



## The Old Dog

### *Zaporozhian Cossacks - Ukraine*

There was once a man who had a dog. While the dog was young he was made much of, but when he grew old he was driven out of doors.

So he went and lay outside the fence, and a wolf came up to him and said:

‘Doggy, why so down in the mouth?’

‘When I was young,’ said the dog, ‘they made much of me; but now that I am old they beat me’.

The wolf said:

‘I see thy master in the field; go after him, and perchance he’ll give thee something.’

‘Nay,’ say the dog, ‘they only beat me’.

‘Look now,’ said the wolf, ‘I’m sorry, and will make things better for thee. Thy mistress, I see, has put her child down beneath that wagon. I’ll seize it, and make off with it. Run thou after me and bark, and though thou hast no teeth left, tousele me as much as thou canst, so that thy mistress may see it’.

So the wolf seized the child, and ran away with it, and the dog ran after him, and began to tousele him. His mistress saw it, and made after them with a harrow, crying at the same time:


‘Husband, husband! The wolf has got the child! Gabriel, Gabriel! Don’t you see? The wolf has got the child!’

Then the man chased the wolf, and got back the child.

‘Brave old dog!’ said he. ‘You are old and toothless, and yet you can give help in time of need, and will not let your master’s child be stolen’.

And henceforth the woman and her husband gave the old dog a large lump of bread every day. □

Translated by Robert Nisbet Bain (1916).

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## Comments

This story belongs, according to the translator's own territorial specifications (Bain, 1916, p. 9), to the subdivision of the Ukrainian Cossacks, called Zaporozhian Cossacks, as distinct from the Russian Cossacks or Don Cossacks.

The Cossacks cannot be said to be an ethnic group, insofar as they appeared from the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards as societies nomadic, predominantly militaristic societies. According to historians, the Cossacks could be the product of a crossbreeding of Ruthenian (East Slavic), Turkic and Tatar peoples. However, others believe that they descended from the Cumans who inhabited the south of present-day Ukraine. Others think they are related to the Khazars of the northern shores of the Caspian Sea, who settled in the steppes of the northern Black Sea and were Slavicised between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Zaporozhian Cossacks, 2022). The only certainty is that their emergence as a society with a distinct culture is attributed to their role as a border people living between different states, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were in constant conflict. These states included the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Muscovite Tsarate, the Ottoman Empire and its vassal state, the Crimean Khanate.

Since the Mongol invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the southern Ukrainian steppe had become an ‘empty’ and unregulated region

populated by nomadic bands of hunters, fishermen and plunderers who came to be known as 'Cossacks' (Plokhy, 2004). This is a term derived from the Turkic root *kazak*, meaning 'free man' or 'adventurer'. These societies, that had no higher law than those they set by themselves, acted as irregular forces which, in exchange for special privileges, protected the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in some cases or of the Muscovite Tsarate in others. Their constant skirmishes and fighting with the troops of the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate led them to develop a strongly militarised and patriarchal culture, whereby becoming peasants and farmers was an unacceptable idea, and in which the self-organisation necessary for survival in such a context led them to develop a strong democratic tradition. This resulted in them electing their own leaders and deposing them if necessary (Kotovchikhina *et al.*, 2020).

Unfortunately, the warrior culture on which these societies were based would lead them to perpetrate a multitude of barbaric acts including torture, executions, rapes and massacres. All this, together with their egalitarian and democratic tradition, earned them countless enemies who were prepared to engage in torture, summary execution and atrocities as well. These episodes include the bloody repressions suffered during the Cossack rebellions of Razin and Pugachev against the Muscovite Tsarate, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively, and the methodical revenge to which the Cossacks were submitted during and after the Russian Civil War (1917-1923) for having mainly supported the White Army, the losing side. This was a true policy of 'de-Cossackisation' (1919-1933), in which an attempt was made to destroy Cossack culture and societies. This repression led many Cossacks to side with the Nazi German army during World War II – another mistake they would end up paying for, some with their lives, at the hands of Yossif Stalin, who pressured Allied governments, during the Yalta Conference, to deport the Soviet citizens who had escaped. This led to the repatriation of 45-50,000 Cossack men, women and children in what became known as the Great Betrayal, perpetrated by British commanders who feared that Stalin would not return the British prisoners of war liberated by the Red Army. Many Cossack officers committed suicide to avoid repatriation or were executed when they arrived in Soviet Union, while the rest were interned in the dreaded gulags. According to some authors, many died in forced labour camps, while others claim that 'Of the Cossacks repatriated to Russia, few were actually killed; horrendous as their privations were, the

vast majority survived the Gulag' (Alastair Home, 1997, quoted in Repatriation of Cossacks after World War II, 2022).

## Sources

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## *Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Principle15a: Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.

*Other passages that this story illustrates*

Principle 1a: Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

Principle 2: Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.

Principle 9c: Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

Principle 15: Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

