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**Original research article**

# RECONSTRUCTION OF ROMAN LEGIONS WITH PHYSICAL EXERCISE'S EXAMPLES ON THE TERRITORY OF SERBIA.

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## SUMMARY

This work tries to gather on one place all valuable reconstructions of Roman legions on the territory of Serbia, and archeology tries to demystify them. Searching for materialized time in the form of architectural remains, tools and weapons, cult and magic objects in Serbia, archaeologists "captured" the time in which there were intense physical activities in this area, martial arts arenas, race track, thermal baths, and luxurious villas with mosaics. It is supposed that physical exercise was firstly intended for strengthening power and efficiency of Roman soldiers. With multidisciplinary cooperation, firstly, with archeological and military historical museums across the Serbia, this work can help in demystification how of exercising soldiers, as well as military strategies of Roman legions in this region. It can be useful for the people in the field of art, and in contemporary military schools.

**Keywords:** archeology, physical exercise, museum, art, army.

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## INTRODUCTION

Search for materialized time in the form of architectural remains, tools and weapon, cult and magic objects, Serbian archaeologists have discovered that several Roman emperors were born in this region - among which are the two who would have the biggest impact on the ages to come; Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337) and Emperor Iustinian (527-565). But there had been many *more Roman rulers who stayed in Serbian territories, preparing for military campaigns,*

*building, dying.* A Roman legion was the basic unit of the Roman land force. A legionnaire was a soldier- the member of the legion. Physical exercise and sport today are increasingly becoming theatrical like gladiator fights of the Roman arenas, with the basic sense of entertainment and victory at all cost. Physical exercise is becoming a forgotten antique thought- it is no longer a food for body and soul.

## **METHODS**

Using combined historical and description method, analyses was taken from the primary sources of data of the Romans' legion leftovers, which were found in museums of the following cities: Belgrade, Nis, Pozarevac and Jagodina on the Serbian territory. In the immediate environment of above mentioned cities can be found leftovers of the Roman cities, military fortifications and camps. The goal of this work was to select primary sources, which were directly used by archeologist of the museum in reconstruction of a military equipment, weapons and object used in exercise. A theoretical analysis method and comparative analysis were used in the discussion of collected data. A research hypothesis was that forms of physical exercise, which structurally belonged to phylogenetic forms of human motion (walking, running, jumping, throwing) were kept in the same form in the Roman period too.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

There are evidences that two Roman legions were placed on the Serbian territory, V and VII, from about fifty identified in the Roman Empire. One Roman legion usually covered one Roman province, which they protected. For the battle soldiers were deployed in three lines: 1. The hastate (they endured first enemy attack), 2. The Principes, 3. The triarii (experienced veterans who resisted the enemy cavalry attacks). Equites, the Roman cavalry, attacked from a side. Leves and Velites forced enemies to close fight. They usually substitute their old strategy with the strategy of their enemies. The 'gladius' sword was taken from the Iberian Peninsula people, warships from the Carthaginians and heavy cavalry and archers from the Persians. Infantry was usually armed with spears, bows, slingshots, daggers, swords, maces and war axes and various shields served as protection. Within the infantry, archers formed a separate group. Each of them was equipped with its own quivers with arrows, and a bow whose length was approximately equal to the height of a man. Archers were working in groups of three fighters. Next to the archer himself (here was a pikeman who was supposed to protect him and a squire - who is supposed to protect all three). Lightweight horse-drawn

carriages rapidly became an integral part of the army. In the ninth century BC each coach carried the carriage driver and an archer, and later one or two squires were added. The bow of the archer on the carriage was significantly shorter than one of the infantry archer. The Cavalry was strategically important to the army considering the mobility. Cavalry, along with coaches, represented the elite part of the military. Each rider was equipped with a small bow and short sword. In the ninth century BC a squire rided usually the same horse, as a defense of a horseman and for holding a bridle while the rider aimed. After the ninth century BC the squire disappears again, The battles were fought melee by the infantry, which was covered the archers, chariots and cavalry. Special tactics, that the Roman army occasionally used, were the night attacks. Vegetius, the late Roman author described the sword fighting technique of experienced soldiers who did not fight lo cut, but to stab and so directly damage the opponent's vital organs. Cutting was difficult because of the armor and the bones. By raising an unarmed hand they were reducing the revealed area of the body. This doctrine was utilized by Italian fencing masters of 16<sup>th</sup> century and became the primary characteristic of the Italian and French schools of fencing. The Romans enjoyed to celebrate their victory on (he battlefield by racing chariots. Races for two-horse chariots (Lat: biga) and four-horse chariots (Lat: quadriga)<sup>1</sup> were very popular. Cavalry was formed of equites and auxiliary unit of Italics, which also formed easy infantry and archers. At the time of the republic one legion numbered 4200 legionnaires. With reforms in the late Imperial period one legion numbered 1500 legionnaires, which gave units elasticity and speed. Constantine the Great increased the number of legions, but decreased the number of legionnaires. The reason was better flexibility and to limit the possibility for rebellion. The military path (Via militaris) which was spreading from Belgrade (Singidunum), trough Viminacium (near Pozarevac), trough Nis ( Naisus), Sophia (Serdica) and Edrine(Hadrianopolis) all the way to Carigard, was connected with Ignatius path (Via egnatia) across the Vardar valley. On the Via militaris mostly were consist of the iron horseshoe nails, horseshoes and various objects made of iron, tin plating of the carriages, arrow points, ancient coins and two sapphires <sup>2</sup>. Mosaic examples with scenes of physical exercise at the time of the late Rome were: wrestling, fencing, swimming, equitation contest, shooting a bow, fight with wild animals, gladiator fights, chariot race<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mirkovic, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings no. 5, Nis Cultural Center, Niš, 2007, p. 28

<sup>3</sup> Bokan, Bokan, Markovic, 2014, p.17

Naissos or Naissus (Naissus, today Nis) linking Europe with the Middle East, for centuries have been the true gateway between the East and the West. Ancient settlement of Mediana is by area the largest in the vicinity of Naissus<sup>4</sup>. It is only three Roman miles (4.5 km) from the ancient city and defined as its suburb. On that occasion, they conducted the division of escort - military commanders, troops, and the imperial court (courtiers). It was noted that the settlement with its villas and buildings covered the area of about 40 hectares. The luxury of detected objects, baths, mosaics indicate that it was a favorite destination of the highest social classes, where, enjoying the luxury stayed many Roman emperors, starting military campaigns or returning from them. Constantine often visited and also conducted diplomatic affairs there. Historical documents attest to the laws from 315, 319, 324 and 334 signed in Naissus. The motto "win or die"<sup>5</sup> was the most important in the show performed for the audience. There are many examples with elements of physical exercise trough Roman legion of : mosaic chariot race, mosaic animal hunting with neat for game, gladiator fights and bestiary (gladiator-animal fights)<sup>6</sup>. In the vicinity of Medina the statuette called "Gladiator" was found - in a combat stance, with left leg bent at the knee. Chest is protected by a leather armor and head by a helmet with n plume and lowered visor. Short pants, a massive belt, leather glove on the right hand, and in the hand of left, bent arm, a handgrip of a sword or an ax whose blade is missing<sup>7</sup>. In Mediana "the Bronze fence" is discovered a rarity that as a part of the mythology of Gates of Heaven talks about the entrance to paradise (Picture 1.). It is considered that in a practice it separated mobility from proximity of gladiator fights. Also found, a bronze boat-lamp, its glow symbolizing the light of the divine word, and its presence in the tomb is a symbol of light and bliss for the deceased granted by prayer (Picture 1.)<sup>8</sup>. In the years of the victory and success of the Roman conquests the Imperial Palace with hippodrome was built in the southern part of Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) which structurally resembled the Palace of Galerius in Thessaloniki. In Sirmium there was a track exclusively used for chariot races. Race track was covered with 30 cm thick mixture of river sand and gravel, beneath which was a network of draining canals. Racing chariols had a lot simpler form and weighed less compared to the combat version. Small semi-open platform on wheels, rigidly connected to horses

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<sup>4</sup> Proceedings No. 6-7, the National Museum, Nis, 1991.str. 24

<sup>5</sup> Zivanovic, 2011, p.20

<sup>6</sup> Bokan B., Bokan M, Markovic M, 2014 p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Proceedings no. 10, The National Museum, Nis, 2001, p.36

<sup>8</sup> Proceedings No. 1, The National Museum, Nis, 1985, p. 69

which were 'driven' by whip and harness<sup>9</sup>. The Roman drivers were tied to their cars and if toppled, they had to quickly cut the ribbon that held them in order to save their life, while in Greece, the drivers held the ribbon in their hands. Most common were the chariots with four horses, although there were extreme cases, with up to 10 horses that could be driven only by the most skillful drivers. Bow and arrow were historically used not only in warfare, but also in huntings by the monarch skilled in shooting targets while riding, therefore as the beginning of the modern practice of recreational or professional sports. Hunting with falcons and related birds of prey (hawk, eagle) and training birds for hunting was an old and widespread tradition among the rulers of that time. It was practiced by the Thracians, Romans, Japanese, Chinese, Kyrgyz, Mongols, Indians and other nationalities. In Europe, falconry was, next to hunting with cheetahs, especially a favorite among the prominent rich. Deities and heroes in several mythologies were described as archers (Diana and Cupid were extremely adept at archery on horseback riding). Felix Romuliana Palace (archaeological site near Zajecar) revealed a mosaic with a sword and shields, with scenes of hunting with falcons, hunting scenes of Dionysus and the panther<sup>10</sup>. As a special form of fighting was a special demonstration of fighting scene. It was found a sculpture of a cavalry man in hunt with a dog that bites a boar's leg. (Picture 4). The cavalry man could be a tsar, assumes Bojca Dimitrijevic, director of National museum in Zajecar. At the Mediana site, a group of damaged statues was discovered in one room in 1972. They represented Aesculapius, Hygenia, Dionysus, Hercules and Satyr. In 2011 a marble sculpture of Artemis, goddess of hunting was discovered. Balkan Pompeii at Viminacium (near Old Kostolac, 12 km from Pozarevac) was one of the most important Roman cities and military camps in the period from first to fourth century. Within and around the city, which extended to 450 hectares, the archeologists have discovered an amphitheater, monumental buildings, squares, streets, bathrooms, and hippodrome. They found a gold plated bronze eagle (probably placed on combat chariots and fell off during a performance (Picture 5). Thermal baths were also discovered, which were the main meeting place for Romans.

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<sup>9</sup> Tatic-Djuric, 1960., p. 238

<sup>10</sup> Mitic, 2012, p.248

## CONCLUSION

Physical exercise was known as military exercise, and it was directed to the better military preparation of the future warriors, just like it was done in Greece. With an appearance of the Empire, there was need for organized physical education for children of the richest society members. Primary, physical activity of Romans was intended to strengthening power and efficiency of Roman soldiers of that time, but later it grew into circus games. Specificity of the Roman Empire described through phylogenetic forms of physical exercise shows that ontogenesis (evolvent of an individual) of human is a short recapitulation of phylogenesis (evolvent of the human species). Modern man is becoming a passive watcher of sports on TV, than an active participant. Physical exercise forms that belonged to phylogenetic form of a human motion like basic forms of motion: walking, running, throwing, jumping in modified form of performing, kept their primary form through history. Above mentioned forms of physical exercise also had some other forms. Through history, dominant phylogenetic forms of motion was mostly used in hunting.



**Picture 1.** *Bronze lamp and Bronzant gate - (Source: The National Museum, Nis)*

Hunting scenes from Prehistory shows magical rituals on caves. In the Roman period hunting scenes on preserved mosaics show that this form of physical exercise beside military exercise also had a character of entertaining audience in the arena. That is the only logical explanation for a great number of pictures from hunting on mosaics, and a great number of bows, spears and arrows. The other examples of physical exercise in Roman time in Serbia were: running, throwing a disk, throwing a spear, wrestling, fencing, swimming, equitation contest, shooting a bow, fight with wild animals, gladiator fights, chariot race. With reconstruction using a primary source data, we have now more completed and accurate picture of the Roman warfare on the Serbian territory. It was written: "It should be noted that the main reason of



**Picture 2.** *Gladiator in a combat stance (Source: The National Museum, Nis)*

*the Roman's reign over the world was that they give up their own practice as soon as they find the better ones"* <sup>11</sup>. By using primary sources of data we should revive shadows of the past and work for the future. First of all, we should remember valuable archeological objects, from which we learn about the past. History still lives. Life is like the fight of gladiator in arena, who never gives up, although he had an invincible opponent in front of him. Let this historical revelation of physical exercise help us in finding how material as well as spiritual glow, and the greatness of ancient times.



**Picture 3.** *Reconstruction of Sirmium, Roman and equipment (Source: Military Museum, Belgrade)*



**Picture 4.** *A Cavalry man in hunt with a dog that bits a boar's leg (Source: National Museum Zaječar.)*



**Picture 5.** *A gold plated bronze eagle (Source: Archaeological Park Viminacijum)*

<sup>11</sup> Secondat de Montesquieu, 1965.

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## РЕКОНСТРУКЦИЈА И ФИЗИЧКА АКТИВНОСТ РИМСКИХ ЛЕГИЈА НА ТЕРИТОРИЈИ СРБИЈЕ

### САЖЕТАК

Рад покушава да прикупи вредне доказе физичке активности на територији Србије које нам историја оставља а археологија покушава да демистификује. Тражећи материјализовано време, археолози су "ухватили" тренутак у коме је на простору данашње Србије било: интензивне физичке активности и одмарања римских легија, и царева, слугећи према откривеним аренама за борилачке вештине, тркачким стазама, термалним купатилима, и луксузним вилама са мозаицима. Претпоставља се да је физичко вежбање било намењено првенствено јачању снаге и ефикасности римских војника. Мултидисциплинарном сарадњом првенствено са археолошким и војно-историјским музејима широм Србије овај рад може помоћи у демистификовању како начина вежбања војника, израде, држања и ношења оружја, тако и војничким стратегијама римских легија на овим просторима. Може користити и људима из области уметности, као и савременим војним школама.

**Кључне речи:** физичко вежбање, музеј, уметност, војска.



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## РЕКОНСТРУКЦИЯ И ФИЗИЧЕСКАЯ АКТИВНОСТЬ РИМСКИХ ЛЕГИОНОВ НА ТЕРРИТОРИИ СЕРБИИ

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### РЕЗЮМЕ

В исследовании совершается попытка собрать ценные свидетельства о физической активности на территории Сербии, которые оставляет нам история, а археология пытается прояснить. Разыскивая материализованное время археологи "поймали" момент, в когда на территории нынешней Сербии были: интенсивная физическая активность и отдых римских легионов и императоров, на основании обнаруженных боевых аренах, гоночных трасс, термальных ванн, и роскошных вилл с мозаиками. Считается, что физические упражнения были предназначены в первую очередь для повышения силы и эффективности римских солдат. Многопрофильным сотрудничеством в первую очередь с археологическими и военно-историческими музеями по всей Сербии эта работа может помочь в демистификации не только способов тренировки солдат, производства, хранения и ношения оружия, но и военных стратегий римских легионов в этой области. Все то может быть на пользу и людям из области искусства и современным военным школам.

**Ключевые слова:** физические упражнения, музей, искусство, армия.

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