

Sport and Physical Education in Ancient Georgia
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Introduction

The sport field scholars have been long arguing about when exactly people started getting involved in physical education and sports. There have been endless disputes about it, since everyone has his/her own opinion, theory and hypothesis. Base on the reports and information available to date, there is no straightforward answer to this question.

Physical education and sport trace their roots back to a period in the distant past, when physical and mental activity of a human being was focused only on obtaining livelihood. Throughout that period, hunting was the major and vital activity of a human being.

Although the prehistoric humans had no idea about physical education, neither did they have any special martial weapons, but to a certain extent they realized that withstanding harsh natural conditions without such weapons required extraordinary strength, endurance, training and courage. And all the aforesaid could be mastered only through hard work i.e. through exercising.

At the subsequent stage of the mankind development, when humans learned how to make fire and produce martial weapons, the means of struggle for existence quite naturally changed, conditioning the need for acquiring new skills that required specialized training.

Various mass games with some obvious elements of competition were gradually introduced back in the prehistoric times. In that period, physical exercises were closely linked to the labor activities. Physical education and sport started emerging as a phenomenon basically from that very period.

The **aim** of this paper is to study the origins of physical education and sports and to identify the circumstances that created favorable conditions for the development of physical education and sport, as well as for mass engagement of people in sports worldwide and in Georgian reality.

When working on this paper, we applied the literary source searching-and-processing **technique**. Only the sources that represent academic publications and thus are more credible have been selected from the diverse and sometimes contradictory sources presently available in the print or electronic media.

Basic text

Physical education and sport trace in the primitive human society

Traces of physical education and sport could be found in the early states existing in the 5th-4th centuries B.C. Ritual competitions dedicated to Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, had been organized thousand years earlier than the ancient Greek Olympic Games. Competitions had been held in such disciplines as: archery, wrestling, fencing, fist-fighting, horse riding (equestrianism), chariot racing, javelin throwing and hunting.

Hunting, horse-riding, sabre-fencing, chariot racing, archery, ball-and-stick games, were quitewidespread in India and Persia in the remote past; polo, chess, grass hockey and some other games emerged in India. Schools, where children were taught horse-riding, javelin-throwing and archery techniques, were established in Persia.

The inscriptions and paintings depicting over 400 physical exercises and games were discovered by scholars on the walls of ancient Greek pyramids.

Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Rome and Greece were the countries whose power and wealth were based on the mighty army. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that military and physical training was given particular, if not primary, attention.

Sport and physical education in ancient Georgia

When it comes to the availability of physical education and sport systems, Georgia is not an exception either. Being one of the ancient countries in the world, it had gone through a long historical process of state building and development.

Physical education and sport in Georgia had been known since the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. Its history is directly related to the history of our country as a state.

The ancientness of physical exercises and sporting activities in Georgia has been confirmed by the information provided in the foreign chroniclers' historical and literary sources, as well as by the rich archaeological and ethnographic materials found in our country.

Throughout the centuries, the Georgian nation created a diverse and unique, region-specific physical education system, which was not merely spectacular and sporting by its nature. For more than three millennia, the idea of conquering Georgia was within the strategic interests of nearly each and every more or less powerful state in Asia and the Middle East.

Our country, too, willy-nilly has had to deflect numerous enemy attacks and, quite naturally, given such a historical reality, physical education system was an important component of the martial arts and held a special place in the Georgians' everyday life. Coupled with some other factors, it ultimately ensured the viability of the Georgian people, a successful struggle for national self-empowerment and self-preservation. Throughout the history of the Georgian nation, this struggle had been systematic and permanent.

Travelers, historians and public figures from ancient Greece and other countries often described the prevalence of exercises that were part of the Greek gymnastics in Colchis and Georgian regions. **Apollonius of Rhodes**, a prominent Alexandrian poet and scholar (295-215B.C.), imitated Homer by creating “The Argonautica” (comprising 4 books), an epic poem that is related to our country. The poem was written in the 3rd century B.C. and is regarded as one of the oldest sources surviving to our days, covering the period of the 13th century B.C. Apollonius of Rhodes particularly focused on the ancient culture of the Georgian state -Colchis, describing the activity and mightiness of the local tribes residing there. No king is greater than the ruler of Colchis, and if he so wanted he could pursue his quarrel in Hellas, far away though he lives” – writes Apollonius of Rhodes.

Of all the Greek poets, Apollonius of Rhodes offered the most impressive description of the expedition of Jason and other Greek heroes in the quest of retrieving the Golden Fleece. He also wrote about the major and the most ancient city of Aea, and “the Plain of Ares, that lays on the opposite side of the city, as far off as is the turning-post that a chariot must reach from the starting-point, when the kinsmen of a dead king appoint funeral games for footmen and horsemen”. Some chronicles also reported on the existence of sports training camps in some other Black Sea cities. All the aforesaid proves that almost 3 300 years ago, Georgians have had arenas and special competition venues arranged.

The existence and development of the physical education system in ancient Georgia is evidenced by the fact that the Greek, Roman or Byzantine public figures often described the life of Colchian tribes, and therefore the ancient world was well-aware of their military training. They claimed that those tribes have had good physical training and a wide range of exercises, thus it should come as no surprise that the Kartvelian tribes were outstanding warriors. This view has been substantiated by the records that have survived to the present day, namely those by some prominent writers and public figures, including: **Xenophon (427-355 B.C.)**, an ancient Greek historian and a prominent representative of the ancient literature; **Procopius of Caesarea (507-562B.C.)**, a Byzantine chronicler, a lawyer and a diplomat, a principal historian of the Emperor Justinian I; **Strabo (64/63 B.C. – 23/24 A.D.)**, a prominent Greek historian and geographer and **Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.)**, a Jewish historian.

Xenophon characterized the Khalibes as the ‘most courageous people the Hellenes ever dealt with during their campaign’. The Khalibes are the Kartvelian tribe, whose central city of Sinope was known for its top-class athletes.

According to **Procopius of Caesarea**, the Colchian city of Apsyrus „was a populous city in ancient times, and a great expanse of wall surrounding it, while it was adorned with a theatre and hippodrome and all the rest of those things by which the size of a city is commonly indicated. But at present nothing of these is left except for foundations of the buildings“. (“Georgica”, 1934).

AgathiasScholasticus (536-582 A.D.), a Byzantine historian and a poet majoring in jurisprudence, wrote as follows: “The Lazi are strong and brave tribe and they rule over other powerful tribes. They are proud of their connection with the ancient name of the Colchians”.Scholasticus was particularly attracted by the ‘vivacity and beautiful character’ of the Lazi. (Georgica, 1939). AgathiasScholasticus mentioned a highly skilled commander, Theodore, a Georgian by origin, who was physically rather strong and was the most distinguished among the Roman military commanders.

Physical education played an important role in the life of Georgian high-landers (Svaneti, Khevsureti, Pshavi), each member of the community was committed to protect his community and offer an adequate response to the enemy.Upbringing of the young men started at the age of 7-8 and aimed training physically strong, healthy, resilient and battle-worthy youth. Competitions and contests aimed to try and test young men were regularly organized on public holidays in this and some other regions of Georgia. There were diverse means of high-lander physical training, including:mountain hiking, running, broad jumping, stonethrowing for distance and throwing at a given target (manually and using a slingshot), motion games and dancing to the music, skiing, fencing, archery, horse-riding, wrestling and hunting.

Many foreign statesmen and military figureswere carried away by the effectiveness of Georgian physical exercises. It was no coincidence that the Roman Emperor, **Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106-48 B.C.)**, who invaded Georgia, showed interest in the mastery of the Khevsurian fencers and highly praised their ‘courage and bravery’.Of no less importance is the record about PharsmanKveli, the King of Iberia, provided by a Roman historian, **DioCassius Cocceianus(approx. 153-235 A.D.)**. As the record reads, “when ParsmanKveli (Valiant), the King of Iberia, accompanied by the noblemen, was visiting Rome to join in the celebration of the God of War festival on the Caesar’sinvitation, he organized such aGeorgian competition at the Field of Mars, that he really astounded the audience.“As Cassius reported, King Parsman has had no equal in horse-riding (Caesar, who was taken away by his performance, ordered to erect an equestrian statue of the King of the Iberians at the Field of Mars), while his son,Prince Mithridates, won the wrestling competition – at first he knocked down the local wrestlers, and then pulled down two infuriated oxen.

There are reports that the long-distance running competitions were regularly organized in the Greek Black Sea city of Gorguipia, in the 3rd century B.C.

A stone stele bearing a cuneiform style inscription, which was discovered in Urartu, has been preserved in the National Museum of Georgia. The inscription was deciphered by Giorgi Melikishvili(1918-2002), an academician, Director of the Iv. JavakhishviliInstitute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Georgia, who introduced a new stage in the global Urartology. The information provided on the stone stele proves that kings

often participated and won the competitions (including in equestrian jumping and archery) organized in the State of Urartu. The inscription contains the reports on the competitions dating back to the period of reign of the King Menua and King Argishti. Giorgi Melikishvili believed that “Urartu undoubtedly hosted some grand equestrian competitions”.

The aforesaid stone stele bears the names of 225 runners-competition winners. All those persons are mentioned by their first names and patronymics. As for the runners from the non-Greek countries, the inscription only bears mentioning of their first names and the countries of origin. As the stele inscription reads, Kratinos, a native of Kutaisi (KratinosKutation) participated in the competition, winning three times, while Blastos from Kutaisi, as well as Stratios and Sosi, the natives of Meskheta, won the competition just once.

The sources that survived to the present day prove that various public competitions were organized in some other cities at different times to test the athletes. Although the sources at hand do not offer any information on Georgians' participation in the Greek Olympic Games, we possess certain data evidencing that “Georgians organized some sports events similar to the Hellenic Olympic Games once in four years”. (Gugushvili, 1997). This, first of all, implies the so-called ‘Meskhetian’ competitions involving people from across Georgia, as described by Ivane Gvaramidze, a Meskhetian researcher-ethnographer (Droeba newspaper, 1882). According to the author, ‘Captain Jason, the Argo hero, left the games program in Georgia.’ The Georgian ‘Olympic Games’ program included: wrestling, boxing, circle-rope jumping, marathon race (including ‘women-only races’), ball-games, horse-racing, chariot racing, discus throwing (‘shistonethrowing’), rock-lifting, equestrianism and archery.

Physical education and sport in medieval Georgia

In the medieval Georgia, it was the People’s Army that played a decisive role in defending the homeland. In its training process, a particular focus was made on the military-type physical exercises. Great attention was paid to fencing, ball-games, horse-riding and javelin throwing. As is known, Georgian warriors mostly have had to fight the enemy cavalry and it is no surprise that equestrian sport was so widespread in our country.

Physical exercises available in Georgia in the medieval times are reflected in the ancient folk stories and fiction literature. “Amiran-Darejaniani’, an adventure-genre literary piece by Mose Khoneli, makes mention of the physical exercises widely spread in Georgia in the 11th-12th centuries, describing the scenes of the knights’ fight. This literary piece makes it obvious that some sporting events were organized in such disciplines as: archery, spear-throwing, hunting, swimming and chess. Another literary work ‘Rusudaniani’ describes the ancient Georgian game -Kabakhi.

The existence of a certain system of military and physical education and a high-profile competition culture, as well as the organization of contests in the physical exercises involved in it, imply the existence of special training and competition facilities.

Training facilities could be found in various sources under the names as follows: „hippodrome“ „tskhentsarbieli“ (horse-riding arena), „aspazi“ (arena), „moedani“ (ground), „mere“, „phori“, „mindori“ (field), „samgereli“, „satamasho“ and „samorinesakhli“ (gambling house) (Afridonidze, 1986). Ioane Shavteli, a Georgian poet and clergyman, made mention of hippodrome and arena in his novels on the number of occasions: „hippodrome dispositions“, „contestants on the arena“ etc.

Georgian and foreign original historical and literary sources prove that there had been numerous sport training camps in Georgia since the very early times. There were few villages with no wrestling ground arranged (especially in Eastern Georgia). Hippodromes and gyms were built.

According to Ioane Shavteli, a 12-13th century Georgian poet and clergyman (1150-1215), ‘hippodrome disposition’ adorned the Queen Tamar’s Palace. Many sport training camps were even relocated to the church and monastery yards. A number of churches became a kind of sports centers. A clergyman would often serve as a referee and competition organizer during the Leloburti game. This example clearly shows that the Georgian Christian religion to a certain extent contributed to the development of sports movement. It’s no coincidence that alongside with other educational institutions, physical education was also introduced in some women’s religious schools in medieval Georgia. Although certain attention was paid to the physical education of women during that period, but there was no special physical education system available. Some reliable sources confirm that women were actively involved in the military and physical training, as well as in hostilities. There is a well-known legend about the Amazons, according to which, in the area near the Thermodont River that had been inhabited by the Kartvelian tribes since the ancient times women had been trained in horse-riding, archery and spear-throwing since early childhood.

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, an ancient Greek historian (commonly regarded in the Western culture as the ‘Father of History’), provided the first record on the Amazons. He was followed by the Greek, Roman and Byzantine authors of the subsequent period, offering a great variety of interpretations. Some iron arrow-heads, copper chain armor and equestrian equipment were found in the women’s tombs located in the Aragvi and Algeti valleys, in Khevsureti, Georgia. Alongside with the Amazons, we should also recall a folk legend about Amiran - a prototype of the Sumerian King, Gilgamesh, and the Greek Prometheus, an impeccable warrior and hunter, whom the divine godfather baptized, granting him ‘the speed of fast-moving ox, the hardness of the avalanche, the strength of 12 oxen and the wolf’s knee’. The exemplary story of Amiran’s spiritual and physical power was passed down from generation to generation and won the overall respect and admiration.

In the 12th -13th centuries, Georgia was a rather large and powerful state, with considerably increased political significance and reputation at the international arena. This period is

referred to as the Revival Era, during which physical education reached the high level of development.

Combat exercises elaborated by King David Aghmashenebeli (David the Builder) (1073-1125) are commonly known. In that period Georgia resembled a kind of a military camp, as it was mandatory for everyone to master martial arts and physical training. His combat strategy was applied in military schools around the globe. David IV used to train his cavalry troops in the lean fields, and his army showed highest level of physical preparedness.

Alongside with other sources, the knights' physical strength and combat training are perfectly described in Shota Rustaveli's genius poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin". Ball-games, archery, horse-riding and hunting – those were the popular types of physical exercises in that period and Shota Rustaveli tells about them in his chivalry and love poem.

The poet considers the following as important for the human health: strength, agility, mightiness, endurance, bravery, zeal, dexterity of the panther. For one to be beauty he/she should be eye-catching and similar to the sunshine, etc. For a knight it is necessary to be skilled in archery, horse-racing, running, tightrope-walking, acrobatics, falconry, ball-games, target-hitting etc.

Conclusions

The development of physical education and sport was a natural process accompanying the development of the primitive human society. In the beginning, its function had been to enable the humans to withstand harsh natural conditions and obtain livelihood; whereas later it turned into a means of facilitating human labor activity.

In the prehistoric age, the physical education and sport gradually transformed from entertainment into a spectacular sporting event. This is evidenced by the Greek Olympic Games and the great diversity and multitude competitions available in India and Persia. In case of some countries (Assyria, Babylon, etc.) it turned from a spectacular sport event into a source of military and physical training.

The development of sport and physical education in Georgia was largely conditioned by the need to rebuff numerous enemy attacks. The aforesaid fact has been confirmed by the outstanding ancient writers' works, describing Georgians as the 'exemplary warriors'.

Georgians' particular attitude towards physical education and sport as a phenomenon could be found in many literary works.

Thus, it is safe to say that like some leading ancient states, Georgia also plays an important role in the matter of cultivating and inculcating sports and physical education in the society, as well as in further enriching and developing it.

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Summary

The article provides an overview of the history of origin and development of sport and physical education throughout the centuries. It highlights the global factors that contributed to the origination of sport and physical education, including such issues, as: human beings' ability to withstand harsh natural environment and obtain their livelihood; development of necessary skills related to creation and use of martial weapons, and military training in the Middle Ages, etc. The aforesaid circumstances created favorable conditions in the prehistoric time for the development and introduction of various mass games. Those games/competitions oftentimes were of ritualistic nature.

Some irrefutable facts substantiating the emergence/existence of sport and physical education in various regions across the globe are presented in the article. Against this background, the significant part of it is devoted to the discussion of the circumstances related to the sport and physical education issues in the ancient and medieval Georgian reality. It has been noted that, when dealing with numerous enemies from various countries, throughout the centuries the Georgian nation had employed diverse physical training systems, ensuring revitalization and toughening up of the society, and thus safeguarding the country's security against the enemy onslaught.

The end-text of the article focuses on the medieval Georgia and the sport and physical education-related activities of those times.

Key words: physical education, struggle for existence, body toughening up, Olympic Games.

სპორტი და ფიზიკური აღზრდა ძველ საქართველოში
ჯემალ მაგანია, ნინო მაგანია
რეზიუმე

სტატიაში მოცემულია მიმოხილვები სპორტისა და ფიზიკური აღზრდის წარმოშობისა და განვითარების შესახებ საუკუნეების განმავლობაში. მასში განხილულია ის გლობალური ფაქტორები, რომლებმაც შეუწყეს ხელი სპორტის და ფიზიკური აღზრდის წარმოქმნას, მათ შორის ისეთი საკითხების ჩათვლით, როგორცაა: ადამიანის შესაძლებლობები გაუძღოს მკაცრ ბუნებრივ გარემოს და მიიღონ მისგან მათი საარსებო საშუალებები; საომარი იარაღის შექმნასა და გამოყენებასთან დაკავშირებული აუცილებელი უნარების განვითარებას და შუა საუკუნეებში სამხედრო მომზადებას და ა.შ. ზემოხსენებულმა გარემოებებმა შექმნეს ხელსაყრელი პირობები პრეისტორიულ დროში სხვადასხვა მასობრივი თამაშების განვითარებისა და დანერგვისთვის. ეს თამაშები / შეჯიბრებები ზოგჯერ რიტუალურ ხასიათს ატარებდა.

მსოფლიოს ზოგიერთ რეგიონში სპორტის და ფიზიკური აღზრდის გაჩენის / არსებობის დამადასტურებელი ზოგიერთი შეუსაბამო ფაქტი მოცემულია სტატიაში. ამის ფონზე, მისი მნიშვნელოვანი ნაწილი ეთმობა სპორტულ და ფიზიკურ განათლებასთან დაკავშირებული გარემოებების განხილვას ძველ და შუასაუკუნეების ქართულ რეალობაში. აღინიშნა, რომ სხვადასხვა ქვეყნის მრავალრიცხოვან მტრებთან ურთიერთობისას, ქართველმა ხალხმა საუკუნეების განმავლობაში გამოიყენა ფიზიკური მომზადების სხვადასხვა სისტემა, უზრუნველყო საზოგადოების აღორძინება და გამკაცრება, და ამით ქვეყნის უსაფრთხოების დაცვა მტრის თავდასხმისგან.

სტატიის დასასრულს ყურადღება გამახვილებულია შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოზე და იმდროინდელ სპორტსა და ფიზიკურ აღზრდაზე.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ფიზიკური აღზრდა, ბრძოლა არსებობისთვის, სხეულის გაკაჟება, ოლიმპიური თამაშები.

Спорт и физкультура в древней Грузии

Джемал Дзагания, Нино Дзагания

Резюме

В статье дается обзор истории возникновения и развития спорта и физического воспитания на протяжении веков. В нем освещаются глобальные факторы, которые способствовали возникновению спорта и физического воспитания, включая такие вопросы, как: способность людей противостоять суровой природной среде и получать средства к существованию; развитие необходимых навыков, связанных с созданием и использованием боевого оружия, военной подготовки в средние века и т. д. Вышеупомянутые обстоятельства создали в доисторические времена благоприятные условия для разработки и внедрения различных массовых игр. Эти игры / соревнования часто носили ритуальный характер.

В статье представлены некоторые неопровержимые факты, подтверждающие возникновение / существование спорта и физического воспитания в различных регионах мира. На этом фоне значительная его часть посвящена обсуждению обстоятельств, связанных с вопросами спорта и физического воспитания в древней и средневековой грузинской действительности. Отмечалось, что, имея дело с многочисленными врагами из разных стран, на протяжении веков грузинская нация использовала различные системы физической подготовки, обеспечивая оживление и закаливание общества и, таким образом, обеспечивая безопасность страны от натиска врага.

Конечный текст статьи посвящен средневековой Грузии и спортивно-физическим занятиям того времени.

Ключевые слова: физическое воспитание, борьба за существование, укрепление тела, олимпиада.