

Article

A Study of the Neopagan Movement in Romania and Methodological Challenges Involved

Radu Petre Mureșan

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest, 050663 Bucharest, Romania; radu.muresan@unibuc.ro

Abstract: In Romania, the neo-pagan communities are being organized and are working to define their identity in the middle of a Christian environment. In turn, individuals claiming to be neopagans begin to assert themselves in the public space. While the neopagan phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe has been investigated over recent years by religious, anthropological, and sociological studies, the issue has been scarcely tackled in Romania. The very few studies concerning the neopagan phenomenon in Romania are largely based on web sources, with all the methodological shortcomings that such an investigation involves. The present study aims to outline the status quo of the neopagan presence in the Romanian context and to list some of the methodological challenges that its investigation involves. By highlighting the peculiarities of the neopagan phenomenon in Romania, the author hopes to offer a useful working tool to specialists in missionary studies or missiology as a theological discipline.

Keywords: neopaganism; religious identity; postmodernism; mission studies; missiology

1. Neopaganism in Post-communist Romania: Early Developments

In the study “Forme ale neopăgânismului în societatea contemporană”/“Forms of Neopaganism in Today’s Society”, published in 2009, it was noted that neopaganism reached Romania tentatively after 2000, via the Romanian version of the website of the Pagan International Federation (PFI) (Mureșan 2009). This website aimed to support the emergence of a neopagan community in Romania by promoting workshops and other events, hosting the exchange of information, and enabling the adherents of this movement to express their beliefs freely, to counter every criticism, and to defend their rights in court¹. Through the contribution of the Romanian branch of the Pagan International Federation, the first courses of Wicca Witchcraft were held under the supervision of Morgana (Morgana Sythove, coordinator of Pagan Federation International) and of Saddle (Tamas Nagy, co-founder of the Celtic-Wiccan Traditionalist Church in Hungary)².

In the same study, the online visibility of some autochthonous pagan groups advocating the revival of the old beliefs of the Dacian tribes inhabiting the Romanian territory during antiquity³ was also noted. The most notable among these groups was Societatea Gebeleizis (Gebeleizis Society), named after the god of lightning, thunder, and rain, worshiped by the Dacians. This organization was identified as a cultural–religious association whose main purpose was to establish and develop, on the territory of today’s Romania, ethnic communities professing the religion and culture of their Dacian ancestors. Although it claimed to be a native movement, its website promoted several deities belonging to the Scandinavian pantheon, even though the Dacian tribes possessed their own pantheon, headed by the god Zamolxis (Mureșan 2009, p. 688).

More than a decade after the publication of this study, several elements of both continuity and discontinuity in the neopagan discourse in Romania can be noticed. For instance, the website of Pagan Federation International (PFI) is still managed by people who are not speakers of Romanian. For this reason, certain parts are barely comprehensible to the Romanian readership they are actually targeting. The representatives of PFI Romania



Citation: Mureșan, Radu Petre. 2023. A Study of the Neopagan Movement in Romania and Methodological Challenges Involved. *Religions* 14: 1308. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101308>

Academic Editor: Cristian-Sebastian Sonea

Received: 20 August 2023

Revised: 11 October 2023

Accepted: 12 October 2023

Published: 18 October 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

still cover their identities by hiding behind pseudonyms (Ursus of Cluj-Napoca, who is also the website administrator, and Sun Cat of Bucharest). The *Contact* section simply provides an email address, which can be accessed for any kind of information, clarifications, or questions, while the section *Events* offers no information of public interest⁴. In our opinion, the website operates as a platform for bringing into contact self-declared atheists or pagans, enabling them to get in touch with each other and possibly join a pagan community after they express their interest in doing so simply by sending an email.

A novelty in the structure of the Romanian-language PFI website, compared to its former version, is that it borrows articles from the Romanian tabloids (yellow journalism) centered around certain media figures who have turned to witches and witchcraft. These posts only covered the period 2015–2016, although they are grouped under the heading “Recent posts”⁵. Another novelty is that the website of Pagan Federation International indicates and provides links to other pagan groups organized on Romania’s territory. In order, these are as follows: “Romanian Coven”, actually a newsletter containing announcements only for the period 2006–2007 and providing a number of articles on neopaganism, whose authors use pseudonyms⁶; “Magyar Ásatrú Gyülekezési Pont” (headquartered in Hungary), with a Facebook page in Hungarian language⁷; “Societatea păgână din România” (The Pagan Society of Romania), headquartered in Braşov, with a Facebook page in Romanian language⁸; “Societatea Gebeleizis” (Gebeleizis Society), a currently inactive website⁹; “Spiritalitate Daco-Românească” (Dacian–Romanian Spirituality), with a Romanian-language website¹⁰ and; “Zamolxiana” (inactive website).

As mentioned above, the website of the Gebeleizis Society cannot be accessed at present. It was still active in 2011 when researchers Rozália Klára Bakó and László Attila Hubbes of the Hungarian University of Transylvania conducted an empirical comparative study of two organizations they described as “ethno-pagan”: Gebeleizis of Romania and Tengri of Hungary, respectively (Bakó and Hubbes 2011). In their opinion, these two organizations had similar institutional mechanisms regulating the shaping of the community, the production of a set of values, and the members being involved in the group’s activities. According to them, Gebeleizis stirred the interest of Romanian mass media because of allegations concerning their contribution to promoting Satanism and Nazism, while their members were investigated by the authorities and later brought to court (Bakó and Hubbes 2011).

Currently, it is difficult to find any website, blog, or Facebook page claiming to represent a group whose adherents identify as pagans and worship the Dacian god, Zamolxe (Zamolxians). As Romanian theologian Constantin Damian noted in addressing the visibility of reconstructionist groups in the online media, “Zamolxians are neither many nor organized as conventional religious groups; these communities have a loose organization and generally exist as such only in the intangible space of the internet” (Damian 2019, p. 52).

2. Pagan Paths: Two Romanian Case Studies

In 2009, when the abovementioned study on Romanian paganism was published, there was no one to identify as pagan publicly, just as there were not any legally recognized pagan associations similar to those operating in other Central and Eastern European countries (some articles in the written press stated that the Gebeleizis Society operated as an NGO; however, this piece of information was not able to be verified). A few years later, though, a significant change occurred in the forms taken by the neopagan movement in Romania. I shall address this briefly in the following pages.

After 2015, the virtual realm hosted several presentations and interviews given by a young pagan from the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca. A graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design of Cluj-Napoca, she embodied a complex personality as a photographer and artist of photography; a crafts person who collects zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines, as well as ancient idols and toys; a collaborator of a black metal band and a well-known actress of historical re-enactments.

Paganism, to her, is a lifestyle, personal exploration, and the freedom not to follow any model (“I am free to be as pagan as I want”). With this pagan identity, she professes, the young artist is very active in the social sphere, weaving, either intentionally or not, connections between those members of her generation who have various artistic pursuits (music, acting, crafts, fine arts, etc.) and are open to pagan ideas. She follows the pagan path openly, so she posts her email address and phone number, maintains conversations on her personal Facebook page, and posts Instagram photos showing herself in various pagan stances¹¹. Moreover, she writes almost exclusively in English, being known abroad as a “wonderful Transylvanian photography artist”¹².

According to available online information, the young pagan began her collaboration with the black metal band Ashaena in 2016, when she was mentioned as *Morrigan* among the attendants of the pagan parties organized by this band¹³. From 2017 onwards, she has been a member of the association Terra Dacica Aeterna (a legally recognized NGO) in the National Festival of Ceramic Art, held by the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, where she has been running demonstrative and interactive workshops for children¹⁴. In 2017, she began to promote her bronze jewelry in ancient style, crafted according to her own vision and carrying strong symbolic connotations. Finally, in 2018, she played the part of a Dacian witch in the feature-length film *141 A.D Mission in Dacia*, produced by two associations of Sibiu, well known for their historical re-enactments¹⁵. Since 2019, she has pursued, almost exclusively, the sale of her pieces of jewelry via the platform Etsy, where she has opened an account by the name of *Madonna Oriente*¹⁶.

Around the same time, a high school student from the town of Bacău established the association “The Neopagan Movement of Romania”, later renamed “Ropaganism”, aiming to protect and restore the pagan religion in Romanian society and to provide an institutional framework to the adherents of neopaganism in Romania. In 2018, the association took the name “The New Pagan Dawn” (TNPd) and was legally recognized in 2020, operating as an NGO. The association “The New Pagan Dawn” identifies as an “association with cultural–religious, philosophical and educational character” aiming to advocate social inclusion for minorities and vulnerable groups, improving the spiritual life of people by spreading information on the pagan and neopagan cults and esoteric sciences¹⁷.

There are three major elements along the *pagan path* of the young founder of The New Pagan Dawn. Firstly, he publicly identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community. His official site and personal Facebook page present all the developments in this direction in Romania, including the recent debates on legalizing same-sex marriages and the acknowledgment of civil partnership between same-sex persons.

Secondly, we note the support offered to the Satanist community of Romania. According to the information posted on his own site and Facebook page, the young man originally founded the Satanist coven “Dead Cross 666”, as a subsidiary of the association “The Joy of Satan”. After this group dissolved in 2016 and after a period of “study and meditation”, he declared himself to be a pagan¹⁸. However, he maintained tight links to Satanism, and currently, one of the aims of the association The New Pagan Dawn is to defend the interests of Satanists in Romania, especially in their interaction with state authorities¹⁹. The connection between paganism and Satanism is problematic to researchers in the field of religious studies (Hutton 1999; Rountree 2016; Partridge and Melton 2004)²⁰. In general, when certain pagans declare themselves to be Satanists, they claim they do not worship the devil, but rather, they regard the myth of Lucifer as a powerful symbol of the latent divine forces within the human being.

Finally, the young pagan seeks to defend the rights of the institutionalized children in orphanages and foster care, to make public the physical and emotional abuse they are subject to, to fight for a change in the structure of government institutions in charge of child protection, respectively, and to contribute to an improvement in the quality of these children’s lives through charitable activities. It is worth mentioning that he is driven by a personal motivation, namely the fact that he himself used to be an institutionalized child.

His activism in the sphere of human rights and minority rights is associated with political pursuits: he has announced, in advance, his intention to run for deputy in Romania's parliamentary elections of 2024²¹. It should be added that all his posts are bilingual, in Romanian and English, and information is available in other languages as well. All his personal and contact information is available to the public, and he is also active on social networks.

3. Some Methodological Challenges

Our information on the neopagan groups or persons who identify as pagan in Romania is almost exclusively gathered from electronic sources, that is, presentation websites, Facebook and Instagram pages, and interviews posted in various online publications. This kind of approach was also used by the researchers from the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, who conducted "non-participatory", "obtrusive", and "exploratory research" on the Hungarian and Romanian ethno-pagan groups. Their project was based exclusively on "web rhetoric", as the researchers called the information found in the online realm²². From their point of view, this approach is only possible when there is no other opportunity to investigate this phenomenon from the inside: "In order to gain access to the 'operational rhetoric' or daily communicative practices of minority religious organizations, one has to be fully integrated and socialized within such a group, to participate at its rituals and practices—namely to be an insider" (Bakó and Hubbes 2011, p. 129).

Hence, several methodological challenges might puzzle the researcher. They are related, as Douglas Cowan pointed out, to the ephemeral and fluid nature of the information source, to the credibility of the information, and the limited opportunities to verify whether the online community corresponds to an actual community in real life or at least to a community of the size declared online (Cowan 2005, pp. 199–200). Thus, researchers into the neopagan phenomenon can find that certain information circulating virtually, which they use at a certain point in conducting a study, may be withdrawn after a while, that certain sites become inactive, as in the case of the Gebeleizis Society mentioned above, or that other sites are "frozen" at some point as happened with the Romanian language section of the Pagan Federation International website, whose last postings under the heading "Blog" dates from 2016, and others under the heading "Forum" are from 2019.

Further, the lack of statistical data prevents us from getting a clear picture of the neopagan presence in Romania. After 2000, three censuses were conducted in Romania in 2002, 2011, and 2022, respectively²³. According to the surveys whose results are available on the website of the Romanian Institute for Statistics, the questions to be answered on religion concerned the churches and denominations officially recognized by the Romanian state, as well as sections headed "another religion", "no religion", "atheists", and "not declared"²⁴.

The adherents of neopaganism may fall into any of these categories, or, on the contrary, they may indicate the religion or denomination in which they were born and possibly baptized. One may assume that, under societal pressure, some people declare themselves as belonging to a certain community when they are actually atheists or non-religious (indifferent to religion). The reason may lie in their social conformism, understandable for persons born and raised in traditional Christian families who do not have the courage to acknowledge different identities, all the more so in the case of a minority that is unpopular at present (Gheorghe 2018, p. 294; Molteni 2017).

For this reason, as long as the surveys conducted in Romania do not include a section specifically addressing paganism, the collected data are not very relevant to the present study. In order to estimate the proportion of the population who declare they are not affiliated with any of the traditional churches and denominations, and which might include the proponents of paganism, it should be noted that in 2011, none of the sections mentioned above exceeded 0.04% of the total population surveyed, and the partial results of the 2022 census revealed that these sections together amounted to 0.9% of the total population. These figures, however, must be taken with a grain of salt to avoid both downplaying the

pagan presence in Romania and exaggerating its importance by assuming that all those who failed to declare their religious affiliation are pagans in corpore²⁵.

In addition to the scarce statistical data, there is a lack of sociological studies in Romania based on social investigation or opinion surveys. Admittedly, the Romanian experts in the sociology of religions are working on European projects addressing religiosity, religious affiliation, and secularization as a *European Value Study*; however, their results are marginally relevant with regard to the situation of paganism in Romania. Thus, Bogdan Voicu and Mălina Voicu, for example, pointed out that in the case of Romania, the demise of the USSR did not impact the religious life in a significant way, so between 1990 and 2000, Romania counted among the most traditional and religious countries of Europe. Only after the accession to the European Union in 2007, which entailed the migration of the labor force, academic mobility, and greater openness to European values, some changes occurred, allowing new religious trends and spiritual alternatives to reach Romania (Voicu and Voicu 2009, pp. 170, 174.).

In the field of religious studies, a number of valuable works were published. They analyze the pagan phenomenon in Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) often by comparison to the similar phenomenon in Western Europe and the USA (Strmiska 2005; Wiench 2014; Rountree 2015). The neopagan movement in Romania did not catch the interest of foreign researchers, who only drew a parallel to the neopagan developments in Hungary or placed it in the broader context of the CEE religious landscape after the fall of communism (Bakó and Hubbes 2011). The findings of these researchers, however, are not always applicable to the Romanian case.

In the introduction to the volume *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movement in Central and Eastern Europe*, editors Kaaarina Aitamurto and Scott Smith noted that although the CEE countries share the traumatic experience of communist regimes and the emergence of neopaganism was inevitably linked to the demise of these regimes, the concrete manifestations of the neopagan phenomenon differ from one country to the next, and the comparative study is hindered by the linguistic barriers between them (Aitamurto and Simpson 2014, p. 4). This opinion was shared by Kathryn Rountree, who pointed out that it is important to investigate neopaganism in a cultural context and that a “creative adjustment” occurs when neopaganism is inoculated into a local tradition. Although neopaganism is “a global new religious phenomenon”, its local expressions are diverse, even within the same country, with regard to religious or moral beliefs, practices, and values (Rountree 2015, p. 1). In his turn, Piotr Wiench argued that the neopagan groups in the CEE countries do not fall into the category of New Religious Movements but rather are expressions of cultural resistance to modernity in conjunction with the construction of an alternative identity. From this standpoint, their characteristic features are polytheism, the absence of proselytism, discourses centered around identity, and the artistic exploration of faith (Wiench 2014, p. 4).

4. Preliminary Considerations on the Neopagan Phenomenon in Romania

Addressing neopaganism, Michael Strmiska summarized the various definitions of this phenomenon as follows: “a religion created by modern people, taking inspiration from what is known of the older, original Paganism and then applying this inspiration in various ways, from seeking to reconstruct the old Pagan ways as accurately as possible according to the best available knowledge of the past, to reinterpreting or altering old traditions in accordance with contemporary ways of thinking, to adding or borrowing further religious elements as needed to suit current conditions of life” (Strmiska 2017, p. 168).

In his turn, Wouter Hanegraaff introduces an important mention of Christianity by stating: “As a general term, “neopaganism” covers all those modern movements, which are, firstly, based on the conviction that what Christianity has traditionally denounced as idolatry and superstition actually represents/represented a profound and meaningful religious worldview, and, secondly, that this worldview should be revitalized in our modern world” (Hanegraaff 1998, p. 77). James Lewis and Sarah Pike pointed out that neopaganism

is diverse, decentralized, antiauthoritarian, and personalized (Lewis 1996; Pike 2004). Finally, Murphy Pizza and James Lewis, the editors of the *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism* stressed the fact that today's pagans are "both religious reconstructionists and culture changers, both spiritual innovators and guardians of traditions" and due to all these paradoxical traits, the phenomenon itself is difficult to describe (Pizza and Lewis 2009, p. 3).

The pagan path of the young Transylvanian artist, as indicated by her interviews available online, has three major components: (1) Feminist and wicca discourse: identifying with the Goddess, perceived in a plurality of historical and cultural forms: "I am Andraste, Bendis, sometimes Potnia Theron, maybe a witch, maybe a fairy, I am who I want to be in my creations"²⁶; (2) Ecofeminism expressed in reverence for nature and belief in the sacredness of the earth: happiness is "to see my wood house finishing, near the forest, to have there a horse, a goat, a raven, a wolf-dog and two cats (maybe a man)" and her greatest fear is losing connection with nature and primordial roots of humans" (King 2004); (3) Dwelling on pre-Christian elements in Romanian folklore.

Her pagan stance is eclectic, as described by Strmiska: she selects at will religious ideas, practices, and deities in the pagan past of Europe and combines what she seems to be similar or complementary or what she feels is fit for her pagan spiritual path (Strmiska 2005, p. 18). In doing so, she takes on pseudonyms, a common practice in paganism, shared by many other traditions when a person undertakes a religious commitment (Cowan 2005, p. 25). In her case, the most frequent alias is *Morrigan*, the feared goddess of war and death in Irish mythology, whom she emulates in many of her pagan personas. She also often associates herself with *Madonna Oriente*, a goddess found in medieval Italian imagery and thought to personify the *Moon*.

Further research should take a multidisciplinary approach, which is necessary to investigate her artistic production, its iconography, and symbolism, and possibly to compare it with the artistic output of other pagans in Romania or abroad. This is all the more necessary as lately, she has made herself known in the public sphere almost exclusively through her jewelry in ancient style, "Jewellery for Goddesses", which she claims reflects her inner world²⁷. Moreover, as Adam Anczyk and Joanna Malita-Krol argued, it may also be an inquiry about the boundaries of the term "ritual". Performing music, reading poetry, dancing, and other artistic activities should be taken into consideration as forms of ritualization, even if some of these practices are not concentrated on worship (Anczyk and Malita-Król 2017, p. 17).

The young pagan of Cluj describes herself as a "solitary soul"²⁸. One may say that she expresses what Angela Coco termed "networked individualism", Carol Matthews referred to "solitary practitioners" or, in the words of Kathryn Rountree, participation in the "global cultural flow of ideas" (Coco 2012, pp. 125–38; Matthews 1995; Rountree 2017, p. 6). However, due to her interest in every art form that recreates the ancient world (photography, music, acting, and ancient artifacts), she is part of a network of people with similar concerns; we cannot know how extended or limited this network is and also whether the people belonging to it are engaged in pagan beliefs and rituals or mere admirers of antiquity. Clearly, in following this pagan path, she is highly creative while the majority religion, Orthodox Christianity, is ignored.

As president of TNPD, the pagan young man stands out through sustained internal organizational actions (establishing branches in the great cities of Romania and even the smaller towns, regular convening of the Board of Administrators, publishing its decisions in the *Gazette* of the association available online) and efforts to join European or world pagan federations: Pagan Awareness Network (PAN), Pagan Federation International (PFI), and the European Congress of Ethnic Religions (ECER).

These efforts are not without challenges to his authority, legitimacy, and credibility as leader of the association. In 2018, one of his close collaborators, having been excluded from the association, established his own pagan association by the name of *Societatea Păgână* (The Pagan Society) headquartered in Braşov²⁹; in the same year, the young founder of TNPD attended the discussion forum on the Romanian language section of PFI, but its

administrator rejected his claim to speak on behalf of the pagan community in Romania³⁰. Finally, although he frequently mentions his affiliation with the EHRC, I could not find the name of TNPD among the signatories of the 2023 Declaration of Riga issued by the EHRC³¹.

However, the young pagan and the association he heads are among the signatories of the Xenia Declaration, which was signed by ten other neopagan groups operating in Romania³². Seeking details on them, I was surprised to find that only one is an independent organization, namely Societatea Păgână (The Pagan Society) of Braşov, already mentioned, while the other nine are satellites of the same TNPD³³.

As a result of all the developments briefly described above, the official website of PFI Romania does not mention TNPD among the pagan groups in Romania, which means it either does not acknowledge it as pagan or disagrees with its creeds or its founder's actions. The above-mentioned PFI website does mention, however, The Pagan Society of Braşov, which is the schismatic group breaking away from TNPD. This can be seen as an instance of *Pandora's box*, in the words of Douglas Cowan, who argued that in paganism, where the personal subjective experience has been given the value of personal ontology, there often emerges tension between wishes, dreams, and pagan aspirations (Cowan 2005, p. 49).

Unlike the young woman of Cluj, who travels her pagan path under pseudonyms, the young pagan man keeps his actual name. While the neopagan themes are numerous on the TNPD website and its satellites (the wheel of the year, the religious and liturgical calendar for the current year, and lunar phases), equally visible are New Age themes such as how to open chakras, whose mechanisms are explained by invoking avatar cartoons³⁴.

The relationship between TNPD and Christianity is complex. The association has argued with the Christian Church throughout history, denouncing its fight against ancient paganism, the medieval witch hunt, and the excesses of Christian missionaries against indigenous populations during the modern period. However, this polemic, which is common and natural to pagan discourse (Strmiska 2005, p. 29), is inconsistent in the case of TNPD since today's Roman Catholicism seems to be a model for its founder. Thus, the association he heads imitates the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, being organized into parishes, dioceses, and archdioceses. Moreover, this year (2023), the young man announced that he graduated from the Faculty of Roman-Catholic Theology of the University of Bucharest and introduced himself as a Roman Catholic theologian, although it is not known whether he has defended his bachelor's thesis. Consequently, in seeking models, the young man looks not so much at the past as the present, and the model of the Christian Church seems powerful enough to be followed.

On the contrary, the criticism against the Orthodox Church of Romania, to which the majority of Romanians belong, and its actions and hierarchies are frequent. In this light, selecting November 30 as the *Day of the Pagan Holocaust in Romania* is not coincidental³⁵. According to the tradition of the Romanian Orthodox Church, November 30 is dedicated to the Holy Apostle Andrew, who, as Orthodox Church historians have proved, preached Christianity in Scythia Minor, the territory situated between the Danube River and the Black Sea (today's Romanian province of Dobrogea). Consequently, this has become both a religious feast and a national holiday in Romania.

In our opinion, the founder of "The New Pagan Dawn" confirms the view of Mika Lassander, according to whom individual values inform the various religious and secular standpoints (Lassander 2014, p. XX). Although he is the self-proclaimed continuator of an ancient tradition (and the subtitle of his association is "Tradition and continuity in the work of gods in Romania"), he does not focus on the reconstruction or revival of pre-Christian religions on the territory of today's Romania. Instead, he promotes, theoretically, an eclectic paganism while he is deeply anchored in the social-political and religious realities of Romania.

5. Conclusions

In Romania, neopaganism is being organized and constructing its identity while neopagan voices are increasingly heard in the public sphere. Developments are spectacular

even from one year to the next, while investigating this phenomenon from an interdisciplinary perspective is quasi inexistent. By assembling the information provided by official websites and social networks, we face a difficult puzzle to solve. However, we shall put forth a few general remarks that might provide the conclusion of the present study.

The first remark is that ten years ago, world paganism was attempting to conquer Romania. Even the so-called autochthonous Gebeleizis Society was headquartered in Florida, USA. On the contrary, today, we witness the reverse trend: promoting abroad the pagan paths “made in Romania”. Both the young artist of Cluj and the young founder of TNDP have many posts in English, which, in our opinion, indicates they are seeking international visibility and intend to join global pagan networks. Interestingly, when these pagan voices resounded in the Romanian public arena, the activity of the Romanian-language PFI website was discontinued for unknown reasons.

A second remark: Neopaganism in Romania, as known before, was secretive about the real names of the coordinators, their contact data, and the events underway; all these were known only to those about to become members. Today, the self-declared pagans make public their biographical data or personal contact information (phone, mobile, email, Facebook, and other social networks). However, this transparency does not lead to a better understanding of the belief system they profess or a better knowledge of the communities they founded or belong to (if any). Generally speaking, we do not have any information about the followers’ profile, their age or gender, the tradition they were born into, or the reasons for rejecting their previous religious affiliation³⁶.

A third remark: In the context of the debate around reconstructionism and eclecticism within contemporary paganism in the CEE countries, Michael Strmiska pointed out that reconstructionists “regard older traditions as better established, more authoritative, and more authentic than those that are newly created or vaguely imagined” and that “the Reconstructionist form is therefore most strongly attested in Eastern Europe, where ethnic culture and identity remain important organizing principles of social life and cultural activities” (Strmiska 2005). However, the binomial reconstructionism–eclecticism, so important for the former communist countries, as Strmiska pointed out, is less relevant in Romania’s case.

Very little is known about the gods worshipped by the Dacians and about their religious practices, while protochronism, manifested as *thracomania* and *dacomania*, has been instrumentalized ideologically and politically over the last two centuries. Romanian communist authorities tolerated protochronism and enforced it as an official historical narrative to such an extent that it later caused an opposing phenomenon of rejection and even debunked the myth of the glorious past of the Romanian people. Certainly, as the historian Cătălin Borangic stated, there are many websites reflecting the protochronist trend in Romanian society, most notably www.dacia.org (accessed on 17 October 2023) and www.dacii.ro (accessed on 17 October 2023)³⁷, but they are beyond the scope of the present study.

The neopagan presence in Romania reflects an interesting relationship between neopaganism as a “global religion” and the local context. Therefore, its investigation from various angles should deserve an in-depth study. However, a question arises, as Bakó and Hubbes put it: why would researchers be interested in studying a marginal phenomenon and the fluid community around it, which hardly succeed in defining itself at the intersection between online and offline?

The answer to this question is different and depends on the researcher’s background. For mission studies or for missiology as a theological discipline, outlining the status quo of neopaganism in the Romanian context could be an indispensable tool for further research to take into consideration certain intriguing aspects, such as whether and how pagans interact with the Christian Orthodox majority or their attitude towards various issues and problems of today’s Romanian society. It could further investigate to what extent neopaganism, as manifested in the Romanian context, is one of the many facets of postmodernism and what could be the most appropriate methodological tools to deal with it.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ <https://ro.paganfederation.org/acasa/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ² <http://www.paeen-network.org/morgana-sythove.html> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
<http://www.saddielamort.com/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
https://m.facebook.com/thelemagick/photos/oa.509013759907395/2074428322865921/?_se_imp=2hVRExfObKrbmOU7g (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ³ The Dacian tribes, mentioned by Greek or Latin literary and historical writings, were the northern branch of the great Thracian family, populating the territories between the Aegean Sea and the Danube river. The greatest flourishing of the Dacian civilization spanned the period between the first century B.C and the first century A.D. when some of the Dacian tribes were united by Burebista (82–44 B.C) and then by Decebal (87–106 A.D). The Dacians were conquered in 106 A.D by the Roman Emperor Trajan (98–117 A.D).
- ⁴ <https://forum.paganfederation.org/viewforum.php?f=38> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ⁵ “Doi fotbalisti din nationala (de fotbal a Romaniei) se trateaza la “vrajitoare” / Two football-players of Romania’s national team turn to a healer” (<https://ro.paganfederation.org/uncategorized/doi-fotbalisti-din-nationala-romaniei-se-trateaza-la-vrajitoare>, accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ⁶ <http://romaniancoven.blogspot.com/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/MagyarAsatru.GyP/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/SocietateaPagana/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ⁹ <http://www.gebeleizis.org/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁰ <https://spiritualitadedacoromaneasca.wordpress.com/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹¹ [https://web.facebook.com/M%C3%B3r-r%C3%ADoghain-Laura-Petresc461042164103713/?fref=ts&ref=br_tf](https://web.facebook.com/M%C3%B3r-r%C3%ADoghain-Laura-Petresc461042164103713/?fref=ts&ref=br_tf;);
<https://www.instagram.com/laurapetresc/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹² <https://drunkinagraveyard.com/2016/01/08/dark-ladies-laura-petresc/> (accessed on 27 July 2023). In the interval between the submission of the present manuscript and its review, the site became inactive. The mention of the interview can be found on her personal Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/laurapetresc/> (posted on 9 January 2016).
- ¹³ https://m.facebook.com/romanianrockradio/photos/a.144060358991100/982391605157967/?type=3&locale2=hi_IN (accessed on 27 July 2023). *Ashaena* band, set up in 2006, promotes a music style, that they call “Pagan Introspective Black Metal”, actually a pagan metal with influences from the Romanian tradition and folklore (https://www.facebook.com/Ashaena/?locale=ro_RO, accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁴ <https://actualdecluj.ro/incepe-festival-de-ceramica-la-cluj-vezi-programul/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁵ The film, which premiered at the Festival of Film and History of Râșnov (July, 2018) and then at Sibiu in October 2018, is available on-line with English subtitles on the Facebook page of the artistic production (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pijVBS_fdrE, accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁶ https://www.etsy.com/shop/MadonnnaOriente?ref=mini_mfts_name&listing_id=729903449 (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁷ <https://thenewpagandawn.eu/despre-mnr/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁸ <https://cosminolteanu.eu/despre-mine/> (accessed on 27 July 2023). See the interview of Teodora Munteanu, published in the magazine *Vice Romania* on 25 January 2017, <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/mg9aeb/tanar-roman-din-cult-satanist> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ¹⁹ “The New Pagan Dawn este o organizație culturală și religioasă de reprezentare a comunității păgâne din România, incluzând comunitatea demonolatră, cunoscută sub numele de satanistă” / The New Pagan Dawn is a religious and cultural organization representing the pagan community in Romania, including the devil-worshipping community, known as satanist” (<https://thenewpagandawn.eu/2021/11/26/drept-la-replica-cazul-studentei-upg-care-a-sacrificat-o-pisica/>, accessed on 27 July 2023).
- ²⁰ In this regard, Ronald Hutton stated: “I have never encountered anything remotely resembling Satanism in my entire experience of pagan witches. To do so would, indeed, be something of a conceptual impossibility, as belief in the Devil itself requires a Christian cosmology...” (Hutton 1999, p. 407); Kathryn Rountree reiterates this affirmation when she writes: “I want to emphasize, that I never came across anything remotely akin to satanism or Devil worship during my research” (Rountree 2016, p. 8). Christopher Partridge in his turn stated that: “Paganism should not be understood as synonym for Satanism. For many pagans, such an association is offensive, being understood as one of the many ways Christians have historically sought to demonize indigenous, nature-venerating religions” (Partridge and Melton 2004, p. 269).

- 21 <https://deputat.cosminolteanu.eu/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 22 Bakó and Hubbes 2011; See also László Attila Hubbes, *A Comparative Investigation of Romanian and Hungarian Ethno Pagan Blogs* (<http://semeistos.wordpress.com/projects/neopagans/>, accessed on 27 July 2023); (Hubbes 2012, pp. 259–94).
- 23 For the 2002 census: <https://insse.ro/cms/files/rpl2002rezgen1/rg2002.htm> (accessed on 27 July 2023). <https://www.recensamanromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-demografice/> (accessed on 27 July 2023); for the 2011 census, see the publication of the Institute for Statistics, *Ce ne spune recensământul din 2011 despre religie*, INS, 2013; For the 2022 census, https://www.recensamanromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Date-provizorii-RPL_cu-anexe_30122022.pdf (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 24 Regarding the 2011 census, according to European regulations, citizens were allowed not to declare their religious affiliation. Also, the survey did not address the Romanian citizens with stable residence in Romania but living abroad for more than twelve months for academic, work, or business purposes. Thus, the religious affiliation of 1,259,739 citizens (6.26%) was categorized as information not available. To make matters more complicated, the latest census of 2022 introduced the section “agnostics” and removed the section “not declared”.
- 25 TNPD claims that 14.7% of the Romanian population is pagan. This assertion is based on the questionable premise that all those who declared “another religion”, “no-religion”, “atheist”, “not declared” are pagans and that only the lack of a section entitled as such prompted them to tick one of these options: “It should be noted that the percentage of pagans is obtained from combining the data of people who declared themselves agnostics, without religion or refused to declare religious affiliation due to the lack of options presented by pagan beliefs. According to DEX (Explicative Dictionary of the Romanian Language, n.a) “pagan” is a person who is not Jewish, Muslim, atheist or Christian”. <https://thenewpagandawn.eu/2022/12/31/recensamant-2021-147-din-populatia-din-romania-e-pagana/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 26 <https://www.facebook.com/paganportraits/> (posted on 5 Oct. 2016, accessed on 27 July 2023). (Cusack 2009; Davy 2019).
- 27 “I create pieces which translate my own world. As in ancient times, my creations focus on the depiction of jewelry with heightened symbolic meaning. Not as simply adornment, but as symbols, amulets, and rituals, continuing to show to the people the beauty of ancient art, inspiring myself from it, from nature, stories, magic, animals, gods. Jewelry that have power. Creating jewelry with a historical relevance, I use and I’m still learning the historical techniques of lost wax casting, hand forging, repoussé and chasing. All pieces are designed and produced locally in my grandfather’s studio, in a village in Transylvania. Concept, accessories, outfits, make-up, photos, edits, are done by myself. I am also the model” (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/MadonnaOriente?ref=l2-about-shopname#about> accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 28 <https://drunkinagraveyard.com/2016/01/08/dark-ladies-laura-petresc/> (accessed on 27 July 2023). Currently, inactive website, see note 16
- 29 The Facebook postings of the Pagan Society of Braşov are constant between August 2018 and September 2020 and fall into four broad categories: information articles on the old religions and mythologies, news about the activity of the neopagans in Europe (temple openings, pagan festivals), supporting the LGBTQ community, polemic with TNPD and its founder. These postings were suddenly discontinued when TNPD sued the leader of the Pagan Society (<https://www.facebook.com/SocietateaPagana/>, accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 30 <https://forum.paganfederation.org/viewtopic.php?t=6557> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 31 See <https://thenewpagandawn.eu/2023/07/02/participarea-tnpd-la-ecer2023-si-declaratia-ecer-de-la-riga/> (accessed on 27 July 2023) compared with the EHCR official site https://sites.google.com/view/ecer2023/declaratie?fbclid=IwAR08AGSNO3J60YDXy49u-5Nq0M36_Ptg6lqNTHiShqA0KuwxbeT5jn2bqCs (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 32 <https://www.xeniadecaration.com/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 33 (1) *Asociația ucenicilor întunericului/The Association Disciples of the Darkness of Sibiu* introduces itself on Facebook page as thematic group of TNPD which aims to represent the pagans-satanist cult in Romania; (2) *Comunitatea elevilor politeiști/Community of Polytheist High School Students* which is “a body of The New Pagan Dawn” (posting of 20 April 2023); (3) *Institutul național de cercetare și studii religioase Harapollo/The National Institute for Religious Research and Studies*, <https://thenewpagandawn.eu/seminarii-pagane/> trains future priests and theologians of “The New Pagan Dawn”; (4) *Paganism, esoterism and the Occult*- private group; (5) *The Platform Pagan Acceptance*- postings only in 2015; (6) *Sclipiri de magie/Magic Twinkle-Târgu Mureș*, private group associated to TNPD; (7) *Societatea păgână kemetică/Kemetic Pagan Society-Bacău*, “thematic group of TNPD”, having the same founders as of TNPD; (8) *Societatea wiccana/Wiccan Society-Botoșani*, having the same email address and site as TNPD; (9) *Templul din Cumidava/The Temple of Cumidava*, Braşov- inactive website.
- 34 <https://thenewpagandawn.eu/deschiderea-chackrelor/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 35 <https://thenewpagandawn.eu/holocaustul-pagan/> (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- 36 For the Polish case, see (Anczyk and Malita-Król 2017, p. 17).
- 37 Regarding Romanian protochronism (Borangic 2008, p. 132), see (Tomită 2007).

References

- Aitamurto, Kaarina, and Scott Simpson. 2014. *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movement in Central and Eastern Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Anczyk, Adam, and Joanna Malita-Król. 2017. Between “theological correctness” and everyday life: Contemporary Paganism as lived religion. In *Walking the Old Ways in a Modern World: Contemporary Paganism as Lived Religion*. Edited by Adam Anczyk and Joanna Malita-Król. Katowice: Sacrum Publishing, pp. 7–20.
- Bakó, Rozália Klára, and László Attila Hubbes. 2011. Religious Minorities’ Web Rhetoric: Romanian and Hungarian Ethno-pagan Organizations. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 10: 127–58.
- Borangic, Cătălin. 2008. Fenomenul daco-roman: Promotori și aderenți. *Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studentești* 14: 119–37.
- Coco, Angela. 2012. Pagan Religiousness as ‘networked individualism’. In *Spirituality: Theory, Praxis and Pedagogy*. Edited by Martin Fowler, John D. Martin and John L. Hochheimer. Leiden: Brill, pp. 125–36.
- Cowan, Douglas. 2005. *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cusack, Carole. 2009. The Return of Goddess: Mythology, Witchcraft and Feminist Spirituality. In *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*. Edited by Murphy Pizza and James Lewis. Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 335–62.
- Damian, Constantin Iulian. 2019. (Re)Inventing sacred places in the context of contemporary paganism Stonehenge and Kogaion. *European Journal of Science and Theology* 15: 49–60.
- Davy, Barbara. 2019. *Paganism. Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gheorghe, Manuela. 2018. Neafilierea religioasă în România după 1989. O abordare statistică. *Revista Română de Sociologie* 29: 287–302.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter. 1998. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hubbes, László Attila. 2012. Ritual Deliberations around Mythic Narratives in online ethno-pagan Communities. A Rhetoric analysis of Hungarian Discussion Forums and ad hoc Dialogues formed around specific Ethnos-related pagan topics (myths). In *Argumentor: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Argumentation and Rhetoric*. Edited by Rozália Klára Bakó, Krisztina Bernáth, Éva Biróné Kaszás, Izabella Györgyjakab and Gizela Horváth. Oradea: Partium Press. Debrecen: Debrecen University Press.
- Hutton, Roland. 1999. *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- King, Ursula. 2004. Feminist and Eco-feminist spirituality. In *Encyclopedia of New Religions: New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities*. Edited by Christopher Partridge and Gordon Melton. Oxford: Lion, pp. 379–84.
- Lassander, Mika. 2014. *Post-Materialist Religion: Pagan Identities and Value Change in Modern Europe*. London, New York, New Delhi, Oxford and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Lewis, James. 1996. *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Matthews, Carol. 1995. Neo-paganism and Witchcraft. In *America’s Alternative Religions*. Edited by Timothy Miller. New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 339–35.
- Molteni, Francesco. 2017. Religious Change among Cohorts in Eastern Europe: A Longitudinal Analysis of Religious Practice and Belief in Formerly Communist Countries. *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 10: 35–53. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Mureșan, Radu Petre. 2009. Forme ale neopăgânismului în societatea contemporană. In *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă, “Justinian Patriarhul”*. București: Editura Universității București, nr. 9. pp. 685–709.
- Partridge, Christopher, and Gordon Melton. 2004. *Encyclopedia of New Religions: New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities*. Edited by Christopher Partridge and Gordon Melton. Oxford: Lion.
- Pike, Sarah. 2004. *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pizza, Murphy, and James Lewis, eds. 2009. *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Rountree, Kathryn. 2015. *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Rountree, Kathryn. 2016. *Crafting Contemporary Pagan Identities in a Catholic Society*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rountree, Kathryn. 2017. *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Modern Paganism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Strmiska, Michael. 2005. *Modern Paganism in World Cultures*. Santa Barbara: ABC Clío Inc.
- Strmiska, Michael. 2017. Paganism and Politics: A View from Central-Eastern Europe. *Pomegranate* 19: 166–72. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Tomită, Alexandra. 2007. *O istorie “glorioasă”: Dosarul protocranismului românesc*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească.
- Voicu, Bogdan, and Malina Voicu. 2009. Continuities and Discontinuities in Social Values in Postcommunist Romania. *Studia Universitas Babeș-Bolyai, Sociologia* 54: 161–78.
- Wienc, Piotr. 2014. A Postcolonial Key to understanding Central and Eastern European Neopaganism. In *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movement in Central and Eastern Europe*. Edited by Kaarina Aitamurto and Scott Simpson. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 10–26.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.