

## SPORT IN BYZANTIUM

**ABSTRACT:** This paper describes, briefly, the way the Byzantine sports were formed into the New Rome, known as Byzantium, from Constantine's I days (330-337 AD) up to the end of the empire (1453 AD). The factors that contributed to a new amateur sport movement, based on the idea of leisure and the recreation, were Christianity and the Greco-Roman sport tradition. The prohibition of the traditional Roman bloody *ludi*, the pause of the Greek Olympic and other pagan games helped the establishment of the basic principle of Christianity (St. Paul) that gymnastic (physical activities) are of second importance for Christians. The author provides a number of newer explanations, other than those traditionally given by other historians.

**KEY WORDS:** Byzantium, sport, games, Christianity, chariot racing, Tzykanion, riots.

**RESUMEN:** El artículo describe de forma somera cómo se originaron los deportes en la Nueva Roma-Bizancio, desde tiempos de Constantino I (330-337 d.C.) hasta el final del Imperio (1453). Los factores que contribuyeron al desarrollo de un nuevo movimiento deportivo aficionado, basados en las ideas de ocio y entretenimiento, fueron el cristianismo y la tradición deportiva greco-romana. La prohibición de los sangrientos *ludi* romanos, la abolición de los Juegos Olímpicos y otros certámenes paganos ayudaron al establecimiento del principio básico cristiano (S. Pablo) de que las actividades físicas eran de importancia secundaria. El autor ofrece nuevas explicaciones, que difieren de las tradicionales dadas por otros historiadores.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Bizancio, deporte, juegos, cristianismo, carreras de carros, *tzykanion*, disturbios.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sport as a cultural element follows human history from prehistoric era up to nowadays. It is a flexible factor getting its characteristics from the cultural context in which it is functioned and performed<sup>1</sup>. According to the above point the theories of the “civilizing process” of Huizinga<sup>2</sup> and the “preexisting of sport” of Elias<sup>3</sup> can be used affectedly in order to explain the identity of sport in Christian times, in particular in Byzantium or East Roman Empire or New Rome, which is the theme of this article. The identity of sport in Byzantium was amateur in the sense that the participants played not for money but for recreation. Of course, the charioteers of the hippodromes were professionals like the nowadays champions<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> R. MANDEL, *Sport: a Cultural History*, New York 1984, pp. 106-109, 122-123, 154; A. GUTTMANN, *Sport Spectators*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 35-54; DECKER (1990): pp. ix, 1-7, 168-172; W. DECKER, *Sport in der griechischen Antike*, München: C. H. Beck, 1995 (transl. in Greek by A. Makatsori, Αθήνα 2004); cf. the review of D. KYLE, «Wolfgang Decker, transl. in English by Allen Guttmann: Decker on Sport in Pharaonic Egypt: Recreations and Rituals, Combats and Ceremonies, Agonism and Athletics? Sports and Games of Egypt», *CJHS* 24. 1 (1993), pp. 75-83, in particular p. 77 («Decker does not claim that sport originated in Egypt but he says that Egypt offers the oldest visual representations and written accounts», and that [ix] «in Egypt, for the first time in history, sport played a significant social and political role», and «Decker has some attractive theories about the origin of sport in prehistory hunting, and about the establishment of primitive leadership by physical demonstrations», p. 79 («...Egypt had popular sport, military physical training, and ritual royal performances, but Greece... institutionalized athletics»), and p. 81 (definition of “sport”).

<sup>2</sup> J. HUIZINGA, *Homo Ludens*, transl. in Greek by S. Rozanes-G. Likiardopoulos, Αθήνα: Γνώση, 1989, pp. 266, 288-289.

<sup>3</sup> N. ELLIAS, *Quest for Excitement – Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, transl. in Greek by S. Heirdare-G. Kakarouka, Αθήνα: Δρομέας, 1998, pp. 169-196 for sport development.

<sup>4</sup> The movement of amateurism started in Europe after the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it was established in late 18<sup>th</sup> and mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was Pierre de Coubertin in late 19<sup>th</sup> century who attempted, through the first Olympic congress that took place in Paris in 1894 (June), to clarify the identity of amateurism and professionalism. Nowadays, the only feature of sport of amateur character is Physical Education in schools and all physical activities programs. According to Coubertin’s idealism all the athletes who take part in the Olympic Games today are “professionals”. The country where sports were, firstly, created in modern times was England. Cf. R. HOLT, *Sport and the British. A Modern History*, Oxford Studies in Social History, Oxford 1989, pp. 12f, 67, 74-134, 281. R. MANDEL, *The First Modern Olympics*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1976, pp. 74-94. I. E. ΧΡΥΣΑΦΗΣ, *Οι σύγχρονοι διεθνείς Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες*, Αθήνα: Έπιτροπή Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων, 1930, vol. I, pp. 172-226. See the “Fundamental Principles” (I) of the *Olympic Charter* (articles 1-14); H. J. VAN DER ZWAAG, «Limitations of Amateurism as a Meaningful Concept in Sport», in: F. LANDRY-W. ORBAN (EDS), *Philosophy, Theology and History of Sport and Physical Education*, Miami 1978, pp. 35-48; A. BRUNDAGE, «Address on the Occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC

The origin of amateurism has been anticipated in different ways by some historians. Decker<sup>5</sup>, for example, maintained that sport in ancient Egypt and Greece had a clear amateur character. That important version had been also pointed out, only for Greece, by Gardiner early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both were right with one difference. Sport in Egypt was used in a ritual form, for recreation and play, while in Greece it was –for the first time in human history– used as a means of education (*gymnastike*). For Greeks the athletes' participation in sacred games was a kind of athletic virtue (*arete*). So, both gymnastics and games were provided for all boys and youths in an amateur way. Professionalism, in the contemporary sense, is an idea developed by Young, saying that all Greek athletes were idiots and not amateurs<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, Young in his latest book (2004) almost corrects himself, emphasizing the educational dimension of Greek sport<sup>7</sup>. The truth is that in Hellenistic times there were more professionals than in classic era. The ecumenical context helped, as globalization today, to the rise of commercialization of sport. Young, paradoxically, ignored the fact that few citizens could live in the Greek cities as clearly professional athletes, that is, as *idiotai*<sup>8</sup>.

Sport in Rome lost both its educational character and its amateurism. The Romans used sport mainly for spectacle. In particular, during the imperial times, some kinds of *ludi* (spectacle activities) such as circus' *circenses*, *gladiatoria*, *cynegia*, *naumachiae* and *gymnici ludi* constituted public show. Each one of the *ludi* included less or more violence. Although the subject has not been thoroughly studied, it seems that athletics was the only Roman spectacle having less violence and blood. It is also certain that not all sport activities in Rome included bloody spectacles and violence. There were sport activities like ball games, athletic activities and dances that remained out of the official bloody spectacle. It is also clear that many of the ancient activities, like massage, walking, some children games and baths were used by Roman people for health purposes. Galen and other medicine authors maintain that

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in Athens (June 16, 1961)», Athens, *COH*, 1961, p. 9: «The amateur question. . . will probably always be with us...» There always will be a problem with the definition because amateurism as a cultural phenomenon changes according to the historical context.

<sup>5</sup> DECKER (1990): pp. ix, 1-7, 168-172.

<sup>6</sup> D. YOUNG, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics*, Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1984, pp. 7f, 16, 19f, 24, 63, 66, 77, 80, 93-99, 126, 182f.

<sup>7</sup> The term *idiotēs* does not always apply to Young's "professionalism". See the commentaries of P. Lecatsas, *Pindar, Ἀθήναι: Δίφρος*, 1960, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the winners after the games went to their civilian duties. For example Cimon, Dorieus, Alcibiades were politicians and generals.

many sport activities were used for health, physical training and military preparation<sup>9</sup>.

Byzantium, as the Empire of New Rome, begun in the Constantine's I era (325-337 AD) and lasted until 1453, when it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. The State was a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Empire, which inherited the Greco-Roman culture, law and social tradition. After the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the official language of the State was the Greek. Byzantium from the Constantine's I times adopted the Orthodox Christian dogma, having some differences from Roman Catholic Church<sup>10</sup>.

Christianity, having different ethic views and human philosophy, prohibited most of the bloody *ludi* and pagan festivals such as the Olympic games were. Therefore, sport in Byzantium took a different character than the one in old Rome. Within this context, a new amateur (in some way) sport movement started in Byzantium, the identity of which and the main characteristics are described as follows.

## 2. SOURCES AND MODERN LITERATURE

The Byzantine sources have not so much information on sport as the Roman ones. Nevertheless, we find information for sport in legal texts collections, Church fathers, historians and chronographers. There is also some archaeological evidence either *in situ* or in museums<sup>11</sup>. The legal texts collections inform about what was prohibited and allowed in sport. Some of them are the *Theodosian Code*<sup>12</sup>, the *Justinian Laws*<sup>13</sup>, and the *Basilica*<sup>14</sup>. The latter allowed the performance of "events just for virtue like running,

<sup>9</sup> *De sanitate tuenda libri VI*, in: C. G. KÜHN, *Claudii Galeni opera omnia*, vol. vi, repr. Hildesheim 1965, pp. 1-452.

<sup>10</sup> BAYNES-MOSS (1961): *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Ep. Ti 4.6.8; *Basilica*, ed. by J. Zeppos, vols. I-V, Athens 1912, in particular in books 54 and 60; J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 53 vols., Parisii-Lipsiae 1901-1927, vol. 11, pp. 953, 972; K. RHALLÉS-M. POTLES (EDS.), *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, Ἀθήνησι 1855-1859, vol. II, pp. 357-360, 424-427, 448-452, and III, pp. 59, 469 and *passim* where the commentators of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, mainly Zonaras and Balsamon, discuss how the Orthodox Church approached the decisions of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod (692 AD) on sport activities.

<sup>12</sup> *Cod. Theod.*, ed. by T. MOMMSEN-P. M. MEYER, I-I.2-11, Berolini 1905 (transl. in English by C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*, Princeton 1952, mainly in chs. 15.7.1-2, 15.7.12, 15.12.1-3).

<sup>13</sup> *Nov. Iust.*, ed. by R. SCHOELL-W. KROLL, Berolini 1895 (repr. Dublin-Zurich 1972) ch. 105.1.2.

<sup>14</sup> *Basilica*, mainly in books 54 and 60.

jumping, javelin, wrestling, fighting (not specified)”. The same law prohibited the traditional Roman blood *ludi*, except of the cases when the chariot racing spectacle was taking place in front of the emperors. Procopius is the most remarkable of the historians who provide information about chariot racing and spectators. He gives useful information about the riot of *Nika* (532 AD), the biggest massacre that took place in Byzantine hippodromes. It is interesting that Procopius provides different information on *demes* in his *Secret History*, than those provided earlier in the *History of the Wars*. This shows the contradictory points of view found in Byzantine sources. The complete description of chariot racing is given by Emperor Constantine VII. In his work *The Book of Ceremonies* the author tried to give a total regulation of the organization of the place<sup>15</sup>. Unfortunately, Constantine’s VII book has never been completed. That is why it is difficult to study and use. The Byzantine art also provides useful information. Scenes of games on textiles, sculptures and frescos are found there. Many hagiographers emphasized human motion and various movements<sup>16</sup>. The best examples of pictorial evidences are the scenes on the mosaics of the Great Palace in Constantinople, which represent activities from the country life, agricultural activities, hunting and children’s games. It is easy to understand it is influenced by the Hellenistic art<sup>17</sup>. Another interesting and fascinate example is John Skylitzes’ miniatures, which are rich in motion, ergonomics and play activities<sup>18</sup>.

Although the contemporary literature concerning sport in West Europe during the Middle Ages is vast<sup>19</sup>, the equivalent one on the Byzantine games is limited<sup>20</sup>. The only scholar who wrote all about the Byzantine sport is

<sup>15</sup> Const. Porph., *De cer.*, ed. A. VOGT, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, vol. II, 1939, pp. 94-168.

<sup>16</sup> RICE (1967): 149, 155, 188, 190, 205, 211f; LIEBESCHUTZ (1972): 136-149; ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΑΣ (1948-1957): 206-244; the same text with 15 figures is in *EEBS* 14 (1938) 217-57; cf. for dancing also R. WEBB, «Salome’s Sisters: The Rhetoric and Realities of Dance in Late Antiquity and Byzantium», in: L. JAMES (ED.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs*, London 1997, pp. 119-148.

<sup>17</sup> JOBST ET AL. (1997): *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> A. GRABAR-M. MANOUSAKAS (EDS.), *Οι εικονογραφίες του χειρογράφου του Σκυλίτζη της Εθνικής Βιβλιοθήκης της Μαδρίτης*, Venice 1979, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> C. HACKENSMITH, *History of Physical Education*, New York 1966; B. VAN DALEN-B. BENNETT, *A World History of Physical Education*, New Jersey 1971; E. A. RICE ET AL., *A Brief History of Physical Education*, San Francisco: The Ronald Press Company, 1969; J. BROCKHOFF, «Physical Education, Sport, and the Ideals of Chivalry», in: B. BENNETT (ED.), *History of Physical Education and Sport*, Chicago 1972, pp. 9-29; E. ZEIGLER, «Historical Foundations: Social and Educational», in: IDEM (ED.), *History of Sport and Physical Education to 1900*, Champaign (Illinois) 1973, pp. 201-33 and *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Mainly: E. ΣΤΑΜΑΤΙΑΔΗΣ, *Ὁ Ἰππόδρομος τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, Ἀθήνα 1868; J. BURY, «The Nika Riot», *JHS* 17 (1897) 92-119; ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΑΣ (1948-1957): vol. III, pp. 81-147; BRYER (1967);

Phaedon Koukoules, but his information is not always trustful. Koukoules considered the Byzantine sport as factor of the continuity of the Hellenism. He didn't see Byzantium as a world which had been changed according to new religious, social and political conditions.

There were, nevertheless, other authors who wrote on the subject more objectively. It seems, then, that the most important works are the two books of Alan Cameron (1973 and 1976). The important scholar, first of all, cleared up terms, definitions and methodological points. He entered also to the Byzantine hippodrome the modern way of analysis of the spectacle. He supported for example, not always with success, the notion of hooliganism in the Byzantine hippodromes.

### 3. THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BYZANTINE SPORT

Sport in Byzantium provided neither the Greek education nor the traditional Roman bloody spectacle. It provided amusement and entertainment in an idiosyncratic amateur way. Let see the main characteristics of the sport movement of Byzantine sports.

A. The first characteristic of the Byzantine sport was the lack of official violence. The exorcism of bloody violence came from both the emperors and the Church prohibitions. The emperors instituted laws, while the official Church prohibited them through the canons of ecclesiastical synods. However, not all parts of *ludi* were banned. The canons allowed not bloody activities. Thus, circus' *circenses* (chariot races) and *gymnici ludi* were permitted for people's recreation only. The remaining forms of *ludi* (*gladiatoria*, *cynegia*, *naumachiae*) were banned for ever. Therefore, the aforementioned activities such as chariot racing, athletics, games and dancing were followed by a tolerance, even by some Christian fathers<sup>21</sup>. Chariot racing lasted up to late 12<sup>th</sup> century (1195 AD), and athletics up to the last years of the Empire, in 1453. As concerning the violence of the new sports types, it should be mentioned

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C. MANGO, «Daily Life in Byzantium», in: IDEM, *Byzantium and its Image*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1984, n. IV; MANGO (1988): *passim*; CAMERON (1973); CAMERON (1976); S. GIATSI, *Chariot Racing and Tzykanion in Byzantine Constantinople from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century, with Particular Reference to the Great Hippodrome and other Places of Entertainment of the City*, Birmingham University, MA Thesis, 1978. S. GIATSI, «The Organization of Chariot-racing in the Great Hippodrome of Byzantine Constantinople», *JHS* 17.1 (2000) 36-68. GIATSI (2000<sup>2</sup>): 141-169.

<sup>21</sup> CAMERON (1976): pp. 15-19.

here that the Byzantine circus' spectacle is connected with some riots and bloody massacres which had political character. The first massacre took place in Thessaloniki in 390 AD, being ordered by Theodosius I (379-395 AD), and the second in Constantinople by Justinian I (527-565 AD), in 532 AD. It is an irony of history that violence was transferred from the Roman arenas to the Byzantine sites. This is the tragic aspect of the Byzantine Hippodrome.

The reason why sport in West Europe involved more violence during the Middle Ages was that there sport was mainly used into the military context of feudalism<sup>22</sup>. However, feudalism in Byzantium never existed in a form as in West. That is why pope and Catholicism permitted in Europe the bloody tournaments and jousts: they were from semiological point of view the means of the soldier of Cross. The seven crusades were based on the knight educational system. The above idealistic system started to be declined after the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, sports started to be more smile after the declaration of the *Charta Magna* in England in 1215 AD and the development of the idea of "christian muscularity" among the thinkers of Catholicism as Thomas Aquinas was at the same period. The decline of the violence helped to be established in West two important ideas for sporting. The first was the feature of physical education, the second was the version of amateurism in the sense of recreation. Both started to be established after the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was for the first time, after the abolishment of the ancient Greek education, sport to be used for educational reasons.

B. The second characteristic of the Byzantine sport was amateurism. The term has not, of course, the same meaning of Coubertin ideas, but it was a new one, related to the Roman bloody *ludi*. Therefore, through the exorcism of the violence of *ludi*, the Byzantines developed a new movement of play, having as main goals leisure, celebration and recreation. The terms that the Byzantines used for those new sport customs were called τρυφή ('amusement' or 'pastime'), παίχνιον ('play' or 'game', or better 'entertainment'), γλυκασμός or ἀγαλλίασις or τέρψις ('leisure'), χαρά or θυμηδία ('fun') and εὐφροσύνη or πανηγυρισμός ('to celebrate in a feast or festival')<sup>23</sup>. The usual specific terms and definitions for sport were the traditional Greek ones,

<sup>22</sup> J. M. CARTER, «Sport, Crime and Peasants in Thirteenth Century England», *CJHS* 17.2 (1986), pp. 37, 41-43.

<sup>23</sup> H. HUNGER, «The Classical Tradition in Byzantine Literature: the Importance of Rhetoric», in: M. MULLETT-R. SCOTT (EDS.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition. University of Birmingham-Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies 1977*, Birmingham 1981, p. 41, for athletic terms used by the Church fathers; cf. the two remarkable books of G. ΠΑΠΑΜΙΧΑΗΛ (1917) and E. ΗΑΤΖΕΦΡΑΕΜΙΔΙΣ, *Οι Ολυμπιακοί Αγώνες πριν την κατάργησή τους*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2005.

often in a different meaning. Eugenicos<sup>24</sup>, for example, used the terms πένταθλον, ἄθλα, ἀθλητής, ἀγωνοθέτης and στάδιον. Some Byzantine thinkers, as Maximus the Confessor, Psellos and John Italos<sup>25</sup>, used the term κίνησις ('motion-movement') as we find it in the works of the pre-Socratic philosophers or in Plato (*Timaeos*) and Aristotle (*Physica II*)<sup>26</sup>. That classical Greek influence is found also in West Thomas Aquinas' texts in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup>. For some Byzantine thinkers the motion relates soul with body and sport –such as athletics, stepping, riding, massage, swimming, rowing, table games, hunting and others– should be considered as a natural human movement<sup>28</sup>. Contrary to the above mentioned positive attitude, some other Church scholars accused all kinds of sport and dancing as evil<sup>29</sup>. It is obvious that on this issue society was divided.

C. The third characteristic of the Byzantine sport was that it was used for health purposes. The idea of using body activities for health purposes was common in Byzantium as well as in the West. Activities like gymnastic exercises, physiotherapy and massage, as well as riding, swimming, walking and dancing were common in Byzantium<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Io. Eug., in: *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, 1 (1912-1923), pp. 182-83, 185; Mich. Apost., «Speech to Constantine Palaeologos», in: *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά* 4 (1930), 77-79 definition about athletes, prizes and games.

<sup>25</sup> Max. Conf., *Φιλοσοφικά καὶ Θεολογικά Ἐρωτήματα*, Ἀθήνα: Ἀποστολική Διακονία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, 1978, pp. 83, 128-129 and *passim*; Io. It., *Quodlibetales*, ed. Π. ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ, Ἀθήνα 1965, pp. 99 (motion-body), 132 (about virtue).

<sup>26</sup> G. VAGENAS, «Aristotle (384-322): The First Kinesiologist», *Αθλητική Ἐπιστήμη* 1 (1991) 9-16.

<sup>27</sup> Thom. Aquin., *De ente et essentia*, Ἀθήνα: Δωδώνη, 1998, pp. 42-89.

<sup>28</sup> Psell., *Chronographia*, in: K. N. SATHAS, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, vols IV and V, Venice-Paris 1872-1894, p. 170 (movement), 173 (games), 232 (feasts), 221 (dancing); Φ. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ, «Θεσσαλονίκης Εὐστάθιος. Τὰ λαϊκὰ θεάματα», *Τὰ Λαογραφικά* 2 (1929), pp. 355-374 (useful comments on what way Eustathius show the popular games, the athletic events, different kinds of games for adults and children and dancing. It is not always clear when Eustathius takes his information from ancient Greek authors and when from his own era); Theophyl. of Achr., *Institutio regia*, in: PG 126, cols. 256-57 about flexibility of the body (Theophylactos connects the Constantine psychology with sport activities); M. TREU, «Der Philosoph Joseph», *BZ* 8 (1899) [1-64], pp. 4-8, 11, 19, 37, 60; Io. Eug., pp. 15, 19, 23, 27-29, 31-32, 36 for athletes, gymnasts, popular games, places of training; Io. It., *Quaestiones...*, p. 99 about nature and movement; Theod. Metoch., *Miscellanea Philosophica et Historica*, ed. by C. MÜLLER-T. KIESSLING, Leipzig 1827 (reimpr. Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1966), pp. 208 (energy and movement), 292 and 296 (body and soul), 523, 534-35 (virtue), 630 (prizes). It is a very difficult text since the author goes from his period to ancient times and he comes again back.

<sup>29</sup> Basil. Seleuc., *In Olympia*, in: PG 85, cols. 308-315.

<sup>30</sup> ΕΥΤΥΧΙΑΔΗΣ (1983): pp. 18, 48, 63, 98, 99, 298; for the use of baths in Byzantium, cf. MANGO (1988): p. 338; ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1947-1952): v. 5, pp. 419-467.



D. Another characteristic of the Byzantine sport is that it was used for military preparation. The authors who wrote about the military preparation were mainly emperors and generals<sup>31</sup>. They stressed that play and athletic activities contribute to soldiers' relaxation and help them forget the war. We find many sport activities performed during the breaks of the military exercises (riding, wrestling, athletic competition, fetching, archery, rowing, hunting, etc.) It seems that a favorite activity was archery and, in particular, archery on riding. This activity was popular among children and young peasants, as well<sup>32</sup>. The idea of the well trained and skilful soldier is depicted in the Orthodox hagiography. It is commonly known that some saints, such as Demetrius, Nestor, Georgios, Theodore (two brothers) and Procopius are presented either as athletes or soldiers. Nevertheless, in symbolic terms, the great "athlete" of Orthodox Church used to be the holy man (ἀσκητής). Brown notes that «...the holy man was the professional in a world of amateurs»<sup>33</sup>. That kind of metaphor is found mainly in the ecclesiastical hymns. This subject needs more consideration.

#### 4. FACTORS OF ESTABLISHMENT OF SPORT MOVEMENT

The above mentioned characteristics of the Byzantine sport were influenced by some significant factors. They formed their own new ontology and identity. Some of these factors were the following:

a) The tolerance that the Orthodox Church showed to the idea of physical training and the participation in sports was based on Apostle Paul's *logos* (preaching) saying that the physical exercise is a factor of less importance (ἡ γὰρ σωματικὴ γυμνασία πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐστὶν ὠφέλιμος). The above idea was repeated by some Church fathers, something which helped the people to participate in certain activities having as main goal amusement and recreation<sup>34</sup>. John Damascenos, a great father of the Orthodox dogma,

<sup>31</sup> Information about the military Byzantine system is in the *Strategica* ('the way of military preparation'). The authors of *Strategica* were mainly emperors or generals; cf. J. KARAGIANNOPoulos, *History of the Byzantine State*, Thessaloniki: Sakkoula, 1978, v. 1, pp. 621-45; T. ΚΟΙΑΣ, *Η θέση του στρατιωτικού στη βυζαντινὴ κοινωνία*, Αθήνα 1994.

<sup>32</sup> Leon Diac., Bonn, CSHB, 1828, pp. 60-63.

<sup>33</sup> P. BROWN, «The Rise and the Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity», *JRS* 61 (1961), p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Ep. Ti 4, 8; Neil. Asc., *Τὰ εὐρισκόμενα*, in: PG 79, cols. 528 and 701, 897, 900 and 1300; Basil. Caes., *De legendis gentilium libris*, ed. by I. BOULENGER, Paris, CUF, 1952, in which

wanted to be an athlete. He writes that his father visited a lot of schools to find a teacher who would not be interested in gymnastics and athletic preparation<sup>35</sup>. However, the permission to participate in sport was common and the event is not included in the proceedings of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, which took place in Constantinople in 692 AD<sup>36</sup>. Nevertheless, gymnastics, chariot racing, athletics and other sport activities are fully included in the commentaries of the above important synod. It is obvious, as Balsamon writes in the 24<sup>th</sup> canon in his commentaries, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, that both, State and Church, accepted the practical value of physical activities. However, not all religious institutions accepted the above mentioned usage. The movements of asceticism, monachism and some Church fathers were against the participation in sport, because of its allegedly pagan origin.

The official agreement and the permission of sports by the east Orthodox Church is referred to by the commentators of the canons of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod (c. 682 AD), written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>37</sup>. In particular Balsamon in the 24<sup>th</sup> canon says that Christians could perform athletics only for “virtue” (ἀρετή), but only for recreation and entertainment. The sports allowed were running, jumping, javelin, wrestling and boxing (?). It is obvious that Balsamon took the text from the *Basilica*<sup>38</sup>, changing it a bit, that is, in Balsamon’s text the last sport is not discus, but boxing. There are two explanations for this: either Balsamon had mistaken or boxing was replaced. Nevertheless, both kinds of “pentathlon” constitute separate sports and not a single one, as it was used by the ancient Greeks.

b) The second significant factor was sport tradition. The Greco-Roman culture was rich in sport activities. Thus, after the prohibitions of bloody *ludi*, plenty of activities were continued for recreation only.

Eusebius of Alexandria mentions that on Sundays people gathered together for leisure in the countryside, where the young men were competing

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points out the good ethical aspects on education; Basil is not against physical training and sports, but in that text keeps distances from a positive view like that of apostle Paul.

<sup>35</sup> BAYNES-MOSS (1961): p. 210.

<sup>36</sup> MANSI: v. 11, pp. 953 and 972.

<sup>37</sup> *Syntagma*, v. 2, p. 360: καὶ ἔλεγον πένταθλον, ἦγουν πέντε παίγνια, εἶναι ἀκόλυτα, πάλην, πυγμὴν, δρόμον, διαλμα καὶ δίσκον (‘We said that we permit the participation of the people only to five events, that is to wrestling, boxing, running, double jumping and discus’); cf. pp. 425-26, 449-52.

<sup>38</sup> *Basilica*, p. 434 (60.8.2): κωλύεται τις παίζειν ἐπὶ χρήμασι, πλὴν τοῦ δι’ ἀρετὴν τρέχειν ἢ πηδᾶν, ἀκοντίζειν, παλαίειν, μάχεσθαι (‘It is forbidden to anyone to wager but only for virtue; that is running or jumping, javelin, wrestling, fighting [boxing?’]). The word “virtue” (ἀρετή) here is obviously a neologism; cf. pp. 179, 323-325, 328.

in athletics and other activities<sup>39</sup>. It is obvious that in the new status, after the banning of the Roman gladiatorial and the Greek athletic festivals, people started to change the rules of the games making them more playful, with less violence and injuries. Cameron points out that the Greek athletic tradition existed more in the East than in the West<sup>40</sup>. Cinnamos describes in detail the imperial game of horse polo known as *tzykanion* as having similar to the contemporary rules<sup>41</sup>.

Therefore, it is not strange the fact that a great pagan festival, like the Olympic games of Olympia of Antiochia of Syria, lasted until 521 AD. For the same reason, the Olympic games of Olympia in Ellis existed up to 400 or 426 AD, when Theodosius II ordered the close off the sacred place of Olympia. Later, according to archaeological findings, a christian church was built to the site, just outside of the Altis<sup>42</sup>. Together with the prohibitions of the pagan games and bloody activities, closed also the *stadia*, *gymnasia* and *palaestrae*, all during the 4<sup>th</sup> and the start of 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. The last gymnasium in Constantinople closed during Justinian I time. Procopius writes that the owner of the *palaestra*, a gymnast called Andreas, closed it and attended as officer in the Justinian's I (527-565 AD) army<sup>43</sup>. The christians destroyed plenty of the buildings using the material for other purposes. In Thessaloniki plenty of seats (they are from the theatre or from the stadium of the city) are still seen in the Sea walls (Bardar walls).

c) The third factor that helped the establishment of the new sport idea in Byzantium was the emperor's support, mentioned in brief earlier. Analytically, the emperors were the leaders of the army and they should keep themselves fit. The emperors knew that it would be good for the army to have soldiers fit and skilful in games and activities: that is why people were encouraged to participate in popular games<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, some of the emperors were athletes. Without doubt, the emperor who loved athletics most of all was Julian (361-63 AD), the nephew of Constantine I, called the *Apostate*. He was one of Libanius' students, the last important philosopher of the pagan Greek tradition, teaching for years in the gymnasium of Antiochia,

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<sup>39</sup> Eus. Alex., *Sermones*, in: PG 86. 1, col. 417. Eus. Caes., *The Life of Constantine*, ed. F. WINKELMANN, Berlin 1975, pp. 128-129, 148, 150.

<sup>40</sup> CAMERON (1976): pp. 201, 203 (and n. 2), 214-229.

<sup>41</sup> Cinn., *Epitome*, ed. by A. MEINEKE, Bonn, CSHB, 1836, pp. 263-264; H. CHEHABI-A. GUTTMANN, «From Iran to all of Asia: the Origin and Diffusion of Polo», *IJHS* 19.2-3 (2002), p. 390.

<sup>42</sup> LIEBESCHUTZ (1972): pp. 136-141.

<sup>43</sup> PROCOPIUS, *Pers.* I, 13, 30.

<sup>44</sup> CAMERON (1976): pp. 215-219.

in Syria. Among Libanius' pupils there were some christians, like Basil. However, Julian was a fervent supporter not only of the sacred Greek athletic games, but of paganism as well. According to a legend, Julian asked from Delphi an oracle as the Greek pagans did. The answer was negative, since the conditions had changed for ever. Tzimiskes was a runner and a jumper<sup>45</sup>. Basil I was skilful in taming horses, hunting and wrestling; these attributes qualified him as an emperor after murdering his benefactor Michael III<sup>46</sup>. Choniates describes some peculiar athletic games like pantomime<sup>47</sup>. Hunting was a very popular pastime among the Byzantine emperors. There are some descriptions and pictorial evidence of hunting scenes<sup>48</sup>. The emperor Alexander I (912-913 AD) was fatally injured while playing a ball game like tennis<sup>49</sup>. Some Byzantine emperors were charioteers<sup>50</sup>. Theophilus I (829-842 AD), his son Michael III (842-867 AD.) and Constantine the Monomach (1042-1055 AD) took part in chariot racing in front of the people, provoking the historians' criticism for having such an extravagant –to them– hobby<sup>51</sup>. Theodore Prodromos, a street philosopher of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, like Diogenes the Athenian, presented his emperor Alexius I Comnenos as a perfect charioteer (Sun) who toured his Empire on his chariot<sup>52</sup>. Bryer mentions that the authors who usually note the participation of the emperors in sport are those who had a typical Greek education<sup>53</sup>. The purpose of that involvement was to create posture and to acquire better health and leisure. They also believed that the skill in sport, in particular in horse activities, was a good means for their military preparation. Anna Comnena, for example, emphasizes the sport capabilities of two important personalities. The first is her husband, the general Nicephoros Bryennius:

<sup>45</sup> Leon Diac., pp. 96-97; Genes., *Basileiae*, ed. B. G. NIEBUHR, Bonn, CSHB, 1836, pp. 126-127.

<sup>46</sup> Theoph. cont., *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn, CSHB, 1838, p. 230; RUNCIMAN (1976), p. 193: «It was more the amateur rider like Basil the Macedonian who attracted attention, or like Philoreaus, a stableboy of the tenth century who was...»

<sup>47</sup> Nic. Chon., *Orationes et epistulae*, ed. by I. A. VAN DIETEN, Berlin, CFHB, 1972, p. 509.

<sup>48</sup> Theoph. cont., pp. 231-232; Const. Man., *Ἐκφράσις κνηρησίου γερανῶν*, notes and transl. by Θ. ΝΗΜΑΣ, Θεσσαλονίκη: Κυριακίδης, 1984, pp. 15, 18-19, 21, 23, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Theoph. cont., p. 380.

<sup>50</sup> According to *Syntagma*, v. 2, p. 358, the emperors were permitted to take part in chariot racing.

<sup>51</sup> Theoph. cont., pp. 230-231, 213, and Genes., p. 102 (Michael III as charioteer) and pp. 126-127 (Basil I as an athlete and polo player).

<sup>52</sup> *Theodoros Prodromos. Historische Gedichte*, ed. W. HÖRANDNER, Wien 1974, pp. 261-262.

<sup>53</sup> BRYER (1967): p. 453.

«...He was powerful and boasted that he could wrestle with Giants –says Anna–; his skin was tawny, his chest, broad, and he stood taller by the head and shoulders than the men of that time...; if anyone saw him playing ball or riding or shooting an arrow or brandishing his spear or indulging in horse-exercise, he would imagine he was looking at a new marvel...: for this reason above all he attracted the good will of the populace»<sup>54</sup>.

It is obvious that Comnena indulges Nicephorus' sportsmanship in a hyperbolic way. Nevertheless, the latter was a general and a historian, i.e. an idol of his times<sup>55</sup>. Anna's second description is that of her father Alexius Comnenos (1081-1118 AD):

«For as in other matters he acted as a philosopher... for the greatest part of the day he devoted to labours, and then again would recall it from labours. But even his relaxation was a second labor... chasing and the game of polo were but of secondary, or tertiary, importance to my father, even ever since he was young and before that monster... But as soon as this disease commenced and began to increase, then certainly he gave himself up to gymnastics, and horse-exercise and other games for he was ordered to do this by medical science...»<sup>56</sup>.

Anna writes also that one idea of the personal philosophy of her father was to control his body through physical training (καὶ γὰρ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἐφιλοσόφει καὶ τοῦτο, χαλιναγωγεῖν τὸ σῶμα καὶ εὐαγωγότερον ἑαυτῷ καθιστᾶν<sup>57</sup>).

## 5. PLACES OF SPORT

Constantinople and all the big cities of the Byzantine Empire had a hippodrome. The Great Hippodrome of the capital had a capacity of 30.000 to 35.000 people. Its founder was Septimius Severus (196-199 AD); Constantine I finished and decorated it with glorious works of art and other monuments. In the Great Palace of Constantinople there were two more sport grounds<sup>58</sup>: the *tzykanisterion* for the game *tzykanion* ('polo') and the

<sup>54</sup> Anna Comn., *Alexiad*, ed. LEIB, Paris 1937-45, p. 174.

<sup>55</sup> Nic. Bryenn., *Historiae*, Bruxelles, CFHB, 1975, pp. 75, 77, 81, 267.

<sup>56</sup> Anna Comn., p. 177.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 174.

<sup>58</sup> For the places see R. GUILLAND, «Les hippodromes de Byzance», *Byzantinoslavica* 32 (1970) 30-34.

Covered Hippodrome (next to the Great Hippodrome), an indoor gymnasium for riding, ball games and other activities for the winter months. Outside the north-west walls, near the palace of Blachernae, there was the *Philopation*, a wood for hunting, used only by the emperors. After the demolishing of the Great Hippodrome during the last centuries of the Empire, its ruins were used by the emperors for practicing in jousts and tournaments<sup>59</sup>.

## 6. THE IMPERIAL AND THE OFFICIAL SPORTS

After the description of the main characteristics and the factors that helped in the formation of the Byzantine new sport amateur movement, it remains to see the most representative sports that existed, either for the emperors and the aristocrats or for the people.

### 6.1. *Chariot racing*

The Great Hippodrome was the third in importance institutional centre of Constantinople, after the Great Palace and the cathedral of Aghia Sophia. The emperor bore full responsibility for both the administration of the building and the races as well, while the practical part of the organization of the games was held by the leaders of the spectators groups, the well known *demes* or *μέρη*. The *demes* were divided into two parts (the Greens and the Blues), while the factions of the charioteers who were competing in the arena were four (the Whites, the Greens, the Reds and the Blues). The sponsor of the games and the provider of the trophies was also the Great Palace. The emperor was present all day long in his special small palace, located next to the Great Palace, called *κάθισμα*. He announced the start of the races and their end as well. The program was completed in a ceremonial Byzantine way within two days and the authorities (judges, umpires, etc.) came rather from the Great Palace. The *demes* had judges of less responsibility<sup>60</sup>.

There were two game categories. The first consisted of standard games, called the “games of the catalogue” (*Οἱ τοῦ καταλόγου*), taking place about five times per year (3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 11<sup>th</sup> of May, one week after the Easter, etc.) The second game category included races held on occasional days, such as marriages, birthdays, army victories, visits of important persons and other

<sup>59</sup> GIATSI (2000<sup>2</sup>): pp. 112-134; R. JANIN, *Constantinople Byzantine*, Paris 1964, pp. 183-196.

<sup>60</sup> GIATSI (2000<sup>2</sup>): pp. 127-140.

events. It is not clear if the poor people could attend the games. There are indications, nevertheless, that women and even priests could attend the races.

The religious ceremonies, the presentation of the emperor and the communication with the people before the beginning of the races, as well as the diet imposed to the people made everyone to feel happy<sup>61</sup>. However, in a few cases, some Byzantine hippodromes have been connected with political and social riots, revolts, acts of serious hooliganism and even massacres. It is well known that the two biggest massacres in Byzantium held after the riots that took place in the hippodromes of Thessaloniki in 390 AD and Constantinople in 532 AD. The two horrible events have been considered by the historians either as revolutions or as acts of insurrection, similar to nowadays hooliganism. It seems, however, that the protagonists of the above massacres were the two emperors Theodosius I and Justinian I. The events that took place in Thessaloniki, in particular, were provoked after Theodosius' I order. His aim was to satisfy his Gothic mercenaries, after the spectators of the hippodrome had killed Buterihus, who was the military governor of the city. Buterihus did not want to obey to the people's wish to release the best charioteer of the games, who was in prison because of the crime of pederasty. He kept in jail the best charioteer. The study of the sources shows that Theodosius I was blackmailed by his Gothic mercenaries, who were a part of his army<sup>62</sup>.

The Nika events in their analysis are more complicate than the previous ones. However, even here the events were provoked neither by the spectators and the *demes* nor by the fans of the factions –called by Alan Cameron as hooligans of the hippodrome. The careful analysis of the factors shows that the top protagonists of the vast massacre were the political antagonists –Justinian I on the one side, and Hypatius and his two brothers Porphyrius and Probus, the nephews of Anastasius I, on the other. The latter part, being members of the Senate, seems that had bribed the *betairestai* of the *demes* (the Greens and the Blues) so as the fans to exhibit acts of hooliganism. Hypatius became emperor for one day, but Justinian I, urged by his wife Theodora, at the end used the imperial army to attack all those who were inside the Great Hippodrome. The number of victims was about 30.000 people. The riot of Nika, therefore, can not be considered as a revolution –like the French Revolution in 1789 or that of the Bolsheviks in 1917. The only social revolution in Byzantine times is the movement of

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<sup>61</sup> KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): p. 66.

<sup>62</sup> GIATSI (2000<sup>2</sup>): pp. 135-137.

Zelotes in Thessaloniki, in mid 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Nika events were acts of “imperial hooliganism”, that is, Hypatius used the hippodrome in order to realize his political ambitions. It is known that Anastasius I was dethroned by Justinian’s I uncle, Justin I, in 517 AD. So, the hate against him from Hypatius and his family remained latent until the circumstances –briefly described above– were propitious<sup>63</sup>.

The conflict between Maurice and Phocas in the years 602-610 AD was the last case in which the hippodrome was used for political purposes. Phocas’ successor, Heraclius, kept his distance from the hippodrome *demes* and spectators. This emperor understood that chariot racing was, in fact, a sport, having as main goal to provide recreation to the people<sup>64</sup>. Up to the end of the games –due to the fact that as sport it became too expensive for the imperial treasure–, chariot racing was a real public entertainment.

We have, then, seen that the christian emperors in New Rome perceived chariot racing in a different political way than in Old Rome the emperors did. Here, chariot racing was provided by the emperors themselves. Although the Roman *panem et circenses* existed, there was, thus, a difference between the Circus Maximus of Rome and that of Constantinople. Here, the violence was not exhibited in the arena but on the seats. In practical terms, the Byzantine emperors tried to reduce the accidents in the track by widening the two track curves, where the chariots run. Chariot racing was a great festival in which emperors and people were connected through a ceremonial ritual, the famous Byzantine one. That fame perhaps gave to the place a political character, a point, in which the political use starts always in sport. The great idol of the hippodrome was the charioteer, especially the professional ones<sup>65</sup>. According to the epigrams of the *Palatine Anthology* the most important of all was Porphyrius, whose biography was written by Alan Cameron.

## 6.2. *Tzykanion*

Without doubt, *tzykanion* was the favourite sport for the Byzantine emperors and the aristocrats, in particular in palaeogeon era. The name *tzykanion* derives from the persian word *chougan* (‘strike a ball with a stick’) and it was introduced in Byzantium from Persia in the eighth century. The Byzantines added new rules to the sport in order to limit the traditional

<sup>63</sup> S. GIATSI, «The Massacre in the Riot of Nika in the Great Hippodrome of Constantinople in 532 AD», *IJSH* 12. 3 (1995) 209-23; GIATSI (2000<sup>3</sup>): pp. 137-139.

<sup>64</sup> A. CHRISTOPHILOPOULOU, *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία*, τ. Α': 324-610, Αθήνα 1975, pp. 331 and 260-274 about the problem of *demes* and hippodrome.

<sup>65</sup> CAMERON (1973): pp. 29, 246.



violence. John Cinnamos provides a complete description of the game<sup>66</sup>. Through their participation in sport, the emperors influenced the whole social life of the Great Palace. The Comneni promoted *tzykanion* to the West. France seems to be the first country where polo was played<sup>67</sup>. Blemmydes<sup>68</sup>, a more skeptical scholar, was wondering why his pupil –Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1258 AD.), the Emperor of Nicea– found so much pleasure in a great number of sport activities. The author gives useful information about different sports, but disagrees with the idea that «... through that kind of sport activities people became more flexible and skilful (καὶ λέγει ὅτι διὰ τῆς τοιαύτης γυμνασίας γίνονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι εὐστροφοὶ καὶ εὐκίνητοι)<sup>69</sup>».

### 6.3. *Jousts and tournaments*

Despite the political gap that was created between the Byzantines and the westerns because of the occupation of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 AD<sup>70</sup>, a mutual interaction existed between them in sport<sup>71</sup>. Some Byzantines admired the physical appearance of the western knights who visited or lived in Constantinople<sup>72</sup>. Tournaments, for example, took place in Byzantium even after 1261 AD. Manuel I Comnenus (1143-1180 AD) was one of the emperors who adopted some of the western methods of frankish chivalry and organized jousts and tournaments in the Great Hippodrome<sup>73</sup>. Nicephorus Gregoras<sup>74</sup> describes in detail some games called “Olympics”, organized by Andronicus III (1325-1341 AD) in the city of *Didymoteichon* in 1332 AD, in order to celebrate

<sup>66</sup> Cinn., pp. 262-263.

<sup>67</sup> BRYER (1967): pp. 456-457.

<sup>68</sup> Blemmyd., *De regis officiis*, in: PG 148, cols. 636-638.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 637.

<sup>70</sup> NICOL (1972): pp. 1-20.

<sup>71</sup> KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): pp. 67, 164. The byzantine society was open for cultural interactions. That happened also in sport. The byzantines took sport customs and games of any kind from West Europe, India, China, Egypt and Russia. They tried also to copy the “barbarian” sports from the Celts and the Mongols. It seems, therefore, that the influence in sport from West was more frequent, since the europeans lived in Byzantium for many decades. Finally, it is interesting to note here that some byzantine scholars, before and after the capture of Constantinople, escaped to West and helped the spreading of platonic and aristotelian ideas on gymnastics and games.

<sup>72</sup> RUNCIMAN (1976): p. 193.

<sup>73</sup> A. BRYER, «The First Encounter with the West, A.D. 1050-1204», in: P. WHITTING (ED.), *Byzantium. An Introduction*, Oxford 1971, p. 102; cf. the important text of an anonymus author ed. by SOTERIADES (1908).

<sup>74</sup> Nic. Greg., *Ῥωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία*, Αθήνα: Νέα Σύνορα, 1997, pp. 415-416 (ch. X. 3); SOTERIADES (1908): pp. 4-18.

the birth of his son John, the later emperor. Nevertheless, Gregoras characterizes both jousts and tournaments as too hard for an emperor<sup>75</sup>.

Although chariot racing was abolished in 1195 AD, the new contests as jousts and tournaments (τζούστρες and ξυλοκονταριές) were never established in the popular sense, for the simple reason that Byzantines did not like, not the sport of jousting, but the “silly-franks”. Nevertheless, some Byzantine emperors liked them, either as participants in the jousts or in organizing them in the western way. The emperors that liked tournaments liked also the political system of West Europe<sup>76</sup>.

It is worthy to point out here that in cultural terms there was an interaction between the two christian worlds. The epic poems of the Byzantines were influenced by the western *romances*, in which the hero resembles the western knight more than the typical Greek hero, like *Akrites*<sup>77</sup>. It is important that even *Erotokritos*, a hero of Vitzentzos Cornaros of the second decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is described in a similar way, as one hero of the chivalry. It appears, therefore, that the real “schism” between the two christian worlds was located on political differences, not in religious ones. Each one of both churches wanted to rule the christian world ecumenically in political terms. Each one considered itself as the best leader of christianity<sup>78</sup>.

## 7. SPORT FOR PEOPLE

The new sport amateur movement flourished not only in the Great Palace, mentioned above. By the centuries it was established also to the people’s daily life. There were, of course, some common activities for both, emperors and the people; these were, for example, chariot racing, hunting, riding, swimming and others.

Although the primary sources referring to the Byzantine emperors’ and aristocrats’ sport life, mentioned above, are satisfactory, the equivalent version

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<sup>75</sup> For differences see NICOL (1972): pp. 1-22. The westerns called the byzantines as *graeci*, since the latters called them as “franks”. Both were mistaken, since they were christians. The paradox is that both again exaggerated the small dogmas differences.

<sup>76</sup> SOTERIADES (1908): *passim*; RUNCIMAN (1976): p. 193.

<sup>77</sup> BECK (1988): pp. 117-118; MANGO (1988): p. 296f; KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): p. 137.

<sup>78</sup> The “Great Schism” between the two Churches happened in 867, 1054 and 1472. Ironically, in 1439 –14 years only before the occupation of Constantinople by Mechmet II in 1453– the Synod of Florence brought the typical unification of the two dogmas, without practical help.

concerning people's sports is limited. Nevertheless, few sources, in particular the so-called traditional ones (folk songs, traditional poems, epics, romance, etc.), reveal both the character and the origin of games, called in general as *παίγνια*<sup>79</sup>. The secondary sources give few outlines only to this important theme. Nevertheless, there is not yet a complete book for the daily life sport. Koukoules' texts, despite of plenty methodological mistakes that did on his books, are rich in information, in particular in using the original sources. Nevertheless, his texts need a careful consideration before using them<sup>80</sup>. Lazos recently worked satisfactory on the games doing a good codification and description. Useful details on the games are in the works of Bryer, Cameron, Mango, Giatsis and others<sup>81</sup>.

The tracing and the description of the Byzantine sports, from methodological point of view, present some difficulties. The first concerns the codification of so plenty in number and formation sport activities. *Pentovola* ('pebbles'), for example, was very popular for all ages. It was played with five small stones and the players had to handle skills having difficult motions and variations. It was played, in particular, by boys and girls into houses and outside and it was more popular for girls, but it was played by women and boys. Arching, to give one more example, was used by the Byzantines either as an army skill and hunting or as a children game. There are difficulties on the attempt to categorize fencing, hunting, swimming, rowing and dancing; each one was used for different purposes and aims. There were activities such as acrobatics, displays, buffoons, janglers, mimes works and dances which were presented anywhere, even in the Great Palace<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> CAMERON (1973): p. 254.

<sup>80</sup> ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΗΣ (1948-1957): vol. 3, pp. 80-147 (athletic games), pp. 247f and 270f (*panegyreis*), p. 260 (acrobatics), p. 263 (*calendae* and *vota*), p. 267 (games); more information about *panegyreis* in the vol. II. 1, pp. 7-63 (holidays, *calendae*, etc.) Koukoules worked also in some very difficult texts, as those of Eustathius of Thessaloniki, cf. Φ. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΗΣ, «Θεσσαλονίκη Ευστάθιος. Τὰ λαϊκὰ θεάματα», *Τὰ λαογραφικά* 2 (1929) 355-374. Among them were athletics, various type of games, baths, dancing and other recreational activities. Koukoules considered sport as a continuous cultural factor coming straight from ancient Greco-Roman world to that of Byzantium and modern Greece. The hard-worked scholar did not take in his mind that most of sports and games in Christian era had lost the old pagan characteristics and were used now just for recreational purposes (τροφή). Koukoules didn't also distinguish the illusions and metaphors given by the Christian fathers; cf. KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): p. 37 (critics about his work).

<sup>81</sup> LAZOS (2002): pp. 101-111 and *passim*; cf. also BRYER (1967): pp. 453-456; GIATSI (2000<sup>3</sup>): pp. 141-188.

<sup>82</sup> BRYER (1967): pp. 453-454; ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΗΣ (1948-1957): v. 3, pp. 247-69; CAMERON (1973): p. 29.

The second difficulty is presented to an attempt to trace the origin of each sport or dancing itself. Some Byzantine activities are referred to Homeric and ancient times (athletic events and dice, games like *psephi* and *ostrakinda*), while others came from Greco-Roman world. It is known also that the Byzantines liked to copy sport activities from other people. We find such play skills from West, Russia, India, China, Mongolia and elsewhere<sup>83</sup>.

Regarding again the difficulties of the understanding the Byzantine games we ascertain some strange features. Despite, for example, of plenty of the law and Church abandons of pagan activities, people continued to use old traditional activities having more or less pagan origin. The explanation seems to be located on the fact that some activities were continued in daily life of people because they were used for health, hygienic and practical-ergonomic purposes. That is why they were, by a silence of the State and Church, incorporated in the context of the daily life. Such activities were walking, gymnastic exercises, bathing, massage (*malaxis* and *kinesiotherapy*) and other ergonomic ones, common, nevertheless, not only in Byzantium but in Middle Ages Europe<sup>84</sup>. Other category of activities (*δρώμενα*), were connected with the daily customs and traditions. Such activities were the *calendae*, *brumalia* or *carnivals*. Some of these customs were used both as much as religious or social activities, and have survived in Greece up to nowadays. Some examples of these activities were: a) the *belidonismoι*, which took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March<sup>85</sup>; b) the display of jumping over a fire on the John's of Cle dona –23<sup>rd</sup> of June– eve, and c) swimming in the day of *Theophania* (the day of Jesus Christ's baptism). Thus, some activities, as having social and traditional base as swimming, rowing, sailing, riding, fencing, arching, hunting, dancing and bathing, were in some cases included in the customs of the new religion<sup>86</sup>.

### 7.1. Categories of sports

Although there were games for all ages, the children's games dominated in number and skill in particular<sup>87</sup>. There were games played by individuals

<sup>83</sup> GIATSI (2000<sup>2</sup>): pp. 167-168.

<sup>84</sup> RICE (1967): p. 155; EUTHEHADES (1983): pp. 18, 48, 63, 98, 99, 298; KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): pp. 67-69; MANGO (1988): p. 111.

<sup>85</sup> PAPAMICHAEL (1917): pp. 61-102; ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1947-1952): v. 3, pp. 93, 95-96, 106 and the figures at the end of this volume; Κ. ΚΑΚΟΥΡΗ, *Προαισθητικές μορφές θεάτρου*, Αθήνα 1998 (repr.), pp. 133, 140-141, 145, 173, writes that ancient pagan customs transmitted to next centuries as games and social feasts; RICE (1967): pp. 157, 169, 171, fig. 67; RICE (1967): p. 156; KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): pp. 64, 66; MANGO (1988): p. 111.

<sup>86</sup> ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1948-1957): vol. 5, pp. 206-244; LAZOS (2002): pp. 101-111.

<sup>87</sup> ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1948-1957): vol. 1, pp. 161-224; see also the figures at the end of this volume.

or teams, others acted with or without means and instruments (stick or ball for example). There were games played indoor (in house) or outside (in the court of the house or in countryside). The material for the ball was from fabric weaving, since the sticks were made by tree's branches. Boys and youths liked also to compete in athletics (running, jumping, javelin and discus), wrestling and boxing<sup>88</sup>. A fascinate idea of play's atmosphere is presented by the Great Palace's mosaics in Constantinople. Boys and youths are playing with small animals and other means (στεφάνι, 'hoop')<sup>89</sup>. The girls loved to play in houses, in courts, different kind of small games and activities, such as *pentovola*, table games like τριάρα and ἐνιάρα. They liked to make dolls, balls, table games, to dance or to play feet-kicks and others<sup>90</sup>. There were men games as those mentioned by Agathias and the *Basilica* (table games like backgammon [ταβλίον-τάβλι] and dice [ζάρια])<sup>91</sup>. The games of chess was played by few people. The Byzantine people liked to play cards, dices, tabli and other gambling games in public houses, called καφωδεῖα or καφενεῖα. They were popular, but they were also used for lotto and money. So, a lot of people did loose their money. That's why the law of *Basilica* prohibited betting. Although there were some games<sup>92</sup> for women, nevertheless the favourite for them activity was dancing. There is not a complete monograph on the subject, unless an article of Koukoules<sup>93</sup>.

### 7.2. The popular games

The official games that took place in the Great Hippodrome were the official imperial games, called δημόσιοι ἀγῶνες, mentioned above. However, there were popular games organized by the people having no official definition: they were "μὴ δημόσιοι" games. Although for the first category of games there is a satisfactory bibliography, for the latter it is limited. The popular games were organized by villagers in the provinces eventually. Nevertheless, some authors in different periods describe this kind of games emphatically. For example, Eusebius of Alexandria, author of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century, the *Basilica* of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, the anonym author of *Digenes*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 167, 170, 171-172 and *passim*; RICE (1967): p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> JOBST ET AL. (1997): *passim*.

<sup>90</sup> ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1948-1957): vol. 1, pp. 162, 167, 170, 171-72 and *passim*.

<sup>91</sup> Agath., *Epigrammata* 76-78, in: *Historici Graeci Minores*, v. II: Menander Protector et Agathias, ed. by L. DINDORF, Lipsiae 1871, p. 421; *Basilica* 60.8.1-2; KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): p. 85.

<sup>92</sup> ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1948-1957): vol. 1, p. 162.

<sup>93</sup> Φ. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ, «Ο χορός», *ΕΕΒΣ* 14 (1938) 217-257.

*Akrites* of 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries and Stephanos Sachlikes in 14<sup>th</sup> century speak about popular games in different sport activities. The description is about similar: in a holyday day some youths are gathered in an open space or in a valley and participate there in running, wrestling, fencing (with sticks [ῥαβδέας]), riding, jousting, arching and other activities. At the end, dancing and pick nick is following<sup>94</sup>. *Digenes Akrites* was the sport idol of the last Byzantine centuries. He was the model of virility, valiant, masculinity and bravery. The origin of his epic locates in the struggle between Byzantines and arabs in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The hero was half Greek and half arab. *Akrites* employed all kind of sport activities, both for recreation and military preparation. *Digenes* “jumped” higher than a bird and was “faster” than a deer. He “beat” the Amazons like Hercules, the mythical Greek hero. At the end, *Digenes* wrestled with Death (*Charon*)<sup>95</sup>.

Some of the above events, such as running and wrestling, took place also in the Great Hippodrome of Constantinople in front of the emperor and the people; the first was called *vota* or βοτόν, and took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, every year. The second took place on the platform (στάμα or σκάμια), in front of the throne of the emperor<sup>96</sup>.

Regarding the permission of five events, called by the authors as *pentathlon*, taking place just only for virtue (ἀρετή, ‘valiant and proud’), I must clear up here two points: the first concerns the definition of the word *pentathlon*. This has nothing with the *pentathlon* of the ancient times, when the five events consisted in one, like today’s *heptathlon* or *dekathlon*. It is known that the ancient *pentathlon* included jumping, running, wrestling, javelin and discus. The Byzantine *pentathlon* refers to a permission of five separated events (παίγνια) such as running, jumping, javelin, wrestling and boxing. Balsamon, the commentator of the proceedings (24<sup>th</sup> canon) of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod (c. 682 AD), in 12<sup>th</sup> century replaces javelin to discus<sup>97</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> Eus. Alex., in: PG 86.1, col. 417; *Basilica* 60.3.1 (competition in javelin... ἔνθα οἱ ἀκοντίζοντες ἔπαιζον); *Βασίλειος Διγενῆς Ἀκρίτης καὶ τὰ ἄσματα τοῦ Ἀρμούρη καὶ τοῦ Ἰγού τοῦ Ἀνδρονίκου*, ἐπιμ. Σ. Ἀλεξίου, Ἀθήνα: Ἑρμῆς, 1990, cols. 690-701; Stephanos Sachlikes, col. 254; cf. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1948-1957): vol. 3, p. 144, n. 2 and p. 142 n. 4 (I have not seen the book of Sachlikes).

<sup>95</sup> A. VASILIEV, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453*, transl. in Greek by D. Bergades, Athens undated, v. II, p. 714; RICE (1967): pp. 111, 158 and 209-210; RUNCIMAN (1976): pp. 252, 270; KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): p. 40.

<sup>96</sup> ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ (1948-1957): vol. 3, pp. 247-269 (different spectacle and acrobatic activities); CAMERON (1973): p. 253, n. 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Basilica* 60.8.2; *Syntagma*, v. 2. p. 360.

It appears that popular games were held by the Byzantines more often after 1261 AD, year of the liberation of Constantinople from the crusaders of the fourth crusade in 1204. It seems that in that period of 57 years a mutual interaction existed between the two worlds in sport, as in plenty of aspects of their daily life. That is proved by the flourish of the western tournaments, mentioned above. Nevertheless, Kazhdan and Constable state that «only few embryonic elements of chivalry ethics are found in some Byzantine *panegyris*»<sup>98</sup>.

The romances' poems, interacted by the West folk ones and romances, referred not only to knights events, but to other sport activities as well. *Tzykanion* was played in West Europe after the departure of crusaders from East<sup>99</sup>.

Regarding the popular games again, we have to mention an open historical question. It's not clear if some of these Byzantine popular games were held in feast religious days as it was happening in the period of the Turkish occupation, called *tourkokratia* (1453-1821). Vryonis states that popular games in religious feasts called *panegyris* (local festival) started in Balkan provisions in 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>100</sup>. However, Damascenos Stoudites<sup>101</sup>, who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD in Lete of Thessaloniki, describes popular sport

<sup>98</sup> KAZHDAN-CONSTABLE (1982): p. 152.

<sup>99</sup> Βυζαντινὰ Ἱποτικά Μυθιστορήματα, ἐπιμ. Ἐ. ΚΡΙΑΡΑΣ, Ἀθήνα 1959: *Τὸ κατὰ Καλίμαχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην ἐρωτικὸν διήγημα*, v. 273 (using of volt for jumping); *Διήγησις ἐξαιρετος Βελθάνδρου τοῦ Ῥωμαίου*, vs. 534-50 (competition of beauty); *Διήγησις ἐξαιρετος ἐρωτικὴ καὶ ξένη Φλωρίου τοῦ πανευτυχοῦς καὶ κόρης Πλάτζια Φλώρης*, vs. 1439-49 (use of tabli), 660-716 (joustes); *Διήγησις ἐξαιρετος ἐρωτικὴ καὶ ξένη τοῦ Ἱμπερίου θαυμαστοῦ καὶ κόρης Μαργαρώνης*, vs. 120-126, 338-386, 415-434, 780-788 (joustes); *Ἀχιλλεὺς-Διήγησις τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως*, Ἀθήνα: Σικυώνιος, 1994, cols. 673-75:

μετὰ τοὺς δεῖπνους οἱ χοροὶ, μετὰ χορούς ορχήσεις,  
μετὰ ορχησμάτων πάλασμα καὶ συμπλοκὴ ἀλλήλων,  
καὶ καβαλλάριοι παρευθεῖς κρούσιν τὰς κονταρέας

Cf. BECK (1988): pp. 191-235, in particular pp. 204, 209, 230; MANGO (1988): pp. 296-300.

<sup>100</sup> S. VRYONIS, «The *Panegyris* of the Byzantine Saint», in: S. HACKEL (ED.), *The Byzantine Saint. University of Birmingham. Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, London 1981, p. 225: «Recreation and relaxation at the scenes of eating, drinking and dancing were accompanied by displays of sports, an aspect mentioned in ancient *panegyris*, in Evliya Celebi, but not in Byzantine authors. It is not known whether the athletic contests existed in the *panegyris* of the eighteenth century or whether they were instituted later»; K. ΤΣΑΝΤΑΣ, *Τὰ ἀγωνίσματα τῶν κλεφταρματολῶν*, Ἰωάννινα 1980, *passim*. About *panegyris* see ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΗΣ (1947-1952): vol. 3, pp. 267, 269-283.

<sup>101</sup> *Θησαυρὸς Δαμασκηνοῦ τοῦ Ὑποδιακόνου καὶ Στουδίτου τοῦ Θεσσαλονικέως*, Venice 1851, p. 164: that in a feast day some youths went in countryside and participated there in running, wrestling and other games; p. 406: the author mentions five events (*pentatblon*).

activities (wrestling and running) organized by some youths on the day of Saint George<sup>102</sup>. The contest was held without spectators.

It seems, finally, that popular games had not taken place during the religious days and saints feasts before 1453, year of the total dissolution of Byzantium and the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks<sup>103</sup>. It is possible that the Orthodox Church after 1453, in some time, asked from sultan the permission of the games during the local religious feasts<sup>104</sup>. In that way the games were incorporated into the context of social *pronomia* ('permissions' or 'privileges') given by the sultan to all minorities of the Ottoman Empire. The popular games in the local festivals in West appeared earlier, since they were part of the idealism of feudalism and chivalry. This subject needs a specific consideration.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Byzantium or New Rome or East Roman Empire (330-1453 AD) developed a great civilization, based on the Greco-Roman tradition and Orthodox Christian dogma. Among the cultural elements that were created in this State was a new sport movement, having as the main characteristics recreation and play amusement (τροφή). It was rather a kind of peculiar amateurism resembled to the nowadays mass sport movement having no relationships with formal clubs and other authorities. That happened by two innovations: i. The emperors, from Constantine I (325-337) on, abandoned the bloody Roman *ludi* apart of chariotteering and some recreational activities and dances; ii. From its position, Christianity rejected the ancient pagan Greek rituals, which included worship of the body and pagan activities. Christian fathers rejected the traditional Greek

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<sup>102</sup> The *Demetria* of Thessaloniki was the greatest *panegyris* in Byzantium, but no popular games are mentioned. The text of *Timarione* mentions about a great procession (πομπή), like the *Panathenaea*, but the author does not mention athletic games. Cf. the book of A. GUILLOU, *La civilisation byzantine*, Paris 1974, transl. in Greek by P. Odorico and S. Tzohantariidou, Athens 1996, pp. 349-350 (*Demetria*), 275 (*panegyreis*), 348, 350 (*panegyreis* in Sparta and Trapezond in which popular games took place).

<sup>103</sup> Both sultan and the Orthodox Church accepted the above events just as a social event, and nothing more. Some *panegyreis* by the centuries became not only a great local religious festival, but adopted also a commercial character. So, the simple *panegyris* become *emporopanegyris* ('commercial festival'). Not all *panegyreis* included games, while dancing took place during all the *panegyreis*.

<sup>104</sup> C. MOSCOF, *Εισαγωγικά στην ιστορία του εργατικού κινήματος της εργατικής τάξης*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1979, pp. 90-108.



idea of dualism according to which the human being is separated in two elements, body and soul. Now human being was considered united (ὁμοούσιος) and his first care should be the solve of the soul. Christianity respected more children and especially boys, who anticipated the heavy educational violence. It is important to note that *paederasty* was prohibited both by the Church fathers and the State laws<sup>105</sup>. In such a new context sports were developed in a different way. In semiotic terms, the identity of the movements were the same, but the ontology and the character was different. The old idealism was changed for ever.

The great spectacle sport in Byzantium –common for emperors and people– was chariot racing. However, the violence that happened in Rome into the arena, in Constantinople was transferred to the seats of the hippodromes. The main reason for that tragic phenomenon was rather that the hippodromes, at least during the first three centuries of the Empire, were used for political reasons.

The greatest sport hero of Byzantines were the charioteer in the first centuries and *Digenes Akrites* in the last ones. The Byzantine sport “virtue” was just for entertainment and bravery. Sport in Byzantium was not used for physical education as in ancient Greece or as in the 18<sup>th</sup> and later centuries.

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<sup>105</sup> SOZ., *HE*, ed. J. BIDEZ-G. C. HANSEN, Berlin 1960, p. 339.

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