

= Chariot racing =

Chariot racing (Greek : ???????????? harmatodromia , Latin : ludi circenses) was one of the most popular ancient Greek , Roman , and Byzantine sports . Chariot racing was dangerous to both drivers and horses as they often suffered serious injury and even death , but these dangers added to the excitement and interest for spectators . Chariot races could be watched by women , who were barred from watching many other sports . In the Roman form of chariot racing , teams represented different groups of financial backers and sometimes competed for the services of particularly skilled drivers . As in modern sports like soccer , spectators generally chose to support a single team , identifying themselves strongly with its fortunes , and violence sometimes broke out between rival factions . The rivalries were sometimes politicized , when teams became associated with competing social or religious ideas . This helps explain why Roman and later Byzantine emperors took control of the teams and appointed many officials to oversee them .

The sport faded in importance after the fall of Rome in the West , surviving only for a time in the Byzantine Empire , where the traditional Roman factions continued to play a prominent role for some time , gaining influence in political matters . Their rivalry culminated in the Nika riots , which marked the gradual decline of the sport .

= = Ancient Greece = =

= = = Early chariot racing = = =

It is unknown exactly when chariot racing began , but it may have been as old as chariots themselves . It is known from artistic evidence on pottery that the sport existed in the Mycenaean world , but the first literary reference to a chariot race is one described by Homer , at the funeral games of Patroclus . The participants in this race were Diomedes , Eumelus , Antilochus , Menelaus , and Meriones . The race , which was one lap around the stump of a tree , was won by Diomedes , who received a slave woman and a cauldron as his prize . A chariot race also was said to be the event that founded the Olympic Games ; according to one legend , mentioned by Pindar , King Oenomaus challenged suitors for his daughter Hippodamia to a race , but was defeated by Pelops , who founded the Games in honour of his victory .

= = = Olympic Games = = =

In the ancient Olympic Games , as well as the other Panhellenic Games , there were both four @-@ horse (tethrippon , Greek : ?????????) and two @-@ horse (synoris , Greek : ???????) chariot races , which were essentially the same aside from the number of horses . The chariot racing event was first added to the Olympics in 680 BC with the games expanding from a one @-@ day to a two @-@ day event to accommodate the new event (but was not , in reality , the founding event) . The chariot race was not so prestigious as the foot race of 195 meters (stadion , Greek : ???????) , but it was more important than other equestrian events such as racing on horseback , which were dropped from the Olympic Games very early on .

The races themselves were held in the hippodrome , which held both chariot races and riding races . The single horse race was known as the " keles " (keles , Greek : ?????) . The hippodrome was situated at the south @-@ east corner of the sanctuary of Olympia , on the large flat area south of the stadium and ran almost parallel to the latter . Until recently , its exact location was unknown , since it is buried by several meters of sedimentary material from the Alfeios River . In 2008 , however , Annie Muller and staff of the German Archeological Institute used radar to locate a large , rectangular structure similar to Pausanias 's description . Pausanias , who visited Olympia in the second century AD , describes the monument as a large , elongated , flat space , approximately 780 meters long and 320 meters wide (four stadia long and one stadefour plethra wide) . The elongated racecourse was divided longitudinally into two tracks by a stone or wooden barrier , the embolon .

All the horses or chariots ran on one track toward the east , then turned around the embolon and headed back west . Distances varied according to the event . The racecourse was surrounded by natural (to the north) and artificial (to the south and east) banks for the spectators ; a special place was reserved for the judges on the west side of the north bank .

The race was begun by a procession into the hippodrome , while a herald announced the names of the drivers and owners . The tethrippon consisted of twelve laps around the hippodrome , with sharp turns around the posts at either end . Various mechanical devices were used , including the starting gates (hyspleges , Greek : ????????? ; singular : hysplex , Greek : ???????) which were lowered to start the race . According to Pausanias , these were invented by the architect Cleoitas , and staggered so that the chariots on the outside began the race earlier than those on the inside . The race did not begin properly until the final gate was opened , at which point each chariot would be more or less lined up alongside each other , although the ones that had started on the outside would have been traveling faster than the ones in the middle . Other mechanical devices known as the " eagle " and the " dolphin " were raised to signify that the race had begun , and were lowered as the race went on to signify the number of laps remaining . These were probably bronze carvings of those animals , set up on posts at the starting line .

In most cases , the owner and the driver of the chariot were different persons . In 416 BC , the Athenian general Alcibiades had seven chariots in the race , and came in first , second , and fourth ; obviously , he could not have been racing all seven chariots himself . Philip II of Macedon also won an Olympic chariot race in an attempt to prove he was not a barbarian , although if he had driven the chariot himself he would likely have been considered even lower than a barbarian . The poet Pindar did praise the courage of Herodotes of Thebes , however , for driving his own chariot . This rule also meant that women could win the race through ownership , despite the fact that women were not allowed to participate in or even watch the Games . This happened rarely , but a notable example is the Spartan Cynisca , daughter of Archidamus II , who won the chariot race twice . Chariot racing was a way for Greeks to demonstrate their prosperity at the games . The case of Alcibiades indicates also that chariot racing was an alternative route to public exposure and fame for the wealthy .

The charioteer was usually a family member of the owner of the chariot or , in most cases , a slave or a hired professional . Driving a racing chariot required unusual strength , skill , and courage . Yet , we know the names of very few charioteers , and victory songs and statues regularly contrive to leave them out of account . Unlike the other Olympic events , charioteers did not perform in the nude , probably for safety reasons because of the dust kicked up by the horses and chariots , and the likelihood of bloody crashes . Racers wore a sleeved garment called a xystis . It fell to the ankles and was fastened high at the waist with a plain belt . Two straps that crossed high at the upper back prevented the xystis from " ballooning " during the race .

The chariots themselves were modified war chariots , essentially wooden carts with two wheels and an open back , although chariots were by this time no longer used in battle . The charioteer 's feet were held in place , but the cart rested on the axle , so the ride was bumpy . The most exciting part of the chariot race , at least for the spectators , was the turns at the ends of the hippodrome . These turns were very dangerous and often deadly . If a chariot had not already been knocked over by an opponent before the turn , it might be overturned or crushed (along with the horses and driver) by the other chariots as they went around the post . Deliberately running into an opponent to cause him to crash was technically illegal , but nothing could be done about it (at Patroclus ' funeral games , Antilochus in fact causes Menelaus to crash in this way ,) and crashes were likely to happen by accident anyway .

= = = Other festivals = = =

As a result of the rise of the Greek cities of the classic period , other great festivals emerged in Asia Minor , Magna Graecia , and the mainland providing the opportunity for athletes to gain fame and riches . Apart from the Olympics , the best respected were the Isthmian Games in Corinth , the Nemean Games , the Pythian Games in Delphi , and the Panathenaic Games in Athens , where the

winner of the four @-@ horse chariot race was given 140 amphorae of olive oil (much sought after and precious in ancient times) . Prizes at other competitions included corn in Eleusis , bronze shields in Argos , and silver vessels in Marathon . Another form of chariot racing at the Panathenaic Games was known as the apobatai , in which the contestant wore armor and periodically leapt off a moving chariot and ran alongside it before leaping back on again . In these races , there was a second charioteer (a " rein @-@ holder ") while the apobates jumped out ; in the catalogues with the winners both the names of the apobates and of the rein @-@ holder are mentioned . Images of this contest show warriors , armed with helmets and shields , perched on the back of their racing chariots . Some scholars believe that the event preserved traditions of Homeric warfare .

= = Roman era = =

The Romans probably borrowed chariot racing from the Etruscans as well as the racing tracks , who themselves borrowed it from the Greeks , but the Romans were also influenced directly by the Greeks . According to Roman legend , chariot racing was used by Romulus just after he founded Rome in 753 BC as a way of distracting the Sabine men . Romulus sent out invitations to the neighbouring towns to celebrate the festival of the Consualia , which included both horse races and chariot races . Whilst the Sabines were enjoying the spectacle , Romulus and his men seized and carried off the Sabine women , who became wives of the Romans . Chariot races were a part of several Roman religious festivals , and on these occasions were preceded by a parade (*pompa circensis*) that featured the charioteers , music , costumed dancers , and images of the gods . While the entertainment value of chariot races tended to overshadow any sacred purpose , in late antiquity the Church Fathers still saw them as a traditional " pagan " practice , and advised Christians not to participate .

In ancient Rome , chariot races commonly took place in a circus . The main centre of chariot racing was the Circus Maximus in the valley between Palatine Hill and Aventine Hill , which could seat 250 @, @ 000 people . It was the earliest circus in the city of Rome . The Circus was supposed to date to the city 's earliest times , but it was rebuilt by Julius Caesar around 50 BC so that it had a length of about 650 metres (2 @, @ 130 ft) and a width of about 125 metres (410 ft) . One end of the track was more open than the other , as this was where the chariots lined up to begin the race . The Romans used a series of gates known as *carceres* , an equivalent to the Greek *hysplex* . These were staggered in the same way as the *hysplex* , but they were slightly different because Roman racing tracks also had a median (the *spina*) in the centre of the track . The *carceres* took up the angled end of the track , and the chariots were loaded into spring @-@ loaded gates . When the chariots were ready , the emperor (or whoever was hosting the races , if they were not in Rome) dropped a cloth known as a *mappa* , signalling the beginning of the race . The gates would spring open , creating a perfectly fair beginning for all participants .

Once the race had begun , the chariots could move in front of each other in an attempt to cause their opponents to crash into the *spinae* (singular *spina*) . On the top of the *spinae* stood small tables or frames supported on pillars , and also small pieces of marble in the shape of eggs or dolphins . The *spina* eventually became very elaborate , with statues and obelisks and other forms of art , but the multiplication of the adornments of the *spina* had one unfortunate result : They became so numerous that they obstructed the view of spectators on lower seats . At either end of the *spina* was a *meta* , or turning point , in the form of large gilded columns . Spectacular crashes took place there , as in the Greek races , in which the chariot was destroyed and the charioteer and horses incapacitated were known as *naufragia* , also the Latin word for shipwrecks .

The race itself was much like its Greek counterpart , although there were usually 24 races every day that , during the fourth century , took place on 66 days each year . However , a race consisted of only 7 laps (and later 5 laps , so that there could be even more races per day) , instead of the 12 laps of the Greek race . The Roman style was also more money @-@ oriented ; racers were professionals and there was widespread betting among spectators . There were four @-@ horse chariots (*quadrigae*) and two @-@ horse chariots (*bigae*) , but the four @-@ horse races were more important . In rare cases , if a driver wanted to show off his skill , he could use up to 10 horses

, although this was extremely impractical .

The technique and clothing of Roman charioteers differed significantly from those used by the Greeks . Roman drivers wrapped the reins round their waist , while the Greeks held the reins in their hands . Because of this , the Romans could not let go of the reins in a crash , so they would be dragged around the circus until they were killed or they freed themselves . In order to cut the reins and keep from being dragged in case of accident , they carried a *falx* , a curved knife . They also wore helmets and other protective gear . In any given race , there might be a number of teams put up by each faction , who would cooperate to maximize their chances of victory by ganging up on opponents , forcing them out of the preferred inside track or making them lose concentration and expose themselves to accident and injury . Spectators could also play a part as there is evidence they threw lead " curse " amulets studded with nails at teams opposing their favourite .

Another important difference was that the charioteers themselves , the *aurigae* , were considered to be the winners , although they were usually also slaves (as in the Greek world) . They received a wreath of laurel leaves , and probably some money ; if they won enough races they could buy their freedom . Drivers could become celebrities throughout the Empire simply by surviving , as the life expectancy of a charioteer was not very high . One such celebrity driver was *Scorpus* , who won over 2000 races before being killed in a collision at the meta when he was about 27 years old . The most famous of all was *Gaius Appuleius Diocles* who won 1 @, @ 462 out of 4 @, @ 257 races . When *Diocles* retired at the age of 42 after a 24 @-@ year career his winnings reportedly totalled 35 @, @ 863 @, @ 120 sesterces (\$ US 15 billion) , making him the highest paid sports star in history . The horses , too , could become celebrities , but their life expectancy was also low . The Romans kept detailed statistics of the names , breeds , and pedigrees of famous horses .

Seats in the Circus were free for the poor , who by the time of the Empire had little else to do , as they were no longer involved in political or military affairs as they had been in the Republic . The wealthy could pay for shaded seats where they had a better view , and they probably also spent much of their times betting on the races . The circus was the only place where the emperor showed himself before a populace assembled in vast numbers , and where the latter could manifest their affection or anger . The imperial box , called the *pulvinar* in the Circus Maximus , was directly connected to the imperial palace .

The driver 's clothing was color @-@ coded in accordance with his faction , which would help distant spectators to keep track of the race 's progress . According to *Tertullian* , there were originally just two factions , White and Red , sacred to winter and summer respectively . As fully developed , there were four factions , the Red , White , Green , and Blue . Each team could have up to three chariots each in a race . Members of the same team often collaborated with each other against the other teams , for example to force them to crash into the *spina* (a legal and encouraged tactic) . Drivers could switch teams , much like athletes can be traded to different teams today .

By 77 BC , the rivalry between the Red and the Whites was already developed , when a funeral for a Red driver involved a Red supporter throwing himself on the funeral pyre . No writer of the time , however , refers to these as factions such as came into existence later , with the factions being official organizations . Writing near the beginning of the third century , he wrote that the Reds were dedicated to Mars , the Whites to the Zephyrs , the Greens to Mother Earth or spring , and the Blues to the sky and sea or autumn . *Domitian* created two new factions , the Purples and Golds , which disappeared soon after he died . The Blues and the Greens gradually became the most prestigious factions , supported by emperor and populace alike . Numerous occasions occurred when a Blue vs. Green clash would break out during a race . Indeed , Reds and Whites are only rarely mentioned in the surviving literature , although their continued activity is documented in inscriptions and in curse @-@ tablets .

= = Byzantine era = =

Like many other aspects of the Roman world , chariot racing continued in the Byzantine Empire , although the Byzantines did not keep as many records and statistics as the Romans did . In place of the detailed inscriptions of Roman racing statistics , several short epigrams in verse were composed

celebrating some of the more famous Byzantine Charioteers . The six charioteers about whom these laudatory verses were written were Anastasius , Julianus of Tyre , Faustinus , his son , Constantinus , Uranius , and Porphyrius . Although Anastasius 's single epigram reveals almost nothing about him , Porphyrius is much better known , having thirty @-@ four known poems dedicated to him .

Constantine I (r . 306 ? 337) preferred chariot racing to gladiatorial combat , which he considered a vestige of paganism . However , the end of gladiatorial games in the Empire may have been more the result of the difficulty and expense that came with procuring gladiators to fight in the games , than the influence of Christianity in Byzantium . The Olympic Games were eventually ended by Emperor Theodosius I (r . 379 ? 395) in 393 , perhaps in a move to suppress paganism and promote Christianity , but chariot racing remained popular . The fact that chariot racing became linked to the imperial majesty meant that the Church did not prevent it , although gradually prominent Christian writers , such as Tertullian , began attacking the sport . Despite the influence of Christianity in the Byzantine Empire , venationes , bloody wild @-@ beast hunts , continued as a form of popular entertainment during the early days of the Empire as part of the extra entertainment that went along with chariot racing . Eventually , Emperor Leo (r . 457 ? 474) banned public entertainments on Sundays in 469 , showing that the hunts did not have imperial support , and the venationes were banned completely by Emperor Anastasius (r . 491 ? 518) in 498 . Anastasius was praised for this action by some sources , but their concern seems to be more for the danger the hunts could put humans in rather than for objections to the brutality or moral objections . There continued to be burnings and mutilations of humans who committed crimes or were enemies of the state in the hippodrome throughout the Byzantine Empire , as well as victory celebrations and imperial coronations .

The chariot races were important in the Byzantine Empire , as in the Roman Empire , as a way to reinforce social class and political power , including the might of the Byzantine emperor , and were often put on for political or religious reasons . In addition , chariot races were sometimes held in celebration of an emperor 's birthday . An explicit parallel was drawn between the victorious charioteers and the victorious emperor . The factions addressed their victors by chanting " Rejoice ... your Lords have conquered " while the charioteer took a victory lap , further indicating the parallel between the charioteer 's victory and the emperor 's victory . Indeed , reliefs of Porphyrius , the famous Byzantine charioteer , show him in a victor 's pose being acclaimed by partisans , which is clearly modeled on the images on the base of Emperor Theodosius 's obelisk . The races could also be used to symbolically make religious statements , such as when a charioteer , whose mother was named Mary , fell off his chariot and got back on and the crowd described it as " The son of Mary has fallen and risen again and is victorious . "

The Hippodrome of Constantinople (really a Roman circus , not the open space that the original Greek hippodromes were) was connected to the emperor 's palace and the Church of Hagia Sophia , allowing spectators to view the emperor as they had in Rome . Citizens used their proximity to the emperor in the circuses and theatres to express public opinion , like their dissatisfaction with the Emperor 's arrant policy . It has been argued that the people became so powerful that the emperors had no choice but to grant them more legal rights . However , contrary to this traditional view , it appears , based on more recent historical research , that the Byzantine emperors treated the protests and petitions of their citizens in the circuses with greater contempt and were more dismissive of them than their Roman predecessors . Justinian I (r . 527 ? 565) , for instance , seems to have been dismissive of the Greens ' petitions and to have never negotiated with them at all .

There is not much evidence that the chariot races were subject to bribes or other forms of cheating in the Roman Empire . In the Byzantine Empire , there seems to have been more cheating ; Justinian I 's reformed legal code prohibits drivers from placing curses on their opponents , but otherwise there does not seem to have been any mechanical tampering or bribery . Wearing the colours of one 's team became an important aspect of Byzantine dress .

Chariot racing in the Byzantine Empire also included the Roman racing clubs , which continued to play a prominent role in these public exhibitions . By this time , the Blues (Vénetoi) and the Greens (Prásinoi) had come to overshadow the other two factions of the Whites (Leukoí) and Reds (

Roúsioi) , while still maintaining the paired alliances , although these were now fixed as Blue and White vs. Green and Red . These circus factions were no longer the private businesses they were during the Roman Empire . Instead , the races began to be given regular , public funding , putting them under imperial control . Running the chariot races at public expense was probably a cost @-@ cutting and labor @-@ reducing measure , making it easier to channel the proper funds into the racing organizations . The Emperor himself belonged to one of the four factions , and supported the interests of either the Blues or the Greens .

Adopting the color of their favorite charioteers was a way fans showed their loyalty to that particular racer or faction . Many of the young men in the fan clubs , or factions , adopted extravagant clothing and hairstyles , such as billowing sleeves , " Hunnic " hair @-@ styles , and " Persian " facial hair . There is evidence that these young men were the faction members most prone to violence and extreme factional rivalry . Some scholars have tried to argue that the factional rivalry and violence was a result of opposing religious or political views , but more likely the young men simply identified strongly with their faction for group solidarity . The factional violence was probably engaged in similarly to the violence of modern football or soccer fans . The games themselves were the usual focus of the factional violence , even when it was taken to the streets . Although fans who went to the hippodrome cheered on their favorite charioteers , their loyalty appears to be to the color for which the charioteer drove more than for the individual driver . Charioteers could change faction allegiance and race for different colors during their careers , but the fans didn 't change their allegiance to their color .

The Blues and the Greens were now more than simply sports teams . They gained influence in military , political , and theological matters , although the hypothesis that the Greens tended towards Monophysitism and the Blues represented Orthodoxy is disputed . It is now widely believed that neither of the factions had any consistent religious bias or allegiance , in spite of the fact that they operated in an environment fraught with religious controversy . According to some scholars , the Blue @-@ Green rivalry contributed to the conditions that underlay the rise of Islam , while factional enmities were exploited by the Sassanid Empire in its conflicts with the Byzantines during the century preceding Islam 's advent .

The Blue @-@ Green rivalry often erupted into gang warfare , and street violence had been on the rise in the reign of Justin I (r . 518 ? 527) , who took measures to restore order , when the gangs murdered a citizen in the Hagia Sophia . Riots culminated in the Nika riots of 532 AD during the reign of Justinian , which began when the two main factions united and attempted unsuccessfully to overthrow the emperor .

Chariot racing seems to have declined in the course of the seventh century , with the losses the Empire suffered at the hands of the Arabs and the decline of the population and economy . The Blues and Greens , deprived of any political power , were relegated to a purely ceremonial role . After the Nika riots , the factions grew less violent as their importance in imperial ceremony increased . In particular , the iconoclast emperor Constantine V (r . 741 ? 775) courted the factions for their support in his campaigns against the monks . They aided the emperor in executing his prisoners and by putting on shows in which monks and nuns held hands while the crowd hissed at them . Constantine V seems to have given the factions a political role in addition to their traditionally ceremonial role . The two factions continued their activity until the imperial court was moved to Blachernae during the 12th century .

The Hippodrome in Constantinople remained in use for races , games , and public ceremonies up to the sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 . In the 12th century , Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (r . 1143 ? 1180) even staged Western @-@ style jousting matches in the Hippodrome . During the sack of 1204 , the Crusaders looted the city and , among other things , removed the copper quadriga that stood above the carceres ; it is now displayed at St. Mark 's Cathedral in Venice . Thereafter , the Hippodrome was neglected , although still occasionally used for spectacles . A print of the Hippodrome from the fifteenth century shows a derelict site , a few walls still standing , and the spina , the central reservation , robbed of its splendor . Today , only the obelisks and the Serpent Column stand where for centuries the spectators gathered . In the West , the games had ended much sooner ; by the end of the fourth century public entertainments in Italy

had come to an end in all but a few towns . The last recorded chariot race in Rome itself took place in the Circus Maximus in 549 AD .