Teresa Wolińska (Łódź)

**CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CHARIOTEERS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS**

So engrossed were they in the wild passion that the entire city was filled with their voices and wild screaming. (...) Some perched higher behaving indecorously, others located in the market shouted at the horsemen, applauded them and screamed more than others.¹

The above characteristics of the Byzantine supporters, recorded in the fourth century by the bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, could as well, after minor adjustments, be applied to describe today’s football fans. Support in sport is certainly one of the oldest human passions. It is only the disciplines captivating audiences that change.

In the ancient Roman Empire, bloody spectacles had the same role as today’s world league games – gladiatorial combat and fights with wild animals². However, they were incompatible with Christian morality, and as such, they were gradually eliminated as the Christianization progressed³. Their place was taken by hippodrome racing, particularly chariot racing.

Residents of the imperial capital cheered the chariot drivers, whose colourful outfits signaled their membership in a particular circus faction. In the empire, there were four factions (demes), named after the colours of their outfits worn by runners and drivers representing them, the Blues, Greens, Whites and Reds⁴. Each faction had

---


³ During the reign of Maurice rebels were still sentenced to death by being torn apart by animals, but the emperor pardoned the convicts (*Theophylact Simocatta, Historia*, III, 8, 6–8, ed. C. de Boor, reed. P. Wirth, Stuttgart 1972 [cetera: Theophylact]).

their own racing team. It was their rivalry that aroused such a great passion among the supporters in Constantinople that a modern scholar, N. Baynes, did not hesitate to write that Byzantine society had two heroes, i.e. *the winner in the chariot race and the ascetic saint*.

For Constantinople, the division into ‘colours’ was evidenced for the first time in 380, in the homily of Gregory Nazianzen. In the capital of the empire, the first two factions played the leading role: the Blues and the Greens. Throughout history, lasting alliances were formed between the demes. The Blues collaborated with Whites, and Greens with Reds.

The races took place at the hippodrome – a building resembling in shape and dimensions a modern stadium, located in the city center, near the imperial palace. The Constantinople hippodrome was designed on the model of the Roman *Circus Maximus*. It was shaped like a very elongated horseshoe or a letter U surrounded by a high wall. The northern end was rounded – it was the *sfendone* (ring). It is the only part of the hippodrome visible today. At the south side, there were 12 boxes closed off with barriers (*carceres, kankélla, thýrai*), from which chariots started their run. Through the center of the hippodrome ran a *spina*, a slightly sloped stone barrier that separated the track where chariot races were held. Racers circled it, just as today runners circle the football field. At either end of the *spina*, there were cylindrical columns called *metae*, around which chariots turned back. Thus, they were not the finish lines in the modern sense of the word.

Thanks to the preservation of *spendone*, it is possible to calculate the width of the building. At the beginning of the arch it was about 120 meters, with the length of the track amounting to about 82 meters. It is not possible to determine the length of the hippodrome, though, as it was not possible to find the starting boxes. It is estimated at 370–450 meters. Also, the width of the auditorium can be determined only approximately, because the stands did not survive. It could be 21.5 m on the east and 22.5 on the west side of the hippodrome. Places for spectators were on the three sides of the object, probably at an angle of about 26 degrees. It is assumed that there were 30–40 rows of seats. It is certain that at least some seats were lined with marble. The number of spectators which the hippodrome could accommodate is estimated to be from 30 to even 100 thousand. In addition to the seats, there were probably also standing places in the aisles.

For the imperial couple, a special box (*káthisma*) was reserved in the eastern part of the building, on the first floor. At the emperors’ side, their family members and senators watched the spectacle, along with high officials and dignitaries of state. Rulers of foreign countries and their deputies staying in Constantinople were invited to the imperial box. Places below were reserved for highest dignitaries and lay officials. The wives of dignitaries, ladies-in-waiting and eunuchs from the palace could watch the games from a darkened box on the second floor, invisible to the rest of the audience. Imperial guard soldiers sat probably not far from the imperial kathisma. Places a bit to the side were occupied by representatives of lower aristocracy, while the opposite side of the hippodrome – supporters grouped in factions. The latter were positioned so that the Blues sat slightly to the right of the emperor (at the beginning of the spina), next to them set the Whites, then Reds and Greens at the end.

Since visibility from the *spendone* was not the best, places there were occupied by representatives of lower social classes. Their compensation was the opportunity to watch accidents which often happened to drivers there, and on other occasions – executions which were carried out in this place. The spectacle was watched from the outside of the stands by people connected professionally with the hippodrome – drivers, messengers, track guards and, as we would say today, law enforcement officers and other personnel.

Admission to the hippodrome was open and free of charge, although it is pos-

---

15 J. Kostenec, A.T. Öner, *op. cit.*, p. 47. Some of them were found in the area of the Blue Mosque.
18 Initially, during the reign of Theodosius the Great, the Imperial Guard soldiers occupied seats in front of the imperial box and slightly to the left. Theodosius II gave them to the Greens. Then, soldiers sat in the vicinity of the Blues. Then again they changed place, perhaps for security reasons (*ibidem*, p. 7).
21 L. cit.
sible that if the place could not accommodate all those interested, special tokens or tickets were distributed23.

For the race to take place, each time the consent of the ruler was necessary24. The emperor could decide on his own initiative or in response to a request from the factions25. Residents of the capital were informed about the decision by a flag hanging on the top of the hippodrome, on the quadriga tower, which rose above the starting boxes26. Until the last moment, the Emperor could revoke the permission. This happened relatively rarely and some special circumstances had to occur to deprive the residents of the capital of their favorite entertainment. In 583, Maurice had to cancel the races due to an earthquake27.

The importance of races is evidenced by the fact that the preparation was personally supervised by the city prefect, and in the relations with the factions the emperor was represented by the chamberlain of the sacred bedchamber (praepositus sacri cubiculi)28. The latter managed the Hippodrome staff, among whom were law enforcement officers, messengers, inspectors, guards of the um for drawing lots, combingraphers (their job was writing down the program of the races and the settings in different runs), grooms, those responsible for setting and lowering staring barriers and the maintenance of track and many others29. Praepositus made decisions on behalf of the ruler if any contentious issues arose and communicated his will during the competition. It was through him that the emperor instructed to display the flag, signaling that the race is to be held.

A special role of the emperor in the hippodrome is confirmed by the images placed on the base of the obelisk of Tithonius III, which show Theodosius I the Great seated in the imperial box at the hippodrome, with a wreath in his hand30. During the race, the ruler served as the honorary head and sometimes an arbitrator settling disputes31. Throwing a crimson scarf (mappa) gave the signal to start the competition32. Through his mandator, he crowned the winners. Sometimes he did so in person33, as had emperor Gallus, personally decorating driver Thorax34. The ruler also granted his consent to promote a driver to a higher category, as well as award the winner with a golden bull (chrysobulla) and the right of the lap of honor35.

Organizing the competition along with all the accompanying events has been an essential task of factions (demes), sometimes called circus factions. These factions were real sports associations, which can be compared to modern clubs36. They had significant financial resources at their disposal. They paid for and supported a number of drivers, runners, trainers of horses and wild animals, mimes, dancers, acrobats, poets, musicians and singers. They cared for their recruitment and training. They also employed caretakers, messengers, artisans of various specialties, grooms, etc.37 Organizing shows to fill time between individual races, factions cooperated with a special official38.

In the fight for the victor’s palm four chariots participated, representing the above-mentioned factions. Chariots started from the boxes, with the start line shaped like an arch – the chariot closest to the spina was further away than the one at the edge39. The chariots circled the stadium seven times anti-clockwise40. Finish line was probably on the western line, opposite the imperial box.

Drivers used chariots whose construction has changed little since ancient times, when they were used in a war. A chariot was small in size, with the wheel axle set low. It consisted of a booth with three sides and an open rear platform. In the past, the number of horses harnessed to the chariot would sometimes vary, but in the Byzantine

23 Ibidem, p. 6–7.
24 It could be given in writing or orally (ibidem, p. 1).
25 The latter ones were usually arranged (idem, Études..., IV, Les courses de l’Hippodrome, Bsl 26, 1965, p. 18). Rodolphe Guillaud (Études..., V, Les courses de l’Hippodrome, Bsl 27, 1966, p. 36) assumes that each of them annually received permission to organize a certain number of races.
29 Idem, Études..., III, p. 3–5. They are all mentioned in the Book of Ceremonies. Cf. Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris De cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae, I, 55; I, 69; I, 72, rec. I.I. Reiske, vol. I, Bonnæ 1829 [cetera: De cerimoniis]. Issues concerning the personnel working at the hippodrome have been recently discussed by G. Dagron (L’organisation..., p. 134–139), however, he is interested in the later period (9th and 10th centuries).
32 G. Dagron, From the mappa to the akakia: Symbolic Drift, [in:] From Rome to Constantinople. Studies in Honour of A. Cameron, ed. H. Amrav, B. ter Haar Romeny, Leuven–Paris 2007, p. 203–204; F. Kolb, Ideat póçõesantycznego władcy. Ideologia i autoreprezentacja, trans. A. Gierłńska, Poznań 2008, p. 250. The former emphasized, however, that due to the vastness of the hippodrome, the emperor signaled with a nod of his head to the official (mapparis) who lifted the mappa, while his colleague gave the signal to persons opening the carceres (p. 204).
36 R. Guilland, Études..., II/1, p. 206.
38 Idem, Études..., IX, p. 2.
40 R. Guillaud, Études..., I, p. 45.
Empire exclusively quadrigae participated in races. The driver had to control four horses running along a track similar in shape to a very elongated ellipse. The horses were harnessed in lines: two to the drawbar of the car and two next to them, by the sides.

The driver’s affiliation with a faction was marked by a band worn over his shoulder. Also other persons connected with the hippodrome wore the attire of the factions.\(^41\) Leaders of demes (demarchs) wore short tunics in appropriate colours and chlamys.\(^42\) Their colours were used in animal harnesses, an expression of which were plumes on the heads of horses.

Competition usually lasted one day, but sometimes it could be extended to several days.\(^43\) While mostly about 8 races took place in one day, their number could reach 24–25 races,\(^44\) usually in two series: in the morning and in the afternoon.\(^45\) At the beginning, a trial race was always held.\(^46\)

Fighting for victory meant that competitors did not always play fair. We read about attempts to use magical means, but also doping, to ensure the success of one’s charioteer.\(^47\) To prevent abuse, the authorities tried to maintain equal conditions for all competitors. They were both people appointed by both factions, as well as imperial officials who were responsible for this. Chariots and horses were carefully selected (each had a fixed place in the team, where it would run continuously). The skills of the horses running on the left side were regarded as particularly important because efficient performance on the curves largely depended on it.\(^48\) Proper functioning of the symbol of their power was a staff. They also carried writing tools (idem, \textit{Études sur l’Hippodrome de Byzance}, II/2, À propos du chapitre 69 du ‘Livre de Cérémonies’. Les courses, Bal 25, 1964, p. 243). Leaders of demes (demarchs) wore short tunics in appropriate coloured and chlamys (\textit{De cérémoniis}, I, 17, p. 106; R. Guilland, \textit{Études}, II/1, p. 210).


H. G. Saradi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 298 mentions up to 50 races possible, although in this case the competition was probably held over the period of several days. During the Nika rebellion, after the 32\(^{nd}\) race, the factions appealed to the emperor for grace for their members (\textit{Procopius, History of the Wars}, II, 11, 31–35; II, 14, 1–2, ed. et trans. H.B. Dewing, vol. I, London 1914 [cetera: \textit{Procopius, Wars}; Ioannes Ephesinus, \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica pars tertia}, VI, 6, rec. E.W. Brooks, Lornian 1936 [cetera: Ioannes Ephesinus]).

This is proven by the inscription (Leontius’ epigram) found between the hippodrome and the baths of Zeuxippos (\textit{Anthologia Graeca}, IX, 650), and Malalas’ testimony that after the 22\(^{nd}\) race, the factions presented their demands to the emperor Justinian in 532 (\textit{Malalas}, XVIII, 71). Cf. H.G. Saradi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 298.

R. Guilland, \textit{Études}..., II/2, p. 239.

\textit{Ibidem}, p. 234 and 249. The most valuable were two tracks closest to the spina. When a horse appeared to be unable to race, it could be replaced with another according to applicable rules. More on this subject see \textit{Ibidem}, p. 249.


\textit{Ibidem}, \textit{Études}..., II/1, p. 203–205.
in the arena himself, which was not necessarily accepted by his subjects. Of course, not everyone went to the hippodrome with equal eagerness. For some, it was a chore. However, it was a duty they had to do perform because subjects expected that rulers would share their passion and show no contempt for their preferred entertainment. Common emotions supporting a favorite charioteer gave a sense of community, intimacy, of an immediate – even if from the height of the imperial lodge – contact between the ruler and his people.

Byzantine supporters, like their modern counterparts, had their idols. The object of their worship, and at the same time the elite among those working on the hippodrome, were charioteers (heniochoi, aurigae). Driving a chariot was not a safe occupation and being a driver required unique skills. Chariots were light carts, maintaining the stability thanks to the weight of the driver. Often, there accidents and falls would occur, sometimes with tragic consequences, as exemplified by the coachman Julianicus, who died during a race.

Training drivers took a long time and not all of those who pursued this career would succeed. The profession was often inherited. The majority of drivers belonged to a group called *begárioi*, and it included both full and novice drivers. The first ones drove in the colours of a particular faction, and theoretically they were not allowed to change them. In practice, as evidenced by Porphyrius, they did so, and they did it often. A beginner, who today would be called a trainee, could in the future choose a “team” for which he would ride. Having proved his skills in racing he turned to the Emperor asking for a special belt, which, along with a helmet and tunic, was the symbol of a driver.

The most talented among the *begárioi* were able to advance and become factionaries (*hoi faktionárioi*) or mikropanites (*hoi mikropantai*). Each of the two major factions, that is the Blues and the Greens, had one factionary, the other two – a single mikropanite each. They were appointed by the emperor at the request of a particular faction. Other drivers were subject to mikropanites and factionaries, who represented them in all matters concerning racing. They chose competitors from among *begárioi*, who represented the faction in a particular race.

Although formally drivers were classified as *inhonestae personae*, outstanding...
ing competitors enjoyed immense popularity, just like modern stars of football or volleyball. Surviving iambic verses indicate that the ceiling in the gallery above the imperial kathisma featured images of famous drivers. They had monuments and stelei dedicated to them, as well as poems which praised their achievements. Their accomplishments are documented in epigrams located on the bases of statues preserved and recorded in anthologies. Through these, we know the names of the most famous among them: Porphyrius, Faustinus and his son, Constantine, Julian and Uranius.

The first of these had several statues, put by both the Blues and the Greens. At the Constantinople hippodrome spina alone there were five. What is worth emphasizing, emperor Anastasius had agreed to honor the driver in such a way before the latter ended his career. Uranius lived to see a special honor – he was given a statue of gold, while others’ were of bronze. Drivers were given monuments particularly often in fifth and sixth century. From the later period there are none, but it does not necessarily prove the decline in the popularity of racing, as statues of private individuals were no longer erected, reserving the privilege for the rulers and their family members.

The most famous among these players was undoubtedly Porphyrius, born probably in the early sixth century in Africa, also known under the name Kalliope. His career lasted for a very long time (he was winning for about 40 years) and during it he changed the colour several times, which is confirmed by inscriptions. He appeared in the hippodrome in Constantinople, but also in Antioch. In the latter city, he was the leader of the Green faction. There, he not only participated in sports competition, but he led his supporters in an attack on the synagogue at Daphne. In turn, after his return to Constantinople, he took part in the suppression of a usurpation (probably the Vitalian rebellion of 515). Perhaps these very achievements led the emperor to consent to the erection of several of his statues.

Drivers were entitled to payment both for their participation in the race and for winning it. In addition to the monetary payment, they could also receive payment in nature and a certain amount of bets they had made. The most talented among them were honored and rewarded both by rulers and other wealthy admirers. In addition to gifts, sportulae, they were entitled to their official dress, stored in a special changing room. The winner was decorated in a stama, facing the imperial box, by handing him a wreath and palm tree branch. He could also (though he did not have to) receive permission from the emperor to make a lap of honour on his chariot. It was then that he received the Golden Bull (faction, faktion).

Most active supporters were grouped in factions. It is uncertain how big a number of people were grouped in demes. Once it was thought that the entire population of the city was divided between them, but the fact that only certain grandstands in the hippodrome were assigned to them shows that it could not have been possible. There is no doubt that factionists were a minority. Their social makeup was very diverse. All of the factions associated some young aristocrats, artisans, clerks and others. Some references in the sources suggest that there were fac-

---

73 A. CAMERON, Porphyrius..., p. 188–214.
74 In Palatine and Planudean Anthology. Since those on the statues and those from the anthology are almost identical, it must be assumed that they were copied in the Hippodrome and the copyist wrote them down one at a time, statue after statue (A. CAMERON, Porphyrius..., p. 117). The cited author analyzes the inscriptions in terms of linguistics and their content (ibidem, p. 65–95).
75 Ibidem, p. 122, 136–140. Two epigrams mention Faustinus, 14 – his son.
76 Ibidem, p. 141–143. Uranius is the hero of 5 epigrams, Julian – only one.
77 We know of at least five. The earliest originates from ca. 500, while the fifth – from 515 (ibidem, p. 241).
79 In the opinion of A. CAMERON (Porphyrius..., p. 251), the emperor agreed to numerous statues of Porphyrius because the latter was not his real rival, unlike the outstanding commanders, and moreover, the emperor could treat the charioteer’s victories as the symbol of his own power and victory.
80 Ibidem, p. 168, 240. The author is right to emphasize that the price of the statue did not necessarily mean that Uranius, was more successful than his predecessors. Instead, it demonstrates the increase in races popularity.
81 A. CAMERON (ibidem, p. 255) emphasizes that he only knows one exception from this rule – the erection of a statue of Narces during the time of Justin II.
82 Ibidem, p. 117–131, 150–180; more on this figure, cf. annex.
83 Ibidem, p. 155 and 170. The author suspects that by Libia Alexandria could have been meant.
84 MALALAS, XVI, 6; A. CAMERON, Porphyrius..., 123–124 (cites 5 inscriptions), 173.
tion activists and ordinary supporters-sympathizers. The former were mostly young people, who wanted to stand out, also with their clothing and hair. They tried to be noticeable. Procopius described them as follows:

(...) the mode of dressing the hair was changed to a rather novel style by the Factions: for they did not cut it at all as the other Romans did. For they did not cut the moustache or the beard at all, but they wished always to have the hair of these grow out very long, as the Persians do. But the hair of their heads they cut off in front back to the temples, leaving the part behind to hang down to a very great length in a senseless fashion, just as the Massagetae do. (…) And the part of the tunic which covered the arms was gathered by them very closely about the wrist, while from there to each shoulder it bellowed out to an incredible breadth. And as often to hang down to a very great length in a senseless fashion, just as the Massagetae do. (…) And the hair of their heads they cut off in front back to the temples, leaving the part behind at all, but they wished always to have the hair of these grow out very long, as the Persians do.10

Some grew out of their youthful passion. This was the case with Menander Protector, who in his youth was an avid supporter.

 Factionists, especially young people, often demonstrated a high level of aggression. As a result, factions provoked many brawls, sometimes turning into riots spreading to the entire city. They reached their peak in sixth century, starting during the reign of Anastasius. Historians, among them Procopius, Cassiodorus, and Menander, were aware of the dangers of the fighting supporters. Procopius wrote about them that they were destroying each other. Conflicts between the factions did not have any serious (be it economic, social or political) reasons. They were simply hooligan antics, mostly due to the results of the competition, of which even the contemporaries were already aware. Justinian issued a special regulation prohibiting

96 As the text of PROCOPIUS (Anecdota, VII, 2–3) seems to suggest, where the author writes about the excesses of some of the activists of the Blues that frightened even their colleagues from the faction.
100 Malalas mentions the riots on several occasions (vide e.g. p. 394–395, 416, 473–476, 483, 484, 490, 496).
102 PROCOPIUS, Anecdota, XVIII, 32–34.
103 A. CAMERON, Circus factions…, p. 272.
during the reign of Constantine the Great. It was very solemn and the emperor was always present. It was preceded by a great cavalcade in the hippodrome and a procession with the statue of the Genius of the City.

Spring competitions, depending on the date of Easter, could be held on different days. The competition of the Golden Hippodrome were very solemn in nature, organized most likely on a Tuesday after the first Sunday of Easter. It took its name from the gilded costumes that victorious charioteers wore that day. November was also often chosen for the organization of competition. It is possible that more frequent races in the winter were due to the fact that in the summer emperors often stayed outside the capital, for example, on military expeditions. Another reason was the lack of church holidays in this period which would make it impossible to organize shows at the hippodrome. However, if the emperor was present in the capital, events could take place also in summer and autumn.

Apart from these fixed dates, numerous occasions could be a reason to organize a competition for the entertainment of Constantinople citizens. A very common reason for organizing races was a victory over external or internal enemies. Theodosius II in 415 celebrated in this way the defeat of a barbarian chief-tain John and the death of the Visigoth king Ataulf, and a year later, the triumph over the usurper Attalus, Mauritius – the victory over the Persians, while Michael II in 823 celebrated the defeat of Thomas the Slav. The competition was usually accompanied by a triumphal entry to the capital. Justinian honored this way his best commander, Belisarius, after the latter restored North Africa to the empire. Theophilus and Nicephorus Phokas did the same the

Racing were also how emperors celebrated the seizure of power. So did, among others, Leo I in 457, Phokas in 602, and Heraclius in 610. Another pretext to organize competitions was an important event in the imperial family. For example, races were held to celebrate weddings in imperial families, anniversaries of birth, deaths, coming to power or an imperial coronation. Often, races were held in honor of guests of the Empire, crowned heads and ambassadors – for example, envoy of the Arab caliph. Sometimes, no pretext was needed to provide entertainment for the residents of the capital.

On some days it was not permitted to organize performances at the hippodrome. Excluded dates were primarily religious holidays – Sundays, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, the week before and after Easter. Thus, Gilbert Dagon speaks of adapting the pagan ludi to the Christian calendar.

In fact, the Christianization of the empire was followed by a kind of “Christianization” of the hippodrome, as well as the competitions held there. Successful charioteers believed that they owed their success to God. Before racing, they prayed and attended a Mass. This “Christianity” did not mean, however, as evidenced by the events described above in Constantinople, emotional restraint and}

121 De cerimoninis, I, 91, p. 417.
122 Theophylact, VIII, 10, 8–13.
123 Chronicon Paschale, p. 701.
125 Such as the marriage of Theodosius II to Aelia Eudocia (Chronicon Paschale, p. 578); the marriage of Domentia, the daughter of Phokas (Theophanes, AM 6099, p. 294, 11–14sq).
127 Such as in 946 – De cerimoninis, II, 15, p. 588–592.
128 CTh, II, 8, 20 (the prohibition did not include those days on which birthdays of rulers were celebrated). This law, issued by Theodosius I, was taken further by Leo I who banned all music and secular ceremonies at this period (Cf. III, 12, 9 [11]). On Sundays, it was obligatory to refrain from any activities (Malalas, XIV, 39; Michaelis Glycuse annales, ed. I. Bekker, Bonnae 1836, p. 483).
129 G. Dagonon, L’organisation..., p. 128–132.
130 H.G. Saradi, op. cit., p. 300–301. A manifestation of this phenomenon were Christian invocations, carved in the hippodrome in Alexandria. It is also possible that in the Constantinopolitan hippodrome ancient inscriptions were preserved which were copied in the sixth century (A. Cameron, Porphyrio..., p. 109–116). However, it is uncertain whether they were copied from objects or from literary sources.
131 R. Guillaud, Études..., II/1, p. 220–223. At the same time they had no qualms about seeking advice of fortune tellers before the race (E. Wipszycka, Historia pewnego zwycięskiego woźnicy, MW 1995, p. 8).
civilizing the forms of cheering one’s favorite competitors. Nor did it contribute to discouraging the short-tempered factionists from violence against the supporters of rival teams, or even from criminal behaviour.

**Abstract.** Support in sport is certainly one of the oldest human passions. Residents of the eastern Roman imperial capital cheered the chariot drivers. The passion for supporting the drivers was common for all groups and social classes. The hippodrome was visited by the representatives of the aristocracy, artisans and the poor of the city alike. The popularity of chariot racing is evidenced by their frequency. 66 days were reserved for circenses, that is racing.

Organizing the competition along with all the accompanying events has been an essential task of circus factions (demes). In the empire, there were four factions named Blues, Greens, Whites and Reds. These factions were real sports associations, which can be compared to modern clubs. They had significant financial resources at their disposal. Each faction had their own racing team. They paid for and supported a number of drivers, runners, trainers of horses and wild animals, mimes, dancers, acrobats, poets, musicians and singers. They cared for their recruitment and training. They also employed caretakers, messengers, artisans of various specialties, grooms, etc.

Expectations of subjects meant that emperors put great emphasis on the organization of shows and they were actively engaged in them themselves. The preparation was personally supervised by the city prefect, and in the relations with the factions the emperor was represented by the praepositus sacri cubiculi. The latter managed the Hippodrome staff. Byzantine supporters, like their modern counterparts, had their idols. The object of their worship, and at the same time the elite among those working on the hippodrome, were charioteers. Outstanding competitors enjoyed immense popularity, just like modern stars of football or volleyball. They had monuments and stelae dedicated to them, as well as poems which praised their achievements. The ceiling in the gallery above the imperial kathisma featured images of famous drivers.

*Translated by Katarzyna Gucio*

**Teresa Wolińska**
Katedra Historii Bizancjum
Uniwersytet Łódzki
ul. A. Kamińskiego 27a
90–219 Łódź, Polska
t.wolinska@wp.pl