

## PHYSICAL EXERCISES, GAMES AND SPORT CONTESTS ON THE TERRITORY OF DACIAN PROVINCES

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**ABSTRACT.** The aim of this paper is to bring the history of sport and physical education in the province of Dacia in the current knowledge on the subject of the Roman Empire, respectively from more developed provinces of the Empire. The work completes the basic dates regarding the integration of the Province of Dacia in the Empire structures and assuming the Roman models, contributing in this way to complete the idea of the romanization of the province. The number of evidence about "sports branch" is smaller, and its representation is modest compared with those of the oldest and most developed provinces than Dacia and, in fact, better and more researched, but more important to us it the fact that it can be shown that it exist a part of every branch of sport life. The fact that certain representations and local daco-roman artifacts produced present a great resemble to products from other provinces (eg. representation on bricks of gladiators) shows that there were general knowledge about these games that crossed border.

**Key words:** *palestres, box, pentathlon, wrestling, amphitheater, Porolissum.*

**REZUMAT.** *Exercițiile fizice, întrecerile cu caracter sportiv și jocurile publice pe teritoriul provinciilor dacice.* Scopul lucrării este acela de a aduce istoria sportului, a educației fizice din provincia Dacia la nivelul cunoștințelor actuale despre acest subiect din Imperiul Roman, respectiv din provinciile mai dezvoltate ale Imperiului. Lucrarea va completa datele fundamentale în legătură cu integrarea provinciei Dacia în structurile Imperiului și cu preluarea modelelor romane, contribuind astfel la întregirea ideii de romanizare a provinciei. Desigur, numărul de dovezi pe „ramura de sport” este mai mic, iar modul de reprezentare mai modest, în comparație cu cele din provinciile mai vechi și mai dezvoltate decât Daciile și, de fapt, mai bine și mai intens cercetate, dar important ni se pare faptul că se poate demonstra că din fiecare compartiment al vieții sportive există câte ceva. Faptul că unele reprezentări și artefacte produse locale daco-romane se aseamănă izbitor cu produse din alte provincii (e.g. reprezentarea pe cărămizi a gladiatorilor) arată că existau cunoștințe generale despre aceste jocuri care treceau peste granițe.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Palestre, pugilat, pancațiu, pentatlon, amfiteatrum, Porolissum.*

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## **Introduction**

Based on the existing references, we can say that it does not exist a systematical and conducted research in this area of Roman Dacia history. As a result, also the knowledges regarding the physical exercises, sport contests and games from Dacian provinces of Romania are far behind in comparison with those of developed countries in Western Europe.

### **The current status of researches**

There are only two paper works that, in theory, addresses to this topic. This paper works belong to Ghibu E.- Todan I. (Ghibu-Todan, 1970) and to Postolache N. (Postolache, 1979). Both of them present only vague references. The first paper refers to modern and contemporary epoch, so the title does not match the content.

The second paper presents vague references about the amphitheatres from Ulpia Traiana and Porolissum, where "are attested fights with gladiators and animals" (the baths of Drobeta and Romula). The good and probably true observation is that "they enter in Dacia, under the influence of Roman culture, entertaining manifestations, bloody fights and games organized in amphitheatres". He mentions also about the travels on Roman roads, from which, one has a touristic travel character.

There are several paper works that are reduced as content and incomplete regarding the topics that deal with various branches of sports: amphitheaters and gladiatures (Alicu-Opreanu, 2000), with brain games and gambling (Paki-Cociș, 1993) and a lot of small articles and studies that are publishing statues of athletes (athletes, dancers, gladiators, fighters), graphical representation on different objects or monuments (dancers, gladiators) and also many pieces from brain games and gambling, most of them found in Roman camps (monographic published).

The existing data are few and vague and the information refers especially to amphitheatres and to the stories related to them. There is no connection yet with the inscriptions and the dacian-roman archeology. Both books (Ghibu-Todan, 1970; Postolache, 1979) have no adjacent illustration. Macrea M. (Macrea 1969, p 349) gives a plan of amphitheatre from Ulpia Traiana.

### **Sources of the paper**

We must mention that in comparison with the written sources, monuments and representations that can be found in the western provinces of the Roman Empire, our patrimony (from the dacian territory) is quite poor.

We do not have literary sources. Epigraphic sources remind only the existence of some athletics, without giving any explanatory notes. . IDR III/6, p. 163, nr. 311: Herculanus – gladiator – Apulum; p. 227, nr. 423 (Longinus – armoured car leader – Apulum). In volume III/2, p. 51-63 presents architectural elements belonging to Ulpia Traiana amphitheatre, especially owner chairs, some of them with inscriptions fragments. We have several large stone monuments with representations of people who do "sport"; one of this kind is the monument with two women dancers from Ulpia Traiana. There are more sportive basis and we refer here only to amphitheatres. Today, there are known amphitheatres at Ulpia Traiana, Micia, Porolissum; there are suppositions regarding this kind of constructions, based on the discovery of some pieces related to amphitheatre at Apulum, Potaissa, Drobeta Napoca. It has not been identified any circus, or a stadium.

Many representations made of bronze (statues, chandeliers) present gladiators, gymnasts, acrobats, athletes, fighters, dancers.

There are a few representations (graphitized drawings) on the bricks with gladiators.

There are more pieces connected with brain games and gambling; bricks with the game drawn (backgammon), dice and discs made of bone, clay or glass for the movement on the board. The number of these pieces is very large in settlements like Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Paki-Cociş, 1993), Porolissum (Gudea 1989, 1996), Buciumi (Chirilă et al., 1972).

### **Research and presentation methods**

Regarding the research of this area and publication of the resulted data there were and still are limitations in:

- fixing the terminology that meet both the ancient and the romanian current (which is international);
- establishing a comprehensive and complete list of sport exercises from antiquity in order to be able to select, based on the repertory, which sports activities were practiced in Dacia;
- the presentation way of each monument chosen as the subject of the repertory elaborating a bibliography that contain papers about all aspects of antique sportive life from Dacia, starting with analogies of the Empire and continuing with sources and works about artifacts from different localities. Data about the ancient sport and the history of physical education of the Empire, will serve, of course, as models and guides.

The bibliography created until now includes about 80% of Romanian historical literature on the subject. We chose Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani system because it corresponds to archaeological and scientific exigencies.

To identify and determine activities of physical education in Dacia, it was necessary to review on one hand, literary and epigraphic sources of Empire relating to sports activities, on the other hand, the entire historical-sportive literature that gives valuable archaeological discoveries confirming the literary and epigraphic sources. Therefore, we made a list of sports activities, classified in six categories:

**a. Physical exercises** (throwing the javelin, riding, marching, swimming, etc.) that occurs in the circus or the baths palestres (where existed runnings and sport fields) or even outside (Rome Field of Mars) (Lascu 1965, p. 394-395, Etienne 1970, p. 351; Aries-Duby 1994, p. 200; Iordanescu 2003, p. 25);

**b. Proper games**

- ball games, which were practiced in baths and outdoor (Lascu 1965, p. 395, 388-390; Iordanescu 2003, p. 116; Aries-Duby 1994, p. 200);
- games of intelligence and luck that were practiced in the for, in private houses, on stadiums and camps (especially in the soldiers barracks, where were found most of such artifacts); the extent to which intelligent games are also games of luck, was underlined by N. Lascu (Lascu 1965, p. 390-393).

**c. Sports competitions:**

- **professional sports** (pancrațiu-pentathlon, wrestling pugilat). In this sense a big help is an inscription from Pompei (CIL X 1074 = ILS 5053, 4) enhanced by the Etienne 1970, pp. 351, 371-377.

In this text, Aulus Claudius Flaccus, duumvir quinquenalis, chosen for the third time, tells the "facts" that he did for the city:

- first duumvirat: he organized in for shows with clowns, fights with bulls, pugilat;
- the second duumvirat: he organized in for fights with bulls, pugilat; in the amphitheater - athletes, gladiators, fights with animals, fighters;
- third duumvirat: buffoons.

Unfortunately we have no data about pancrațiu and pentathlon complex competitions.

- **public games**

- in circus - horse racings, cart racings (Lascu 1965, p. 405-410; Iordanescu 2003, pp. 126-128);

- in amphitheatre: fights with animals (venatio), gladiators fights (Lascu 1965, p. 410-420; Aries-Duby 1994, p. 202; Iordanescu 2003, pp. 124-126, Etienne 1970, p. 377; Tudor 1976, p. 84-92);
- naval battles (in the amphitheater and on lakes) (Iordanescu 2003, p. 126).

**d. Dance**, as a way to public show

- in the amphitheater (especially in pompous procession of entry and at the circus) (Lascu 1965, p. 397-398).

**e. Tourism** (travels with economical interest, scientific interest, pleasure, etc) .

- on the roads between different cities, at different distances; on the sea (Casson 1974, p. 115-329, Roman epoch).

### **The extention of the Roman Empire**

For the period we are interested in sports movement in Roman antiquity, we are talking about the Roman Empire which had its beginnings in the late first century BC. and it touched its apogee at the end of the fourth century (after that it was dismembered).

In the early first century AD. Empire held in an organized way, only Italy, Hispania, Gaul, Greece, Cilicia, Crete and North Africa. In the first century were conquered Noricum, Dalmatia, Raetian, Germany, Britannia, Moesia and Thracia. In the second century were conquered Dacia, Mesopotamia, Armenia. Roman Empire reached the apogee of its extent. At the end of the third century began territorial losses which were never recovered (Dacia, Germany Higher part = Agri Decumates, Armenia (Bechert 1999, passim). However, in these first four centuries the Roman Empire was extent on three continents: Europe (western, central and south-east, from Britannia to the Black Sea and Aegean Sea), North Africa, from Gibraltar to the mouth of the Nile, Asia Minor and the Arabian territories (Syria, Liban, Palestine). This territory was divided into provinces which were called after the people who lived there. In I-III centuries, there were 50 provinces, in the fourth century (after 285) were reorganized 101 and then 117 provinces (ECR, p. 630-631, Bechert 1999, p. 5-13). During this period, the Roman state was led in a centralized way, in two forms: in I-III centuries principality (Cizek 2002, p. 237-250) and IV-VI centuries domination (Cizek 2002, p. 524-642). Octavianus, nephew of Julius Caesar called himself princeps, and the first three centuries have been known since antiquity "principality". Year 27 BC. is widely and traditionally considered the beginning of the Roman Empire.

Province remained the main territorial unit. It was an administrative unit established on the ethnic basis of the territory. Under the principality, the border provinces were led by Emperor legates; inside provinces without troops were led by legates elected from senators, appointed by the emperor. Under domination the provinces were led by a financial administrative praeses and the troops, by a dux; these were independent functions. There were outlined several socio-economic processes: moving centers of economic, military and political influence to the border provinces, Italy was then lowered to the provinces level; later, Rome was abandoned as the capital; structures and pagan religious organization eroded during the time and it was abandoned in the favour of Christianity.

### **Short history of dacian provinces**

This chapter was elaborated only to show that in the Dacian provinces (Porolissensis, Apulensis and Malvensis) have worked the same state institutions, there was the same military and administrative organization, were identical social, social classes which were identical those from other provinces of the Roman Empire.

### **The extension and the organization**

The territories of the dacian kingdom led by the king Decebalus were conquered after great wars between 101-106 by roman army led by emperor Traianus (96-117). It was the last conquered european province of the empire.

The territory of the dacian state had a much greater extent than that which was turned into a roman province. The extra Carpathians territories situated in the north-west and north-east (Crisana, Maramures and northern Moldova) remained outside the roman province. Without its part of south-east (Country of Fagaras, Country of Barsa, Harghita and Covasna) Transylvania (historical) and Banat belonged to the province territory. Banat and Transylvania, together with the West Oltenia, have formed the province of Dacia. East Oltenia and Wallachia, together with the South of Moldova were annexed to Moesia Inferior province. This situation lasted until the death of the Emperor Trajan around 117/118.

Hadrianus emperor has reorganized this territory as follows:

- The northern part of Transylvania, to the north of the Mures and Aries rivers, was formed the province of Dacia Porolissensis, with the capital in Porolissum / Moigrad;
- The central part of Transylvania (without Covasna, Country of Barsa, and Country of Fagaras) with west Oltenia and Banat formed Dacia Superior / Apulensis, with the capital in Apulum / Alba Iulia;

- The eastern part of Oltenia, with south-eastern Transylvania (Covasna, Country of Barsa, and Country of Fagaras) and Wallachia until Milcov have formed a new province, Dacia Inferior Malvensis, with the capital in Romula.

Eastern territories of Wallachia and southern Moldavia were abandoned.

This territorial organization lasted until the end of Roman domination in Dacia (275). It is believed that around 250 the eastern parts of Dacia Inferior, Wallachia and East Oltenia have been lost.

Roman administration was slightly different in those three dacian provinces. At first (106 – 118), the province was ruled by a governor *legatus Augusti propraetore*, having a consular rank. This rank existed because in the province had stationed three legions (15.000 soldiers): *legio I Adiutrix*, *legio III Flavia*, *legio XIII Gemina*. The governor had military and legal responsibilities. After the reorganization of the territory under Hadrianus, situation has changed radically.

Dacia Superior-Apulensis, which was the largest and richest of the dacian provinces, had as a leader a *legatus augusti propraetore* with praetorian rank; the diminution of governor rank is owed to the fact that only one legion had stationed in the province (*XIII Gemina*), at Apulum / Alba Iulia .

Dacia Porolissensis was ruled by a *procurator Augusti*, having military and administrative duties.

Dacia Inferior Malvensis was led by a *procurator Augusti*.

## **Physical exercises, sport contests, public games, dance and tourism in dacian provinces**

### **Historical comment**

The basic feature of images that are found in Dacia and, of course, of the artifacts related to sports, is that the sport representations appear on the same types of artifacts: luxury pottery, decorated pots, tiles, bricks and tiles with sports designs, glass vessels, stone monuments and inscriptions, bronze statues, bronze vessels.

Sometimes, images and representations are parts of the series that are found throughout the Roman Empire, eg *terra sigillata* vessels, bronze statuettes. Sometimes, some local creations (such as drawings of gladiators on bricks) show an admirable unity in representation to the ones of the Empire.

The pieces used as evidence of sports activities in Dacia were found, especially in large cities (Porolissum, Napoca, Potaissa, Apulum, Ulpia Traiana, Drobeta, Romula) and in the camps which were better researched and published (Porolissum-Pomet, Buciumi, Veșel, Feldioara, Râșnov).

a. there are representation of athletes in action, bronze statuettes (Ulpia Traiana), gymnasts (Potaissa), scenes of demonstrative battles (Arcalia near camp of Ilișua);

b. of the actual games, we have many evidence only of intelligent games (places where they could play on money!) there are many representations mill games scheme drawn on bricks (Potaissa; Drobeta; Bistrețu);

There are many fragments of bricks that represents rests of drawings of the game ludus militum or ludus latruncularum (Ulpia Traiana, Porolissum; from the same game we have many parts = chips, milites, latrunculi), made of clay (several of them unfinished) or of bone (Ulpia Traiana; Vețel, Porolissum; Porolissum, Buciumi). The frequency of this game is very high. We gave some examples but pieces of the game and fragments of the table board are found in all camps and even in the houses from civil settlements (eg Porolissum - vicus). Even the fact that the pieces of the game were not finished anymore, having some rough on their surface, simply made of walls or vessels, could be an evidence. From the intelligent game we have many typical dice made of bones (Ulpia Traiana Apulum, but there are also at Porolissum, Bucium).

c. sport contests, especially pugilism and pancratium are less represented. We only have representations of fighters. Pancratium and pugilism were not atested. But, on a bronze vessel from Gilau camp we have an almost complete fight scene; it is almost complete because it does not have elements of contest opening; we have instead fight scenes, table with cash prizes and laurel leaves. Scenes of this kind are wellknown in the Empire. Perhaps the vessel is imported and is part of a series of promotion.

A bronze statue representing a warrior standing, leaning on a piece that can not be determined, comes from Porolissum. Another piece of bronze representing a fighter comes from Ocnita (Dacia Inferior); curious representation of a dressed character. A side wall of the funeral aedicule near Sângătin (Sibiu county) presents, among other images, two fighters face to face trying to "catch" themselves in battle.

Much interesting is the representation on a glass bottom from the camp of Bologa of two fighters that are staying face to face. The piece was found in a backup products storage and it is dating from the third century AD.

As part of sports contests we have some representation carts raceings, which probably took place in Dacia also, in the circus (although this is not yet archaeological identified).

On a pattern of clay found in Apulum is represented an auriga (car driver with whip in his hand, driving a cart with four horses; in the field representation inscription NIKA = victory); on another pattern of clay of Porolissum is a rider in the race to the left, the piece was discovered in Porolissum / Moigrad. From a tomb in the cemetery at Locusteni (Dacia Malvensis) appears it appears a medalion with a racing cart, drawn by four horses, auriga having the whip in his left hand.



On a funerary stele from Zegaia (Hunedoara county, near Ulpia Traiana) appears the text of the inscription that was put by the revengers of a robber attack, a scene with bears hunting scene. It is difficult to explain the context.

On a side wall of terra sigillata from Romula appears a bestiarius with a whip in his hand, rushing after a lion. Also on a side wall of a vessel from Apulum appears (several times) a spear fighter that attacks or is being attacked by a boar, a lion.

The representations about the fights of gladiators, are numerous, suggesting that they were most enjoyed by the public. It can be seen that they are more diversely widespread.

First we have the amphitheatres, the most eastern amphitheatres of the Roman Empire (as in the Greek world of the Orient amphitheatres are rare). There have been identified and investigated three amphitheatres: two of them with two phases of construction (wood and stone), at Ulpia Traiana and Porolissum, one with simple wooden enclosure, at Vețel / Micia.

An amphitheater could be identified on the column in Drobeta. That was then certified and archaeological research is ongoing. Two amphitheatres are only assumed, on the basis of some findings of artifacts related to the activity of the amphitheater - Apulum and Napoca (gladiator designs on brick).

The two amphitheatres, studied systematically (the one from Ulpia Traiana benefiting from an archaeological and architectural extended study) are, so to speak, classical: : ellipsoidal plan, several rows of stands, high garden towards the arena, ellipsoidal arena, four gates. Both amphitheatres had, as I said above, a phase of wood and were built with stone walls in the middle of the second century AD. For the amphitheatre of Porolissum there is even a building inscription dated to 157, under emperor Antoninus Pius.

A number of artifacts sustain the work of gladiators from amphitheatres:

- from Orsova / Dierna (a Roman city vanished in the lake from Portile de Fier) comes a pattern of clay for casting votive disks on which appear two gladiators in battle; it seems to be one retiarius;

- from Cluj / Napoca is known a fragment of a pattern on which appears a gladiator armed with sword and shield;

- from Moigrad / Porolissum is known a clay fragment of a pattern with two gladiators in combat.

Such patterns were used to multiply similar parts or to prepare cakes with sports representations.

Even more interesting are the bricks that had incised drawings representing gladiators:

- from Chinteni/Cluj-Napoca comes a piece of brick which stores a part of a drawing representing a gladiator;

- from Ulpia Traiana comes a brick that has scratched into the smooth paste a gladiator with shield and sword in attack;

- from Apulum, from old discoveries, comes a brick that has painted in soft paste a gladiator (retiarius) with net and hook, nude; the inscription Herculanus indicates his name; the brick belongs to the ceramic workshop and also to the guard of the governor *numerus singulariorum* Governor.

By comparing with similar parts of the Empire, we can see how unitary is the representation of the gladiators.

A group of artifacts related to fighters in the amphitheatre, is formed by the bronze statues representing the gladiators. Their number is large:

- from Turda / Potaissa comes a bronze statuette representing two gladiators clenched in battle;

- from Zeicani (near Ulpia Traiana) comes a head banner on which is a gladiator with the helmet, huge shield and short sword;

- from Moigrad / Porolissum comes a bronze statuette representing a gladiator attacking forwards; the shield is broken and the right hand fractured, the weapon it can not be seen, it probably was a short sword.

Many representations of gladiators appear on rushlights. Unfortunately, in Dacia we have only one rushlight with such representation:

- rushlight made of clay; the disc shows a gladiator in attack to the left; it comes from Porolissum / Moigrad.

Representations of gladiators on luxury vessels are few. It is true that I have not inspected all the vessels TS published in Dacia:

- from Moigrad / Porolissum comes a fragment of a pattern with two gladiators;

- on a clay fragment of a vessel from Micasasa is part of a gladiator;

- on a clay fragment of a vessel from Turda TS / Potaissa is a gladiator in the attack to the left and another (represented below) in the attack to the right;

- on a fragment of a bowl from Romula appears in a medalion a gladiator with sword attacking to the right.

Gladiators appear even on tiles (statuettes) of clay:

a fragment of clay statuette from Apulum is the top of a piece of clay, representing a gladiator with helmet.

An inscription from Ulpia Traiana dedicated to the goddess Nemesis (patroness of gladiators), a fragmentary piece, has a trident on one of its end who suggests by his presence of that we deal with a retiarius.

On a funeral aedicula without known the place of the discovery located in the National History Museum of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca, are represented two gladiators standing and armed with daggers. On another aedicula funeral wall, without known the place of the discovery, located in Sibiu museum, are

represented two gladiators in battle, shields are face to face, in their hands were wearing short daggers.

Dance, treated by us as physical, artistic and public activity, appears less in Dacia.

- from Ulpia Traiana comes a bronze statuette representing a dancer in motion; his raised left hand and right foot are a proof of a dance figure;

- also from Ulpia Traiana, we have a bronze statuette representing a man lying in an artistic dance figure;

- from Potaissa comes a bronze statuette of a dancing figure;

- from Moigrad / Porolissum comes a bronze statuette representing a man in dance motion;

- from Gherla camp area, comes a statue representing a man in dance motion.

- from Medias, from a rural settlement comes a bronze statuette representing a dancer.

As we can see, unlike the Empire (the other provinces), where representations of the dance are painted, are on stone monuments, in Dacia we have more bronze artifacts representing dancers.

Tourism is represented in Dacia only by the presence of some vehicles and by an inscription that certifies the journey of some characters from Ulpia Traiana in Rome:

- votive altar dedicated by several citizens to water goddesses of Baile Herculane, who had travelled to Rome for a political event and, at their return, they stopped in Herculane to treat;

- wall of funeral aedicule on which is represented a chariot pulled by horses; the place of the discovery is not known and this piece is in Brukenthal Museum in Sibiu.

Dacian provinces, conquered at the beginning of the second century and lost at the end of third century III AD. failed to assimilate all forms of physical activity, sports competitions, public games, dance and tourism, so that the repertory of images is poorer than the one from the eldest imperial provinces. We have the following sections of sport activity:

**I. Physical exercises:** athletics; gymnastics; fight with weapons;

**II. Proper games:** brain games and games of luck

**III. Sports competitions - professional sports:** wrestlings (greek-roman)

**IV. Sports competitions - public games:** carts racings; hunting in the amphitheatre; gladiators fights

**V. Dance**

**VI. Tourism:** journeys for pleasure

Basic feature of images that are found in Dacia is that they appear on the same types of artifacts (pottery, glass vessels, bricks and tiles, stone monuments); images are the same because they have the same sources (vessels of terra sigillata).

## Conclusions

1. Province of Dacia (106-118 AD.) and then the three dacian provinces - Porolissensis, Apulensis and Malvensis / Inferior (118-275 AD.), came later in the composition of the Roman Empire and were parts of it a short time (about 165 years). And yet, it integrated very well from political, military and economic point of view, as population and territory has suffered the effects of romanization, it was necessary to identify elements of physical education and public sports competitions here.

- there is no literary source related to Dacia on this regard;
- there are inscriptions and monuments that show that were built also in Dacia "sport bases" and especially amphitheatres. Traian's Column shows an amphitheatre near Drobeta (which has been archaeological identified), at Ulpia Traiana was investigated an amphitheatre, at Micia / Vețel was investigated a small amphitheatre, at Porolissum we have an inscription and an amphitheatre largely investigated. In Porolissum case we know that the stone amphitheatre was made by the governor of the province on behalf of the emperor, at 157. Many artifacts found in localities (gladiator statues, representations of gladiators, etc..) had made throughout the roman cities (Apulum, Potaissa, Napoca), where had been found such representations, to assume the existence of some amphitheatres;
- There have been found numerous artifacts of bronze, clay, bone, that present athletes, wrestlers, gymnasts and pugilism scenes;
- There are sculptured images and artifacts showing that it have been practiced also higher forms of physical movement, as was the dance.

2. Our paper work approached in a general way this field of spiritual life of the mass culture from those three dacian provinces, for the first time, sistematically, from archaeological point of view and, especially, from physical education and sport games point of view.

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