

3. Kyrylo Kozhumiaka and the Serpent



There is a place in and around Kyiv, called the Serpent's Shafts. This is an earthen fortification in central Ukraine, which is surrounded by legends and tales. Legends and tales tell about a strongman Kyrylo, or Mykyta Kozhumiaka (leather-wrinkler) who saved Kyiv from the Serpent. The tale can be encountered in different parts of Ukraine and has many variants:

URL: <https://www.navkoloua.com/tours-ukraine/day-tours/zmievy-valy-vasilkovskie-karpaty.html>

Once upon a time, there was a prince (knyaz') in Kyiv, and there was the Serpent nearby Kyiv. Every year people sent him a girl or a boy as a tribute. Once there was the prince's daughter's turn because citizens had already given their children. Nothing to do, he sent his daughter. She was very beautiful, so, the Serpent fell in love with her.

Once she asked him, "Is there anyone who can slay you?". He said, "Yes, there is one in Kyiv over the Dnipro. When he heats the stove, smoke reaches the sky. And when he goes soaking the leather, he takes not one pelt, but twelve of them at once. Once they got wet in the river, I grab them to see whether he can pull them out. Meanwhile, he seems like doesn't mind at all. When he holds them, he could pull me out along with the pelts. He is the only one I am afraid of."

Princes listened to him and sent the letter about Kyrylo to her father. Prince sent people to talk him in, however, he refused until children came to ask him. Then he agreed. He wrapped himself in straw, covered it with resin, took a heavy mace, and went to meet the Serpent.

"Did you come fighting or making peace?" – the Serpent asked. "Certainly, to fight!" – Kozhumiaka replied. And they started to fight. The Serpent got wet during the battle and was running to Dnipro from time to time to drink some water. The entire Kyiv was watching closely the battle until the Serpent was eventually slayed and burnt.



Illustration by Vladyslav Jerko, Kyiv: Ababahalamaha, 2005.

A legend version says that Mykyta/Kyrylo was dragging the Serpent through Kyiv, and the Serpent blew up from all the water he had consumed from the river.

Sources of a summary from two versions:

Записки о Южной Руси: [в 2 т.]. Вид. та прим. Пантелеймон Олександрович Куліш. Санкт-Петербург, 1857, 27-30.

Url: <http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/ulib/item/UKR0001914>.

Труды этнографическо-статистической экспедиции в Западно-Русский край, снаряженной Императорским Русским Географическим Обществом. Юго-Западный отдел. Материалы и исследования: [в 7 т.]. Собрал П. П. Чубинский. Т. 2 : Малорусские сказки / изд. под наблюдением П. А. Гильтебрандта. Санкт-Петербург: Тип. и хромофотография А. Траншеля], 1878, 129-130. Url: <http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/ulib/item/UKR0002490>



This fairy tale, along with other Ukrainian tales and legends, got a cartoon adaptation in 2016, which is entitled in English as “The Dragon Spell”:

<https://youtu.be/8MSUnrkVaM0> (trailer),

https://youtu.be/I_FpRshyNa8 (full movie)



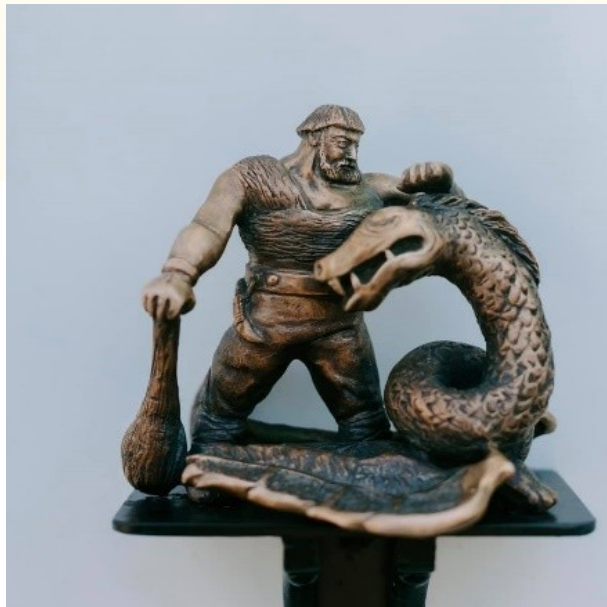
Other Ukrainian fairy tales can be read at HathiTrust Digital Library: *Cossack fairy tales and folk tales*. Selected, ed. and tr. by R. Nisbet Bain. Illustrated by E. W. Mitchell. New York, 1902?

URL:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015004192616&view=1up&seq=20>

The fairy tale about Kyrylo/Mykyta Kozhumiaka is one of many Kyivan narratives where the Serpent is present. Thus, there are legends and Kyivan bylyna (epic song) about a strongman Dobrynia Mykytych and Zmii Horynych (The Serpent). The etymology of Horynych can be derived from hory – mountains). Dobrynia lived in Kyiv and tried to get married, however, every beautiful girl he wanted to woo kept being taken by Zmii Horynych.

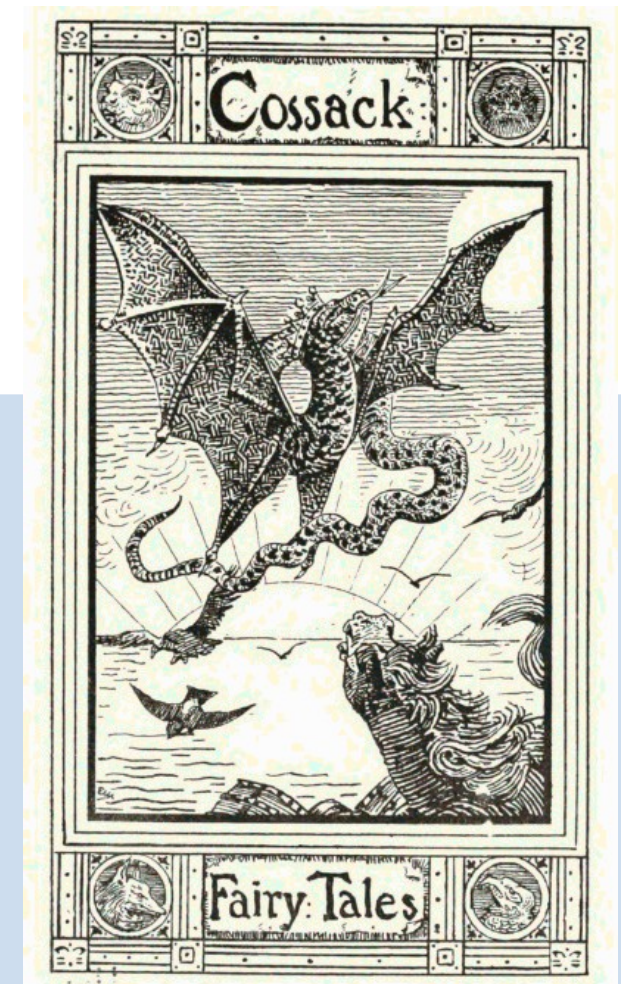
One day was hot, so, Dobrynia decided to go swimming. The hero put on all his armor, mounted the horse, and rode to the Puchai River or Pochaina. He swam to another bank of the river, that is to Obolon', which was ruled by Zmii. Zmii just came back from hunting, and once he saw Dobrynia, they started to fight. Dobrynia won, and Zmii begged not to kill him and promised not to take away girls anymore. However, he broke his promise. Dobrynia got furious and slayed the Serpent, and freed Kyiv.



Kyrylo Kozhumiaka's mini-sculpture in a frame of the "Search!" project in Kyiv.

URL:

<https://rubryka.com/2019/05/18/shukaj-kyryl-kozhum-yaka/>



This fairy tallish legend is widely known in Obolon' district nowadays. Also, there is another version of it, which says that the battle took place at Dorohozhychi and connects this story to Kyrylivska Church. The urban version of the legend says, "It is rumored that caves lead from this church to the southern outskirts of Kyiv, to the area that is named "Church" (Tserkovshchyna). However, no one certainly knows about these underground passages, so it is unknown who created them, when, and why. But the legend says that it is the same legendary Zmii Horynych who lived and still lives in these caves, and his cave is so deep that it leads to hell.

Then there are several finals of this story: some say that the Serpent was defeated by Dobrynya Mykytych, the others - that no one could defeat him, and the hero only drove the villain far into the cave; the third version says that the Serpent still lives under the foundation of the Church of St. Kyryl (Kyrylivska Church).



Legends might be legends, but with the establishment of Soviet power in Kyiv, the Bolsheviks filled part of the foundation with concrete.

By the way, right next to this place, on Smorodynsky Descent, there are more caves. Some legends claim that Zmil Horynych lived in these underground passages, and young boys and girls were sacrificed here to the beast, and here he was defeated by the hero Kyrylo Kozhumiaka." (quoted from FB page about society and culture Zaporizhzhia online

URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/417896548381866/posts/1092754954229352/>

URL: <https://ukrainaincognita.com/kyivska-oblast/kyiv/kyrylivska-tserkva/kyrylivska-tserkva>

Firstly, Kozhumiaka appears in the **Tale of Bygone Years** in the year 992.

"Volodymyr went to the Croats. And when he returned from the Croatian war, the Pechenegs came on the other side of the Sula. Vladimir then went against them and met them on Trubezh near the ford, where now Pereyaslavl. And Vladimir stood on this side and the Pechenegs on the other. And they did not dare to go to that side and those - to this side. And the prince of Pechenegs came to the river, and called Volodymyr, and said to him: "You release your man, and I release mine. Let them both fight. And if your man defeats mine, we will not fight for three years, but if our man defeats yours, we will fight for three years. " When Volodymyr returned to the camp, he sent a birchman around the camp, saying: "Isn't there a man who would fight the Pechenegs?" And there was no such man. "

It was then that the old warrior offered the prince to summon his youngest son to the battlefield. Kozhumiaka is the youngest of the old warrior's five sons. He tested his strength by defeating the bull, agreed to fight, and defeated the Pecheneg's strongman."

Въ лѣто 6500 [992]. Иде *Володимиръ* на Хорваты. Пришедшю бо ему с войны хорватския, и се печенѣзи придоша по оной сторонѣ от Сулы; Володимиръ же поиде противу имъ, и сретє я на *Трубежи на бродѣ*, где нынѣ Переяславль. И ста Володимиръ на сей сторонѣ, а печенѣзи на оной, и не смяху си на ону страну, ни они на сю страну. И приѣха князь печенѣжскый к рѣкѣ, возва Володимира и рече ему: «Выпусти ты свой мужъ, а я свой, да ся борєта. Да аще твой мужъ ударитъ моимъ, да не воюємъ за три лѣта; аще ли нашъ мужъ ударитъ, да воюємъ за три лѣта». И разидостася разнѡ. Володимиръ же приде въ товары, и посла биричи по товаромъ, глаголя: «Нѣту ли такого мужа, иже бы ся ялъ с печенѣжиномъ?». И не обрѣтєся никдѣже. Заутра приѣхаша печенѣзи и свой мужъ приведоша, а у наших не бысть. И поча тужити Володимиръ, сля по вѣсѣм воємъ, и приде \138\ единъ старъ мужъ ко князю и рече ему: «Княже! естъ у мене единъ сынъ меншей дома, а с четырьми есмь вышєль, а онъ дома. От дѣтства бо его нѣсть кто имъ ударитъ. Единою бо ми ѡ сварящю, и оному мѣнущю усние, разгнѣвався на мя, преторже черєви рукама». Князь же се слышавъ радъ бысть, и посла по нь, и приведоша ѡ ко князю, и князь повѣда ему вся. Сей же рече: «Княже! Не вѣдѣ, могу ли со нь, и да *искусите* мя: нѣту ли быка велика и силна?». И налѣзоша быкъ великъ и силенъ, и повєль раздражити быка; возложиша на нь желѣза горяча, и быка пустиша. И побѣже быкъ мимо и, похвати быка рукою за бокъ, и выня кожу с мясы, елико ему рука зая. И рече ему Володимиръ: «Можеши ся с нимъ бороти». И наутриа придоша печенѣзи, почаша звати: «Нѣ ли мужа? Се нашъ dospѣлъ». Володимиръ же повєль той нощи *obleцися* въ *оружие*, и приступиша ту обон. Выпустиша печенѣзи мужъ свой, бѣ бо превеликъ зѣло и страшєнь. И выступи мужъ Володимиръ, и узрѣ ѡ печенѣзинъ и посмѣяся, — бѣ бо середний тѣломъ. И размѣривше межнѡ обѣма полкома, пустиша я к собѣ. И ястєся, и почастєся *крѣпко* держати, и удави печенѣзина в руку до смерти. И удари имъ о землю. И кликнуша, и печенѣзи побѣгоша, и русь погнаша по них сѣкуще, и прогнаша я. Володимиръ же радъ бывъ, заложи городъ на *бродѣ* томъ, и нарече ѡ Переяславль, занє перея славу отроко тѣ. Володимиръ же великимъ мужемъ створи того и

URL: <http://litopys.org.ua/pvllavr/pvllavr05.htm>



URL: [https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0_%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%B6%D1%83%D0%BC%27%D1%8F%D0%BA%D0%B0#/media/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Rus_and_the_Pechenegs_\(992\).jpeg](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0_%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%B6%D1%83%D0%BC%27%D1%8F%D0%BA%D0%B0#/media/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Rus_and_the_Pechenegs_(992).jpeg)



History repeats itself, consequently, folklore reacts to historical events. Nowadays Kyiv and entire Ukraine are tortured by Putin, hence, he is turned into the Serpent. There is also a remake of the tale retold in a political manner (see, <https://wz.lviv.ua/ukraine/189992-kyrylo-kozhumiaka-i-zmii-kremlivych>)