shnirelman²⁴, Irina Selezneva, Alexander Seleznev²⁵, Anton Sveshnikov, Olga Sveshnikova²⁶, Elena Golovneva, Irina Schmidt²⁷, Irina Sadovina²⁸. Interesting comparative data is presented by studies of similar practices in the West by Adrian

²³ Andreeva Yu. "Places of Power", "Spirits of Dolmens" and "Pristine Knowledge": Archaeological Monuments and the New Age Movement "Anastasia" // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2014. № 5. P. 73-87.

²⁴ Shnirelman V. Arkaim: Archaeology, Esoteric Tourism and National Idea // *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. № 14. 2011. C. 133-167.; Shnirelman, V.A. Sacred Sites: The Construction of Sacred Space: Introduction to Discussion. *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2014. № 5. P. 3-9.

²⁵ Seleznev, A.G. 2014. A New Mythology of History: The Archetype of "Ancient Civilizations" and the Sacral Center of Okunevo Village. *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. № 5. P. 41-59.; Seleznev A.G., Selezneva I.A. New Sacred Spaces, Invention of History and Global Information Environment: Okunevo Village in Western Siberia // *Omsk University Bulletin*. 2016. № 3. P. 76-86; Seleznev A.G., Selezneva I.A. Archaeological Sites and New Sacred Spaces: Hierotopy, Chronotope Global Information Environment // *Ural History Bulletin*. 2017. № 1 P. 135-143.

²⁶ Sveshnikov A., Sveshnikova O. Was Zarathustra born here? Or the Ways and Consequences of Protecting one Archaeological Site. *Neprikosnoveny Zapas*. 2008. №1. (<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2008/1/sve19.html>).

²⁷ Golovneva, Elena and Schmidt, Irina (2015) Religious Conversion, Utopia, and the Saced Site: Okunevo Village in Western Siberia // *State, Religion, and Church in Russia and Worldwide*. № 33. P. 291-321.

²⁸ Sadovina, I. The New Age Paradox: Spiritual Consumerism and Traditional Authority at the Child of Nature Festival in Russia // *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 2017. Vol. 32. No. 1. P. 83-103.

Ivakhiv²⁹, Alexandra Arellano³⁰, Anna Fedele³¹, Dallen Timothy, Paul Conover³², Justine Digance³³, Jenny Blain, Robert Wallis³⁴, Kathryn Rountree³⁵.

It is important to mention the works of Kathryn Rountree on neopagan pilgrimage and the studies of Orthodox pilgrimage by Jeanne Kormina³⁶. Both authors refer to the Turner's terminology, and Jeanne Kormina puts her research in the context of contemporary debates on secularization. I see this analytical move as promising because the fact that New Age pilgrimages can be institutionalized in the format of tourist destinations, that is an important feature of modern religiosity.

It is also important to consider the impact of pilgrimage sites created by followers of New Age spirituality on the social imagination of tourists and the existence of New Age narratives and interpretations in the media context. The study of this issue touches upon the positioning of contemporary post-Soviet traditionalist movements

²⁹ Ivakhiv, A. J. *Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001; Ivakhiv, A. *Power Trips: Making Sacred Space through New Age Pilgrimage // Handbook of New Age*. Ed. by J. Lewis, D. Kemp. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

³⁰ Arellano, A. *Religion, pilgrimage, mobility and immobility // Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective*. Ed. By D. Raj, N.D. Morpeth. Walingford: CABI, 2003.

³¹ Fedele, A. *Energy and Transformation in Alternative Pilgrimages to Catholic Shrines: Deconstructing the Tourist/Pilgrim Divide // Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. 2014. Vol. 12. No. 2. P. 150-165.

³² Timothy, D.J., Conover, P.J. *Nature Religion, Self-Spirituality and New Age Tourism // Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*. Ed. by D.J. Timothy, D.H. Olsen. New York, London: Routledge, 2006.

³³ Digance, J. *Pilgrimage at Contested Sites // Annals of Tourism Research*. 2003. Vol. 30. No. 1. P. 143-159.

³⁴ Blain, J., Wallis, R. J. *Sacred Sites, Contested Rites, Rights Contemporary Pagan Engagements with the Past // Journal of Material Culture*. 2004. Vol. 9. No. 3. P. 237-261; Blain, J., Wallis, R. J. *Sacred Sites — Contested Rites/Rights*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007.

³⁵ Rountree, K. *Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body through Sacred Travel // Sociology of Religion*. 2002. Vol. 63. No. 4. P. 475-496; Rountree, K. *Performing the Divine: Neopagan Pilgrimages and Embodiment at Sacred Sites // Body & Society*. 2006. Vol. 12. No. 4. P. 95-115.

³⁶ Kormina J. *Nomadic Orthodoxy: on New Forms of Religious Life in Russia // Ab imperio*. 2012. №. 2. P. 195-228; Kormina J. *Pilgrims: Ethnographic Essays on Orthodox Nomadism*. Saint Petersburg: Higher School of Economics Publishing House, 2019.; Kormina, J. *Avtobusniki: Russian orthodox pilgrims' longing for authenticity // Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective*. Ed. by C. Hann, H. Goltz. Berkeley: University California Press, 2010.

and how the interaction between traditionalists and various secular actors formulates a new understanding of the religious and the secular. Concerning the post-Soviet context, the issues of converting religious projects into secular ones and vice versa have not yet been sufficiently addressed, however, Sergei Shtyrkov³⁷ and Ludek Broz³⁸ contributed to this topic.

The **methodology** of the dissertation is based on the secularization theories of Thomas Luckmann³⁹, Jose Casanova⁴⁰, Talal Asad⁴¹, and Charles Taylor⁴²; concepts from the studies of esotericism, conspiracy, and New Age spirituality by Michael Barkun⁴³ and Wouter Hanegraaff⁴⁴, theories of the sacred and ritual developed by

³⁷ Shtyrkov S.A. Soviet Roots of Ethnic Traditionalism: the Case of North Ossetia // *Neprikosnoveny Zapas*. 2011. №4. P. 66-79; Shtyrkov S.A. Traditionalist Movements in Contemporary North Ossetia Society and the Logic of Religious Nationalism / *Caucasian City: the Potential for Ethnocultural Communication in Urban Area*. Saint Petersburg. Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, 2013. P. 331-362; Shtyrkov S.A. "Those Three Pies, That Chalice... One Could Say, This is the Liturgy": Interpretation of Ethnic Traditions as an Inner Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in North Ossetia-Alania / *Mountains and People*. Saint Petersburg. Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, 2015. P. 295-335.

³⁸ Broz, L. Conversion to religion? Negotiating continuity and discontinuity in contemporary Altai // *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union*. Ed. by M. Pelkmans. Oxford: Berghan Books, 2009.

³⁹ Luckmann, T. *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, London: Macmillan, 1967; Luckmann, T. *The Structural Conditions of Religious Consciousness in Modern Societies* // *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. 1979. Vol. 6. No. 1/2. P. 121-137.

⁴⁰ Casanova, J. *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁴¹ Asad, T. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. P. 181-183; Asad, T. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009.

⁴² Taylor, C. *Secular Age*. Harvard University Press, 1997. Taylor, C. *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991; Taylor, C. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2003.

⁴³ Barkun, M. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013; Barkun M. *Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge* // *Diogenes*. 2016. P. 1-7.

⁴⁴ Hanegraaff W.J. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Emile Durkheim⁴⁵, Victor Turner, Edith Turner⁴⁶, Mary Douglas⁴⁷, Dean McCannell⁴⁸.

Statements to be defended

In the case of the pilgrimage to the Zhane River valley, New Age spirituality turns out to be institutionalized as a tourist location characterized by the performance of the “Voskhozhdenie” activists and various forms of attendance of other pilgrims.

Cultural tools applied to sacralize the valley and dolmens stem from the ideology of authenticity that is pretty common for many contemporary religious as well as secular contexts. The more specific ideological content of pilgrimage practices is characterized by esoteric beliefs and narratives.

Even though social hierarchies are weak in New Age spirituality and individual autonomy of believers is strong, the performance arranged by the activists of the “Voskhozhdenie” center generates a space for the secondary socialization, where pilgrims successfully learn spiritual practices, narrative and certain epistemological habits.

The products of amateur science and some forms of social and political activism in the “Voskhozhdenie” center go beyond the narrow context of pilgrimage and become

⁴⁵ Durkheim, E. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster Press, 1995.

⁴⁶ Turner, V. W., Turner, E. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978; Turner, V. *Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality* // *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. 1979. P. 465-499; Turner, V. *Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting*. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, NY: PAJ Publications, 1982; Turner, V. W., Schechner, R. *The Anthropology of Performance*. NY: PAJ Publications, 1988; Turner, V. *Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama* // *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*. Ed. by R. Schechner, W. Appel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

⁴⁷ Douglas M. *Purity and Danger. Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Moscow: “Kanon-Press-C”, “Kuchkovo Pole”, 2000; Douglas, M. *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986; Douglas, M. *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology*. London, New York: Routledge, 2002.

⁴⁸ MacCannell, D. *Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings* // *American Journal of Sociology*, 1973. Vol. 79. No 3. P. 589-603; MacCannell, D. *The Tourist. A New Theory of Leisure Class*. Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999; MacCannell, D. *The Ethics of Sight-Seeing*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011.

part of the public media space. New Age traditionalism successfully redefines itself as a secular rather than strictly religious project that makes it a public religion.

The **theoretical significance** of the thesis is that it provides material for the development of the concept of "public religion" in the context of secularization theories and its application to post-Soviet and Russian situations. The dissertation makes a special emphasis on 1) the influence of New Age spirituality on the rethinking of secular and religious categories; 2) the peculiarities of the development of the tourism industry and amateur science with the esoteric background.

Contents of the Dissertation

The introduction specifies the research goal and questions, provides basic information about the subject and object of the research, describes the circumstances of fieldwork, indicates the theoretical and methodological foundations.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Foundations: Secularization, New Age Spirituality, and the Sacred, describes the analytical model of the study, which is derived from the studies of secularization, New Age spirituality, and sacred spaces.

Paragraph 1.1 Private and Public Religion: Discussions on Secularization is concerned with the issue of secularization. The main focus is on the opposition of the private and public, as well as religious and secular, and their supposed synonymity. Beginning with Max Weber, religion has been interpreted as a disappearing phenomenon of public life, which is replaced by secular, and thus by rational, institutions of the "disenchanted world". Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's works provide a detailed analytical framework to describe this situation. Berger and Luckmann's theory has contributed to the migration of the theory of "private religion" in many research fields, including New Age studies.

The alternative view in the form of the "public religions" theory, formulated by Jose Casanova and revised by Talal Assad, has not yet found its empirical application and does not cover all socially significant forms of religious life. The part of the problem stems from the fact that contemporary religious groups, especially traditionalist communities, avoid to define themselves in strict terms and refer to religious or

secular categories, according to situational goals and interests. As a result, the discursive design of contemporary religious practices is complex, and studying the dynamics of this process allows a better understanding of the place religious phenomena occupy in the secular world and how they affect the foundations of the latter.

Paragraph 1.2 New Age Spirituality and Secularization elaborates on the issue of how to apply secularization theories to the New Age spirituality. The discussion about private and public religions has influenced the study of esoterism and New Age, and Thomas Luckmann's ideas are still explicitly, and sometimes implicitly, contained in a variety of works on this topic. Concerning the subject under discussion, the thesis of "private religions" is complemented by the concept of "bricolage", that postulates that New Age culture is highly individualized phenomenon in terms of social structure and syncretic in ideological respect.

At the same time, there are several studies whose authors claim that New Age spirituality should be considered as a space of specific socialization (M. Wood, S. Aupers, D. Hautman). They also stress that syncretism, or bricolage, of New Age culture is rooted in the historical and social conditions of European and North American modernization (W. Altglas, O. Hammer). It was secular modernization that contributed to the separation of esoterism into a specific domain of ideas and practices, the adherents of which often pose themselves as an alternative to the mainstream and as critics of the modern "disenchanted world". This discursive and structural feature of New Age spirituality is analyzed in the works of historians of esoterism, who proposed the interpretation of this phenomenon as "rejected knowledge" (D. Webb, W. Hanegraaf), "occulture" (C. Partridge), or "cultic milieu". (C. Campbell)

Michael Barkun developed these concepts and suggested the model of "stigmatized knowledge" that covers key discursive and epistemological features of esotericism. The legitimacy of "stigmatized knowledge," which includes amateur science, folk medicine, perinatalist narratives, esoteric beliefs, and conspiracy theories, is based on opposition to the dominant social institutions of the state, education, science, official

medicine, and the media. At the same time, this opposition continues to exist even when “stigmatized knowledge” is no more marginalized and even becomes part of the mainstream.

Paragraph 1.3 New Age Pilgrimage and Authenticity contains a discussion of esoteric pilgrimage practices as well as theoretical developments regarding the concept of the sacred. Subsection **1.3.1 Power Places as Sites of Pilgrimage and Tourism** states that the search for authenticity associated with images of antiquity and nature characterizes New Age pilgrimages all around the world. Subsection **1.3.2 Authenticity as an Analytical Category** focuses on the comparison of the Durkheimian theory of the sacred and Turnerian category of liminality. It also describes the notion of authenticity as analyzed in the texts of Charles Taylor and Dean McCannell and the symbolism of the pure and danger as analyzed by Mary Douglas. Also, a critique of the sociological line of the theory of the sacred is provided here, especially the project of cultural sociology by Philip Smith and Jeffrey Alexander.

As a result, the conclusion justifies the need to apply the model of sacralization based on the concept of performance and authenticity suggested by Dean McCannell, which allows to describe and analyze, firstly, how sacred space is framed and how social interaction is organized within it, and secondly, how a collective activity to create a pilgrimage site connects actors with a broad social context, how sacred symbolism encapsulates the key ideology of the modernity.

Chapter 2 The Voskhozhdenie Center as a Space for Performance describes three key actions taken by pilgrims to sacralize the locus: framing the place as different to the sphere of everyday life; naming the place, and filling the place with ideological, textual and visual content.

Paragraph 2.1 Naming, Framing, and the Content describes these stages of locus sacralization in detail. The main focus is on how the Voskhozhdenie center is organized and the idea that the Center's activity can be interpreted through the McCannell performance theory is proposed. In this perspective, we can identify the “front stage” and “backstage”, that is the spaces that determine the way pilgrims

interact in Zhane River valley. The activities of the center's organizers, activists, and entrepreneurs contribute to the formation of a platform for the performance of a specific version of "traditional culture". The Centre organizes yoga camps, hikes, lectures on alternative history, seminars on ecological settlements, home births, health practices, diets, as well as folk dances, and celebrations in honour of the gods from the neopagan Slavic pantheon. Besides, performance is also characterized by the daily trade in specific products, including products for healthy diets (understood as vegetarianism, veganism, raw food), aromas, jewelry and souvenirs, medicinal plants, books and brochures on healthy lifestyles and alternative history, etc.

Pilgrims' practices correspond to a certain aesthetics, observance of which is the result of common efforts of the organizers and active pilgrims. This aesthetic consists of such elements as linen shirts; long skirts; ethnic outfits based on neopagan images; embroidery with solar ornaments; queues; clothes used for yoga; gusli and sitars; visual images of "ancestors" in the form of tall people with blond hair; patriotic symbolism (for example, the flags of the Russian Federation and the Russian Empire); imitations of pre-revolutionary grammar and imitation of Old Russian script; specific fonts with references to the pre-revolutionary alphabet.

As a result of the activities of the employees of the Voskhozhdenie Center, a platform for spiritual practices is being formed, bringing together people with different cultural backgrounds, including those who are not related to the New Age and Anastasian movement. Dietary practices, yoga and gymnastics, nature contemplation, and hiking to dolmens and mountains — all these practices apply to most pilgrims and are accompanied by similar interpretations. The latter includes the idea of the otherness of the Zhane River valley as a place opposed to urban daily life, where it is possible to cultivate an authentic component of the human personality, that is, independent from previous socialization.

Such a binary subjectivity, assuming the presence of an authentic and false/social "ego", is a fairly common basis for a spiritual experience in many religious and secular contexts, especially pilgrimage and tourism (see studies by J. Kormina, S. Slavin, L. Mikaelson, K. Rountree, etc.). Natural objects and images of pre-industrial

cultures embodied in dolmens become the basis of pilgrimage performance and play an important role in its ideological construction.

Relying on this "ideology of liminality" pilgrims pay special attention to the body experience, which they see as an alternative to rational ways of learning as an attribute of urban modern culture. The pilgrim's locus is perceived as a "clean" space, contributing to the cultivation of a healthy lifestyle. Even physical ailments are interpreted as positive manifestations of the "work" of the sacred objects. Spiritual practices, together with their interpretation, turns out to be the matter of grassroots proselytism. Pilgrims motivate each other to perform disciplinary practices, generating common socializing experience in pilgrimage.

Paragraph 2.2 Performance Content: Stigmatized Knowledge addresses a more specific aspect of the pilgrimage content, namely esoteric beliefs, perennialist narratives, and conspiracy theories. It is demonstrated that the syncretism of New Age spirituality is a set of well-established ideas, and the pilgrimage is one of the places to learn them. Also, the newagers themselves do not see their knowledge as syncretic, but as a consistent traditionalist view of the world. The central principle that unites various esoteric beliefs and practices is perennialism — the idea of the existence of an utopian society at the dawn of mankind.

It is perennialist narratives that prove to be a resource for legitimizing various spiritual practices, including diets. Dietary restrictions may not be positioned as a personal choice, but as a result of communication with supernatural forces, and represent an important element of socialization in Anastasian and pilgrimage communities. Ascribing key decisions for religious socialization to non-human agents is a significant epistemological feature of esoterism as a stigmatized knowledge, which Michael Barkun referred to as "fiction-as-fact".

This feature is expressed in how New Age pilgrims refuse to see the boundaries between physical reality and fiction. In addition to the fact that the key text for the pilgrimage — "Ringing Cedars of Russia" (written by Vladimir Megre, he is also one of the inspirations behind the Anastasia movement and the pilgrimage to the dolmens) — is a fiction that has become the basis for traditionalist projects, a variety

of products of art, folklore, cinematographic creativity can serve as an argument for the utopian ideas of the Anastasia movement followers. Finally, conspirological narratives are also an element of pilgrimage socialization, but they serve not only as an explanatory model of social and political processes but also as a rationale for disciplinary practices.

Paragraph 2.3 The Content of Performance: Perennialism and Alternative Science continues the issue of the stigmatized knowledge domain and, in particular, addresses the topic of alternative science as a significant practice for the activists of the Voskhozhdenie Center. Amateur history and archaeology are the most popular forms of New Age science, positioned as more progressive against academic research. Nationalistic interpretations of history, taken from such famous projects of Russian alternative science as "Velesov's Book" or "DNA-Genealogy", are especially popular. Pilgrims often resort to amateur science as an entertaining intellectual exercise, lectures and seminars on history are organized regularly in the Voskhozhdenie center.

Esoteric interpretations of dolmen's culture dominate in excursion texts, both among the spokespersons of the Voskhozhdenie Center as well as among the guides of secular tourist agencies. Most excursion texts reproduce an imaginary discussion with academic archaeologists and emphasize the contradiction between New Age and official science. The latter prescribes radical evolutionism and a disregard for the spiritual component of dolmen's culture. New Age experts refer to the archaeologists' opinion, according to which the dolmens have only funerary functions without any spiritual symbolism.

This view simplifies academic interpretations of the dolmens, in which funeral and ritual functions are by no means mutually exclusive. The discursive reproduction of this contradiction between the two types of knowledge serves to prove the idea of holism — the inseparable connection between the spiritual and material components of culture, as well as the perennialism as an anti-evolutionary view of the historical process. This imaginary discussion is a way to challenge not so much the academic

interpretations themselves, but rather the opinion of scholars about New Age communities as a manifestation of marginal religiosity.

Chapter 3 Voskhozhdenie as a Collective Symbol and its Publicity gives an analysis of two locus sacralization processes, namely, what Dean McCannell has called the "social" and "mechanical" reproductions.

Paragraph 3.1 Social Reproduction and Performance: The Relationships between the Front Stage and the Backstage describes how pilgrimage performance contributes to the emergence of a pilgrims community, and particularly how pilgrims participate in a collective action of the performance of utopia based on the idea that the Center is a perfect place of the cultivation of alternative way of life opposed to the urban world. Even when pilgrims do not share some attitudes of Voskhozhdenie Center activists, they experience solidarity through the opposition against the "tourists", namely those who fit New Age stereotypes about the negative sides of urban life. Pilgrims from Voskhozhdenie are seeking to embody and experience the natural life refusing from urban habits and having contact with natural objects and dolmens as symbols of an "enchanted" anti-modern world. The front stage and backstage of this everyday performance turn out to be closely interrelated.

At the same time, there is a contradiction based on the inability to follow utopian ideals entirely. The pilgrimage provides a place for reflection on the current state of affairs primarily for Anastasian communities, whose representatives discuss (especially during the festival) the problems of their movement and the implementation of the model of society they share. The example of gender-related events and practices demonstrates the mismatch between patriarchal family models and gender roles and the real-life strategies of pilgrims. The gender models of "female house-keeper" and "male breadwinner" are rarely fully implemented by pilgrims in everyday life, but they are the basis of the scenario that is performed on the pilgrimage scene. The very process of performance is much more important to pilgrims than the realization of shared patterns of gender behavior in daily life.

The tension between the front stage and backstage of pilgrims' performance also lies in the fact that the organizers of traditionalist projects, which declare the traditional

status of represented ideals and practices in the framework of mass events, may express skepticism about the very possibility of reconstructing the past authentically. In this way, involvement in practice is more important than solidarity with a set of beliefs and practices. Different regimes of belief and doubt reveal the specificity of people's interaction and reflection about these practices.

Paragraph 3.2 Mechanical Reproduction: New Age Traditionalism in the Public Field deals with the issue of what media images are associated with the pilgrimage to the Zhane River valley and how the products of amateur science and social and political activism affect the public status of New Age spirituality. Social reproduction, i.e., solidarization of people with the version of traditional culture represented in the Voskhozhdenie, can be problematic, and the outside viewer may see in this performance not an authentic tradition, but a religion that is false in its foundation and marginal in its status. In this regard, mechanical reproduction as the creation and spreading of media representations of pilgrimage performance generates a more acceptable image of New Age spirituality in the public sphere.

The paragraph also describes the place of the Voskhozhdenie Center and its activists in the social network of Anastasia movement followers and how participants of the network confront with other religious actors. The organizers of the center are in touch with the traditionalist project "World Ring Dances", which is aimed to revive the tradition of folk dances and games. Activists of Voskhozhdenie play a significant role in the construction of Anastasian communities and presenting them to the outside world. Projects of Anastasians are sometimes facing the resistance of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose representatives accuse the followers of New Age spirituality in the misrepresentation of the past, as well as concepts of tradition and ethnicity. However, more often than not one can see how projects such as the "World Round Dances" or the political activism of the Anastasian Homeland Party, which promotes a law on "family estates" (this law stipulates that the state should grant land plots to families of Russian citizens free of charge), find support in the public field as secular rather than religious projects. And in many cases, the Voskhozhdenie and the Zhane

River valley become the background for such traditionalist initiatives of Anastasians, a kind of locus of tradition.

Amateur science in this respect allows newcomers to penetrate the media field with esoteric interpretations of the dolmens. The author describes the case of a documentary about Caucasian dolmens produced by state television channel “My planet”. The episode discussed was a part of a project narrating about the key locus of Russian cultural and historic landscape. In this film, the central theme is the version of dolmens history by an amateur archaeologist well-known in Voskhozhdenie. His version was described as secular science and inscribed to the pro-state version of the national memory.

The conclusion lists the main results. The making of sacred space in the Zhane River valley is a result of collective effort, which involves two main categories of pilgrims — directors and the audience. The directors are the workers and activists of the Voskhozhdenie Center, whose activities are referred to as the "revival of traditions", and their intellectual resource is esoteric literature. The audience, however, is not a passive recipient of the Center activities. Pilgrims involve in the pilgrimage performance in different ways, they even become a part of this performance that allows them to call them viewer-participant.

Most pilgrims and directors are united by the idea of existence of the authentic part of the human personality, independent from the influence of socialization and any kind of social institutions. The search for the authentic self is accompanied in the pilgrimage experience by the understanding of the sacral locus as a specific space as opposed to the urban daily life, in which the cultivation of the authentic personality is allowed. The images of pre-industrial societies are closely linked to notions of authenticity.

As a result, the pilgrimage generates a specific space of socialization, which exists in the format of a tourist location and functions as an agent of secondary socialization. Within this space, it is possible to learn different bodily and diet health practices, as well as esoteric beliefs and narratives. However, the second component is not obligatory and becomes a basis for solidarity, mainly in the case of directors, i.e.

workers and activists of the Voskhozhdenie Center. Thus, in the pilgrimage to the Zhane River valley, it is not identities and beliefs that are indicators of belonging, but the involvement of people with different cultural backgrounds in certain collective practices.

"Voskhozhdenie" is an important point in the social network of Anastasia followers and many other Russian New Age followers because the center, its activists, and allies are involved in the production of excursion lectures, literature, and media products, which penetrate the broader media space. Traditionalist initiatives to revive different aspects of folk culture, amateur science, political activism as promotion of the law on "family estates" find their demand, contributing to a rethinking of the secular and religious categories and somehow affecting the social imagination of the people of contemporary Russia.

Approbation of work

Author's publications on the topic of the thesis study

The works published by the author in journals indexed in the international databases of indexing and citation, as well as on the list of highlevel journals of the HSE:

1. Tiukhtiaev A. Body and Sociality in New Age Pilgrimage // State, Religion, and Church in Russia and Worldwide. 2019. № 4 (37). P. 45-68 (in Russian).
2. Tiukhtiaev A. Stigmatised and Scientific Knowledge: Some Characteristics of Competition for Legitimacy between New Age and Academic Archaeology // The Journal of Social Policy. 2018. № 16(2). P. 265-278 (in Russian).
3. Tiukhtiaev A. Performance of Gender Identities in New Age (the Case of Pilgrimage to Archaeological Sites in Krasnodar Region) // The Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology. 2017. № 20(5). P. 151-166 (in Russian).