

Lapponoid Yodelling and Carols

One of the least-known methods of versifications is **melodic prosody** peculiar to Indochinese tonal languages beaming from the cradle-land in Vietnamese Annam. Besides Indochina tonal languages are found in greater density in the Nigerian Ewe-Igbo group of Africa. Their specific feature consists in three to six tones modulating mostly monosyllabic words. Alternating various tone pitches is common as a concomitant trait of intonation patterns in many languages of the world but in tonal languages rises and falls of tones occur in one syllable and vowel segment. Tones function as a semantically relevant trait distinguishing phonemes. In Mandarin Chinese the syllable *ma* may be accompanied by various tones causing changes of five meanings: mum, hemp, horse, scold and interrogative particle. These tones are denoted by graphic symbols 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1.

The Annamite race is remarkable for short-sized brachycephalous stature and omnivorous subsistence. It was common to the Austronesian Negrito, who travelled southward as far as Tasmania about 55 000 years BP. Its unmistakable traces are found in cremation burials excavated at Lake Mungo in Australia. One of its migrations found a plantation in Africa attributed to the Bushmen, Pygmies and Semi-Pygmies in Chad. About 26,000 BC their kinsmen began wandering northward to Europe, where they became known as Gravettians producing backed knives and ivory or ceramic Venuses. Here their tonal and melodic prosody lost semantic relevance but it was perceptibly preserved in the so-called melodic accentuation peculiar to Serbo-Croatian, Baltic and Lappish languages. A valuable remainder is observed also in the so-called **melismatic versification**, whose distinctive trait rests in polytonal variations of the tonal pitch in final syllables of hymns. In the Middle Ages such **melismata** (German *Koloratur*) appeared especially in the final lilt of *Alleluia* and *Kyrie eleison* 'God, be merciful to us'. The medieval audience in churches sang such chants in choruses in response to the priest precentors' voice. Their distinctive feature was producing several tones in one syllable.

The principle of singing one syllable with rich variation of pitch register is characteristic also of **yodelling**. The best-known illustration of its musical cultivation is seen amidst the Tyrolese race of Alpines, the short-sized highlanders with fabulous appearance resembling the fairy-tale elfin dwarfs. Another refuge of yodelling chants is found in Lapland, where they are referred to as *yoik*-singing. Its Lappish inhabitants wear red caps with a bumpkin and give a vivid picture of legendary elves. European Lapponoid races probably descended from Chad and Central Africa, where Pygmy tribes accompany yodelling chants by playing the *mbira*, a wooden musical xylophone-like instrument with as many as 25 keys. The Shona pygmies are

skilful in playing the *mbira* keyboards as well as the Mbuti pygmies, who accompany yodelling with whistling.

Current musical theory classifies yodelling as a manifestation of **polyphonic music** remarkable for steep rises and falls of the pitch register. Musical styles with rich variations of tones in the interval of one syllable are denoted as *falsestto* or *tremolo*. They cannot be considered as accidental techniques because the occurrence of this manner of chanting was originally confined only to Lapponoid races and their traditional settlements. They drifted to Europe from India and partly also via Africa. Their travels along the migration corridor can be recognised according to the moves of the Andronovo culture (1500 BC) settled in Kazakhstan east of the Caspian Sea and remarkable for high rates of cremation burials. Its vestiges may be scented also from residual marks of yodelling preserved in the vernacular folk music of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Austria and Switzerland. In Persian classical music polyphonic tremolos of yodelling type are called *tahrir*. Georgian musicians are familiar with its technique under the name of *krimanchuli*.¹

The common origins of Lapponoid races are scented in **mendicant carols** sung in melodic metres. Their original patterns are preserved only in tonal prosody peculiar to Indo-Chinese (Palaeo-Annamite) and Eve-Igbo Semi-Pygmie languages but substantial remains can be detected also in Lappish, Slavonic, Celtic, Baltic and Greek melodic accentuation. Starving Bushmen tribes sang prayers to the their animal trickster god Cagne embodied as the mantis insect: "Oh Cagne, oh Cagne! Are we not your children? Can't you see how we are starving? Do something and see to that we have got something to eat!"² The Botocudo tribes sang such begging carols even to passer-by tourists.³

In ancient Greece the Ionian lower classes sang similar carols when holding yearly festivals and Dionysian processions in the streets of their town. Ancient carols (Greek *kalanda*, Latin *calendae*) were not associated with Christmas, they began to cling to Christmas as late as in the Middle Ages. The etymology of carols stems from Old French *carole* and its Latin equivalent *choraula*, a dance performed by a circle of dancers accompanied by a chorus of singers. Their prosody was based on regular patterns of melodic intonation with different tones, as is common in the Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese **regulated verse**. Their degenerated European remnants are remarkable for

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yodeling>.

² Ján Komorovský: *Únoscovia ohňa*. Bratislava 1986, p. 26.

³ Heinz Werner, *Die Ursprünge der Lyrik*. München 1924, S. 15.

alternating verses with 5-7 or 4-7 syllables and frequent interior rhymes in half-verses.

Begging customs were very common among medieval 'travelling people' called in Germany *fahrende Leute* (*vagantes, jongleurs*). In Europe there existed an inveterate tradition of begging itinerant preachers (Sophists, Cynics, Peripatetics, dervishes, *Vagantes*, Franciscans, Minorites, Lollards), who spread popular Protestant-like doctrines. They bore remarkable resemblance to Chinese Taoism and Indian Buddhism that professed beliefs in unchangeable deterministic laws (*tao*) of nature. Buddha was a protestant reformer of Indian folk masses, who practiced cremation burials and burnt widows together with their dead husbands on the funeral fire. Theirs was the Cemetery H culture (1700 BC) with rich cremations and the racial variety of short-sized **Indids** hanging sacks and urns with ashes on the Buddhist *stupa*. Their lawful heirs were also European heretic and Protestant sects preaching predestination, fatalism and determinism in the wake of St. Paul and Augustine.

A striking coincidence is found in Vietnamese¹ and Greek Ionian carols sung by guilds of bakers and potters during their annual festivals. Both used iambic metres and were devoted to birds carried as guild emblems at the head of processions. The well-known Ionian *Swallow Carol* welcomed the coming spring with a clay swallow figurine in hands and asked for gifts. The popular poet Foinix of Colophon composed an iambic poem *Crow Carol* of similar prosodic patterns.² Vietnamese folk music conceived such carols welcoming spring season as greeting to ancestors returning to their homes. Lapponoid tribes burnt their dead fathers, worshipped winds carrying their smoke to the heaven and believed that in spring they would return in the reincarnation of birds. The priests and oracles of the Roman *populi Albanenses* were called augurs and they specialised in foretelling the future according to the flight of birds. They built columns with *Ianus bifrons*, a two-headed deity with two faces looking in opposite directions. In Mesopotamia slaves and lower classes spoke 'a female dialect' *eme-sal* employing isolating reduplicative morphology resembling in structure to Vietnamese. They are depicted by terracotta 'lizard figurines' with Sinoid slanted coffee-bean eyes.¹ Their deities were embodied by columns with four faces blowing wind in four opposite world's ends. The Lapponoid stock in Ancient Greece included Hellenes, Ionians and Aeolians, newcomers from Troy and Colchis. They worshipped their forefather Aeolus, whose role was to act as a god blowing winds. The predominance of iambic rhythms in Ancient Greek and Vietnamese

¹ Alex Preminger - T. V. F. Brogan: Vietnamese poetry. In: *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton 1993.

² *Slovník antické kultury*. Praha 1974, str. 319.

¹ Stephen Bertman: *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York 2003.

carols may be a coincidence but nobody can deny their parallels in cremation and cults devoted to birds greeted as an embodiment of dead fathers. They bring testimony of prehistoric migrations via India from seats of the Cemetery H culture (1700 BC), renowned for cremation burials.

Extract from P. Bělíček: *Systematic Poetics II. Literary Ethnology and Sociology*. Prague 2017, pp. 108-111.