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The Bored Cossack: The Way of a Ukrainian Warrior

Summary: The article examines Ukrainian folk paintings of *Cossack Mamai* as the most complete visual archetype of the Cossack, a professional warrior of the Early Modern period. It argues that Mamai's static posture and melancholic expression should not be interpreted solely as reflection or sadness, but primarily as a state of boredom, understood in the philosophical sense developed by Martin Heidegger. This boredom emerges from the Cossack's relationship with time, the steppe landscape, and a psychotype shaped by warfare, isolation, and environmental monotony. An iconographic analysis of key elements (the tree, horse, weapons, bandura, and utensils) shows Mamai as a wealthy, mobile warrior immobilised by enforced rest. The figure is interpreted as one of existential suspension: bored, waiting, aware of purpose yet unable to realise it. In this reading, Mamai becomes a symbol of Ukrainian mentality and of a long-term historical search for identity and meaning.

Keywords: Cossack Mamai, boredom, Ukrainian folk art, social anthropology, Early Modern period, military culture

*The wide prairie's my kin,
My sword and pipe are my related,
The grey colt is my twin¹*

Introduction

A series of Ukrainian folk paintings entitled 'Cossack Mamai' presents an archetype of the professional Ukrainian warrior of the Modern Period — the Cossack — more effectively than any other visual source. While some scholars seek the roots of Mamai in various

1 Shashkevych A. 1888.

world art traditions, the artistic image of Mamai originated in Ukraine.² ‘Cossack Mamai’ was not only an oil painting. It was extremely popular among Ukrainians, who often decorated parts of their houses, furniture, tiles, and even utensils with images of Mamai.³

The eastern name ‘Mamai’, closely related to Ukrainian surnames, toponyms, and hydronyms, was given to images only from the end of the 19th century, due to the captions ‘Cossack Mamai’ found on a few later paintings. The central figure in Mamai paintings is the professional Ukrainian warrior of the Early Modern Period — the Cossack, sitting with legs crossed near a tree, playing a bandura or making a distinctive hand gesture. Common features of most Mamai paintings include a horse, weapons, a bandura, a pipe, a hat, a bag, and occasionally a bottle or a cup. Some paintings feature additional figures interacting with the Cossack in various ways, ranging from flirtatious girls to rebellious peasants executing their enemies.

The oldest known paintings of Mamai date back to the early 18th century, during which the iconographic basis of this image was formed. According to Zholtovskiy, the first portraits of Mamai depicted actual representatives of grassroots Cossack society.⁴ In the third quarter of the 18th century, the compositions began to include scenes featuring Haidamaks (rebellious peasants).⁵ It was only at the end of the 18th century that the ‘lyrical version of the Cossack-bandurist’ appeared, surrounded by a diverse material entourage.⁶

The paintings are sometimes accompanied by inscriptions and even quite extensive texts that echo folk songs, apt aphorisms, proverbs, and sayings, where humour and satire intertwine with serious lyrical, elegiac, and dramatic moods.⁷ The combination of word and image in artistic work is quite common in Ukrainian art.⁸

After more than one hundred years of studying, several scholars thoroughly explored the different aspects of Mamai images — from art history to ethnography, the history of material culture, and even the mystical. Now it is time to study Cossack Mamai in terms of social anthropology and modern philosophy.

Problem Statement

During the whole period of studying Cossack Mamai, scholars were often surprised by the static position of the Mamai figure and his ‘sad’ and ‘apathetic’ mood. So, researchers present Mamai as a serious, upset, or tragic character. The paintings were considered

2 Bushak S. 2008, 8.

3 Bushak S. 2008, 8; Laska I.M. 2007, 405.

4 Zholtovskiy P. 1978, 298.

5 The appearance of these scenes related to the “Koliivshchyna” — Cossack and peasant national liberation uprising in the Right Bank Ukraine in 1768–1769.

6 Zholtovskiy P. 1978, 290, 298.

7 Bushak S. 2008, 117.

8 Bushak S. 2008, 110.

to be full of elegiac reflection, and sorrow for the Cossacks' past,⁹ and Mamai himself was seen as a former peasant who longed for home.¹⁰ Almost a saint who meditates, 'elusive' and 'whimsical'...

It seems that nobody dares to categorically deny that the psychological state of Mamai (the expression of his face, figure, etc.) is very similar to boredom, one of the most studied human mental states in philosophy and sociopsychology.

The problems related to boredom in history, philosophy, sociology, physics, and psychology are well studied, and the number of publications on the topic is growing rapidly. Nowadays, researchers pay much more attention to the physical and neurophysiological aspects of boredom as an original psychological state or a secondary symptom of others.¹¹

Heidegger thoroughly explored boredom as a philosophical category and psychological state in his *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.¹² Heidegger deliberately avoided the formal universal definition of boredom¹³ and until now, the fundamental and unified definition is absent. The applied sciences, like physiology and psychology, suffer mostly because of this.¹⁴ Generally, they treated boredom as a 'state of core motivational deficits accompanied by a phenomenological experience of a lack of interest or affective engagement'.¹⁵

Anyway, the most general definitions were formulated years before Heidegger's book was published. Modern dictionaries define boredom as 'the state of being weary and restless through lack of interest';¹⁶ a state caused by inactivity, lack of entertainment, sadness, or annoyance; and a state caused by the monotony of the environment and lack of interest in the surroundings, occupations etc.¹⁷

After many years of study, boredom was also defined as the feeling of having no interest or purpose,¹⁸ or as a state in which a desire to engage with the world yields little success.¹⁹

The majority of the above-mentioned definitions are too brief, and most importantly, they do not take into account the dependencies and relationships between human beings and time, which is extremely important for this study. Thus, a working definition of boredom is needed, based on the postulates of Heidegger.

9 Zholtovskiy P. 1978, 294.

10 Biletskyi P. 1997, 28–35.

11 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 648.

12 Heidegger M. 1995, 74–167.

13 Heidegger M. 1995, 153.

14 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 648.

15 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 649.

16 *Boredom*.

17 Nud'ha 1974, 452.

18 Mills C.W. 1959.

19 Fenichel O. 1951, 349–361.

Boredom — the state of binding, holding by time our current existence (so-called ‘Dasein’²⁰) in limbo, thus making it (i.e. ‘Dasein’) inessential, oppressive, and leaving us empty.²¹

After exploration of the relationship between boredom and three phenomenologically related states — apathy, anhedonia, and depression — researchers revealed that although related to each state to varying degrees, boredom is empirically distinct.²² This fact is quite important for this study, as it shapes the bizarre concept of ‘boredom’ into a well-learned clinical state. Researchers propose many theories trying to explain the process of initiation of boredom,²³ but the task of this article is not to conclude a medical diagnosis (which is obviously impossible) but to identify a bored person, given their general psychotype and using the analytical tools of Heidegger.

Modern researchers often pay attention to the creativity of boredom. For instance, the state of boredom, caused by an excess of inactivity, stimulates new creative activity.²⁴ Recent studies also demonstrate how a basic emotion, such as boredom, can shape both rudimentary and complex human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.²⁵

Therefore, boredom is not just another set of medical symptoms. As an important state that encourages the individual to develop, it provides inner inspiration, and it needs to be understood as a social and philosophical phenomenon of civilisation that is closely related to the problems of social anthropology and modern philosophy. The ‘history of boredom’ reveals a huge layer of unstudied historical topics — from the forms of leisure to the motivating factors of the people of the past, as well as a large number of emotional states — from the ‘routine despair of not wanting to do anything in particular’²⁶ and the forms of time passing, to profound boredom as a ‘fundamental mood’.²⁷ After all, the meaning of ‘boredom’ as it is used now has appeared only since 1853.²⁸

As a universal human experience, ‘boredom’ must have been inherent in *Homo sapiens* since prehistoric times. But how people experienced boredom in the later periods of the studied history, how they escaped it and generally understood this state — we still do not have clear answers.

The main intention of this article is to define the emotional and mental states of the Cossack Mamai and to try to understand what he aspires to. Is he bored or occupied

20 Dasein [da:zam] (“being-there” or “there-being”) adopted by Heidegger from the vernacular German word meaning ‘existence’.

21 Heidegger M. 1995, 74–167.

22 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 647–666.

23 Goldberg Y.K. et al. 2011, 648–649.

24 *Nuda...* 2018.

25 van Tilburg W.A.P., Igou E.R. 2019, 11–35.

26 Kingwell M. 2019, 4.

27 Heidegger M. 1995, 160.

28 Boredom.

by another psychological state — meditation, reflection, longing, arrogance, indifference to the surrounding characters and related events, etc.? Another question — what is the possible meaning and significance of boredom in the compositional concept of Mamai's image?

So, the tasks of the article are to analyse Cossacks in socio-psychological and historical contexts and to identify the main psychological, professional, and domestic tendencies and preferences of Mamai. Next, to analyse the plot in detail, including the environmental objects and composition. Then, to find out what a Cossack does and how he treats his occupations, and, finally, to discover what symbolic content the classic 'Mamai' plot retains?

The author believes that this article will reveal the first, most general basis for understanding the nature and meaning of boredom in Cossack society and shed some light on specific aspects of everyday life in the Early Modern period.

Historical Background

In Ukraine, the beginnings of the Cossacks date back to the second half of the 15th century, although the Cossacks' way of life was known since the Medieval Kyiv Rus' state period. Peculiarities of local life and constant invasions of the Turkic-speaking nomadic population (Tatars) from Crimea into Ukraine through sparsely populated wild steppes contributed to the fact that the Ukrainian population of various social groups and ranks resorted to the so-called 'Cossack way' — a way of life that included plunder, deep raids into Tatar territory in the southern steppe regions of Ukraine, and isolation from the rest of society in border fortresses and fortified camps — so-called 'Sich'.

As a new special estate, Cossacks established themselves in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as personally free, armed vassals of the Polish king. Cossacks treated themselves as 'Ukrainian men-at-arms' who survived from the spoils of war and claimed the right to elect a new overlord and protector under certain circumstances.²⁹ They assimilated some elements of knightly culture, and their leaders perceived themselves as nobles and real knights from the 16th century. Many of them had a high social status and occupied high official positions.

In the late 16th century Cossacks developed so much that they posed a serious threat to the Ottomans. The acceptance of the Cossacks by European rulers as a 'knight-like' estate is largely due to their fight against the Ottoman-Tatar threat and the defence of the southern frontier, led by 'steppe knights', often well-known and wealthy nobles, who also held prominent administrative positions in the Polish-Lithuanian state.³⁰

²⁹ Chukhlib T. 2003, 47.

³⁰ Brekhunenko V. 2011, 281.

After gaining independence from the Commonwealth in the 17th century, the Cossacks became the foundation of a new Ukrainian state, where they acquired a privileged elite position.

During the existence of the Cossacks, some of them lived in cities, where they were registered by the government and obeyed the official orders and the law, and some lived in the Sich, on the wild southern steppe border of Ukraine, engaging in military affairs at their own discretion.

Life in the Sich was not easy, fighting daily against nature and enemies and constrained by the strict rules of the men's military community. The Cossacks spent most of their lives in military campaigns. The key to Cossack freedom and the military-economic efficiency of their society was a hierarchical system of autonomy that was based on the principles of military democracy.

In terms of military specialisation, the Cossacks were universal soldiers — infantry, dragoons, sappers, sailors, and light cavalry — but in battle they mostly represented a powerful, well-organised infantry, extremely effective gunners who operated mainly under the cover of a movable wagon camp or trenches. In the 17th century, Cossack cavalry was also created instead of hiring a Tatar one. Generally, Cossack military affairs of the 16th – early 18th centuries combined Western European, Ottoman and Tatar military traditions.

After Ukraine's accession to the Russian Empire, the Cossacks were used in the Russian army, mostly as auxiliary units, and after the final destruction of the Sich in the late 18th century, they were relocated to the Kuban, where the last Cossacks lost direct contact with Ukraine.

Socio-Psychological Background. Impact of Nature, Characteristics of Society, Formation of Ethnic Character

Researchers note that among all types of sensory perception related to geopsychic impact, vision is the most important.³¹ Thus, the climatic zones, landscapes, and nature of Ukraine played a significant role in the formation of the specific mentality of the Cossack warriors. Ukraine included the three types of landscapes — steppe, forest-steppe, and forest. As in Cossack times (15th – 18th centuries), the huge steppe area formed the wild southern frontier of Ukraine, where the 'real' Cossacks lived, isolated from other civilisations.

The Ukrainian steppe has two contrasting aspects — bleak and monotonous in autumn and winter, yet experiencing a brief majestic revival in spring. The oppressively monotonous arid steppe, with only a short-term spring revival and significant

31 Rybchyn I. 1970, 7.

differences in day and night temperatures, makes the Ukrainian steppes similar to deserts, to some extent.

Scholars have written about the strong influence that both states of nature have on the national mentality and character of Ukrainians. Čyževskij believes that the influence of the charm and majesty of the spring steppe contributed to the formation of an unusually active and mobile type of Ukrainian. Rybchyn, on the other hand, emphasised that the only long-term phenomena are infinite visual distance, monotony, the depressing indifference of the empty landscape, the terrifying infinity of space, and its impact on the mind, which leaves a strong, lasting impression.³²

Steppe monotony and the lack of visible dynamics could initiate the effect of ‘slowing down’ or ‘dragging’ of time, related to the effect of ‘being held in limbo’ described by Heidegger,³³ and, accordingly, the accumulation of internal emotional tension. The growth of emotions and the accumulation of energy during isolation in the monotonous steppe boost mental dynamics, but, at the same time, ‘lock’ this tension, postponing the moment of the discharge of these accumulated emotions, which occurs at the proper time and is dramatically powerful.

The effect of ‘time that is going slowly’ (*Langeweile*³⁴) also contributes to the feeling of existential emptiness and the need to fill it permanently. The incomplete relaxation of an ordinary ‘peaceful life’ cannot quench the appetites of the emptiness of the steppe and only causes the effect of ‘stopped’ time with subsequent disappointment and mental oppression.

As a result, an unquenchable desire to discharge accumulated emotions was formed in the mental life of the steppe man, along with a tendency towards hyperactive compensation of this ‘emptiness’, which the Cossacks often found in fierce battles with enemies³⁵ (Tatars, Ottomans, Poles, and Muscovites during the 15th – 17th centuries).

In the extreme conditions of the steppe, the importance of belonging to a local group of similar people is very high. The chances of survival increase compared to those of an individual, and the inner dynamic of the group gives its members a chance to partly regain mental balance³⁶ during intragroup communication.

Modern scientific research shows that people’s ability to form stable coalitions was formed during intergroup conflicts and is based on a combination of opposite characteristics within the individual — altruism towards members of one’s group and hostility (so-called parochialism) towards others. Combined in a single behavioural

32 Rybchyn I. 1970, 9.

33 Heidegger M. 1995, 99.

34 ‘Langeweile’ another German word adopted by Heidegger, meaning “ennui” a feeling of being bored, tired, and generally dissatisfied because nothing interesting is happening. Langeweile; Heidegger M. 1995, 96–97.

35 Rybchyn I. 1970, 9–10.

36 Rybchyn I. 1970, 10.

complex, militancy (towards competitors) together with friendliness (towards one's own) gives the group the best chances for survival.³⁷

The important conditions for the formation of such a behavioural complex are the high intensity of intergroup hostilities and a significant number of outstanding 'altruists' — heroes capable of a feat who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the victory of the group.³⁸ Heroism, military valour, and even peaceful concern for every member of the group increase the popularity of 'altruists' and their social rank. This well-studied mechanism of evolutionary ethics³⁹ is perfectly illustrated by the organisation and everyday life of Sich Cossack society.

The Cossacks had a full set of characteristics of the Parochial Altruism Society, including a system of control and punishment of 'parasites' — 'zrada' (betrayal) — and religious principles that strengthen every system of parochial altruism,⁴⁰ so the defence of the Orthodox faith by Cossacks gains a new meaning. Finally, there is a propensity for egalitarianism, which also develops in such closed militant groups in parallel with altruism and parochialism.⁴¹

So, the need to fight for survival in extreme conditions in a closed group, as well as the geopsychic influence of such a hostile, static, and at times fleeting steppe, created a common psychotype of the Sich Cossack — a mobile (active, dynamic), freedom-loving, cruel warrior, ready for heroic feats and thirsting for glory (as the highest values of the Zaporozhian community), prone to egalitarianism, and an extremist and survivor loyal to 'his own' religious, national, or other group. Over time, these traits have become an integral part of the Ukrainian mentality.

Analysis of Image and Plot

The basis of the Mamai paintings is a frontal, invariably static figure of a Cossack, who sits with legs crossed under a tree, playing the bandura or holding hands in a specific gesture. The standard features of most Mamai paintings are a horse, weapons, a bandura, a pipe, a hat, a bag, a bottle and a cup. An analysis of these items emphasises that Mamai is a wealthy nobleman and a respected leader of Cossack society. He is depicted at rest during a long distance journey.

This is related to the traditions of Ukrainian folk icon painting, which, together with the so-called Sarmatian portrait, undoubtedly influenced the composition and the image of Mamai.⁴²

37 Choi J.K., Bowles S. 2007, 636–640.

38 Bowles S. 2009, 1293–1298.

39 See: Alexander R.D. 1987.

40 Markov A.

41 Fehr E., Bernhard H., Rockenbach B. 2008, 1079–1083.

42 Butnyk-Siverskyj B. (ed.), 7.

The oldest items (depicted on the oldest paintings) should be highlighted first, as they give us the keys to understanding the origin and social status of Mamai. In addition, some items carry significant symbolic meaning.

A **tree** (usually an oak) under which Mamai rests is presented in almost every Mamai painting. It is one of the traditional symbols of Ukraine, embodying strength and durability. It is also a symbol of the ‘world tree’ of tribal ancestors.⁴³ For this study, the tree is interesting because it emphasises the presence of Mamai in an unusual environment for him: the forest or forest-steppe instead of his native steppe.

A **horse** — faithful companion and comrade of the Cossack. On the one hand, the presence of a horse, including its temporary leash, proves that Mamai travels and also hints at his steppe origins. The horse also symbolises virtues highly valued in Sich Cossack society: devotion, love of freedom, and self-sacrifice.

Symbols. As mentioned above, the important symbolism of the horse and its image is used in some paintings as the main heraldic figure, depicted on an oval-shaped ‘Cossack coat of arms’, which, along with other military equipment, hangs on a tree. The horse, as a heraldic figure, plays a multifaceted role, informing the viewer about the noble status of Mamai, the chivalrous nature of his nobility, and ‘truly Cossack’ virtues. In later images, sometimes the Russian Emperor symbols — the two-headed eagle or the monogram of the names of Russian tsars—appear on the Cossack bag. These symbols were the regular features of the military equipment of the Russian imperial army of the 18th – 19th centuries⁴⁴ and indicate that Mamai is a regular Cossack in Russian military service.

Rich **clothing** testifies to Islamic⁴⁵ (Ottoman) influences and emphasises the high material status of Mamai. Sometimes one can see on the portraits the tightly stuffed wallet of Mamai. A hat with a rounded or segmented top, popular in Ukraine since the 1740s, stressed that Mamai belongs to the so-called ‘elected’ regular Cossacks or unregistered Zaporizhia Cossacks.⁴⁶

Weapons and military equipment are represented by a spear, sabre, musket, pistols, bow and arrow, bag, and powder keg. The Cossacks’ armaments reflect a blend of Western and Eastern military traditions, a common characteristic of their culture. The sabre became the main long-bladed weapon of the Cossack from the 16th century, taking over all the main sacred ‘noble’ functions of the sword as a knight’s weapon.⁴⁷ At the same time, the bow and arrow emphasise the connection of Mamai with the steppe.

43 Marchenko-Poshyvailo T. 1999, 34.

44 See: Viskovatov A. (ed.), 1841–1862.

45 Halenko O. 2009, 156.

46 Slavutych Y. 2012, 54–55.

47 Toichkin D. 2013, 130.

According to several researchers, a spear with a flag represents ‘Cossack glory’ and ‘mourning for the dead’.⁴⁸ On the other hand, a spear with a flag is just a demonstration of the endurance of the Cossack chivalric traditions from the heavy hussar cavalry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where many Ukrainians served. Of course, the traditional ‘Cossack’ military service was significantly different from that of the heavy hussar cavalry, and the universal spear, popular among the Cossacks, was significantly different from the highly specialised hussar lance. By the time the ‘Cossack Mamai’ canon was formed, the glory of the Polish hussars was already a thing of the past. The ‘new life’ of the Cossack spear began in the early 18th century, after the transformation of the Cossack troops into irregular light cavalry regiments of pikemen, along with other ‘natural horsemen’ in the Russian Imperial army. During this period, the main elements of a Cossack’s armament complex were firearms, pikes, and sabres or broadswords of Russian regular patterns.

Utensils — bowls, ladles, cups, bottles, and glasses — are not just ‘road props’, which once again testifies to the long journey of Mamai to lands far from his native steppe. A metal bowl with wine is one of the most archaic items. It demonstrates Mamai’s relation with the steppe communities and testifies to his high social status.⁴⁹

A special detail of the Cossack entourage is the Ukrainian folk string instrument — the **bandura**. Bandura, kobza and lyre players for centuries preserved and spread the Cossack spiritual heritage in the form of *duma*⁵⁰ and songs. The bandura was such an organic part of Cossack life that it was sometimes called ‘travel’, i.e., it was taken on the road.⁵¹ The fact that Mamai has an excellent bandura and can play it points to his education and wealth.

The same is evidenced by the Mamai **pipe**: many paintings depict not a simple clay pipe, like those found in large numbers by Ukrainian archaeologists, but rather complex, even bizarre, accessories.

Let’s explore what Cossack Mamai is doing with these items and what he might be feeling. In most paintings, the Cossack smokes a pipe and plays the bandura. Sometimes the bandura lies next to him, and then Mamai ‘beat the lice’. Occasionally, another character offers Mamai ‘gorilka’ (alcohol), but the Cossack maintains his famous calm.

In many paintings, the central figure of Mamai is surrounded by small (obviously distant) figures of other characters — girls, other Cossacks, etc. They are engaged in various activities that do not disturb the Cossack, even if Mamai is indirectly involved. No character can significantly affect the mood or activities of Mamai, who has removed himself from the fussy environment.

48 Marchenko-Poshyvailo T. 1999, 34; Biletskyi P. 1997, 34.

49 Halenko O. 2009, 157.

50 *Duma* — a genre of purely Ukrainian recitative folk and heroic epic performed by itinerant singers-musicians.

51 Bushak S. 2008, 31.

In some paintings, Mamai seems to participate in the activities around him; sometimes, with a fake smile, he seems to be actively spending his leisure time, yet this incomprehensible melancholy, some inner emptiness, always follows him. His gaze is faraway; for the most part, the Cossack does not look at the viewer at all.

In general, Mamai's facial expressions and posture create the impression of a person completely focused on himself and his problems and deeply bored with the current situation and his forced 'leisure'.



Fig. 1. Cossack Sharpylo, 19th c. (Nogaïsk, now Prymorsk, Zaporizhzhia Oblast. National Art Museum of Ukraine, Inv. no. Zh-803)

Conclusions

1. The series of Mamai paintings represents a Cossack in a mental state of boredom. One can find all the main (according to Heidegger) signs of boredom of the first and second types in the paintings:
 - a) Boredom of the first type ('bored by'⁵²) — the Cossack is being held by time. Surrounding things and even events refuse themselves to the Cossack,⁵³ and thus can't alleviate his boredom. Mamai is not interested in the surrounding events, other people's problems, or the expensive items around him. Therefore, the Cossack is deeply irritated and bored here (Fig. 1, 2).
 - b) Mamai's boredom of the second type ('bored with'⁵⁴) is mixed with boredom of the first type: after all, the most formal participation of the Cossack in background events is also a form of the passing of time. So, at some point, time stops for the Cossack, and he has a little fun (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Cossack Mamai from Zhalko, 19th c. (Central State Archive Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine, Inv. no. KV-6190/Zh-176)

52 See: Heidegger M. 1995, 92–105.

53 For details about “Refusal of things” see: Heidegger M. 1995, 103.

54 See: Heidegger M. 1995, 106–131.



Fig. 3. Hopak (Ukrainian Dance), late 18th – early 19th c. (Dnipropetrovsk Art Museum, Inv. no. Zh-567)



Fig. 4. Cossack – A True Soul, 19th c. (National Art Museum of Ukraine, Inv. no. Zh-810)

- c) The paintings represent the passing of time⁵⁵ of both types — from outright boredom to ‘following social rules’ (ranging from the lonely strumming of his bandura to formal participation in surrounding events).
- d) In a few paintings, one can find even the boredom of the third type — a global, profound boredom as the ‘fundamental mood’. The Cossack is particularly vulnerable to this condition, being profoundly affected by the enduring visual and

55 For definition of passing of time see: Heidegger M. 1995, 95.

geopsychic impact of the steppe landscape. According to one modern neurophysiological theory, boredom is externally driven — an affective response to impoverished external stimuli,⁵⁶ as in the Mamai case, visually.

Anyway, Mamai is far beyond all the situations that occur around him, which is typical for boredom of the third type. Since profound boredom is not associated with the passing of time, it may be better to look for it in portraits where the Cossack fighting lice as an activity can be almost unconscious and automatic. In a few paintings, one can find even the boredom of the third type — a global, profound boredom as the ‘fundamental mood’ (Fig. 4).

2. So, the Cossack shows outright boredom; it is the driving force of Mamai and the key to understanding him. But what does the Cossack expect? It is expedient to distinguish two layers of composition related to time and space.
 - a) ‘Cossack and time’. The boredom of the first type is related to waiting.⁵⁷ So Mamai is taken out of the context of the activity of his dreams. What is he waiting for? Mamai is bored, impatiently awaiting the continuation of his journey. We have already established the restless and hyperactive nature of the Cossack psychotype. Permanent travel is the way for him, where he hopes to eventually find something that can quench his emotional thirst. But where is he going? What is the final point of this journey? Mamai is a rich and respectable warrior; he seems to have everything that he needs. Does he go in search of new victories, valour, and glory!? It seems that this journey has no end; the Cossack feeds and reduces his inner tension on every new ‘real’ or ‘true’ event on this endless road. Yet every delay contradicts the very nature of the Cossack, causing unbearable boredom.
 - b) ‘Cossack and space’. Formally joining some of the affairs offered to him by the background characters (‘Bored With’), Mamai remains dissatisfied with the external problems he is involved in. Deep inside, the Cossack knows something greater, the above-mentioned ‘real thing’ for him.⁵⁸ However, someone or something delays him on his way. The composition does not answer the existential question of who or what holds Mamai. There are only indistinct hints: nobles, revolted peasants, girls — in fact, the global world. Mamai has nowhere to escape from the annoying environment, so he tries to ignore it, turning to no less trivial matters, which is very disappointing. This is the tragedy of Mamai: he has no answer to who is to blame for his problems and what to do about it.

56 Goldberg Y.K. 2011, 648.

57 Heidegger M. 1995, 93–94.

58 What is this thing, so “real” and “true” for a Cossack? The authors of paintings never answer and left it to the viewer’s guess: this is a big mystery of the image of the Cossack.

3. Conceptuality of the image. Cossack Mamai paintings truly represent ‘the reflections of the Ukrainian people about their ethnic essence’, as Marchenko stated.⁵⁹ The image of Mamai embodies the collective Ukrainian mentality: there is an internal understanding of the right objectives and direction, but there is no clear plan, no understanding of how or what to do. The image of Mamai resembles a bored lion in captivity: he sees no way out of the cage — wherever he goes, whatever he does, the vicious circle closes again and again. And the worst part is that the Cossack has no idea how to fix it here and now. But mentally he has already mounted his horse and is ready to run away from the problem to the Sich of his dreams. The conclusions above are related primarily to the classical, canonical image of Mamai, elements of which, however, can be found even in the most innovative works. Their number is rapidly growing: the historical and cultural longevity and inextinguishable relevance of the image of Mamai persist in contemporary Ukrainian art, and the famous ‘Mamai’s boredom’ and postmodern irony are not only present in modern painting.⁶⁰ It seems that the explanation for the widespread popularity of Mamai should be sought in the Ukrainian mentality.

Despite the transition to a qualitatively new stage of state independence, Ukrainians have not fully grasped their path, groping for it in small steps, almost blindly, searching for fragments of national identity scattered over centuries and assembling them into a complex puzzle of modern independent Ukraine. In this respect, Mamai indeed reflects the historical consciousness of the Ukrainian people.

Latest discoveries place boredom at a pivotal position in modern society, revealing this unfairly trivialised emotion as nothing less than a reminder of the vital human quest for meaning in life⁶¹ and a fundamental means of comprehending our relationship with the world.⁶² Perhaps the modern Cossacks and, at the same time, all Ukrainians, should find their way through the creative potential of Cossack boredom?

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59 See: Marchenko-Poshyvailo T. 1999, 34.

60 There are so many culture projects in Ukraine related to Cossack Mamai in last decades — in literature: poems of Gustav Vodichka (Густав Водичка), Yuri Andruhovich (Юрій Андрухович), poetical group “Bu-Ba-Bu” (“Бу-Ба-Бу”) etc.; in paintings: launching of the all-Ukrainian fests “Mamai Unite Ukraine” and “Mamai-fest”, collective exhibitions of the modern Ukrainian painters, sculptures, even monuments. See: Hodenko-Nakonechna O. 2010, 90–94; Moly N. 2017, 123–132.

61 van Tilburg W.A.P., Igou E.R. 2019, 11–35.

62 Cáceres J.A.E. 2020, 217–235.

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