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Suzanne Owen and Angela Puca, eds. *Pagan Religions in Five Minutes.*

Equinox, 2024.

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The publishing house Equinox, which in past years launched the book series *Religion in 5 Minutes*, recently published *Pagan Religions in Five Minutes*, edited by Angela Puca (Leeds Trinity University, also known for her podcast *Angela's Symposium*) and Suzanne Owen (Leeds Trinity University). This collection of essays contains 70 short chapters by a broad range of authors, including many renowned names in Pagan studies (Ronald Hutton, Michael York, Caroline M. Cusack, Sabina Magliocco, Douglas Ezzy), as well as a younger generation of scholars (Angela Puca, Mary Hammer, Jennifer Uzell) and a few selected experts from various modern Pagan subgroups. As the title already suggests, the aim of this collection is to provide science-based information about modern Paganism to a wider audience, in a format that is both useful for scholars and accessible to the general public. Did the editors achieve their goals? What are the main benefits of this collected volume in the wider context of Pagan studies? And what about the quality of the chapters?

The book is divided into five subcategories – *Paganism*, *Pagan Religions*, *Pagan Beliefs and Practices*, *Pagan Discussions*, and *Studying and Teaching Pagan Religions* – to offer an easy-to-navigate structure for both scholars and the general audience.

The first section, *Paganism*, contains chapters that aim to provide readers with a foundational understanding of what modern Paganism is—whether it is a religion, when it began, how many modern Pagans exist, and what world-views they hold. Since modern Paganism is more like a family of new religious movements with a shared interest in the (re)construction of pre-Christian Pagan traditions, the authors correctly point out the difficulty of providing definitive answers to some questions due to the multi-faceted nature of Paganism. This

section is likely most useful for newcomers, such as students or those with a general interest in religion, as it does not present much new information for scholars already familiar with the basics. Only one chapter—on Theosophy and Paganism—felt slightly underdeveloped. It relied heavily on academic clichés such as calling the topic an “interesting field for future research,” but in my view, the *scope appears limited* beyond the fact that Blavatsky popularized certain Eastern religious concepts that, through alternative spirituality, found their way into various new religious movements, including streams of modern Paganism.

The second section, *Pagan Religions*, is perhaps not ideally named (as many modern Pagans reject labelling their faith as religion), but it is an appropriate term for a section that introduces readers to various schools or traditions of modern Paganism, ranging from Wicca, Druidry, and Heathenry to Slavic Native Faith movements and Romuva (Lithuanian Paganism). The chapters are well-written by experts in their respective fields, though I would have appreciated more variety. There are two chapters on Romuva and several on Wicca—one of each would have sufficed for a basic introduction. The chapter dedicated to modern Paganism in Brazil is interesting, and it is admirable that the editors were able to include a text from the global South. However, there is no explanation of the key according to which the editors decided to cover some modern Pagan traditions and others not. I would have preferred discussions on unique takes on modern Paganism in Hungary or in Turkey, more in-depth discussion about Native Faith movements, or a brief summary of how well modern Paganism is doing in non-European countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

The third section, *Pagan Beliefs and Practices*, focuses—as the title suggests—on the core worldviews of modern Pagans and the nature of their ritual life. As the editors envisioned the book for a general audience with a predominantly Christian religious or cultural background, many chapters address questions such as: What does Pagan ethics look like? Is there a concept of salvation? Do Pagans have ministers? Do they practice ritual sex? Were Christmas or Easter originally Pagan holidays? Even though I’m not a big fan of interpreting modern Paganism through a Christian lens (as viewing Christianity as the standard model of religion is a longstanding issue in religious studies), in this context it makes sense. The authors have done a good job using these questions to highlight the specific and unique traits of modern Paganism. This section also includes a chapter on the role of magic in modern Paganism. In the light of my fieldwork, I find that this chapter—“How Pagans View Magic”—somewhat overstates magic’s importance. I’ve interviewed Pagans who could be described as Pagan atheists or cultural Pagans—science-oriented individuals who don’t believe in magic and would prefer trained therapists over spiritual healing. For them, Paganism is an expression of cultural and ethnic identity.

During rituals, they are not seeking altered states of consciousness, but rather enjoyable moments shared with like-minded people.

The fourth section, *Pagan Discussions*, offers a wide array of themes, ranging from clarifying common misconceptions about Paganism (e.g., the relationship to Satanism, the role of sacrifice) to political topics (cultural appropriation, right-wing extremism, the war in Ukraine), questions of gender (LGBTQI+, queer Pagans), and technology (WitchTok, the internet), predominantly from a Western perspective. As a scholar from Slovakia in central Europe, where the dominant form of Paganism consists of ethnic reconstructionist groups with rather conservative political views and liberal stances on spirituality and ecology, I found this section intriguing, as it illustrates how being Pagan in the United States differs from being Pagan in Slovakia. For example, topics such as queer Paganism or cultural appropriation remain marginal among Czech and Slovak Pagans—due to the low number of openly LGBTQI+ Pagans and the absence of a colonial past. Another polarising issue is right-wing extremism among Pagans, which has been debated among scholars of Pagan studies since the early 1990s. I agree with Amy Hale that right-wing extremism poses a problem in some Pagan circles—just as it does in many Christian churches or in Islam. But I also ask: are modern Pagans more prone to right-wing extremism than followers of other religions? Could this concern represent a subtle attempt to defend “good” Paganism against critiques from mainstream society, while ostracizing “unworthy” Pagans? I am not convinced that Paganism is more inherently susceptible to extremism; rather, it depends on the context in which specific Pagan groups emerge and the influence of charismatic leaders. I would have appreciated a chapter on the role of folk culture or national identity in modern Paganism from a comparative perspective, to balance the focus on extremism.

The final section, *Studying and Teaching Paganism*, contains just three chapters. The first reflects on the current state of Pagan studies. The second discusses whether Paganism should be taught in schools alongside Christianity and places the issue within the broader context of religion in education. The final chapter symbolically considers whether the multifaceted nature of modern Paganism is indicative of how religion might change in the near future.

Pagan Religions in Five Minutes offers a volume worthy of the attention of both academic and lay readers, bridging the gap between scholarship and general interest. Its short, accessible chapters—written by experts—allow for quick engagement with modern Paganism. Furthermore, the language remains clear and understandable without losing scientific rigor, which is commendable. On the other hand, the book is not ideal for readers seeking a deep dive into specific topics within Pagan studies. Overall, however, the volume is well-balanced, covering both foundational issues and niche topics. My only reservation

is the lack of contributors from non-Western academia, and I would have liked to see greater representation of non-western perspectives on this topic. This would have enhanced the quality of the book in my opinion. I am not suggesting that Western scholars did a poor job or that non-Western scholars were excluded. However, while some wrote on specific regional topics (e.g., Paganism in Lithuania), none contributed to the general introductory sections. This reflects a broader issue seen across academic disciplines: while the Iron Curtain and colonialism are long gone, barriers like language, the cost of conferences, lower academic salaries, and family obligations continue to hinder the full integration of diverse academic spaces. We have yet to fully benefit from these different perspectives.



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Aleš Palán. *Ten farář je nějakej divnej, o farářkách nemluvě.*

Portál, 2025.

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Kniha Aleše Palána *Ten farář je nějakej divnej, o farářkách nemluvě* přináší sedm profilových rozhovorů s nekonvenčními duchovními křesťanských církví (římskokatolické, českobratrské evangelické, husitské). Palán, zkušený publicista, vybíral respondenty – Filipa Boháče, Alexandru Jacobea, Pavla Jägera, Pavla Semelu, Sandru Silnou, Petra Wagnera a Jana Wirtha – podle osobnosti, nikoli denominace. Jak sám uvádí, „chtěl zkrátka hodit do vžitých představ o farářské práci vidle“ (s. 4). Cílem autora nebyla evangelizace a snaha naplnit kostely, ale touha „povzbudit svobodu“.

Kniha je strukturována jako sedm rozhovorů, každý odhalující jedinečný příběh. Duchovní v knize nejsou církevními hodnostáři, kteří nikdy nesv-
 lékají kolárky, destičky a štolý, ale uvěřitelní „lidé z masa a kostí“, kteří