

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ORIGINS OF THE COSSACK FOLKLORE OF THE DNIEPER REGION

**Olena Goncharenko**

Assistant Professor, PhD, Kryvyi Rih Economic Institute of Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman,

e-mail: goncharenko\_om@kneu.dp.ua, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8577-6240>, Ukraine

**Abstract.** The archeological, geopolitical, social-psychological and cultural factors of the Cossachchyna generation, having become the historically basic preconditions of the Cossack folk-lore's appearance as a definite complete system of the creative reflection of the reality, genetically connected with the ethnographical territory of the above part of the Dnieper region (Naddniepryanshyna), are examined in the article.

**Keywords:** Cossachchyna, Cossack folk-lore as a system of the reality's creative reflection, the above part of the Dnieper region (Naddniepryanshyna).

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23856/3110>

### Introduction

The peculiarity of Naddniepryanshyna as a historical region lies in the fact that the Ukrainian nationality, language, culture were formed on its lands and the formation of the Ukrainian Cossachchyna, becoming the decisive social force in the struggle with the Crimea khanship, the Great Lithuanian Principality and the Polish Shlyaha, was taken place. The Cossachchyna itself promoted the cultural rebirth of the Ukrainian nation, determined its moral-ethical, aesthetical priorities in the world, pointed out the further way of its development in the civilization process. The determinative factor is that the very Cossachchyna represented an original culture to the world. As Ye. Malanyuk wrote, its essence lies in the following: "The is no culture without its root and without face, -the national one, of course. Our culture has not always been only "national", its directions, its deeper and wider contents were often dictated and presented namely by the geographical position of our Motherland" (*Malanyuk, 1992:8*). The geographical environment of Naddniepryanshyna, its nature, relief, climate, fertility, its richness of the flora and fauna – gave birth and ratified a Cossack, his ambition to confirm the freedom, faith, truth – the main constants of the Ukrainian nation.

### Cossack folk-lore as a system of the reality's creative reflection

The spire turns of Cossackship, its culture go to the pre-historical times, when the first information on the partially wooded area of Naddniepryanshyna appears. Greek and Arabian historians speak on its peculiarities. Thus, Herodot in the V century visited the Ukrainian lands, describing them in his "History" and connected them with the high culture of ancient Ellada. The history of the Southern Ukrainian prairie (steppe) has been connected with the Scythians name for a thousand years. They were wise and freedom-loving people, but very cruel at the same time. The war for the Scythians was a daily occurrence, because they had to defend the land, which surprised the foreigners by its richness. The character feature of the war traditions lied in the fact that the Scythian warrior drank the blood of the first killed warrior. And though the traditions of the Cossacks are different from those of the Scythians by their structure, they still have something in common. The Cossacks, like the Scythians, were not only corn-growing, but were busy at the war affair. As far as the funeral rituals of the Cossacks are concerned, they

have the noble character, and the funerals of Cossacks, like those ones of Scythians, more often take place festively, on the banks of the Dnieper river. Their peculiarity lies in the fact that the Cossack rituals, in contrast to the Scythian ones, though deprived of the sacrificial actions, are still complicated by the ritual behavior, accompanied by different word forms that have become the ground for the epical genres' generation of the Cossack folk-lore.

The military force and power of Naddniepryanshyna residents, its old traditions are mentioned in Byzantine sources of VI-X centuries. The Slavs in those territories were presented as ants in the IV century. By the way, the word "ant" in the translation means "area", "end", symbolically akin to the notion "Ukraine", being recently taken in the meaning of the borderland. Being under the influence of the Byzantine-Roman sources, M. Grushevsky wrote: "the foreigners praise our people of that time for their sincerity and friendliness. The Byzantine writer Prokopiy describes with the special interest Ants and Slavs, i. e. Ukrainians and their neighbors at the end of the VI century, the times of their settlement. He says they are amiable to foreigners, accept them hospitably and see them off in order to escape making any harm to them. Their women are especially faithful to their husbands and often kill themselves, when the husband dies. They like freedom very much, neither want to serve to anybody, nor to be under anybody's submission. But they are not pliable, do not obey any other idea, every woman lives on her own, and that's why there are a lot of contradictions and bloody fights between them. They are brave and aggressive people and nobody could have contradicted with them, if they acted in accordance... They liked to have fun and to entertain, to sing and to eat. No occasion was held without any song and dances. This luck is welcomed and is clearly reflected in their traditions and staging. There was no any punishment to death for those who were guilty in the old law, nobody was mutilated by chopping hands, cutting ears, noses, as it had been done, according to the Byzantine or ancient German laws" (*Grushevsky, 1991a:39*). Mentioning the luck, traditions and belief of Naddniepryanshyna residents, M. Grushevsky considered ants to be the direct forefathers of Cossacks. The proof of such a statement of the scientist became the defined by him joint features of the social-daily, military way of life, being characteristic both to ants and to Cossacks. To his mind, the war between Ants and Goths led to the Ukrainian settlement in the Black Sea prairies (steppes): "The war with Goths did not stop him, like no other arguments and wars with people of that time stopped. Living among the warlike people in prairies, these steppe Ukrainians, ants themselves, were getting used to the aggressive life, went for the robbery together with Huns and their countrymen-Bulgarians (the Turkish horde, which later on, having settled in the Balkans between the Slavs, mixed with them and passed its name to them). Deviating from keeping houses, they were more getting used to the war as Cossacks were doing later. They left corn-growing, lived in bad houses, poorly and in scarcity, didn't have any iron armature, operated badly by the couple of lances, ect. They were not used to hammer together in attack, but they were masters to hit only somewhere and suddenly, inveigling the enemy, and to scatter again. They were fast and patient in any trouble, they could hide well and keep silence somewhere, even in water, diving and breathing through the reed, as Cossacks were doing later. They surprised Greeks by this greatly and helped them while going for the trophy to the Greek lands. Sometimes Greeks were paying them for being at war with their enemies. Thus, they made Ants to attack the neighboring Slavs, living behind the Dniester and bothered Greeks by their attacks very much" (*Grushevsky, 1991a:30*). Without any doubt, Ants should be considered to be the direct ancestries of Cossacks as they were democratic, quick-witted, freedom-loving, industrious, hospitable, principled and aggressive. That's why, as Ye. Malanyuk determined: "Ants were the epilogue of our protohistory (the part of the history, recorded by foreigners)" (*Malanyuk, 1992:24-25*).

Due to the historical circumstances, Naddniepryanshyna was the nuclear of the Ukraineship consolidation and the state system's obtaining (firstly the Kyiv Russ, then Zaporizhzhya Sich, Ukrainian National Republic and at present – the sovereign Ukraine), made an essential influence on the political and cultural life of Europe and Asia. And this factor is decisive, because, testifying from the historical sources, the Ukrainian Cossackship appeared in the second half of the XV century on the slopes of the so-called "Great border", passing through the very typical phenomenon for our geography – prairie (steppe). Evidently, the very steppe played the great role in the stormiest and the most tragic moments of our history and was marked especially in the appearance period of Zaporizhzhya Cossackship and its folk-lore. It occurs because "the steppe line forms the eternal "corridor", eternal geographical "draught" in our historical "dwelling-house". The periodic waves of the nomadic hordes, thrown out of its jungles by Asia, passed through that corridor. This "corridor" cut away our Motherland from its natural support – the "sea" (*Malanyuk, 1992:11*). The archaeological type of steppe was displayed most expressively in the Cossack folk-lore of Naddniepryanshyna, having become its main basis. Thus, the development and formation of Zaporizhzhya Cossackship in Naddniepryanshyna territory is explained by the natural-geographical basis of the area, which made the essential influence on the mentality formation of Ukrainians and therefore defined the movement of our history.

The Cossack folk-lore appeared in Naddniepryanshyna territory due to the dynamic processes, occurring on the background of the Cossack age's historical events. In the process of its development and functioning it inherited from the prince period's folk-lore its already elaborated artistic system, which defined the world outlook positions of the strong, heroic personality on conditions when feudally crushed Kyiv Russ experienced significant losses from the numerous invasions of Pechenegs, Polovtsians and since the XII century – from the Tatar-Mongolian horde. Its proof is the analysis of historical chronicles, which confirmed that Cossackchyna generation should be already referred to the prince times, when the steppe nomads threatened Kyiv Russ and its separate lands. Thus, the archaeological sources indicate the fact that in the lower reaches of the Dnieper, the Southern Bug, the Dniester and the Danube, together with the Turkish-spoken nomads, the Slavonic tribes also lived during X – XIII centuries: polyans, drevlyans, ulyches and others, being busy at corn-growing, hunting, fishing and also doing the military business. Their main city was Kyiv. The greatness and power of the Russian state depended on the policy of princes, having nothing to do but to leave their feuds and to turn to the country's protection and to the struggle with the steppe people by their joint forces. However, the Slavs left those beneficial lands under the pressure of Pechenegs, Polovtsians, because they did not reach any agreement with each other and, besides, were at feud wars constantly. The warlike population of the Slavonic origin was called in the domestic and foreign sources as vagabonds or tramps, i.e. draggles, beggars, robbers. They were the trade allies of Kyiv princes, helped Bulgarians to acquire independence from Constantynopil (1186), participated in the trips to the Balkans together with Polovtsians. The written evidences on vagabonds are lost with the Tatar-Mongolian horde, when Naddniepryanshyna area went wild during XIII-XVI centuries from the pressure of nomadic hordes and, especially, from the feudal wars of princess, then, the rich Ukrainian lands became deserts: "After that Kyiv relapses completely and the later Tatar massacre did not corrected much to those home massacres. The Ukrainian life along the Dnieper region relapsed too (*Grushevsky, 1991b:58*) and in order to somehow defend their possessions, Kyiv princes settled the hired Turkish cavalry along the Rosa river, the line of the ancient rich cities Cherkasy and Berdychyv. But the plundering actions of the Tatar robbers were so powerful that Ukrainians had to leave their dwelling houses and return to their lands only by the "visits", attacks, in order to hunt the wild beast, to go fishing, to collect honey of the wild honey-bees. People life was overfilled with troubles and

dangers. That's why the motives of the tragic break with the Motherland and home sickness for the native dwelling house, land were the most principal in the pre-Cossack period's folklore. Tatar fears, the seizure of yasys were so much cut into the memories of crowds that "when one person, catching another one at a certain work, asked him: What are you doing?", he was often answered: "No matter, - mainly not to sit and not to be taken by Tatars" (*Dolenha-Khodakovskiy, 1974: 675*). Thus, the historical circumstances made Cossacks to unite into the gangs on order to hunt jointly and, in case of necessity, to attack Tatars, beating off the yasys and the robbed property. As it's mentioned in the historical researches, Ukrainians had to constantly defend their possessions both from Tatars and the local power, which constantly increased taxes on their crafts. The unbearable existence on such conditions induced the original "beating of Tatars", becoming the matter of their honor, because, as P. Chubynsky mentioned, "the Ukrainian person is generally proud and self-loving; he does not easily endure any images; he is revengeful, if he is inflicted by hard offence" (*Chubynsky, 1874: 355*). Without any doubt, the very revenge for images led to the fact that the center of the partisan Cossack war was formed in the bordering territories after Kyiv's falling, firstly in Cherkasy (the name "Cherkasy" is taken from the Turkish words 'Chyry kysi', meaning "the army people") and in Kaniv (the name "Kaniv" from Turkish means "blood"). The numerous Cossack detachments destroyed Tatars along Ukraine. Tatars were afraid of visiting the partisan regions, the population of which was called as the "army people" by them. There were more and more of such Cossack regions. The deserters from the bordering lands of Ukraine, being colonized by the Lithuanian-Polish state, gathered here with the intensification of the Polish self-will.

Searching for salvation, the residents of the Middle Dnieper region had to settle along the bank line of the Dnieper steppe stream. As M. Arkas wrote, they settled in the "so-called "Wild field", - the area, being called in such a way, lied above the Dnieper, the Bug and the Dniester of that time. People began to move there in the middle of the XV century and those ones, who had settled there, did not know any taxes. The life in those steppes at those times was dangerous very much: it was necessary to be always ready and be careful of Tatar attack. Those people were called "Cossacks"; about those ones, who were going to settle in the "Wild field", people said - "they go to Cossacks". The new layer of people, which became soon the most principal one in the history of our area, began from those people. There was no any slyachtych, any gentleman, any older, any younger, - all of them were equal and were governed by their "senior", who was appointed by the community. The government of that time did not bother them and did not levy by any taxes, as considered Cossacks to be the defenders from Tatars" (*Sarbey, 1990: 113-120*).

You should indicate that the name "Cossack" appears for the first time in the dictionary of the Polovtsian language from 1303 and means the "watch-man", "warrior"; but in the dictionaries of the Turkish language "Cossack" meant the robber, the independent, free, unsettled person, the draggle. The term "Cossack" in relation to Ukrainians is used since 1492 in the meaning of the person, who is busy at the "steppe craft". M. Maksymovych, determining the origin of the Cossack position in the Pre-Dnieper Russ, indicated: "Cossacks in Ukraine have become historically known already after 1471... In the Kyiv act of 1499, when Cossacks are mentioned for the first time, they appear on the Dnieper, not being at war affair, but being busy at Chumak craft, as fish traders... The first Hetmanship of Cossacks also refers to that time, beginning from 1516" (*Maksymovych, 1994: 193-216*). From 1520 Cossacks were recruited to the military service to defend the eastern areas of Ukraine. Cossacks moved from one place to another, lived in the houses, covered by the skins of wild beasts, or scooped the dug-outs in the protected places, where they fixed the original reinforcements - the separated houses with the shots, being called as "town-dwellings", "siches". Being busy at the steppe craft, Cossacks took the armament into their hands in order to defend themselves and their

estates from the external enemies. As M. Dragomanov defines, the very Cossacks “have made most of all to drive the Turks and Tatars out of our land for our man would be able to build the house, to plough and seed in the field on his land, to feed children, not being afraid of the foreign enemy” (*Dragomanov, 1991: 176*).

Having moved to the Dnieper rapids, the Ukrainian Cossacks founded the Zaporizhzhya Sich in the XVI century. As M. Maksymovych mentioned: “Zaporizhzhya was the nest, where the friendly, brave, enjoying crowd of free Cossacks was born – they were brought up without mother, because Sich was their mother and Great grass-land was their father”. The thirst of freedom, revenge, struggle and acquiring united Cossacks and made them friends, and every person - whatever he might be – could become their brother-friend, only if he takes with him the quick combat courage for him to take the Greek faith and their language (*Maksymovych, 1834:68*). Without any doubt, Cossackship was the social self-defended association, which on the severe conditions of the border-line elaborated the following stereotypes of behavior and moral-ethical values: patriotism, military heroism, faithfulness, honor, glory, nobility, fraternity, readiness to self-sacrifice for freedom. The system of Zaporizhzhya values gave birth to the Cossack ideal in the public consciousness – a free person with the certain codex of rights and privileges, being, according to I. Kravchenko definition, the “very secret doctrine, which opened the sacral realities of existence, without knowing which a person died in the vain struggle with the past and the fuss” (*Kravchenko, 1993:27*). The life of Zaporizhzhya Sich with several laws and taboo, victorious heroic deeds of separate knights, fraternity among them and severe hate to the enemy led to the creation and appearance of the great number of Cossack compositions. The great influence on the development of Cossacks’ narrative creative work was made by the ancient Cossacks or Sich grandfathers, being the bearers of the Sich tradition, its customs and rituals.

Determining the mission of Cossackship, D. Yavornytsky refuted the theory of the Russian historian S. Solovyov, indicating that “Ukrainian Cossacks, fighting with numerous enemies’ force for faith, for the Russian people, for freedom, for human rights, not knowing any heretics and disunity and at the same time were free of extraordinary fanatics; that left after themselves the biggest wealth of the highly artistic historical songs, in which everybody feels a kind, pitiful and loving heart, sincerely sympathetic to its mother Ukraine; those Cossacks, that gave birth to the great force of historical literature and chronicles’ material; that demonstrated themselves as great knights in the combat fields; that stepped out as solid and courageous body-guards of the highest in Ukraine citizenship; that represented themselves as clever and transparent politicians, as definite judges of nature beauty, - such Cossacks, in fact, could expect another verdict in the history than that one which had been expressed on them by the Moscow historian” (*Yavornytsky, 1919:18-19*). The role of Zaporizhzhya Sich was not simply significant. As I. Krypyakevych wrote, “for Europe its meaning was in the fact that Ukraine was forming its bastion of European culture, moved further to the east, that it restrained the attacks of Asia’s wild hordes by its effort and victims of blood” (*Krypyakevych, 1994:328*). Thus, taking their military tactics from Tatars, Cossacks started to trip on horsebacks, but before the fight they were on foot, being a very dangerous enemy for them. The trips of Cossacks widened their glory in Europe, and the people memory made the names of the following Cossack figures heroic: Dmytro Vyshnevetsky, Ivan Pidkova, Samuil Kishka, Petro Sagaydachny, who fought for freedom of their people. M. Grushevsky wrote: “People believed in Cossack force. Cossacks became their heroes. They were sung in songs and grew into the super human images in retellings. And at the same time, as people believed in the irresistible Cossack force, more and more people demonstrated sympathy to Cossachyna, and the number of those, who became Cossacks for all their lives, grew. The whole personal Cossack layer grew and separated too” (*Grushevsky, 1991a:185*). The character feature of

Cossack retellings, historical songs is their saturation by the narration elements from the life of heroes, drawing of the typical outlines – patriotism, bravery, peacefulness. It was an important factor in the appearance of the indefinite sample of the moral authority among Cossackship, the spiritual pivot of which was the idea of devotion to the Christian faith and to traditions of forefathers. The important propaganda role in this process was played by Cossack thoughts. The epical compositions, with the help of which Cossacks sang on the historical events of the local character, were called so. It was the most productive period of the Cossack thought's development in the whole genre-poetic system of Cossack folk-lore. The example is the death of Strus brothers, Galychchyna shlyahyches, killed in the fight with volohs in 1506. The stories of Cossack thoughts were the Tatar attacks, captivity, the sufferings of captives in slavery. And though the most part of thoughts was preserved till our times in the remade look in XVII – XVIII centuries, and it's difficult for us to judge on their initial contents, we recognize that new misfortunes took the experiences of the previous times, and the Cossack epos in Ukraine has come to change the bylines of Kyiv times.

The ideological-artistic contents of the Naddniepryanshyna's Cossack folk-lore was enriched due to the Liberation war under the leadership of Bogdan Khmelnytsky. The war's remarkable reasons are: religious (people wanted to keep their Orthodox faith), national (a great danger from Poles' side existed for Ukrainians), political (Ukrainian people did not want to be reconciled with that state order which dominated in Poland), social-economic ones (Ukrainians endured the extremely hard oppression of the shlyahtha-Jew government, enslaving of people, the seizure of their lands); it's necessary to describe the psychological factor in the character formation of a Ukrainian, who does not stand when his feeling of dignity is ignored. Thus, P. Kulish indicated: "It's necessary to know the character of the free Ukrainian settler and his notion on his dignity in order to judge, to what degree it was unendurable for him to have a daily humiliation in those times from zhovnirs and shlyahtha, making half-gods from themselves" (*Grushevsky, 1991a:324*). Thus, ethical consciousness and Zaporizhzhya hardening confirmed the feeling of own dignity, knight ideals of faithfulness, heroism and honor in Cossacks. Those notions during the national-liberation movement widened from the Cossack environment to another layers of population. That's why it's completely natural that the world outlook's principles of Cossackship have become the appearance basis of a great number of historical songs, thoughts, retellings, legends on Liberation war. Defending the interests of their people, Cossackship kept in their memory the historical moments of creative elation, being represented not only in the strategy of the military affairs' conducting, but in desire for peace, searching of truth, protection of independence, in determination of their place on earth. The philosophy of those problems' decision was developed through the Cossack thoughts, songs, ballads, narrations-recollections, legends and retellings, fairy-tales, being composed by Cossacks themselves. The creators of the Cossack folk-lore represented to the world the qualitatively new type of the world vision, being expressively developed in the nation's memory, ethics and aesthetics. Their creativeness has become the original reveal of political agitation for the ideals of their people, their faith, their truth.

## Conclusions

Thus, the precondition of Cossackchyna folk-lore tradition's appearance were the social-psychological, historical-cultural factors, being formed in the territory of such cities as Cherkasy, Kyiv, Kaniv – the Cossack movement that covered mainly the population of Naddniepryanshyna. And the boundary living conditions of Ukrainians in the territory of the Cossack area gave birth to the tendency of the lyric-epical creativeness center's formation, the bearer of which became the knight-Cossack type of a person.

## References

- Chubynsky, P. P. (1874). *Works of Ethnographical-Statistical Expedition to the Western-Russian Countryside. Southern-Western Department. Materials and Researches, Vol. 7. Saint Petersburg. [in Russian].*
- Dolenha-Khodakovskiy, Z. (1974). *Ukrainian Folk Songs in Recordings of Zorian Dolenga-Khodakovsky. From Galychyna, Volyn, Podillya, Prydnipryanshyna and Polissya.– Kyiv: Naukova dumka. [in Ukrainian].*
- Dragomanov, M. P. (1991). *Selected...My Conception is to Compose Essay of Civilization History in Ukraine. Mischuk, R.S. (Ed.). Kyiv: Lybid. [in Ukrainian].*
- Grushevsky, M. (1991). *History of Ukraine. Trubaychuk, A. F. (Ed.). Kyiv: Lybid. [in Ukrainian].*
- Grushevsky, M. (1991). *Illustrated History of Ukraine with the Addendum of New Period of Ukraine History from 1914 to 1919. USA: School Council at UKKA. [in English].*
- Kravchenko, I. (1993). *Zaporizhzhya World and Its Values. Zaporizhzhya people. To the History of Cossack Culture. Kyiv: Mystetstvo. [in Ukrainian].*
- Kryp'yakevych, I. (Ed.). (1994). *History of Ukrainian Culture. Kyiv: Lybid. [in Ukrainian].*
- Kulysh, P. (Ed.). (1994). *Notes on Southern Russ. Kyiv: DNYPRO. [in Ukrainian].*
- Maksymovych, M. (1834). *Ukrainian Folk Songs. Moscow: V Unyv. [in Russian].*
- Maksymovych, M. (1994). *Historical Letters on Prednieprovsk Cossacks (to M.V.Yuzefovych). Kyiv Appeared as Great City... : Selected Ukrainian Compositions. Zamlynsky V. O. (Ed.). Kyiv: Lybid. [in Ukrainian].*
- Malanyuk, Ye. (1992). *Essays from the History of our Culture. Kyiv: JSC Talismans. [in Ukrainian].*
- Sarbey, V. G. (1990). *M. Arkas and his History of Ukraine-Russ. Ukrainian historical journal, No.7, 100-113. [in Ukrainian].*
- Yavornytsky, D. (1919). *Ukrainian-Russian Cossackship before Court of History. Katerynoslav. [in Ukrainian].*