

## **Are Wooden Pixels More Pagan Than Plastic Pixels? The Case of the Światowid Idol.**

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In this paper it is our aim to follow the contemporary reproduction of an image of an early-medieval Slavic deity, popularly known as Światowid. Although the image was first reported in the record as a ‘simple’ religious icon used in public ritual practice, its use in modern Polish culture has frequently brought the image to new contexts and new types of meaning, such as a ‘work of art’ or a ‘national symbol.’ Furthermore, the image has appeared in a variety of media, beginning with stone and wood, then in engravings and photographs, and most recently in pixels disseminated via the Internet. During this process of reproduction, many details of the image can be seen to change, but at the same time, we note that other details are conservatively retained, sometimes even struggling against the nature of the medium in which it is found, leading us to use the paradoxical phrase ‘wooden pixels’ in describing use of the image on the Internet.

### **1. Three ‘original’ Światowids and their execution.**

The vast bulk of the indigenous Slavic religion that existed in what is today Poland was effectively wiped out by Christianity, leaving very little behind on which to base a reconstruction. The process began circa 880 AD with the forced conversion of a Pagan prince ‘on the Vistula’ and effectively ended in 1168 with the violent destruction of the last major center of organized Slavic religious activity at Arkona. Wooden idols were often burnt and stone idols were broken up or sunk in bodies of water.

The three ‘original’ religious icons of the pagan deity Światowid (described below) inspire most contemporary reproductions. They were executed in different techniques and one of those is only known to us through a textual description of a lost original. In fact, up until the mid-19th century, all such reconstructions were based on the textual descriptions of medieval Christian chroniclers who were in no way sympathetic to the religions that they were trying to eradicate.

### **The statue of Światowid in the temple at Arkona – textual description of a lost wooden figure decorated with metal**

One such Chronicler was Saxo Grammaticus, a well-educated Danish writer who lived at the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries. His Latin work *Gesta Danorum* covers a broad range of Danish history in 16 books, from ancient legends to recent events that Saxo himself may have witnessed firsthand. One such event was the Viking raid in 1168 that the Christian King Waldemar I successfully launched on the Slavic island of Rugen (now part of Germany) in the Baltic Sea, gaining both a profitable pile of loot and a striking a blow against the heathen religion of its inhabitants. In particular, Saxo describes the temple and idol of a local god at Arkona who was named ‘Svantovitus’ in his text (rendered Światowid or Świetowit in modern Polish), recording both its pristine condition and the desecration and destruction that Waldemar’s Christian troops visited upon it. The idol itself is lost, but Saxo’s deathbed portrait remains:

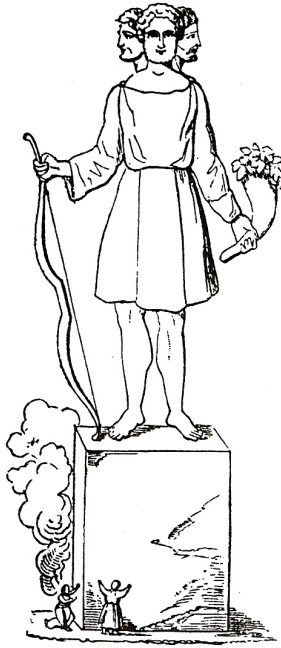
The temple has an enormous statue, the size of which exceeds the height of any man, causing amazement with its four heads and just as many necks, two seeming to look over the breast, and the same number over the back. Moreover, regardless of whether you positioned yourself in front or in back, to the right or to the left, its gaze seemed to be upon you. Its beards were combed and its hair was shorn in a form such that the diligent craftsman showed the hairstyle of the men of Rugen. In the right hand, a horn of various precious metals was held, into which an experienced holy priest was

accustomed each year to pour wine and from this liquid to foresee the abundance of the coming year. The left arm was bent back to the flank in the shape of an arch. Its tunic reached to the shins, devised, through the use of various woods, such as to hide the joint with the knee, so that it could only be discovered with diligent study. The legs seemed to touch the ground, its base was sunk hidden in the ground. Not far from the statue lay a bridle and saddle and other insignia of divinity to be seen<sup>i</sup>.

Only after a couple of pages of description of the rites associated with this statue does Saxo reveal the figure's name: Svantovitus<sup>ii</sup>. This textual portrait is the 'original' which gives us the name of the deity, whose Slavic form is most commonly reconstructed in Polish as either *Świętowit* or *Światowid*. And, up until the mid-19th century, this was the only four-headed portrait of Światowid known to historians.

Saxo leaves out many detail which we wish to know. He tells us that 'various woods' were used to hide a joint, which raises the possibility that some decoration elsewhere on the figure (for example, the tunic above the joint) may have been executed in an intentional intarsia of contrasting woods. A slightly later Chronicle confirms the fact that the statue was made (at least mostly) of wood by telling us that the statue was chopped up and burnt by the Christians. We also know that at least the horn was executed in metal, so there is also room to speculate that other details may have been gilded or adorned with metal ornaments, a technique known, for example, in descriptions of roughly contemporary idols at Kiev where Perun had a golden mustache. Lastly, Saxo does not describe the color of the idol, although we know that many other Slavic idols were painted in strong colors like red and black.

Vollmer's *Wörterbuch*, first printed in 1835 before significant authentic archaeological finds were unearthed, contains a drawn illustration based solely on Saxo's text. The artist has taken Saxo's phrase "*Laeva arcum reflexo in latus brachio figurabat*" to mean that he holds a reflex bow in his left hand (as seen by the viewer, not the statue's left hand). The scale of the statue is also staggering – 'larger than a man' of course, but judging by the tiny figures abasing



themselves at the base, the idol would be around 14 meters from floor to heads, which while not impossible, is distinctly improbable for a wooden statue in that time and place (and wouldn't fit inside what we know today about the historical temple at Arkona).

Early image based on Saxo's description in: Vollmer's *Wörterbuch*, 1835

### **The monument found in the Zbrucz river – painted limestone**

In 1848, workers dredging the river Zbrucz near Liczkowic in what was then Austrian Galicia (and is now western Ukraine) discovered a four-sided limestone figure 2.57 metres tall.

When found, some traces of red paint were still visible. The bas-relief carvings are clearly divided into three levels from top to bottom. The topmost level shows what appears to be a four-faced being or beings. The 'front' face depicts a figure with a horn in its right hand and its left hand crooked at an angle. The figure was brought by the workers to the local aristocrat and amateur antiquarian, Count Mieczysław Potocki, who seems to have been the first person to declare it to be an image of Światowid who was worshipped at Arkona, and under this name it was sent to Krakow (in what is now Poland) where it was displayed to enthusiastic crowds. The identification of this figure with Saxo's Światowid has stuck in the popular imagination, and schoolchildren across Poland know the figure as the 'Światowid of Zbrucz'. Furthermore, after the Zbrucz discovery, few artists have been able to imagine Saxo's Światowid without betraying the influence of this figure. (see section 3, below)



The original Zbrucz monument (9th c.) in its current context in the Archeological Museum in Krakow, Poland



A graphic depiction of the Zbrucz monument (1855)

Not all historians and archaeologists have been as enthusiastic about this assumption of identity. The figure has one neck, with a four-faced head, topped by a single cap. Rather than Saxo's two arms, this figure has eight in the top level. In addition to the figure with the horn, we have a figure outfitted with a sword and horse, both of which were associated with Światowid. However, the remaining two sides show a figure with a ring and a figure with no attributes which are harder to place. Furthermore, the idol has two more levels that are even less reminiscent of Saxo's description. The middle level contains four small figures (and a faint fifth), frequently interpreted as the mortal human worshippers in a world below that of the gods above. The bottom level might be a kind of underworld, showing a three-headed figure (with two arms and two legs). Although it is not visible to the naked eye, laboratory

study of the figure revealed that a six-spoked wheel was painted on the uncarved panel at the bottom back.

### **‘Światowid from Wolin’ – yew carving**



Carved yew figure found in Wolin (9th. c.)

The so-called ‘Światowid from Wolin’ belongs to a rather different order of idols, perhaps best seen as a talisman. It was discovered in an archaeological dig in 1974 in Wolin in northeast Poland (relatively close to the site of the Arkona temple when compared with the distant Zbrucz site). The figure itself is very small: 9.3cm in length, carved from yew, showing four stylized faces at one end, with a rounded ‘handle’ at the other (Filipowiak, 1993, p.29).

There is no sign of a horn or of a crooked arm, but the ‘handle’ area is marked with vague hatchings which may represent more detailed carvings on some larger original. It was found in what appeared to be a rather ordinary wooden residence of the 10th century, possibly having been accidentally trampled underfoot during the destruction

of the building in a fire. Its small size and simple craftsmanship make it unlikely that this was an icon worshipped by a large community. It may have functioned in a simple household shrine or as a personal talisman carried by its owner.

Although dated to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, there is reason to believe that the ‘Światowid of Wolin’ is already a sort of reproduction of some other religious sculpture. The local deity of Wolin seems to have had only one head, so it is possible that this figure was brought back by its owner from a visit (or pilgrimage) to a shrine elsewhere (perhaps the temple at Arkona described by Saxo), in very much the same way that a modern Polish Roman Catholic pilgrim

to the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa is likely to purchase a small reproduction in the nearby gift shop and bring it back to their home to be placed in an honored position, both to remind the owner of the deity, but also to display the fact of the pilgrimage to any visitors to the house.<sup>iii</sup>

## **2. Deity – Idol – Likeness**

We do not know much about what the Pre-Christian Slavs themselves believed about their religious idols. The Christian chroniclers describe a few temples, rites and idols, but emphasise that they were meaningless, primitive and without real power. It would have been counterproductive to their missionary programme to write about sincere religious feelings or refined theological ideas. However, comparison with related Indo-European religions suggests that more than one explanation for the meaning and power of idols could live side-by-side in harmony and that the basic list of such explanations is relatively simple and short, in spite of many subtle variations:

1. The idol of a god is identical with the deity itself
2. The idols of the gods are inhabited by at least a part of the gods themselves at least some of the time.
3. The idols of the gods are inhabited by lieutenant spirits of the gods which they represent.
4. The idols of the gods act as privileged conduits to the gods' attention.
5. The idols of the gods are representations of the gods which bring human attention to the gods (who are not necessarily more present in the idol than anywhere else)

One of the last Pagan philosophers, Porphyry, had to defend his faith against both its own collapse into ossified superstition and against stiff competition from the new Christian

paradigm. He took it for granted that the gods exist and are able to appear to humans in visible forms when they wish to do so. Therefore, it is possible to create a likeness or 'portrait' of those forms (which need not be the *only* forms the deity might take, but can be said to be 'true' to at least one such form).

Those offering proper worship to the gods do not believe the god to be in the wood or stone or bronze from which the image is built...; for the statues and the temples were built by the ancients as reminders so that those who went there... might come to think of the god; or that they might approach it and offer prayers and supplications each asking for him what he needs. For if someone makes a portrait of a friend, he does not believe the friend himself to be in it... but that respect for the friend is shown through the portrait<sup>iv</sup>.

Even the most intellectual and philosophical interpretation of the power of icons, therefore, presupposes an important fact: the image is a true likeness of the deity. At its simplest level, we might have an icon which is a direct representation of a religious vision, such as St. Faustina's vision of Jesus which she then relayed to the painter Eugeniusz Kazimierzowski in 1934 as a kind of 'police sketch' of the real face of Christ (but which, she famously complained, did not quite capture his full handsomeness). It is possible that some nameless Slavic craftsman at Arkona performed a similar service for a local visionary who had a personal revelation of the four-headed Światowid.

However, it is not necessary to assume such a vision in order to have such an icon. Pagan artists in the ancient world, like later Christian monks in their monasteries, created 'true' religious icons through a process of 'true' synecdoche. Thus, an ancient Greek artist creating a statue of Aphrodite could use a beautiful mortal woman as a model because he was confident that at least the element of 'great beauty' was a true visual attribute of the goddess. Likewise, the early medieval Slavic craftsman knew that four-headedness was a visual attribute of the god. At a different end of the spectrum, we may recognize even primitive



reproductions by the paraphernalia which they carry, such that the most poorly carved figure nailed to a cross and wearing a crown of thorns is still instantly recognizable as Jesus, and in such cases it is even possible to drop the human figure entirely and the cross alone is sufficient to indicate Jesus.

Since Pagan Greek and Roman times onwards, it has been a traditional trope in discussions of religious icons to draw, as Porphyry did, a strong distinction between the form and the material (to use Aristotle's categories) of images of the gods. A closely-related distinction was also made between surface and interior. More than one ancient author (including those who appear to be faithful religious believers) goes so far as to contrast the glorious visible surface of an idol with the hidden rot, vermin, and makeshift repairs within. However, this distinction is not quite as clear-cut as it may appear at first. If the form/surface of the idol were the only important 'likeness' then we have difficulty in explaining the various formless meteorites and planks of wood (also often claimed to have fallen from the sky) which were worshipped in ancient shrines throughout the ancient world, such as the chunk of wood representing Hera at Samos. Furthermore, the general human tendency to adorn religiously important idols with rare and economically valuable materials belies any speculation that the material is of no importance. Many idols are also known to be made from an 'appropriate' material, such as Athena's ancient olive-wood statue on the Acropolis, where the olive is her own sacred tree<sup>v</sup>. In a similar fashion, Roman Catholic shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary or saints in Poland are frequently carved from linden wood and those that are outdoors are also frequently planted with living trees of this same species. Therefore, the 'likeness' of a religious icon to its object may extend beyond the Aristotelian form and also embrace the material from which it is made.

Some of these relationships are at least partially symbolic in nature, that is, made of up of arbitrary signs determined by culture (the leaves of the linden resemble stylized hearts, the heart is symbolic of love, love is an attribute of the Virgin Mary). An outside observer (a non-believer in the religion in question) might well object that all of the relationship is simply one of symbolism. However, it is important to note here that for a religious believer the iconic relationship is what makes the image worth including in religious practice. Few human beings would be inclined to pray to a piece of wood if they believed that the piece of wood's relationship to the deity was completely arbitrary.

In current Neo-Pagan practice (that is, 'RL' practices), while an image of Światowid is often present and may be handled with respect, in most cases the image is not addressed directly by gesture or by utterance. Rather it is most likely to remain unengaged at the edge of the proceedings, as a reminder of the deity or as a reminder of the religious intent of the rite. (In contrast, a central fire is typically the focus of most rites. This fire is addressed directly, both



Offerings to the fire in the presence of a Światowid wooden statue; documentation of Kupala solstice feast, Members of the Rodzima Kościół Polski

in terms of sacrifices of food and drink burnt in the fire and in terms of private prayers made facing into the fire.) This means that there is a certain amount of ambiguity about the role of the human-made image in modern religious practice, paired with a distinct diversity of opinion among the individual participants about their importance (which has been verified in fieldwork and interviews).

Secondly, images of the deity which have been constructed for a clearly religious purpose (including both larger ‘cult images’ and smaller personal ‘amulets’) are most commonly found as wooden sculpture. Arguably, this is due to practical concerns. Wood is a cheap and plentiful material which can be carved by relatively inexperienced sculptors using easily available tools. Furthermore, wood achieves a reasonable balance between portability and durability, such that a medium-sized wooden sculpture may be brought to the site of a Neo-Pagan rite and then transported away again for safe storage after the rite is over.

However, there are reasons to believe that there are some non-utilitarian reasons as well. The three dimensional reproductions are not the only ‘wooden’ elements to be found. Religious publications (books and magazines, photocopied ‘zines, calendars, webpages) and badges of affiliation (printed t-shirts or tattoos) where illustrations of Światowid have no equivalent utilitarian need to use wood also frequently depict wooden material directly (photographs or drawings of wooden sculptures) or indirectly with illustrations in the style of woodcuts, or imitating wooden grain, or using decorative motifs recognizable as part of the canon of motifs used in Polish folk woodworking. On one level, this is a sort of hyper-realistic copy of the ‘original’ Pagan Slavic culture in which we know that wood was the most common material for building temples or constructing idols, while stone was (in spite of the Zbrucz find) much rarer. It can also be seen as a scrupulous avoidance of those materials which are ‘tainted’ by their association with modernity, globalization, McDonaldization, and Christianity (such as concrete, plastic, neon, silver, etc.)

There are also signs that the material of wood is somehow symbolic or iconic to Światowid. For example, some modern reproductions of Światowid include a trope not found in any early

source: the four faces of Światowid incorporated into a living world tree. Thus the wooden Światowid has also become iconic of nature and life.

### **3. Światowid in reproduction – four phases**

The original phase of reproduction of the image of Światowid was during the time when it was the figure of a deity in a living religion. Since its re-appearance in 1848, the single figure of the ‘Światowid of Zbrucz’ has spawned a remarkable output of re-imaginings, re-creations and faithful copies. There are at least a few hundred near-life-sized, three-dimensional copies in existence today, a large percentage of which are located in Poland (with many also to be found in neighboring Ukraine)<sup>vi</sup>. In addition to the sculptural replicas, there are an even larger number of two-dimensional reproductions (drawings, lithographs, photographs), and these were often mass-produced in the form of printed images. This process of dissemination of the image of Światowid was not spread evenly across this time-period, but came in waves of intense activity. Since the original ‘archeological find’, we can distinguish at least four times when the modern reproduction of the form of the Zbrucz monument was increased.

**The first phase of modern reproduction**, in the second half of the 19th century, was directly inspired by the discovery of the Zbrucz idol. This figure appeared at the right moment to bask in Romanticism’s appreciation for all that was primordial and nobly savage, and to serve as a symbol of ‘true Slavic-ness’ against the background of the Springtime of the Nations and the Pan-Slavic Movement. In this period we find the earliest mass lithographic reproductions and a number of copies in stone. The archives of the Archeological Museum in Krakow report that several plaster casts of the idol were produced for similar institutions across Europe. Another example would be the faithful stone reproduction of the Światowid of Zbrucz commissioned by Julius Florkiewicz (the authorship is disputed but it was probably carved by

Franciszek Wyspiański or Kenryk Kossowski) for the ‘wild’ and wooded park of his folly-esque Neo-Gothic palace in Młoszowa.<sup>vii</sup> Not all reproductions of this period, however, represent the figure in a positive light. As the only widely-recognized icon of Slavic Paganism, it was also frequently shown inverted or shattered in church stained glass and paintings as a symbol of the triumph of Christianity over the old order.



Sandstone sculpture in Młoszowa (1869) probably by Henryk Kossowski or Franciszek Wyspiański

**The second phase came at the turn of the 1920s and 30s.** Here Światowid appears among other Pagan Slavic gods as a recurring theme in the works of modernist artists, especially those associated with the ‘Rtym’ group, who sought to create a new national style for Polish art. This period was rich in two-dimensional works (especially wood engravings and lithography) depicting Światowid both as a relatively naturalistic anthropomorphic figure (albeit with four faces), and as a representation of imagined cult images carved in stone and wood. Examples of woodcuts include Stanislaw Jakubowski’s *Gods of the Slavs*



Wood engraving of Światowit (1933) by Stanisław Jakubowski

(Krakow 1933) which includes a ‘double’ Światowid where a naturalistic figure rides a horse past a Zbrucz-type idol and, by the same artist, *Motives of Ancient Slavic Architectures* (sic) (Krakow 1923) which depict humble wooden shrines to Światowid in the style of village chapels<sup>viii</sup>. Lithographs include Zofia Stryjeńska’s *Slavic Gods*. (Krakow 1918)<sup>ix</sup>. This cycle contains a reproduction of the statue of Światowid nestled in the roots of a tree.<sup>x</sup> In addition

to artistic representations, the 1930s also saw the first flowering of the Polish Neo-Pagan



Lithograph of Światowit (1917)  
by Zofia Stryjeńska

movement and a few religious reproductions, including a plaster copy of Światowit in the Warsaw offices of the Zadruga magazine (which was shattered during a burglary and vandalism attack in 1939) and what was probably a small wooden figure (adorned with stars and Celtic crosses, in addition to the more traditional iconography) is now only known to us through a photograph published in 1947.

**The third wave** of interest in Światowit came in the late 1960s and early 1970s when a series



Limestone copy of the  
Światowit of Zbrucz  
(c.1966) by Józef and  
Waldemar Wesołowski

of copies (and some might even say ‘travesties’) of the statue from Zbrucz were erected in public spaces (especially urban parks and squares) around the date of the official millennium anniversary (1966) of the creation of the Polish state (966 – the date of the official conversion of the Polanie tribe to Christianity, leading to the eventual recognition of Poland as a kingdom by the other states of Christendom). The occasion was organized by the Communist authorities, who were eager to downplay a strictly Christian interpretation of the date. A second such historic date, the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the destruction of temple of Światowit at Arkona fell only two years later in 1968. Figures from this period include large-scale (frequently larger than the Zbrucz exemplar)

stone, concrete and wooden statues. The stone monument of Światowit below the Royal

Castle at Wawel in Krakow was carved by Józef and Waldemar Wesołowski (using the Zbrucz original on loan from the Archeological Museum) as a model). Many, however, departed radically from literal representations. Stanisław Sikora's 1968 sculpture for the headquarters of the United People's Party in Warsaw showed four 'peasant' faces on top of a largely featureless concrete column. The Polish-American artist Florian Rachelski's wooden sculpture of Światowid from 1977 (unveiled in Hackensack, New Jersey) showed only faces with no body.



Concrete sculpture for the Monument to the Peasants (1968) by Stanisław Sikora in its original provenance in Warsaw. (Now disassembled).



Willow carving of Światowid (1977) by Florian Rachelski, in the Świątynia Króla Ducha in Hackensack, New Jersey



Wooden sculpture of Światowid (c.2002) by Neo-Pagan artists at the peak of Luboń mountain, covered in wind-driven snow.

**Finally, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries,** after the ‘fall of communism’ and in the face of increasing globalization and ‘McDonaldization’ of daily life - the image of Światowid has become a religious icon (again) among Polish Neo-Pagans. In this period, the figure of Światowid is often placed in a landscape of "wild nature" (reminiscent of Florkiewicz’s park) such as on the peak of Luboń mountain (where it has become a tourist destination, in spite of threats from the local parish priest and village mayor to baptize it with holy water). Local monuments can also be found in smaller towns like

Żory and Milówce. During this period Światowid also made his appearance in digital reproduction on the Internet. Variations on the image often function as avatars on social sites like My Space or the more local Nasza Klasa. Furthermore, such graphic files may be sent as "virtual gifts" or sent greetings between co-religionists as well as a sign of membership to those ‘in the know.’.

Some materials do not seem to have been used in any context that the authors are aware of; there are no plastic or neon Światowids in modern Poland. Some techniques seem to have been preferred when Światowid was reproduced in an academic context, such as history or archaeology, where faithfulness to the original object is most highly valued: plaster casts, pen-and-ink drawing, engraving, and photography (digital or printed). Other techniques are typically found in art-for-art’s-sake, such as oil paintings, woodcuts and lithographs. Others are appropriate for public monuments, such as stone, concrete, and wood. The religious icons



inhabit a range that overlaps with all three of the above. We find religious uses of images of Światowid in a variety of media, including wood, stone, bone, woodcut, tattoos, and digital images. In some cases, these may be copies originally made in the context of either academia or art, but which find themselves recycled for Neo-Pagan use. Note that there are also media in which religious Neo-Pagan reproductions of Światowid are rare, even when we find such reproductions in other contexts: notably plaster, concrete, painting and stained glass.



Tattoo on human skin (c.2003) showing Światowid as a living tree.

Although it would not be difficult to imagine that Polish Neo-Pagans might avoid depicting Światowid in the form of pixels on the Internet (after all, they avoid other materials such as plastic, neon, concrete and stained glass), this is not the case. Neo-Pagans are a tiny religious minority scattered among the dominant majority of Roman Catholics in Poland. The Internet is a valuable tool in networking and information-sharing that can bring together a far-larger community than would ever be able to meet at bonfire. Therefore, reproductions of Światowid abound on the Internet. Unfettered by ‘real life’ limitations of money, space or material they can appear in a wide variety of forms. However, we return to the notion that religious icons of a deity, for all their creativity, must be ‘true likenesses’ one aspect of which is the material from which it is made. On a social site or virtual world, there is really only one material, bits of information. For this virtual material to truly resemble Światowid, the pixels that make up his image must resemble natural materials, such as wood or stone.

### **Conclusion: virtual wood, virtual form, and real likeness**

New media (digital images, the Internet) can be used to reproduce the image of Światowid in ways and at speeds and at distances that would not have been imaginable to the early medieval worshippers at the island temple of Arkona, or on a hill by the river Zbucz, or in the palisaded town of Wolin. It is not even clear how successful the original worshippers would be in holding a discussion with their modern counterparts about the meaning of what was being sent. However, the image presented on screen would probably still be recognizable to them and the link to their own practices would be obvious.



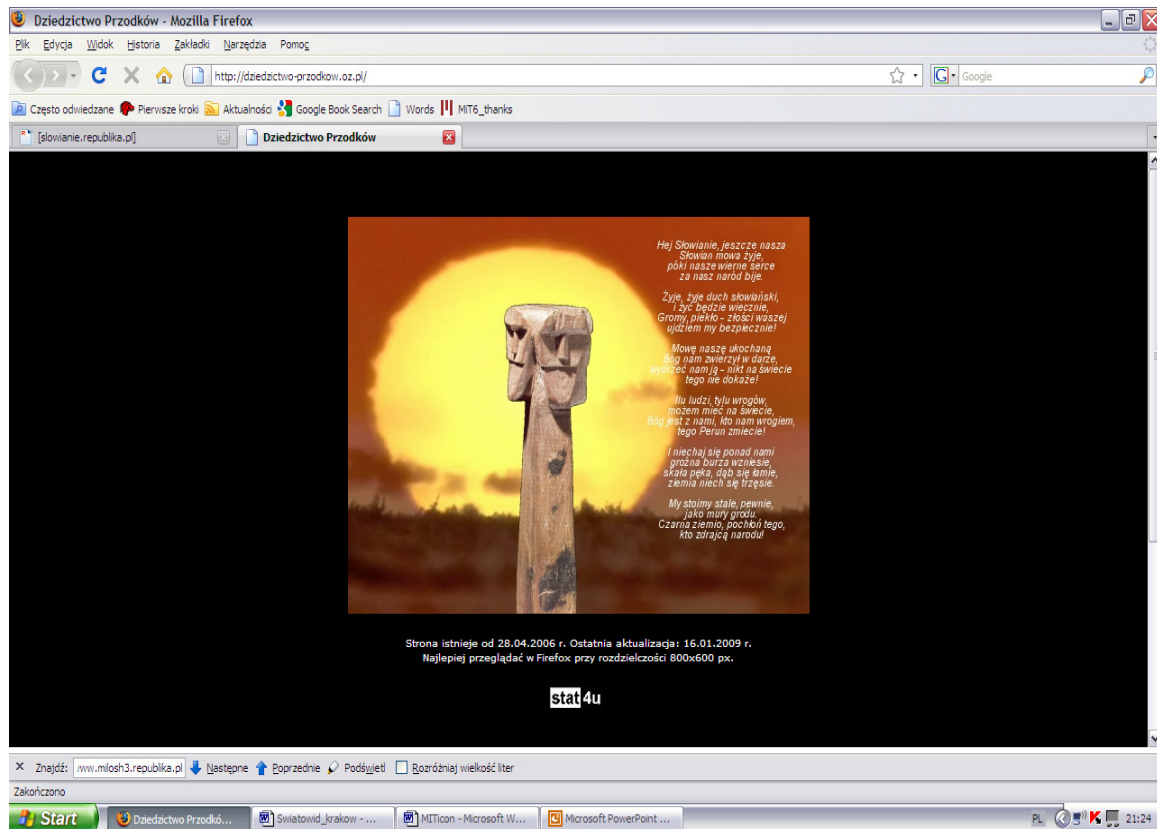
Wooden replica of the Zbrucz monument in Babia Góra, near Białystok.

Modern Polish Neo-Pagans are conservative in retaining the image of wood, even when the substance of wood is by definition not present. Wood carries a variety of important iconic meanings, including: nature, life, tradition, folkways, and continuity with early Slavic culture and history. Wooden-ness can be expressed in a variety of forms, including as living trees, as objects carved from wood, and as the texture left behind by the woodblock matrix in a print.

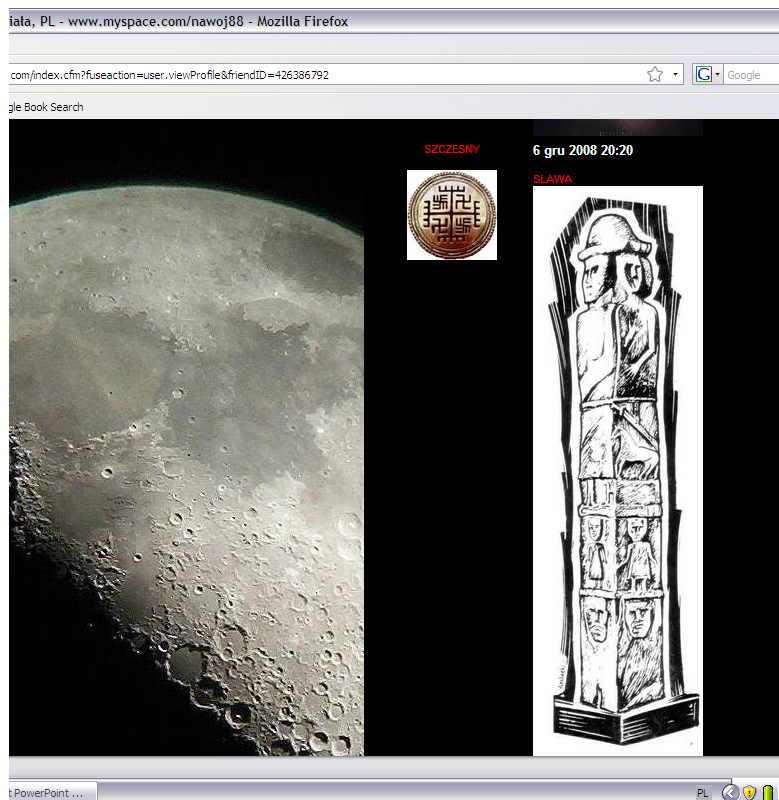
The image of the stone idol from the Zbrucz river has also left an impression on the ways that Światowid is imagined. It was the earliest and most important discovery of authentic Pre-Christian Slavic religious iconography made in modern times. It helped to rouse a new pride in the early achievements of the Slavs and was an impetus for the serious study of Slavic religion which would make

the later revival of that religion in a Neo-Pagan form possible.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Polish Neo-Pagans often bring these two elements together in virtual worlds (in a form reminiscent of the Zbrucz idol, but a virtual material reminiscent of wood) in a way that does not directly reproduce any historical prototype. The resulting mix is acceptable to the believer, in spite of not being a literal copy, because it is a portrait which resembles their understanding of Światowid. It does not call attention to the process of reproduction or mixing at all, but in the mind and heart of the religious viewer it calls attention to a deity.



Examples of Światowid images re-used as badges of religious identification on the Internet: a personal webpage and a profile on Myspace. The images come from different ‘original’ contexts, including both the intentionally religious and art-for-art’s-sake.



Example of Światowid sent as a “virtual gift”. <http://www.myspace.com>



Example of Światowid used as an avatar on a forum. <http://forum.wid.pl>

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## Illustrations:

1. Early image based on Saxo's description in: Vollmer's *Wörterbuch*, 1835
2. Światowid from Zbrucz; Fot.: R. Łapanowski source:  
<http://www.ma.krakow.pl/x/zdjeciep?id=1430>
3. A graphic depiction of the Zbrucz monument (lithograph) in: Przeździecki A., Rastawiecki A., *Wzory sztuki średniowiecznej i z epoki odrodzenia po koniec wieku XIII*, Serya trzecia, Warszaw-Paris 1853-55
4. Carved yew figure found in Wolin (9th. c.) ; source:  
[http://znaleziska.org/wiki/index.php?title=Grafika:Swiatowid\\_wolin02.jpeg](http://znaleziska.org/wiki/index.php?title=Grafika:Swiatowid_wolin02.jpeg)
5. Offerings to the fire in the presence of a Świętowit wooden statue; documentation of Kupala solstice feast, Members of the Rodzimy Kościół Polski. Source:  
<http://www.rkp.w.activ.pl>
6. Authorship disputed (Franciszek Wyspiański or Henryk Kossowski) commissioned by Juliusz Ozdoba Florkiewicz, Młoszowa, 1869; sandstone. The sculpture is situated on *Światowid's Mound* and is the origin of a local legend about the discovery of this artwork as an original archeological find. Photo by Michał Dziewulski; source: author's archive
7. Światowid in: Stanisław Jakubowski, *Bogowie Słowian (Gods of the Slavs)*, Krakow 1933, woodcuts; artistic prints; source: The Jagiellonian Library, Krakow.
8. Zofia Stryjeńska, Światowit; 1917; colour litography, from the album "Bożki słowiańskie" (*Pagan Deities*), artistic print; Kraków 1918; source: author's archive
9. Limestone replica of the Światowid of Zbrucz (c.1966) by Józef and Waldemar Wesołowski. Photograph by Scott Simpson, 2001.
10. Stanisław Sikora, the Monument to the Peasants, 1968 r.; Concrete sculpture, Warsaw, Grzybowska Street; official public monument sponsored by the communist authorities; source: photo by Paweł Słomczyński / AG ; <http://miasta.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34888,3548016.html>
11. Wood carving of Światowid (1977) by Florian Rachelski, in the Świątynia Króla Ducha in Hackensack, New Jersey, made of the remains of a tree called "the Polish Willow" by its owner, destroyed by Hurricane Belle in 1976;  
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12. Wooden sculpture of Światowid (c.2002) by Neo-Pagan artists at the peak of Luboń mountain, covered in wind-driven snow. Photograph by Scott Simpson, 2004.
13. Tattoo on human skin (c.2003) showing Światowid as a living tree. Photograph by Scott Simpson, 2009.
14. Wooden copy (1:1) of the Światowid of Zbrucz in Babia Góra, near Białystok. Source: Źródło PKP: <http://www.geocities.com/gniewko/wspol/>

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* XIV, in Karl Meyer, 1933, p.49

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*, p.51

<sup>iii</sup> There is reason to believe that attributes of Slavic deities were also reproduced in a similar fashion. We have archeological finds of nearly identical examples of small figures of horses across the Baltic coast. Saxo also described a sacred horse as one of Światowid's attributes.

<sup>iv</sup> Porphyry, *Against the Christians*, quoted in: Barasch, p.80

<sup>v</sup> Kroll, 1982, especially p.74.

<sup>vi</sup> See to the list of some examples at the end of this paper.

<sup>vii</sup> Stanisław Ormowski, *Zespół pałacowo-parkowy na tle dziejów Młoszowej*, Trzebinia 2003.

<sup>viii</sup> *Słownik Artystów Polskich i obcych w Polsce działających*, t. 3, Wrocław [i in.] 1979, s. 185 – 186.

<sup>ix</sup> Maria Grońska *Zofia Stryjeńska*, Wrocław 1991, p. 13

<sup>x</sup> The inspiration for this may be the idea of creating a native pantheon which had been suggested by the 'Young Poland' group of artists. Compare this collection with Wyspiański and Stanisław Ekielski's design entitled "Akropolis. Pomysł zabudowania Wawelu" (Kraków 1908)