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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

¹ JOANNES CHRYSOSTOMOS, *Homilia adversus eos qui ecclesia relictæ ad circenses ludos et theatra transfugerunt*, 1, [in:] PG, vol. LVI, col. 263.

² H.G. SARADI, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century. Literary Images and Historical Reality*, Athens 2006, p. 306. Constantine ordered that convicts be sentenced to work in the mines, rather than forced to be gladiators (*Codex Theodosianus*, XV, 12, 1, [in:] *Theodosiani libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellæ ad theodosianum pertinentes*, rec. T. MOMMSEN, P. MEYER, Berlin 1971 [cetera: CTh]).

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]).

⁴ PROCOPIUS, *The Anecdota or Secret History*, VII, 1, ed. et trans. H.B. DEWING, London 1935

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*⁵.

For Constantinople, the division into 'colours' was evidenced for the first time in 380, in the homily of Gregory Nazianzen⁶. 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 *sphendone* (ring). It is the only part of the hippodrome visible today⁷. At the south side, there were 12 boxes closed off with barriers (*carceres*, *kankélla*, *thýrai*), from which chariots started their run⁸. Through the center of the hippodrome ran a *spina*, a slightly sloped stone barrier that separated the track where chariot races were held⁹. Racers circled it, just as today runners circle the football field. At either end of the *spina*, there were cylindrical columns called *metae*¹⁰, around which chariots turned back. Thus, they were not the finish lines in the modern sense of the word.

Thanks to the preservation of *sphendone*, it is possible to calculate the width of the building. At the beginning of the arch it was about 120 meters¹¹, with the length of the track amounting to about 82 meters¹². 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 meters¹³. 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

[cetera: PROCOPIUS, *Anecdota*].

⁵ N.H. BAYNES, *The Byzantine Empire*, Princeton–London 1925, p. 33.

⁶ GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oratio* 37, 18, [in:] PG, vol. XXXVI, col. 301–304; G. DAGRON, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451*, Paris 1974, p. 350.

⁷ Today, archaeological works are conducted there (in a limited scope).

⁸ J. KOSTENEC, A.T. ÖNER, *Walking thru Byzantium. Great Palace Region*, ²Istanbul 2008, p. 20.

⁹ New research has shown that it could consist of a series of rectangular containers filled with water.

¹⁰ On top of each of them another three conical pillars were placed (G. DAGRON, *op. cit.*, p. 323).

¹¹ Depending on the measurement, it is quoted as 117.5 or 123.5 m (*ibidem*, p. 328).

¹² G. DAGRON estimates the length of the arena as 79.50–83.25 m.

¹³ G. DAGRON (*op. cit.*, p. 328) cautiously estimates it as 400–480 m. R. GUILLAND (*Études sur l'Hippodrome: les dimensions de l'Hippodrome*, Bsl 31, 1970, p. 1–11) divides these measurements into following sections: 145 m from *carceres* to the Blues' *meta* + 105 m from the Blues' *meta* to the Greens' *meta* + 100 m the Greens' *meta* to the sphendone wall + 20 m of the auditorium.

east and 22.5 on the west side of the hippodrome¹⁴. 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 marble¹⁵. 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 state¹⁶. Rulers of foreign countries and their deputies staying in Constantinople were invited to the imperial box¹⁷. 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*¹⁸. 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 end¹⁹.

Since visibility from the *sphendone* was not the best, places there were occupied by representatives of lower social classes²⁰. 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 place²¹. 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 personnel²².

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

¹⁴ G. DAGRON, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

¹⁵ J. KOSTENEC, A.T. ÖNER, *op. cit.*, p. 47. Some of them were found in the area of the Blue Mosque.

¹⁶ R. GUILLAND, *Études sur l'Hippodrome de Byzance*, III, *Rôle de l'empereur et des divers fonctionnaires avant et pendant les courses*, Bsl 26, 1965, p. 2, 5–6.

¹⁷ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 6.

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).

¹⁹ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, I, *Le palais du Kathisma*, Bsl 18, 1957, p. 47–49; IDEM, *Études...*, III, p. 6. That was the case from Theodosius II.

²⁰ J. KOSTENEC, A.T. ÖNER, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²¹ *L. cit.*

²² R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 6.

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 urn for drawing lots, combinographers (their job was writing down the program of the races and the settings in different runs), grooms, those responsible for setting and lowering starting 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 Tuthmosis III, which show Theodosius I the Great seated in the imperial box at the hippodrome, with a wreath in his hand³⁰. During the

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 GUILLAND (*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.

²⁶ IDEM, *Études...*, III, p. 2. More on the subject of preparation for the race, cf. G. DAGRON, *L'organisation et le déroulement des courses d'après le Livre de Cérémonies*, TM 13, 2000, p. 147–155.

²⁷ THEOPHYLACT, p. 58; *Theophanis Chronographia*, AM 6075, p. 252, 29–31, rec. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 [cetera: THEOPHANES]; GEORGIUS CEDRENIUS, IOANNES SCYLITZES, *Opere*, vol. I, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonnae 1838–1839, p. 691 [cetera: CEDRENIUS].

²⁸ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 1–3; IDEM, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*, vol. I, Berlin–Amsterdam 1967, p. 345.

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, Bonnae 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).

³⁰ J. GEYSEN, *Presentation of Victory on the Theodosian Obelisc Base*, B 68, 1998, p. 49–50.

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

³¹ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 2.

³² G. DAGRON, *From the mappa to the akakia: Symbolic Drift*, [in:] *From Rome to Constantinople. Studies in Honour of A. Cameron*, ed. H. AMIRAY, B. TER HAAR ROMENY, Leuven–Paris 2007, p. 203–204; F. KOLB, *Ideal późnoantycznego władcy. Ideologia i autoprezentacja*, trans. A. GIERLIŃSKA, 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 (*mapparios*) who lifted the mappa, while his colleague gave the signal to persons opening the carceres (p. 204).

³³ *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, XV, 6, rec. J. THURN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2000 [cetera: MALALAS].

³⁴ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Römische Geschichte*, XIV, 11, 12, ed. W. SEYFARTH, vol. I, Berlin 1988 [cetera: AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS]; R. GUILLAND, *Études sur l'Hippodrome de Byzance*, II/1, *À propos du chapitre 69 du Livre de Cérémonies. Les courses à Byzance*, Bsl 23, 1962, p. 203.

³⁵ *De cerimoniis*, I, 69, vol. I, p. 327–329; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 2–3.

³⁶ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 206.

³⁷ IDEM, *Études sur l'Hippodrome de Byzance*, IX, *Les Factions au X siècle: leur organisation*, Bsl 30, 1969, p. 6.

³⁸ IDEM, *Études...*, IX, p. 2.

³⁹ J. KOSTENEC, A.T. ÖNER, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ R. GUILLAND, *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 factions⁴¹. Leaders of demes (demarchs) wore short tunics in appropriate colours and chlamys⁴². 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 days⁴³. While mostly about 8 races took place in one day, their number could reach 24–25 races⁴⁴, usually in two series: in the morning and in the afternoon⁴⁵. At the beginning, a trial race was always held⁴⁶.

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 charioteer⁴⁷. 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 horse running on the left side were regarded as particularly important because efficient performance on the curves largely depended on it⁴⁸. Proper functioning of

⁴¹ The symbol of their power was a staff. They also carried writing tools (IDEM, *Études sur l'Hippodrome de Byzance*, II/2, *À propos du chapitre 69 du «Livre de Cérémonies»*. Les courses, Bsl 25, 1964, p. 243). Leaders of demes (demarchs) wore short tunics in appropriate colours and chlamys (*De cerimoniis*, I, 17, p. 106; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 210).

⁴² *De cerimoniis*, I, 17, p. 106; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 210.

⁴³ We owe the description of competitions held on fixed dates to Constantine VII (*De cerimoniis*, I, 69, p. 310–340). Cf. also G. DAGRON, *L'organisation...*, p. 158–170.

⁴⁴ H.G. SARADI (*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 32nd race, the factions appealed to the emperor for grace for their members (PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, II, 11, 31–35; II, 14, 1–2, ed. et trans. H.B. DEWING, vol. I, London 1914 [cetera: PROCOPIUS, *Wars*]; IOANNES EPHESSINUS, *Historia Ecclesiastica pars tertia*, VI, 6, rec. E.W. BROOKS, Lovanii 1936 [cetera: IOANNES EPHESSINUS]).

⁴⁵ This is proven by the inscription (Leontius' epigram) found between the hippodrome and the baths of Zeuxippos (*Anthologia Graeca*, IX, 650), and Malalas' testimony that after the 22nd race, the factions presented their demands to the emperor Justinian in 532 (MALALAS, XVIII, 71). Cf. H.G. SARADI, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁴⁶ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/2, s. 239.

⁴⁷ *CTh*, IX, 16, 11; A. CAMERON, *Porphyrius the Charioteer*, Oxford 1973, p. 173, an. 3, p. 245; IDEM, *Circus Factions. Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford 1976, p. 345; H.G. SARADI, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

⁴⁸ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/2, p. 237. Particularly valued were horses of Spanish blood, which were not allowed to be sold even if because of age and a large number of runs they were no longer suitable for work in the hippodrome (*CTh*, XV, 10, 1).

starting boxes (*carceres*) was examined as well as that of the barriers that divided them from the arena. In the interest of justice particular care was taken to allow the quadrigae simultaneous take-off, which was all the more important since the barriers were opened manually. This task was given to the officials subordinated to the praepositus, and thus those representing the emperor, autonomous from the factions⁴⁹. The health of horses was also monitored and starting positions were drawn⁵⁰. Frequently, this was done the day before the race. The draw ceremony took place either in the arena, or in the court building, and its participants were both the representatives of all factions, as well as government officials⁵¹. Not everything, however, depended on fate. If four races were held, in each race a different faction had the best starting place – the draw just decided in which one⁵².

In order to make the event more varied, different types of races were held. Most popular were, of course, those in which each faction had its charioteer, chariot and horses. Sometimes, however, they would exchange chariots (then the driver of the Greens was driving a horse owned by the Blues, the Whites' driver drove the Reds' one and vice versa), or placed teams in which each faction would give one horse for each of the four quadrigae⁵³. In the latter case, teams were drawn and it was here that the driver could prove his skill. The rules of the substitution of a driver who would suddenly fall ill were determined in detail, as well as the rules of rewarding his replacement⁵⁴. For the latter it was a chance to show his skills.

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. It was said that Antiochus and Xenophon, two wealthy residents of the capital, agreed to sell their homes to the emperor Justinian for an unfavorable price. The first one did so out of fear that if were to be imprisoned, he would not be able to watch the races, the second – on the condition that before the race four drivers would give him a bow in the arena such the one given to the emperor⁵⁵. People of lower social standing discussing for hours the merits of horses and drivers were de-

⁴⁹ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/2, p. 239.

⁵⁰ *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 *ibidem*, p. 249.

⁵¹ *De cerimoniis*, I, 69, 312–313; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/2, p. 242; IDEM, *Études...*, III, p. 4.

⁵² IDEM, *Études...*, II/2, p. 246.

⁵³ More on the rules of such races, cf. IDEM, *Études...*, II/1, p. 222–223; IDEM, *Études...*, II/2, p. 236.

⁵⁴ IDEM, *Études...*, II/2, p. 250.

⁵⁵ *Peri tēs hagías Sofías*, 4–5, [in:] *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, ed. T. PREGER, vol. I, Lipsiae 1901, p. 78–81). Leo the Deacon called the Byzantines lovers of spectacles (*Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae libri decem*, IV, 5, ed. C.B. HASE, Bonnae 1828, p. 61 [cetera: LEO DIACONUS]). More on the subject of "hippomania" of the Byzantines, cf. R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 203–205.

scribed by Ammianus Marcellinus⁵⁶. Officials taking positions in a new place, in order to win favor, would take horses and drivers from the area which they had previously managed to the new office, before such practices were legally prohibited⁵⁷.

The popularity of racing is also reflected in the comparisons used by writers referring to the world of the hippodrome. For example, George of Pisidia, in his *Heraclias*, compared Heraclius's victory over Khosrau to a victory in a race⁵⁸. Similar phrases are particularly frequent in the works of Christian moralists. John Chrysostom speaks about the prophets as drivers of truth, the Apostles – as the horses of God, the Church – as a spiritual hippodrome, etc.⁵⁹ The above figures of speech are all the more remarkable that the clergy were forbidden to appear in the hippodrome⁶⁰. Often repeated prohibitions may, however, prove that also for its representatives it was a great temptation⁶¹.

Also, self-respecting women should avoid this place. Justinian acknowledged the presence of married women in the hippodrome as a reason for a divorce⁶², which, however, indirectly indicates that there were ladies ready to risk their reputation. The exception was the empress, who used to accompany her spouse in his box. Aristocratic ladies could watch games from a covered box on the second floor of the Kathisma Palace. Among the spectators, there were ladies of questionable repute⁶³. They were also featured in the performances, usually highly frivolous, presented to the spectators in the intervals between individual races.

Expectations of subjects meant that emperors put great emphasis on the organization of shows and they were actively engaged in them themselves. They were always present in the hippodrome during the competition. Some, for example Michael III and Theophilus, demonstrated great interest in races⁶⁴. This first even appeared

⁵⁶ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, XIV, 6, 25. The cited passage refers to Rome but the case was similar in Constantinople.

⁵⁷ *CTh*, XV, 5, 3.

⁵⁸ GEORGIUS PISIDES, *Heraclias*, I, 201–220, ed. A. PERTUSI, [in:] *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi, Panegirici epici*, Ettal 1960.

⁵⁹ JOANNES CHRYSOSTOMOS, *Oratio de circo*, [in] *PG*, vol. LIX, col. 567–570; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 205; H.W. HAUSSIG, *Historia kultury bizantyńskie*, trans. T. ZABŁUDOWSKI, Warszawa 1980, p. 155–156.

⁶⁰ They were forbidden to do so by the patriarch Epiphanius (520–535), while Justinian included the prohibition in his code (*Codex Justinianus*, I, 4, 34, ed. P. KRÜGER, Berolini 1900 [cetera: *CJ*]).

⁶¹ The above-mentioned prohibition states that men of Church are forbidden to appear in the hippodrome even in disguise. R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 8. Patriarch Theophylact (X w.) was a fan of races (CEDRENIUS, II, 332; *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome historiarum libri XIII–XVIII*, XVI, 26, vol. III, rec. T. BÜTTNER-WOBST, Bonnæ 1897 [cetera: ZONARAS], but there is no evidence that he frequented the hippodrome.

⁶² *CJ*, *Novellae*, CXVII, 8, 6 (it also applied to going to theatre).

⁶³ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 6.

⁶⁴ P. KARLIN-HAYTER, *Imperial Charioteers seen by the Senat or by the Plebs*, B 57, 1987, p. 326–335.

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 (*heniochoí*, *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 race⁶⁵.

Training drivers took a long time and not all of those who pursued this career would succeed. The profession was often inherited⁶⁶. The majority of drivers belonged to a group called *hoi begárioi*⁶⁷, 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 often⁶⁸. 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 belt⁶⁹, 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 mikropanítai*). Each of the two major factions, that is the Blues and the Greens, had one factionary, the other two – a single mikropanite each⁷⁰. They were appointed by the emperor at the request of a particular faction⁷¹. 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*⁷², outstand-

⁶⁵ MALALAS, XVIII, 144.

⁶⁶ A. CAMERON, *Porphyrius...*, p. 156–157.

⁶⁷ The name is confusing as it suggests drivers of two-horse chariots. More on the subject of driver categories, cf. R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 212–222; G. DAGRON, *L'organisation...*, p. 145–147.

⁶⁸ A. CAMERON, *Porphyrius...*, p. 150–151, 163–165.

⁶⁹ *De cerimoniis*, I, 69, p. 329–330; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 224.

⁷⁰ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 213, 215–218.

⁷¹ *De cerimoniis*, I, 69, p. 327–328.

⁷² *CTh*, XV, 7, 12 (394 A.D.). It prohibited the portraits of drivers and actors from being featured in respectable places, especially where portraits of the Emperor were also featured.

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 drivers⁷³. They had monuments and *stellae* 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 anthologies⁷⁴. Through these, we know the names of the most famous among them: Porphyrius, Faustinus and his son, Constantine⁷⁵, Julian and Uranius⁷⁶.

The first of these had several statues, put by both the Blues and the Greens⁷⁷. At the Constantinople hippodrome *spina* alone there were five⁷⁸. What is worth emphasizing, emperor Anastasius had agreed to honor the driver in such a way before the latter ended his career⁷⁹. Uranius lived to see a special honor – he was given a statue of gold, while others' were of bronze⁸⁰. 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 members⁸¹.

The most famous among these players was undoubtedly Porphyrius⁸², born probably in the early sixth century in Africa⁸³, also known under the name Kalliopas⁸⁴. His career lasted for a very long time (he was winning for about 40 years) and dur-

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).

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 11. More on the subject of their placement – p. 180–187. The description of the two surviving bases of the statues – p. 12–58.

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 Narzes 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.

ing it he changed the colour several times, which is confirmed by inscriptions⁸⁵. He appeared in the hippodrome in Constantinople, but also in Antioch. In the latter city, he was the leader of the Green faction⁸⁶. There, he not only participated in sports competition, but he led his supporters in an attack on the synagogue at Daphne⁸⁷. In turn, after his return to Constantinople, he took part in the suppression of a usurpation (probably the Vitalian rebellion of 515⁸⁸). 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 made⁸⁹. 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 room⁹⁰. The race winner was decorated in a *stama*, facing the imperial box⁹¹, by handing him a wreath and palm tree branch⁹². 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*)⁹³.

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 capital was divided between them⁹⁴, but the fact that only certain some grandstands in the hippodrome were assigned to for them shows that it could not have been possible. There is no doubt that factionists were a minority⁹⁵. 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-

⁸⁵ A. CAMERON, *Porphyrius...*, p. 65, 121 (inscriptions), 150–151, 163–165 (reasons for changing colours); 178–180, 240–241 (length of career).

⁸⁶ MALALAS, XVI, 6.

⁸⁷ MALALAS, *l. cit.*; A. CAMERON, *Porphyrius...*, p. 150; P. HATLIE, *Monks and Circus Factions in Early Byzantine Political Life*, [in:] *Monastères, images pouvoirs et société à Byzance*, ed. M. KAPLAN, Paris 2006, p. 20. JOHN OF NIKIU (*The Chronicle of John, bishop of Nikiou*, LXXXIX, 23–30, trans. R.H. CHARLES, Oxford 1916), who writes of these events, never mentions Porphyrius by name, emphasizing the role of factions instead. His account suggests that factionists acted opposing the authority and their protests turned into a rebellion.

⁸⁸ A. CAMERON, *Porphyrius...*, p. 126–128, 150.

⁸⁹ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 221.

⁹⁰ *De cerimoniis*, II, 55, p. 799.

⁹¹ Stama was located opposite of the imperial box (*Chronicon Paschale*, rec. L. DINDORF, Bonnae 1832, p. 530; MALALAS, XIII, 8; R. GUILLAND, *L'Études sur l'Hippodrome de Constantinople: l'arène*, JÖBG 6, 1957, p. 25–44).

⁹² The wreath was probably silver and used only for decoration, that is, the winning charioteer did not keep it to himself. Cf. R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 224.

⁹³ *De cerimoniis*, I, 69, p. 328; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 218–219.

⁹⁴ As claimed PROCOPIUS, *Anecdota*, VII, 1.

⁹⁵ A. CAMERON, *Circus factions...*, p. 75.

tion activists and ordinary supporters-sympathizers⁹⁶. 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 as their arms were waved about, either as they shouted in the theatres and hippodromes, or urged man on to victory in the customary manner, this part of their garments would actually soar aloft (...) Also their cloaks and their drawers and especially their shoes as regards both name and fashion, were classed as “Hunnic”.⁹⁷

Some grew out of their youthful passion. This was the case with Menander Protector, who in his youth was an avid supporter⁹⁸.

Factionists, especially young people, often demonstrated a high level of aggression⁹⁹. As a result, factions provoked many brawls, sometimes turning into riots spreading to the entire city¹⁰⁰. 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 supporters¹⁰¹. Procopius wrote about them that they were destroying each other¹⁰². 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 aware¹⁰³. 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.

⁹⁷ PROCOPIUS, *Anecdota*, VII, 8–14. Cf. also B.B. PHILLIPS, *Circus Factions and Barbarian Dress in Sixth Century Constantinople*, [in:] *Avarenforschungen*, ed. F. DAIM, vol. I, Wien 1992, p. 25–32.

⁹⁸ *The History of Menander the Guardsmen*, fr. 1, ed. R.C. BLOCKLEY, Liverpool 1985, p. 40, 12–14 [cetera: MENANDER]; *PLRE*, vol. III, p. 873.

⁹⁹ PROCOPIUS, *Anecdota*, VII, 11–21, 33–38; XVIII, 32–34; *The Chronicle of Marcellinus*, a. 445. 2, ed. B. CROKE, Sydney 1995 [cetera: MARCELLINUS COMES].

¹⁰⁰ MALALAS mentions the riots on several occasions (vide e.g. p. 394–395, 416, 473–476, 483, 484, 490, 496).

¹⁰¹ *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri quinque*, V, 14, 4; V, 21, 4, ed. R. KEYDELL, Berlin 1967 [cetera: AGATHIAS]; MENANDER, fr. 1, p. 40, 12–44; THEOPHANES, AM 6053, p. 235–236; A. CAMERON, *Circus factions...*, p. 77.

¹⁰² PROCOPIUS, *Anecdota*, XVIII, 32–34.

¹⁰³ A. CAMERON, *Circus factions...*, p. 272.

supporters from throwing rocks and committing murders, promising severe punishments for those who caused unrest¹⁰⁴. However, if social and economic riots broke out, factions could join them, led by a simple desire to, as we would say today, cause trouble. There were cases when as a result of dissatisfied citizens joining in, they could turn into political protests, this, however, happened rarely. Most of the unrest in the capital of the empire began in the hippodrome. People gathered there had a sense of power. However, for the riots to spread over the city and become really dangerous, there had to be more serious reasons than the emotions of supporters¹⁰⁵.

The popularity of chariot racing is evidenced by their frequency. The so-called *Philokalos Calendar* of 354 listed 177 days in which performances (*ludi*) were scheduled, 66 of which were reserved for *circenses*, that is racing¹⁰⁶. Some races had their permanent day in the Byzantine calendar.

Competitions were held throughout the year, but in certain periods, for example during the carnival, there occurred particularly often¹⁰⁷. In January, new consuls took the office, and they tended to begin their time with organizing a competition¹⁰⁸. When the consulate disappeared in 541, the task was taken over by the emperors themselves. On the first of January, the race of the vow was held (*tó Bóton*)¹⁰⁹, very solemn in character. The name comes from the custom of taking a vow on this day for the prosperity of the state and the emperor¹¹⁰. On January 13th, the race of the Ides of January was held¹¹¹. It was during this event that a rebellion broke out, known as *Nika* (532).

Particularly solemn was the competition held on May 11th, the day which can be regarded as a public holiday of the Byzantines. The anniversary of the capital was celebrated – a “birthday” of Constantinople. It was held for the first time in 330 A.D.,

¹⁰⁴ *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 617. Procopius, in turn, complained that Justinian turned a blind eye to the “exploits” of factionists, who not only murdered one another, but also attacked and robbed persons not associated with the factions. They also had the habit of carrying weapons during the night while wandering around the city (PROCOPIUS, *Anecdota*, VII, 5–6, 15–18, 22–29, 33–37). The historian blamed the emperor of Constantinople and the authorities that did not investigate these matters (*ibidem*, VII, 30–31).

¹⁰⁵ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, III, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ The remaining 101 days were reserved for theatrical performances, and another 10 for *munera gladiatoria*. G. VESPIGNANI, *Il cerimoniale imperiale nel circo (secoli IV–VI)*. *La iconografia nei dittici eburnei*, Bi 2, 2002, p. 13. More on the subject, cf. M. SALZMAN, *On Roman Time. The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1990.

¹⁰⁷ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, V, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Justinian limited number of races organized by the consuls to two – at the beginning and the end of tenure (*Novellae*, 105). C. HEUCKE, *Circus und Hippodrom als politischer Raum. Untersuchungen zum Großen Hippodrom von Konstantinopel und zu Entsprechenden Anlagen im Spätantiken Kaiserresidenzen*, Hildesheim 1994, p. 77–80.

¹⁰⁹ *De cerimoniis*, I, 72, p. 359–364.

¹¹⁰ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, V, p. 26.

¹¹¹ MALALAS, XVIII, 71; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, V, p. 28.

during the reign of Constantine the Great¹¹². It was very solemn and the emperor was always present¹¹³. It was preceded by a great cavalcade in the hippodrome and a procession with the statue of the Genius of the City¹¹⁴.

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 day¹¹⁵. November was also often chosen for the organization of competition¹¹⁶. 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 autumn¹¹⁷.

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 chieftain John¹¹⁸ and the death of the Visigoth king Ataulf¹¹⁹, and a year later, the triumph over the usurper Attalus¹²⁰, Mauritius – the victory over the Persians¹²¹, while Michael II in 823 celebrated the defeat of Thomas the Slav¹²². The competition was usually accompanied by a triumphant entry to the capital. Justinian honored this way his best commander, Belisarius, after the latter restored North Africa to the empire¹²³. Theophilus¹²⁴ and Nicephorus Phokas¹²⁵ did the same the

¹¹² *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 529; *Patria I*, 55; *Patria II*, 87, [in:] *Scriptores originum...*; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, IV, p. 25.

¹¹³ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, IV, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ *Patria II*, 87.

¹¹⁵ *De cerimoniis*, I, 68, p. 303–310; R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, IV, p. 30.

¹¹⁶ THEOPHANES, AM 6053, p. 235–236.

¹¹⁷ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, V, p. 35.

¹¹⁸ SOCRATES, *Kirchengeschichte*, VII, 23–24, ed. G.C. HANSEN, Berlin 1995 [cetera: SOCRATES]; PHILOSTORGIUS, *Kirchengeschichte. Mit dem Leben des Lucian on Antiochien und den Fragmenten eines arianischen Historiographen*, XII, 14, ed. J. BIDEZ, F. WINKELMANN, Berlin 1981.

¹¹⁹ *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 572; C. HEUCKE, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

¹²⁰ *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 573; C. HEUCKE, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹²¹ THEOPHYLACT, p. 124.

¹²² *Josephi Genesii Regum libri quattuor*, II, 9, rec. A. LESMUELLER-WERNER, I. THURN, Berolini 1978.

¹²³ PROCOPIUS, *Wars*, IV, 9, 1–12; ZONARAS, XIV, 7.

¹²⁴ *Georgii Monachi Vitae imperatorum recentiorum*, [in:] *Theophanes Continuatus. Ioannes Cameniata. Symeon Magister. Georgius Monachus*, rec. I. BEKKER, Bonnae 1838, p. 798; ZONARAS, XV, 28.

¹²⁵ LEO DIACONUS, IV, 5, p. 61.

defeat of the Arabs and Michael IV after the victory over the Bulgarians¹²⁶.

Racing were also how emperors celebrated the seizure of power. So did, among others, Leo I in 457¹²⁷, Phokas in 602¹²⁸, and Heraclius in 610¹²⁹. Another pretext to organize competitions was an important event in the imperial family¹³⁰. For example, races were held to celebrate weddings in imperial families¹³¹, anniversaries of birth, births, coming to power or an imperial coronation¹³². Often, races were held in honor of guests of the Empire, crowned heads and ambassadors¹³³ – for example, envoys of the Arab caliphs¹³⁴. 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 Easter¹³⁵. Thus, Gilbert Dagron speaks of adapting the pagan *ludi* to the Christian calendar¹³⁶.

In fact, the Christianization of the empire was followed by a kind of “Christianization” of the hippodrome, as well as the competitions held there¹³⁷. Successful charioteers believed that they owed their success to God. Before racing, they prayed and attended a Mass¹³⁸. This “Christianity” did not mean, however, as evidenced by the events described above in Constantinople, emotional restraint and

¹²⁶ *Michaelis Attaliatae Historia*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonnae 1853, p. 9–10.

¹²⁷ *De cerimoniis*, I, 91, p. 417.

¹²⁸ THEOPHYLACT, VIII, 10, 8–13.

¹²⁹ *Chronicon Paschale*, p. 701.

¹³⁰ C. HEUCKE, *op. cit.*, p. 67–76, 106–129.

¹³¹ 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).

¹³² *Strategicon*, III, 101–107, [in:] *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. G.T. DENNIS, Washington 1985, p. 18. Leon VI, imprisoned by his father, Basil I, would later celebrate the anniversary of his liberation (R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, IV, p. 21).

¹³³ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, IV, p. 15; C. HEUCKE, *op. cit.*, p. 130–138.

¹³⁴ Such as in 946 – *De cerimoniis*, II, 15, p. 588–592.

¹³⁵ *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 (*CJ*, III, 12, 9 [11]). On Sundays, it was obligatory to refrain from any activities (MALALAS, XIV, 39; *Michaelis Glycae annales*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonnae 1836, p. 483).

¹³⁶ G. DAGRON, *L'organisation...*, p. 128–132.

¹³⁷ 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, *Porphyrius...*, p. 109–116). However, it is uncertain whether they were copied from objects or from literary sources.

¹³⁸ R. GUILLAND, *Études...*, II/1, p. 220–223. At the same time they had no qualms about seeking advice of fortune tellers before the race (E. WIPSYCKA, *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 chariot-eers. 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.

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