

Romanesque Rhymed Octosyllables

An epoch-making turning-point in the transposition of European ethnic and social hierarchy occurred owing to the arrival of the Hallstatt people between 800 and 600 BC. Their cavalry with horse-drawn chariots plundered the Danube river basin as far as the Alps and continued farther in looting to France and Spain. Their ethnic identity is commonly sought in the 'Celtic tribes' of *Nori*, *Volcae*, *Osci* and *Boii* without realizing obvious differences. The Celtic tribes of Gauls and Gaels were short-sized peaceful people with cremations while the Hallstatt people represented a warrior caste of merciless slave-holders with interment and chariot burials. They owed their military supremacy to the dreaded horseback riders with iron armour and weapons. They displayed Sarmatian origin that was remotely akin to the Cyclopean megalith builders with advanced Bronze Age weaponry and domelike beehive architecture. Sarmatian castles differed from Scythian buildings by quadrangular shapes, atriums and rich crenelation.

The Hallstatt raiders descended from the Sintashta-Petrovka culture (2000 BC) and the Ossetic stock, whose settlements consisted of fortified quadrangular hillforts with tall round towers sheltered with conic roofs. They must have had a hand in the formation of the medieval Romanesque architectural style with semicircular outbuildings and annexes and quadrangular ramparts noted for castellation with battlements, crenels, turrets and merlons. The traditional *Kunsthistorie* assumed that the Romanesque style had been just an ephemeral fashion without noticing its definite lasting ethnic background.

As is implied by the very word Romanesque, its earliest manifestations struck roots in Rome and its ruling caste of the warlike *Salii* brethren (*Salii Agonales*), who held the festival of *ver sacra* 'sacred spring' devoted to the cult of the war-god Mars. As a reminder of earlier raids upon peaceful peasant communities, their young novices were expelled out of Rome and sent to the circumjacent provinces with the task of conquering a village, capturing all villagers, raping their women and bringing valuable trophies. Their reserved quarter was Capitoline hill (*Collis Capitolinus*) near *Campus Martius*. Their tribal contribution to the Italic building arts consisted in the atrium style of Roman houses. The latter bore a striking resemblance to the Mongolian tent (*chum*) with the central roof hole for ventilating air and smoke. The central living room and hall for communal life was located in the central courtyard (*atrium*) under the open hole in the roof (*compluvium*) for smoke and rain. The drops of rain fell down into the sacred well (*impluvium*) in the sunken middle of the floor.

The Hallstatt descendants in Italy included the tribes of *Marsi*, *Marrucini*, *Volsci* and *Osci* affiliated with *Boii* and *Marici* in the north. Their Sarmatian ancestors were horse pastoralists but after settling down along the Danube river basin they adopted a mixed horse-breeding economy with quadrangular farmsteads and central atrium courtyards surrounded by stables for horses. The outer appearance looked like an unconquerable windowless fort with loopholes for shooting arrows. Their social life rested on patriarchal clans feasting with accompaniment of wizards telling **heroic sagas** and singing **heroic chants** (*chansons de geste*). Their unmistakable traits consisted of octosyllabic praise songs made of four accentuated trochaic feet and rhymed couplets.

Such heroic epic existed also in Central Asia but it is not clear whether it was compatible with the Ossetian Nart epic or it arose as a secondary product influenced by the Amorite oral tradition in Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The first invasion of Sarmatoid tribes in the Near East occurred with the arrival of Assyrians, the second took place when the horseback cavalry of the Amorites and Hyksos warriors flooded Mesopotamia and Egypt between 2000 and 1600 BC. Their military expedition ended in Morocco and Mauretania and left unmistakable vestiges in Moorish architecture that resembled Romanesque style in all essential points. The Moors founded a specific horse-breeding culture with quadrangular atrium houses and roofs remarkable for rich crenelation and indented crenels on flat roofs. Their heroic poetry relied on rhymed pre-Islamic verse form *qasida*, where every line rhymes and repeats the same ending. Maghribian poetry abounds in rhymed *qasida* that is called *nashid* in Tunisia.¹ Its octosyllabic form *ramal* was cultivated according to poetry recited at the court of Persian Sasanids.² Its genre corresponded to heroic panegyrics and praise songs (*Heldenlieder*) serving as a headstone of longer epic compositions.

Accentual poetry often combines with syllabicity in order to yield the so-called **accentual-syllabic** or **syllabotonic verse**. This rule applies also to most of Altaic and European heroic poetry that displays either octosyllabic (8-syllable) or dodecasyllabic pattern (12-syllable verse). “The verse of Turkic folk-poetry is syllabic (*barmāq*) and not quantitative as in Classical Arabic ... In the Uzbek epics we find verse-passages with lines of seven or eight syllables and verse-passages with lines of 11 (or 12) syllables. The former is the more archaic verse-form; it is the epic verse line *par excellence* of Kazakh, Karakalpak, Kirghiz, and Altay oral poetry.”³

¹ Philip Peek - Kwesi Yankah: *African Folklore: An Encyclopaedia*. New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 523.

² Alfred Bloch: *Die altarabishe Dichtung, Anthropos*. Bd. 37/40, H. 1./3., 1942, S. 199.

³ Karl Reichel: *Uzbek epic poetry*. In: J. Br. Hainsworth – A. Th. Hatto: *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry: Characteristics and Techniques*. MHRA, 1989, p. 98.

The octosyllabic poetry in rhymed couplets is considered as a specific *chef d'œuvre* of Slavonic epic tradition but it is much more probable that it represented an eastern import of the Hallstatt people. The Czech medieval chivalric romance favoured rhymed 8-syllabic versification (Czech *oktosylab*) and because its patterns swayed also in Polish specimens of epithalamion (*επιθαλάμιον* 'wedding ode'), Slavonic metricians closed a false conclusion⁴ that octosyllables must have formed the archetype of Old Slavonic oral tradition (*Wesen der urslawischen Mündlichkeit*). Nevertheless, its roots seem to stem from Rumanian Wallachia whose "both vocal and instrumental music share a fundamental structure which is trochaic octosyllabic."⁵ Another promising source looms in the Croatian *osmerac* 'octosyllable' common in folk riddles. It is much more probable that the medieval gentry of Central Europe, South Germany, North Italy, France and Spain was composed of the descendants of Hallstatt invaders with chariot burials, *i.e.* *Boii* (*Baiuwari*), *Norici*, *Marharii* (*Marcomanni*, Moravians), *Volcae* (Wallachians), *Marsi*, and may be also Normans. If they controlled hillforts and castles, they necessarily controlled also cultural production and it was them who caused the tremendous prevalence of octosyllabic epic in rhymed couplets of French heroic *chansons de geste*, Spanish *cantares de gesta* and Latin ecclesiastic verse compositions devoted to the deeds of Christian saints. Their metres were Englished by Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Waller and John Dryden as 'heroic couplet'.

The Normans may be akin to the Scandinavian Wodanids and the godly race of *Asen*, who reported their arrival from Turkey in hordes led by the god Thor. This legend complies with the historical occurrence of *Volcae Tectosages* in Anatolia, Wallachians in Rumania and *Jászy* in Hungary. The Nordic gods inhabiting *Asaheim* called themselves *aesir* 'gods' and the Turkic plurals in the final *-r* consonant appears also in the name of their plausible Mesopotamian kinsmen Assyrians. Their cultural unity is proved by the common custom of 2-wheel or 4-wheel chariot burials. Since the Russian *byliny* and Ukrainian *dumki* used unrhymed accentual verse, it is probable that the Hallstatt raiders did not come straight from the steppes of South Ukraine but got accustomed to rhymed syllabic poetry in Anatolia and northern Rumania.

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⁴ Josef Hrabák: *Úvod do teorie verše*. Praha: SPN 1978, p. 128.

⁵ <http://www.liamasbridge.com/grove/Entries/S23736.htm>.