

Hypothesis / Research Question

Did Byzantine sport and the Constantinople Hippodrome influence modern day sporting events and venues?

Sources of Study

Primary

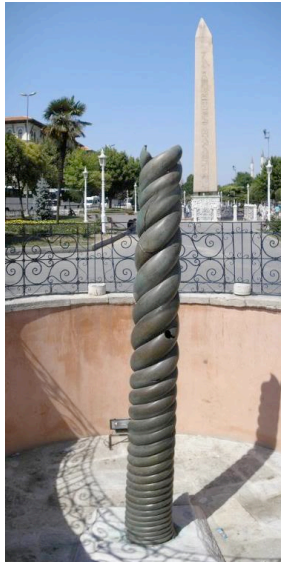


Figure 1: The Serpent Column depicted three snakes intertwined and was one of three legs holding a gold cauldron and was erected on the spina of the Hippodrome. (Governorship Of Istanbul).



Figure 2: The walled obelisk stood at the southern end of the Hippodrome (Governorship of Istanbul)



Figure 3: The Obelisk of Theodosius. This Obelisk of Theodosius stood in the Hippodrome.
(Governorship of Istanbul)

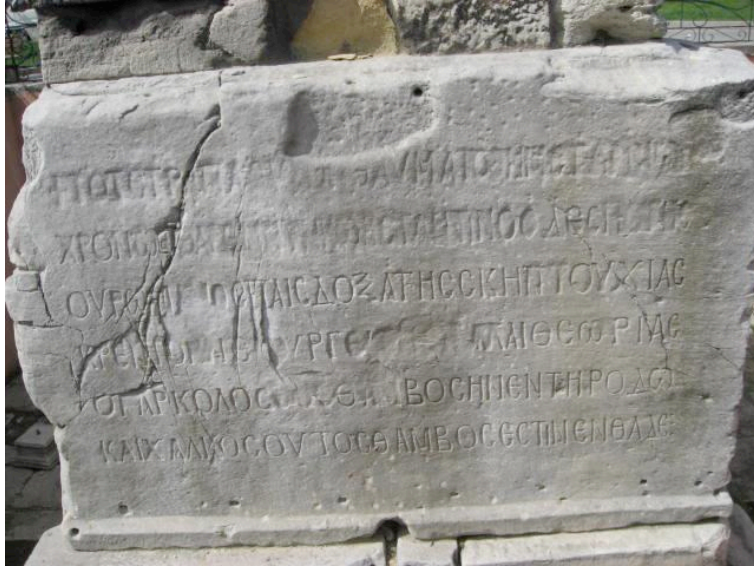


Figure 4: Picture of one side of the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius. The other side's depicts the emperor and his family watching chariot races from the imperial box (Governance of Istanbul).

Secondary

Wells, C. (2006). "Sailing From Byzantium: How A Lost Empire Shaped The Word" Bantam Dell: New York, New York

Guttmann, A. (1981). Sport Spectators from Antiquity to the Renaissance. *Journal of Sport History*. Vol. 8 No. 2 p. 5-27

Schrodt, B. (1981). Sports of the Byzantine Empire. *Journal of Sport History*. Vol. 8, No. 3.

Bassett, S. (1991). The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45, 87-96

Guilland, R.(1948). The Hippodrome at Byzantium. *Speculum*, 23 (4), 676-682

Sultan Amhed Square. In 'Governorship of Istanbul'. Retrieved Feb 19 2009 from:

<http://english.istanbul.gov.tr/Default.aspx?pid=300>

Limitations

The lack of primary accounts of the hippodrome and it's sporting culture has affected our research by having interpretations of accounts rather than an un-interpreted account of detail. By limiting our discussion themes to three important sub-topics we avoid missing particular issues by focusing our research. However, one can assume that we are missing many points of view because of the lack of time and access to resources.

Argument/Discussion

In order to understand the Hippodrome's influence on modern sports and venues we must first understand the Hippodrome. To do this, we will give a brief research based history, explanation of architecture and a look at the sporting culture of the Constantinople Hippodrome. These research based sub sections are aided by four pictures of remaining artefacts which still exist today.

History of the Hippodrome

The Hippodrome of Constantinople was a sporting venue located in Byzantium/Constantinople and played host to chariot racing and other forms of entertainment (festivals, inaugurations of new emperors etc.) (Schrodt, 1981). The hippodrome was built from wood at the end of the second century, while Constantinople was still a city within the Roman Empire known as Byzantium (Guttmann, 1981). Then emperor, Septimius Severus, ordered a hippodrome built in Byzantium. Improvements were made to the hippodrome, including an enlargement and general improvement by Emperor Constantine after Byzantium became Constantinople, the capital of the relocated Roman Empire (Schrodt, 1981). It was estimated that 60,000 - 100,000 spectators could fill the Hippodrome of Constantinople. After several fires had been set by unruly sporting fans, Emperor Justinian had reconstructed the stadium with marble shortly after a fire in 532 (Schrodt, 1981). Located in the cultural epicentre of Constantinople next to royal palace and the Hagia Sophia (see Figure 1) the Hippodrome had political and religious significance not attached to its Greek and Roman sporting predecessors and was described as the “axis of the Byzantine world”. The hippodrome use was limited after a fire in 1203 and ransacked by the Crusaders one year later (Schrodt, 1981). These events were coupled with the increased use of a square in front of the royal palace for official ceremonies and in the mid eleventh century movement of royalty to the outskirts of the city. When Constantinople fell to the Turks, the hippodrome had already fallen out of use.

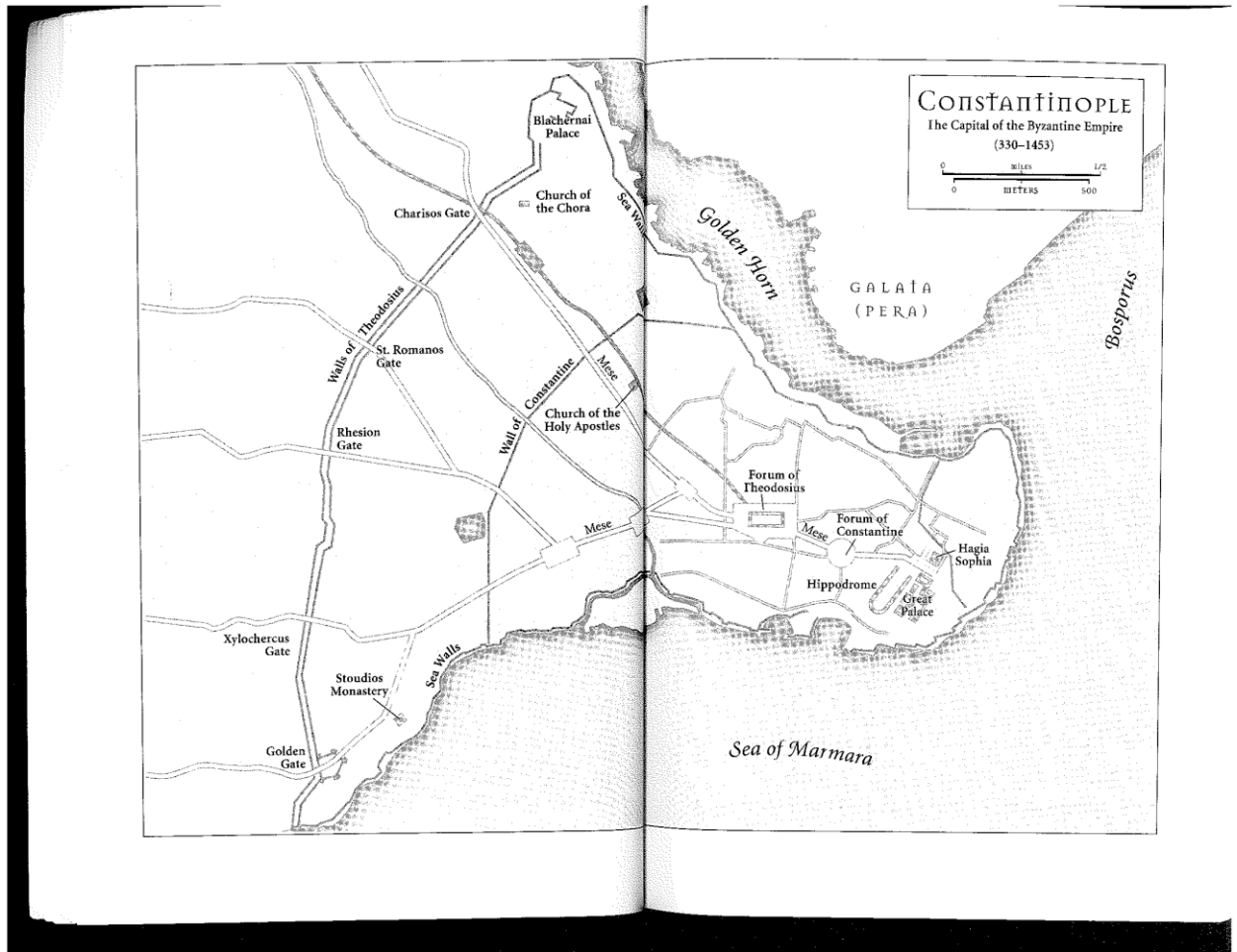


Figure 5: Depiction of Constantinople (Wells, 2006). Hippodrome is located in culture epicentre of the city next to landmarks like the Hagia Sophia and the Great Palace.

Architecture of the Hippodrome

The Constantinople Hippodrome was built as a U shaped chariot racing track. The hippodrome was architecturally similar to the Roman circuses (open air horse racing tracks) with Greek influence (Schrodt, 1981). Hippodromes and circuses were both buildings that hosted horse races primarily but also hosted other entertainment events. Although there is

conflict about details, it is generally accepted that the Constantinople Hippodrome was 1200-1300 feet long and 600-650 feet wide (Schrodt, 1981). The horse racing track was 1000 feet in circumference and spectator tiers rose 40 feet from the ground (Schrodt, 1981). The U shaped building had a low wall spine down the center of the track that stretched approximately 230 yards (Bassett, 1991). On the *spina (low wall spine)*, there were statues of famous riders along with other monuments. The monuments found in the Hippodrome could be classified in four groups: apotropaia, victory monuments, public figures and images of Rome (Bassett, 1991). The Hippodrome's *kathisma* (imperial box) was located on the eastern side of the hippodrome and was built as an open balcony. The *kathisma* also had a guarded stairway that lead to a passageway to the Royal Palace (Guilland, 1948). The Constantinople Hippodrome was built open air with no roof, but there is ongoing discussion on whether or not the spectators were covered from the sun with an awning (Guilland, 1948). Other notable architectural features of the Hippodrome at Constantinople includes the *euripus* (water ditch) that separated the spectator seating from the track and the "Four Horses" a bronze sculpture on which the imperial box was built (Bassett, 1991). The hippodrome at Constantinople was not considered an architectural innovation but rather a continuation of a long line of Roman Circuses (Guilland, 1948).

Sports and Faction Culture at the Constantinople Hippodrome

Chariot and horse racing at the Constantinople Hippodrome drew many spectators. Famous chariot racers were very wealthy and highly regarded within Byzantium. Spectators of these races spilt into factions. Blue, White, Red and Green were the common factions (Schrodt,

1981). These faction colors were an extension of Roman chariot racing factions of the same separation. All four factions had assigned seating in the Hippodrome for chariot racing as well as the other events hosted at the hippodrome (Schrodt, 1981). Some researchers believe that these factions were sects of Christianity, political parties or class based, but it is commonly believed now that the factions were just large groups of sporting fans with too much time on their hands (Schrodt, 1981) (Guttmann, 1981). These faction colors were state controlled and financed and included entertainers (Schrodt, 1981). Blues and Greens dominate accounts of faction rivalry, so it is widely believed the other factions were absorbed into the remaining two (Schrodt, 1981) (Guttmann, 1981). Ladies were separated from the men in the stands because it was not deemed proper to watch the game with the men (Schrodt, 1981). All spectators chose a faction to support when attending games and soccer hooligan type riots often resulted. The worst of these riots, the Nika Revolt (532), began as a faction riot and escalated resulting in 30,000 people killed at the Hippodrome (Schrodt, 1981). Polo was also played at the hippodrome which shows Constantinople Persian influence. Emperors have been reported to played polo which indicates this game was the only sport of nobility (Schrodt, 1981).

Relation/Significance to Current Society

The Constantinople Hippodrome was not a masterpiece of architecture. The hippodrome followed suit of many Roman Circuses. Architecturally there was not likely much influence on modern sporting venues solely from the Constantinople Hippodrome. However, the hippodrome was a part of the Roman and Greek sporting structure influence. The *spina* in the Hippodrome, which hosted works of art that included sculptures and statues of famous

racers, could be paralleled with halls of fame and jersey retirement of modern professional sports. The hippodrome multipurpose use is common in many current sporting venues like Madison Square Garden and the Air Canada Center. Open air stadiums are still quite popular with Old Trafford Stadium and the Sky Dome being primarily open air.

The sporting factions of Byzantium can defiantly be considered as an early influence on common soccer hooliganisms and “hardcore fans”. Fan riots and other disturbances still happen frequently at sporting events across the world. Research that disproves the byzantine faction’s relation to religion, socioeconomic and area would be in contradiction to current sporting fans or factions who are always related to place and on occasion to religion (see Celtic vs. Rangers). Although, choosing a favourite professional sports team in an area which has no team for itself, is comparable to the seemingly nonsensical division of Byzantines into factions.

Without the time to take a more in-depth look at the Byzantines sport culture, it is tough to assume the hypothesis true. However, there are many connections with today’s sporting fans and venues to that of the Byzantines. This topic would have to be further analyzed in order to give this hypothesis a fully supported answer.

Conclusion

With only a fraction of the research needed to make a complete relation to modern society’s sporting venues and sporting culture, confirming the hypothesis is difficult. There is defiantly some evidential relation to current sporting culture and that of the Byzantines. With that said, we are compelled to say that our hypothesis has been proven true, although more

research must be done in order to determine what sporting venues and culture influenced the Hippodrome and to get a deeper understanding of the Hippodrome for a more detailed comparison.