

CULTURAL STUDIES

ANCIENT ROME ENTERTAINMENTS IN THE CULTURAL STUDIES DISCOURSE: CHARIOT RACING

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The scientific and popular science literature is devoted to entertainment ancient culture and its individual forms. The authors of some of these cultural studies, philosophical, historical, literary and pedagogical studies have already become classics and indisputable authorities in this field: F. Cowell, O. Losiev, Th. Mommsen, G. Hyofling, I. Schiffman, R.C. Beacham, J. Nelis-Clement, T. Wiedemann, G. Woolf.

Games and chariot racing form a kind of mirror in which a society can, if it so desires, inspect itself. In its imperialist culture the image that Rome wants to give of itself through its mass spectacles is one that knows no limits: everything must be put to use in order to illustrate and emphasize Roman power and grandeur. As a result, its spectacles become an essential defining element of Roman culture, helping to display the extent of Rome's control over the known world. For all their violence and cruelty the games underpin the *pax romana* and a sense of world domination, order, and control [15, p. 255].

Chariot races were analyzed as a religious form of celebration (F. Cowell), the role of the individual in history (I. Schiffman), the divinity of the individual and the power of the emperor (G. Woolf), as category of Roman aesthetics (A. Losev), human activity and cultural traditions of their social universe (B. Chumachenko), as the household history of imperial Rome (L. Friedlander), the policy of «bread and spectacles» of aediles, emperors (G. Hyofling), forms, organization and financial costs of mass spectacles and entertainment (Th. Mommsen, T. Wiedemann), through the prism of the environmental implications of Roman spectacles (J. Nelis-Clement), spectacle entertainments in early imperial Rome (R. C. Beacham). On the other hand, less attention was usually paid to games, entertainment, performances and events of the ancient world in the studies of B. Chumachenko, L. Fridlender devoted to the leisure culture.

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Therefore, the author of this thesis **aims to** define the genesis and evolution of the chariot racing as the entertainment form in the ancient Rome, to investigate its functions, to establish how the Antiquity chariot racing arose in the cultural tradition of their social universe.

The genesis and evolution of chariot racing as the entertainment form of events of Antiquity, functional features of cultural and leisure practices, specific features of spectacular culture of Antiquity can be investigated by analyzing the historical works of Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, annals of Publius Cornelius Tacitus, Cassius Dio, letters of Gaius Pliny the Younger, poetry pages of Publius Ovidius Naso and others.

The axiological principles of leisure of the ancient society were based on political and personal liberty of the individual, education of model paradigmatic citizen, on the priority of polytheistic religion and state ideology, active development of visual, literary and dramatic creativity [11, p. 11–12]. In general, there are no differentiation in the culture in the ancient world to which we are used – folk and scientific culture, mass and elite, formal and informal, local (peripheral, provincial) and capital, no bohemianism, underground, youth culture [11, p. 24].

Free time, quantity and quality of leisure become a measure of a person's social wealth in Antiquity. Power, politics, war as *arete*, leisure, sports and physical culture are valued, but the physical labor is neglected. Amphitheaters, theaters, stadiums, circuses, hippodromes, courts are the most visited places by the Romans [2, p. 24]. The Romans built what they needed for play, leisure, entertainment and events as a necessary condition of the Roman way of life. The ancient Romans loved agons and spectacles, entertainment, *ludi*, *chariot racing* and *naumachia*, but were more likely as passive spectators than participants, despising gladiators as criminals and actors as comedians [11, p. 57].

Among the forms of spectacle entertainments in early imperial Rome, the Spanish researcher R. Beacham identifies ... triumph ceremonies, funerals, gladiatorial shows, shows with wild animals, processions in the circus, which were influenced significantly by the Roman, Etruscan and African traditions. The ideas of celebrations were influenced by political, social, religious characteristics and state control [13, p. 280]. The origin of Roman games, festivals and spectacle is inseparable from the history of local beliefs, cults and religious ceremonies. The entertainment nature of the ancient Roman culture of events was so pronounced that the games, for example, later became an important component of domestic politics. The German historian Th. Mommsen writes that a certain amount of 200000 aces (14500 thalers) was allocated from the state treasury for the games and that amount was not

increased until the Punic Wars. These funds were managed by aediles, which had to cover all sorts of accidental expenditures themselves [4, p. 365].

The more customized leisure becomes characteristic of representatives of the upper classes, elite, self-employed people who were able to use slaves. According to G. Woolf, the social link between education, social mobility and acculturation suggests that this representation played a role in creation of imperial elite by joining local elite groups to the empire [16, p. 320]. The spectacle entertainments in Rome were a form of cult celebrations, form of honoring the gods, a kind of mystery, mass entertainment and had a competitive nature. As the philosopher O. Losev notes, during the time of the Republic there were seven annual games, which lasted sixty-six days in August. And almost all of them prospered in the IV cen. AD! The most amazing spectacles were ... circus games. ... Fireworks, rope dancers, magicians, equilibrists, etc. joined here for brilliance and variety. It seems that only Rome started the first night performances, using illumination, lamps and lighting vessels. Praetor Lucius Sejanus, for example, during Floralius forced 5,000 slaves to light the way home for the spectators... What is this sensuality at the sight of a senseless carnage, at the sight of blood, at the sight of a whole mountain of corpses? There is only one answer to these questions: this is Rome, this is magnificent, antique, pagan Rome! [3]. According to L. Friedlander, the passion for the stage, arena and circus could be compared with an epidemic disease, which did not spare the upper classes either [9, p. 257].

As Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus writes, Roman emperor Claudius often arranged **circus games** even in the Vatican, sometimes showing venatio after every five races. «In Circus Maximus... Here, in addition to chariot racing, he also represented the Trojan Games and African baiting with participation of a squad of Praetorian horsemen led by the stands and the prefect himself, as well as brought out the Thessalian horsemen with wild bulls whom they chased around the circus, picked up the exhausted ones on the back and threw them to the ground» [7, V. 21]. During the reign of the Emperor Claudius there were 159 public festivals per year, 93 of which were devoted to games at the expense of government expenditures, including celebrations in honor of national heroes and victories in battles [16, p. 320].

The Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus in his «Annals» among the active hobbies of another Emperor Nero (stepson of Claudius – O.G.) notes such an activity as «riding horses in the tiltyard» [16, XIII.3]. Even Tacitus himself was a priest-quintecimvir, organizer during secular games hosted by the Emperor Claudius. «During the games that took place at the circus in the presence of Claudius, teenagers from noble families, among them Britannicus, son of the emperor, and Lucius Domitius (Nero – O.G.)... gave a Trojan performance on horseback» [8, XI.10].

The French scientist J. Nelis-Clement draws attention, that **chariot racing** was particularly popular in Rome and, despite being very dangerous, they did not have the deliberate cruelty of fighting as in fighting of man with wild beasts. In the city of Rome and its environs, entertainment buildings were numerous, ubiquitous, and imposing, among which we can count: *6 circuses*: the Circus Maximus, the Circus Flaminius, Circus Vaticanus, the Circus Varianus, the Circus of Maxentius, the Arval Circus; *4 theatres*: theatre of Scaurus (58 BC), the theatres of Pompey (55 BC), of Balbus (13 BC) and of Marcellus (dedicated 13 BC, in use in 17 BC for the Ludi Saeculares); *5 amphitheatres*: three in the Campus Martius... Two other buildings were the Amphitheatrum Castrense built by Elagabalus and the famous Colosseum, whose construction was planned by Vespasian and financed by the booty brought to Rome in 70 AD at the end of the campaign in Judaea [15, p. 235–236].

At Circus Maximus most of the viewers were sitting on wooden seats behind the front stone rows that were intended for the Vestal, senators and horsemen. *Four teams*, owned by contractors, competed for favor of the crowd – *red, green, white and blue*, named so for the color of clothing of the chariot drivers standing on fragile two-wheeled chariots behind two or four horses, wrapping the reins around their bodies. They needed to free themselves quickly by cutting the reins if the chariot turned over. Remembering the victories of one of the most famous chariot driver Diocles (about 150 AD), G. Hyofling describes his tombstone. It contains the story of 3000 victories in racing on two-horse chariots, and of 1462 victories in chariots harnessed of more than two horses [10]. However, not all residents of Rome favored such races. Pliny the Younger in his letter is amazed by the mass interest in *chariot racing* and the fact that «thousands of men should be eager, like a pack of children, to see horses running time after time, and the charioteers bending over their cars. There might be some reason for their enthusiasm if it was the speed of the horses or the skill of the drivers that was the attraction, but it is the racing-colors which they favor, and the racing-colors that fire their love» [6, IX.6].

The constant mass spectacles, including bloody ones, required considerable organizational work with the public and special premises. As Thomas Wiedemann notes, the Colosseum symbolized the emperor's own legitimacy, demonstrating that he returned the Roman people their right to decide and choose life or death. It was appropriate that the inauguration of the new birth of Roman freedom should be celebrated not only by the traditional slaughter of animals. Each time, during the battles, gladiators displayed the spectacle of death and rebirth in the presence of the Roman people. The audience had to accept mortality, reflecting on the unprecedented strength and continuity of the universal rules of Rome [17, p. 180]. In the document «Res gestae divi Augusti»

(The Deeds of the Divine Augustus) the Emperor Octavian Augustus details the *statistics of mass entertainment and their costs* [12, p. 184].

In the classification of gladiators, fighting couples were the horse fighters, such as the *andabata*. Their body was covered in Parthian chain mail and their faces were covered with deaf helmet with no slots for eyes. They were armed with long spears that they pointed at each other at full speed. The *essedarii* fought in British chariots operated by the driver standing near [10].

Cassius Dio in his «Roman History» mentions the shrine of Augustus. Boys of the noblest families, both of whose parents must be living, together with maidens similarly circumstanced, sang the hymn, the senators with their wives and also the people were banqueted, and there were spectacles of all sorts. For not only all kinds of musical entertainments were given, but also *horse-races* took place on two days, twenty heats the first day and forty the second, because the latter was the emperor's birthday, being the last day of August (Gaius Caesar, Caligula. – O. G.) [14, 59.7.1].

However, in other people such violent fun and gladiatorial shows caused aversion and disgust, and *in moral sense* – condemnation. The Roman poet Ovidius condemned the bloody fun of his contemporaries and in his «Grieving elegies» fervently called on the princeps (except for the other – Octavian Augustus), either jokingly or seriously, to ban the games, spectacle, chariot racing and circus.

Even if I'd confessed it, the games also sow
seeds of iniquity: order the theatres closed!
Many have often found an excuse for sin
when the hard earth's covered with Mars's sand!
Close the Circus! The Circus's freedom isn't safe:
here a girl sits close to an unknown man.
Why's any portico open, since certain girls
stroll there, to meet a lover in the place? [5, II.1].

Conclusions. Thus, chariot racing as the entertainment form of the Ancient Rome became an effective instrument of political domination. This sphere is truly a Roman art sphere, as it shows with utmost clarity and expressiveness, according to A.F. Losiev, how legal absolutism is synthesized in Rome with sensual diversity and internal sensual exaltation [3]. The Imperial Rome is a country of complete and true absolutism, kingdom of some state mysticism, before which a separate individual simply does not exist, he is only a screw in this universal machine.

The chariot racing as the entertainment form of events in the era of the ancient Rome were not just a form of everyday or social behavior, realization of religious and public festivals and mass spectacles, but largely reflected certain life positions, served as an important criterion for assessing the social

role of person in the community, specified political power, reflected social and cultural transformations in society.

The Roman entertainments were a public demonstration of power, including military. Quite often chariot racing are carried out at the expense of the state, which significantly distinguishes them from the spectacles of sacred content, or are organized due to allowances of the officials who dream of relevant state positions. New leisure paradigm is being created that depends on many factors – social conditions, cultural resources, dominant ideologies and beliefs.

In the ancient Rome, labor and events differentiate becoming independent spheres of human life. They are closely intertwined with popular culture, folklore and folk festivals in the representatives of the broad circles. The leisure of wealthy and noble people takes new forms enriching with new content. The professions are born, the representatives of which are engaged in organization of entertainment of nobility in free time, as well as engaged in artistic crafts, art and philosophy. The specialists organizing public festivals and mass entertainment appear. The state plays an important role in organizing the chariot racing, honoring festivals, as it is interested in formation of appropriate stereotypes of thinking and behavior of citizens, and forming public opinion.

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