

# **Northilization in Central Europe: Examining Czech Vikings<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This study introduces the term Northilization to refer to the utilization and commodification of Northern cultural and regional identity, impacting various sectors such as fashion, media, branding, and cultural tourism. The study examines the Czech Vikings, a unique community that embodies Northilization in Central Europe, focusing on their practices and broader implications for cultural preservation and commodification. Through theoretical frameworks and a case study based primarily on social media research, this study explored how Northern cultural elements are recontextualized in contemporary settings, emphasizing the balance between cultural appreciation and appropriation.

**Keywords:** Contemporary paganism, Czech Vikings, Cultural appropriation, Commodification, Northilization, Online ethnography.

## **Introduction**

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As a concept, Northilization involves leveraging the cultural and regional identity of the North, including commercial, aesthetic, and symbolic purposes. It retells stories about the origins, uses, geographies, and symbolic meanings of Northern elements, often reshaping their original context for a broader appeal. This recontextualization is evident in modern consumption, influencing fashion, media, branding, and cultural tourism (Dmitriev, 2002). This study focuses on the Czech Vikings, a unique community that elucidates the multifaceted nature of Northilization to comprehensively understand this phenomenon.

The concept of Northilization is represented in various media formats and cultural productions, with digital platforms significantly disseminating and recontextualizing Northern cultural elements. This study expands on the impact of Northilization on contemporary new media representations, cultural production, and consumption using specific examples from popular culture, social media, and other digital media forms to illustrate its relevance and application.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

The Brand Prism Model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how brands utilize cultural elements to create strong identities and connect with consumers (Kapferer, 2008, p. 182-183). This model comprises six facets: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image. These facets help brands convey their value, ethos, and cultural affiliations to consumers. For instance, using Northern elements, such as Nordic design and folklore, in branding can enhance a

brand's cultural depth and appeal, aligning it with purity, craftsmanship, and heritage.

Integrating theoretical perspectives from media and cultural studies also enhances the understanding of Northilization. Media representation theory emphasizes how media reflects and shapes societal perceptions by constructing reality by selectively portraying events, cultures, and identities (Hall, 1997). This theory reveals how Northern cultural elements influence public perceptions and reinforce certain stereotypes or ideologies in contemporary media. For instance, the romanticized depiction of Viking imagery in films and advertisements often highlights themes of adventure, resilience, and purity, which may simultaneously commodify these elements while perpetuating a simplified and exoticized view of Northern cultures. Such representations can both valorize and trivialize Northern cultural heritage, necessitating a nuanced analysis of their impact on cultural identity and preservation.

Cultural hybridity explores the blending and interaction of different cultural elements in globalization, leading to new hybrid forms of cultural expression (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996). This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how Northern cultural symbols are recontextualized in diverse cultural settings, such as the Czech Vikings' adaptation of Norse heritage.

The notion of global cultural flows further elucidates how media and cultural products traverse boundaries and influence local cultures in dynamic exchanges (Appadurai, 1996). Through their digital presence and participation in contemporary pagan networks, the Czech Vikings

exemplify how Northern cultural elements are not merely passively received but are actively interpreted and reimagined within new cultural contexts. This interplay of global and local adaptations underscores the complex cultural negotiation and transformation process inherent in Northilization.

### **Cultural Appropriation and Appreciation**

Cultural appropriation involves using elements from one culture in another, often without permission or understanding. It is typically performed for profit or aesthetic value, leading to exploitation and misrepresentation of the original culture. For example, non-indigenous designers using indigenous designs in fashion often raise ethical concerns regarding respect and authenticity (Young, 2010).

In the context of Northilization, cultural appropriation is evident in how Northern symbols, designs, and traditions are repurposed for commercial use without proper acknowledgment or respect for their origins. Examples include the widespread commercial use of Viking imagery and runes in fashion and merchandise without engaging with or compensating the communities from which these symbols originate.

Contrastingly, cultural appreciation involves respectful engagement with and acknowledgment of another culture, often through collaboration and proper attribution. This approach aims to honor and elevate original cultural elements and foster mutual respect and understanding (Matthes, 2016).

## **The Enduring Power of Mythology**

The Vikings have become a myth, and it has been rightly noted that “the Viking raids continue today, but the target of attack is popular culture” (Dennis, 2024). Countless reflections have been made on the origin and meaning of myths. Following Dennis (2024), this study tries to understand the reason for the resilience of the Viking myth. For example, Guerber (1893) believed that myths explain timeless inquiries and guide successive generations. They frequently employ captivating narratives, mystical entities, and imaginative settings to elucidate natural occurrences and inexplicable events. These creations possess deep symbolism and evoke strong emotions, drawing influence from fairy tales or myths. Mythological symbols are not deliberately created but arise naturally from the human mind. The genuineness and long-lasting influence of mythical symbols reflect intrinsic human nature and embody essential elements of human existence.

Malinowski’s functionalist perspective remains influential, with his studies dedicated to myths. In a study in 1926, he posited that mythical ideas are practical and useful for the evolution of human culture, influencing multiple facets of their members’ lives, including moral behavior, social institutions, religious rituals, and everyday activities. Mythology unites the past and the present, ancient and modern, and spans many historical periods, social classes, and cultural traditions.

Myths include inherent flexibility and adaptability, assuming different forms, being understood in diverse ways, and encompassing multiple layers of meanings and connotations. They document historical

events and ancient customs, promote ethical principles and convictions, and establish a framework of cultural belief systems that provide significance to existence (Campbell, 1972). Mythology is a compelling force that unites diverse cultures, beliefs, values, traditions, and nations to impart a partial response to exemplify the significance and objective of existence. We also agree with Lévi-Strauss (1978) that myths essentially are complex frameworks of thinking that enable civilization to investigate and clarify essential elements of reality.

Even if myths are no longer powerful in today's society, they still define the standards by which humanity should live and lay the groundwork for how various civilizations are organized (Campbell, 1972). Myths list the real purposes of the supernatural; they release or initiate supernatural activities when portrayed or re-enacted. Ancient myths are greatly altered when translated from one era and society into another, specifically by writers who let their mythopoeic imagination fit the characters and literary styles of the era.

Mythological fiction is, essentially, a literary work that borrows or modifies themes and motifs found in myths, legends, fairy tales, and folktales. In contrast, historical fiction fictionalizes historical events using fictional characters and subplots. Popular culture in mythological and historical fiction is dominated by these themes. Mythology has been made real and recorded throughout history, and contemporary empire builders have shaped and influenced events through its use. The interpretation and belief in myths and history have sparked many debates. If it is indeed true that the past influences the present, it is also true that the past, or at

least the vision of the past, is altered by the present (see Eliot, 1919). Every nation's cultural and religious consciousness represents contemporary myths. Popular culture's depictions of myths and history contribute to a country's legacy by interpreting culture and offering stimulating and instructive forums for group discussion. Mythology indeed serves as a multifaceted conduit by explaining, guiding, and bridging time, culture, and belief systems. By weaving together diverse narratives, myths create a rich tapestry of shared human experiences, influencing literature and entertainment and shaping social norms, ethical standards, and cultural identity. Our exploration of the "Czech Vikings" aims to unravel their identity and illuminate their nuanced interactions with media expressions, both regarding passive consumption and active engagement.

### **Methodology: Integrated Framework for Visual Social Research**

This study employed the integrated framework for visual social research to study Northilization and its implications. This framework combines multiple analytical approaches, including content analysis, semiotic analysis, netnographic and ethnographic methods, to provide a holistic view of how visual representations influence and reflect cultural practices (Rose, 2016). Using this framework, researchers can analyze visual media such as advertisements, travel brochures, and social media posts that depict Northern elements. Content analysis quantifies the prevalence of certain themes and images, whereas semiotic analysis reveals deeper symbolic meanings. Netnographic and ethnographic methods, including

participant observations, provide insights into how individuals perceive and engage with these representations. Offline interviews, collected in a Czech-language master's thesis carried out at the University of Finance and Administration in Prague (Vlková, 2024), provide additional elements to the qualitative research that complete the knowledge framework on the Czech Vikings.

### **A Case Study: The Czech Vikings offline and online**

The phenomenon of Czech Vikings emerged following the creation of the Facebook page *Čeští vikingové*/Czech Vikings in May 2016. Vikingomania in the Czech Republic was found to revive ethnic religions that swept the country, similar to many other European nations, in the late 1990s. In 1999, a civil association called *Heathen Hearts from Boiohaemum* was officially registered. Although religious in nature, with rituals akin to other European groups of Heathenry or Contemporary Germanic Paganism, Czech laws at the time prevented its registration as a religious association.<sup>1</sup>

Virtual communities on the Internet, especially with the development of Facebook in the early 21st century, have significantly boosted interest in pre-Christian religions. More people began participating in rites organized to celebrate solar cycles in the Czech woods. The digital shift from printed brochures and leaflets increased participants and disintegrated the first large neopagan organizations born at the end of the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the success of live action role-play (LARP) in the Czech Republic starting from the mid-90s



significantly influenced the emergence of Czech Vikings and the cultural landscape of the Czech Republic similar to Western Europe, the United States, and Australia (Tychsen et al., 2006).

The third element in the genesis of the Czech Vikings was formed by those who love the living history of ancient Germanic and Viking costumes. Living history can be traced back to the Scandinavian open-air folk museums, starting as early as the 19th century (Dean, 2019). In the Czech Republic, building open-air folk museums is archaic and cherished, similar to the tradition of organizing parades in period costumes or battle re-enactments.

The community of the Czech Vikings has further expanded to organize and participate in events such as historical re-enactments, market visits, and educational workshops to revive and celebrate Norse heritage and adapt to contemporary cultural contexts. The re-enactments provide an immersive experience of Viking life, crafts, and combat (Myslič, 2015). Such events illustrate the dynamic nature of Northilization, in which historical and cultural elements are actively engaged with and reimagined for modern purposes.

The shift within living history toward Northilization was well-described by the respondent Nikola:

*When I joined a fencing group, I started working similarly to the 14th century, which I didn't enjoy because women were relegated to roles like fetching, holding, dressing, and cooking. Over time, I moved to another group where women had the right to fight and*

*were on equal footing with men, and that's how I became interested in Viking culture.* (Vlková, 2024, p. 62)

The community of Czech Vikings often sees religious and mythological aspects as important but not decisive for the cultural alignment of the individuals. For example, for respondent Ondřej, *"At the beginning, it was mythology as such, and later, the way of life of people in Viking culture. I was particularly interested in their way of life, social roles, and rights"* (Vlková, 2024, p. 61). Respondent Katka was even more open-minded, observing just a faint boundary between mythology transmitted by books and the new mythologies created by TV series: *"The mythology and maybe even the cinematic depiction of the Vikings, although I know it is historically inaccurate, has considerable room for improvement regarding historical accuracy"* (Vlková, 2024, p. 61).

From the perspective of first-generation Contemporary Czech Pagans, the Czech Vikings from living history are *"too attached to details."* This observation was supported by a respondent, Lukáš when asked why he loves the Viking world so much:

*I like the interconnectedness of cultures through mythology. I'm also interested in history and archaeological finds, specifically swords and weapons from the Viking era. Precise information such as the balance ratio of the sword, the place of their discovery, and the manufacturing process are important. All these factors play a role for me, as I focus on working with metals and specialize in replicas of swords and all metal objects from the Viking era.*

(Vlková, 2024, p. 61)

In everyday life, some elements are preferred over others, even if they are more of an internal sensation than accurate philological research. Respondent Katka stated,

*My interest probably isn't strictly based on historical accuracy; there's still much I don't know about the Vikings. However, I dress in period clothing, learn the runic script, and possess a few household items that I use daily. For example, my drinking horn serves as my favorite cold beverage mug during the day. (Vlková, 2024, p. 61)*

The community of Czech Vikings revisited the world of Norsemen, evoking Viking heritage with individual and collective emotions and fantasies through gatherings, clothing worn on those occasions, and objects kept at home, such as the drinking horn. Emotional experiences can also be gained through both analog and digital media. Viking and pseudo-Viking themes are offered using TV series, books (especially those translated into Czech), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok pages, educational documentaries on YouTube or other podcast platforms such as Spotify, lyrics of some black metal bands, and video games (Skjoldli, forthcoming).

The digital platform Facebook, favored by most Czech Vikings, is not only a place for exchanging opinions but also for clashes, especially within generations X and Y, as observed during their gatherings.<sup>3</sup> Several Czech Facebook groups are dedicated to the Vikings and Norsemen. Three groups have over two thousand members: “*Vikingové*,” “*Vikingové cz*,” and “*Čeští vikingové-Czech Vikings*”. The most active group, where

discussions revolve around both the culture and spirituality of the Northern people, is called "*Runy, pohanství a germanská magie*" ("Runes, Paganism, and Germanic Magic"), and boasts an impressive 19.3 thousand members. The group reflects its openness not only to Heathenism but also to other non-Christian spiritual practices. While the group's eclecticism occasionally borders New Age spirituality, it is not as openly embraced as other forms of non-monotheistic spirituality.

A thematic analysis conducted on the major Facebook groups where the Czech Vikings are active reveals the following interests.

- *Bibliographic Interests*: The recommended books predominantly appear in Czech literature and cover wide-ranging topics from pre- and non-Christian spiritualities to medieval bestiaries, demonological treatises, and modern witchcraft. These discussions even mention the timeless work of Carlos Castaneda.

- *Standing stones*. Photos collected in the Czech Republic or abroad by travelers are shared among groups.

- *Archaeological Objects*. Various archaeological objects from diverse cultures have caught the attention of active moderators and participants in the discussion group.

- *Festivals*. Invitations and descriptions of festivities organized by contemporary Czech pagan communities.

- *Goddess Images*. Numerous images depict fertility goddesses from various cultures worldwide, focusing on Norse traditions.

- *Living History Images*. Followers of living histories share photographs and descriptions of their gatherings on Facebook.

- *Self-Irony*. The Czech Vikings are not shy from self-irony. They have also coined the neologism “Švejking,” combining Švejk (a burlesque character created by Czech writer Jaroslav Hašek in the 1920s) with the “Viking.”

Notably, “Czech Vikings,” particularly males, depart from their Hollywood hero archetype that often influences contemporary male “Norse Vikings.” Instead, according to Danish scholar Thykier Makeeff (2024), the prevailing model in Scandinavian countries emphasizes a “Peak male physique”—a masculine body presented almost as a monument (Figure 1). This aesthetic draws inspiration from Renaissance beauty ideals and incorporates elements of “Beefcake eroticism” (Thykier Makeeff, 2023).

Interestingly, the Czech stereotype of masculine Vikings shares some commonalities with the Norse model, including a wolf-like aspect and alpha characteristics. However, the self-images of (male) Czech Vikings diverge openly from the ideal muscular Hollywood actor. Rather than monuments, they are humorously referred to as “Lardcakes”.

### **Becoming a “Czech Viking”: Literary Sources and Cultural Impact**

The distinction between Norsemen, referring to the bearers of pre-Christian Germanic culture in northern Europe, and Vikings, associated with Norse warriors, resonates primarily with those deeply engaged in medieval Scandinavian culture in the Czech Republic. Key literary sources, including the Eddas, skaldic poetry, sagas, chronicles, myths, folklore, and legends, continue to engage Czech readers across generations.

The Poetic and Prose Edda are highly respected. However, specifically, older participants with the Norse past remember that they were produced in a Christian context and, therefore, view them with a certain amount of criticism. The Poetic Edda believed to be derived from the Eddic poem *Rigsbula*, is widely regarded as the primary and most extensive repository of Norse mythology. The understanding and interpretation of runic characters represented in the natural hierarchy of “Czech Vikings” groups and subgroups hold undoubted prestige.

As Vikings significantly affect the history of Early Medieval Europe, the history and mythology of Norsemen have become widely popularized in contemporary culture through historical novels, television series, and video games. Works of historical fiction, such as Frans G. Bengtsson’s *The Long Ships* and Jane Smiley’s *The Greenlanders*, impacted modern works such as Giles Kristian’s *Raven Saga* and Bernard Cornwell’s *The Last Kingdom* series. All these respectable literary products, accompanied by countless film and television reductions, have since converged in the Canadian-Irish television series *Vikings*. Although criticized for its “anachronisms,” this series is appreciated for its sensitivity to oral cultures and pre-Christian European spirituality. For this reason, *Vikings* can be called an “innovative” media work (Tromans, 2015) that openly respects Norse religiosity and inspires various contemporary aesthetic fashions, such as tattoos alongside the head (Taylor, 2019).

Viking stories are characterized by their ferocity with severe and ruthless gods and goddesses, illustrating the concept of gods engaging in constant warfare against a backdrop of violent wars. The contemporary

image of the Vikings in the Western world since the mid-1960s is influenced by Marvel comics and the subsequent media franchise—The Marvel Cinematic Universe. It centered around Norse mythology and captivated at least four generations of audiences. Marvel comics, introduced by Stan Lee in 1962, showcased Thor as the protagonist and Loki as the antagonist. Marvel comics significantly influenced Neil Gaiman, who acknowledges their crucial role in acquainting him with Northern mythology. During his childhood, Gaiman became familiarized with Asgard and its residents through the exploits of Mighty Thor, a blonde hero who wields a hammer, as portrayed in Marvel comics by Jack Kirby. These aesthetic experiences were acquired primarily in the 1970s. In his major books (Gaiman, 2017; Gaiman and Craig Russel, 2021-2023), Gaiman depicts the Northern lands as a cold region with lengthy winter nights and perpetual summer days. Many natural features of Scandinavia, including lakes, fjords, forests, mountains, and wind, have served as rich sources of inspiration for iconic Northern mythological creatures and legendary narratives. Gaiman's way of explaining ancient myths brought contemporary audiences closer to the world of Norsemen, with all the subjective and aesthetic interpretations. In the Gaiman model, the ongoing relevance of Norse mythology lies in the concept of Ragnarök, which bestows a tragic element on gods, frost giants, and other characters, transforming them into heroes and villains. Ragnarök has introduced a timeless aspect into the Norse realm, creating a peculiar sense of being current and relevant (Gaiman, 2017).

Although Gaiman and the early Marvel Comics are not particularly

known to the Czech public or even to the “Czech Vikings,” the products of the Marvel Cinematic Universe are well-known and have contributed to creating the contemporary Viking Model.

An alternative to contemporary narratives about Norsemen is Rick Riordan’s *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* trilogy, published from 2015 to 2017. These novels depict more nuanced main deities, providing greater complexity and reducing simplistic portrayals. Loki is perceived as immensely bright but less malevolent and more inclined toward mischief, engaging in the act of playing practical pranks on the gods. Thor is portrayed as a comedic character with limited intelligence. *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* trilogy can influence the “Czech Vikings” given the publishing success of the Czech translation (Riordan, 2016-2018).

While Riordan influences the aesthetics of the younger generations who are fascinated with Norse mythology, Millennials in Central Europe remember Andrzej Sapkowski’s *Witcher*, a fantasy short story series of Central European and Slavic provenance that has also been successful with American publishing and television production houses (Warnke, 2019) by creating popular and culturally influential global products for Western audiences.

### **Fascination with Northern Animals**

Fascination with Northern animals, especially sled dogs, extends far beyond the Arctic regions where mushing is a traditional practice. Before the establishment of *Heathen Hearts from Boiohaemum*, the first



organized community of contemporary Germanic pagans was named *Fraternitas Ulfar* (The Brotherhood of the Wolves). Some original brotherhood members were still active after over a quarter century and gathered in a small community called *Brothrus wulfe* (The Brotherhood of the Wolf). According to them,

*"The foundation is a belief in the Wolf Gods; our ideal is the wolf pack. We constantly reflect this ideal in our lifestyle. It guides us in family and interpersonal relationships, shaping our attitude toward ourselves, nature, the present, and the future. In practice, this means a strong bond with family and other pack members, closely intertwined lives with our dogs, wild and joyful children, a love for movement, and adaptability. We are cautious but eternally curious, always exploring new territories. We revere strength, health, courage, and intelligence and not ashamed of it. (Bratrstvo vlků, 2024)*

This phenomenon is a part of Northilization and reflects broader cultural engagement with the North. Sled dogs have captivated people's imaginations globally, particularly in regions where mushing is not historically rooted. The allure of sled dogs can be attributed to their representation of the wilderness, adventure, and resilience. These animals are often seen as symbols of the untamed North, embodying the spirit of endurance and a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.

This fascination is evident in the rising popularity of Arctic safaris and dog sledding experiences in non-Arctic countries. Tourists seek these

experiences for the thrill of adventure and the unique opportunity to connect with Northern wildlife. Studying this fascination and its implications can be framed within an integrated framework for visual-social research. This framework comprehensively analyzes visual data, integrating various methods to explore how visual representations of sled dogs and Arctic safaris commodify and appreciate Northern cultures (Rose, 2016).<sup>4</sup>

### **Shamanism and Psychotherapy in the Context of Northilization**

Connecting ancient shamanic practices with modern psychotherapy deepens our understanding of Northilization. Kets de Vries (2014) compares the roles of shamans, therapists, and coaches in healing, focusing on “soul retrieval” and “self-retrieval” to restore wholeness. This holistic perspective aligns with Northilization, integrating traditional cultural elements into contemporary contexts to maintain cultural identity.

Shamanism, one of the oldest healing practices, mediates between the physical and spiritual worlds, often through altered states of consciousness. Restoring balance reflects the modern therapeutic practices aimed at promoting psychological healing. In Northilization, the parallels between Shamanism and psychotherapy show how ancient practices can be adapted into modern frameworks, impacting fashion, media, branding, and cultural tourism. By incorporating Shamanism, contemporary therapy has become a holistic and culturally resonant method.

Soul retrieval in Shamanism, where lost parts of the soul are retrieved to restore wholeness, is similar to psychotherapy's focus on self-retrieval, aimed at healing psychological wounds and restoring identity. This act resonates with Northilization's goal of reconnecting modern individuals with their traditional identities and practices. Integrating shamanistic elements into psychotherapy reflects cultural appreciation within Northilization, honoring Northern cultural heritage.

Secular societies, such as the Czech Republic, where inherited cosmological frameworks are lacking, often search for meaning and value. Shamanism and its modern equivalents guide and connect with Northilization's principles of integrating traditional cultural elements to foster identity and continuity. This is evident in developing contemporary Czech paganism, where figures in the wolf cult scene were considered shamans despite not fully subscribing to them (Maiello and Velkoborská, 2021).

### **Deep Ecology and Northilization**

Deep ecology, a philosophical perspective that promotes the inherent worth of all living beings, regardless of their utility to human needs, intersects significantly with Northilization. This ecological worldview deeply connects with nature, advocating for an ethical relationship between humans and the natural world (Reilly, 2017). Deep ecology aligns with shamanistic practices that view the natural world as imbued with spirit and interconnectedness, reflecting a holistic approach to life.

In contemporary contexts, the principles of deep ecology are evident in the practices of mushers and other Northern traditions that emphasize harmony with nature. These practices foster profound respect for the environment and the beings within it, reflecting the values of empathy and mutual respect central to both Shamanism and deep ecology. By integrating these ecological perspectives, Northilization preserves cultural traditions and promotes sustainable and ethical interactions with the natural world.

## **Conclusion**

The results reveal that various domains, from fashion to architecture, leverage Northilization to boost their appeal during marketing campaigns. The new media also widely disseminates Northern cultural symbols and narratives, contributing to their commodification and recontextualization.

The commodification of the North is idealized as a region of fairy-tale magic, high quality, minimalism, pure design, stability, and genuine logos. Brands leverage these associations to boost their appeal, which is evident in marketing campaigns that emphasize North's pristine landscapes, innovative design, and cultural richness (Walton, 2023). The global interconnectedness facilitated by the Internet widely disseminates Northern cultural symbols and narratives, contributing to their commodification and recontextualization.

This study only focused on a specific case study. Future studies may employ other analytical frameworks, specifically quantitative analysis, to

provide a broader perspective of the topic. However, it can already be stated that Northilization encompasses a complex interplay between cultural preservation, commodification, and appreciation. By examining case studies and theoretical frameworks, we can better understand the implications of Northern cultural elements in contemporary contexts. The Czech Vikings exemplify this intricate balance between maintaining cultural integrity and engaging in modernity in Central Europe. As Northilization continues to evolve, fostering respectful collaboration and acknowledgment is crucial to ensure that cultural heritage is preserved and celebrated while adapting to contemporary needs and market dynamics.

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<sup>111</sup>Pavel Horák (2024) collected fragmentary information on contemporary Czech paganism. Early activities of heathen and Slavic groups in the Czech Republic come from Giuseppe Maiello and an informant named Stargard, both active participants during the post-1989 religious innovations in Central-Eastern Europe (see Ališauskienė, 2017).

<sup>222</sup>Heathen Hearts from Boiohaemum gathered the first Germanic contemporary pagans, while Slavic pagans formed Rodná víra (Native faith). To know about the decline of Rodná víra, see Maiello (2018). Memories of the founder of Heathen Hearts from Boiohaemum are published only in Czech (Miki, 2015; Horák, 2024).

<sup>333</sup>In 2021, 2764 Czech inhabitants were identified as pagan during the national census, though this number may not fully represent the contemporary pagan population influenced by new digital media. Additionally, 189 citizens chose 'druidism,' and 42 others selected 'animism' (Czech Statistical Office [CSO], 2021).

<sup>444</sup>The projection of Northern animals in popular culture often parallels the Wild West, symbolizing an untamed wilderness and rugged individualism. Jack London's literature, particularly *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, set in the harsh landscapes of the Yukon and Alaska, crucially shape this imagery by highlighting the themes of survival, adventure, and the primal connection between humans and animals. Depicting the North as a place of both danger and opportunity has influenced generations of readers, fostering a romanticized view of the Arctic and its inhabitants (London, 1903). This literary tradition aligns with the broader cultural phenomenon of Northilization, idealizing the North as a realm of purity, adventure, and resilience. The enduring popularity of London's works underscores the appeal of Northern narratives and their role in shaping perceptions of the Arctic as a symbolically rich and exotic "Other" place. These themes continue to resonate in contemporary media and tourism, where the allure of distant and pristine landscapes encourages people to seek authentic and transformative experiences.