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WRESTLING TRADITIONS OF INDO-EUROPEANS - FROM WARRIOR EXERCISES TO FOLK GAMES AND CIRCUS PERFORMANCES

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ABSTRACT

Background. All warrior cultures have respected or still cultivate wrestling as a male display of strength and fitness.

Problem. On the basis of the preserved wrestling traditions of the descendants of the Aryans, can we claim that the ancient Lechites practiced similar exercises (before the historical Poland came into being)?

Method. On the basis of a series of premises, the regression method was applied, which is used in historical research and in social sciences more generally.

Results. We find a series of premises and possible deductions with probable origins - from the present state to the possible earlier one. Today, Poles and other Slavic nations are doing well in sports wrestling and related jujitsu. We can only infer the ancient forms of wrestling indirectly, by analogy to other preserved traditions.

Conclusions. Since peoples growing out of the same genetic (biological and culturally) stem and neighboring peoples retained the original forms of wrestling, it is likely that the ancient Lechites (i.e. Western Slavs) had similar forms of exercise and competition.

Key words: history, combat sports, wrestling, warrior traditions, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Wrestling have been cultivated in all or the great majority of civilizations and cultures from the earliest times. It can be assumed that also in the direct ancestors of the Slavs and Poles. All cultures of warriors respected, or still cultivate, this type of masculine display of strength and fitness. The analysis of the conditions for the emergence and development of wrestling in Poland requires taking into account various aspects and many factors. This is how it is realized in the systemic anthropology of martial arts and in research conducted in this perspective (Zeng, Cynarski, Xie, 2013). It is worth starting from almost legendary, ancient times. Most likely at that time the ancestors of today's Slavs and Poles practiced similar exercises. It concerns mainly Poles and their immediate ancestors.

Pre-Slavs were neighbors with other Ario-Slavic, Indo-European peoples, also with Turkish, Mongolian and Finno-Ugric peoples. There were probably mutual contacts other than war ones, and the resulting borrowings in the field of technique and customs, including para-sports forms. These could be, inter alia, wrestling grown for ritual, ludic or utilitarian purposes. This kind of "sport" was known and cultivated in all known civilizations as a game or a fighting technique of warriors. On the basis of the preserved wrestling traditions of the descendants of the Aryans, can we claim that the ancient Lechites practiced similar exercises (before the historical Poland came into being)?

Folk wrestling cultivated in many countries in Asia and Europe (cf. Swiss *Schwingen* and Breton *Gouren*) are perhaps a legacy of something that was common centuries ago. Particularly when warriors became farmers, at least in some tribes, the tradition of similar exercise and competition could be preserved. Kazimierz Toporowicz points out that, based on the paintings from the Beni Hassan tomb in Egypt, dating from around 2000 BC, we can assume that wrestling fights were popularized much earlier. Since about 70 wrestling moves are shown there, it is evidence of the advanced development of this form of hand-to-hand combat. Thus, the regressive method allows us to assume a much earlier beginning of growing wrestling in that region (Toporowicz, 1996: 133). The same regressive method was used in this study.

Finally, when the institution of a circus appeared in Europe, the circus arena became a place of displays of male strength and fitness, including wrestling fights (Chelmecki, 2012; Czarnecka, 2019). It was popular entertainment at a time when the circus was later taken over by television. Interestingly, at the beginning of the 20th century, the descendants of Ario-Slavic warriors played a significant role in the international competition of strongmen.

RESULTS

1. Old times

Did the ancient Slavs, living in the territories of today's eastern Germany and Poland from around 2000 BC (Haarmann, 2016), grow wrestling? The Ario-Slavic peoples originally functioned on the principles of military democracy. Each man was also a warrior. Regressive inference, from later states to possible earlier states, gives an affirmative answer. Since wrestling exercises were preserved in Iran and in India, the countries of the Aryan conquest, probably the Slavs coming out of the same trunk did similar things.

According to the results of genetic research, the Aryans migrated from the so-called Lechitic lands (from the Lechitic, West Slavic languages) to the east and south (Underhill et al., 2015). It is a people with a dominant R1a1 Y-DNA haplogroup. Their descendants are the Medes, Parthians and Persians, Afghans and Hindus from the northern part of India (the Brahmin and Kshatriya caste), as well as the Kurds, living today between Turkey and Iraq and Syria. The rest of the people with the indicated dominant haplogroup remained in the basins of the Odra and Vistula. These were the times before the creation of the Scythian state. Then the Scythians and Sarmatians, peoples originating from the Aryans and related peoples (genetically and culturally) influenced the Slavic tribes through their close neighborhood (Makuch, 2013; Cynarski, 2018; cf. Trybała-Zawiślak, 2020). We know little about the times of the legendary Lechia (before the name *Polonia* / Poland appeared and became popular); even more so about men's games and training of warriors. The chronicles speak of horse racing. Predatory birds were probably used for hunting (they could have been eagles, falcons and hawks) (cf. Moszyński, 1957: 131). However, only later history is revealed better thanks to archaeological research and historical sources.

We know that in Poland in the 10th century CE the men practiced horse riding, archery, sword fencing and the use of other weapons. They probably also played or specially dealt with wrestling as a simple form of competition. Legendary strongmen such as Waligura and Wyrwidąb were sung in songs. Especially the mercenary team of the prince had to maintain high combat efficiency. The form of training was hunting for "big game" - aurochs or a bear. The warriors probably used baths in order to regenerate their strength. According to Ibrahim ibn Jakub, in the country of Mieszko I there were "... a great number of wooden bathhouses with walls sealed with moss. In the corner of the room there was a stove on which water was poured to produce hot steam. (...) Whipping with rods in clouds of steam was considered one of the mildest physical punishments" (Koper, 2013: 39). Also during the reign of Bolesław I the Brave, there were numerous steam baths, similar to the Russian "bania" (Jasienica, 1978: 98).

2. Neighboring Turkish and Mongolian peoples

The Ario-Slavic peoples were neighbors with the Finno-Ugric and Turkish peoples, and temporarily also with the Mongol peoples (Huns and Mongol invasions). Especially among the Turkish peoples, wrestling has been popular for centuries. In Turkey, oil wrestling called *güreş* are still cultivated (Podolak, 2013). Other Turkish peoples cultivate their traditional wrestling with very similar names - Uzbek *kurash*, Buryat and Tatar *kuresh*, Kazakh *kures* / *kuresi*, Turkmen *Goresh*, Tajik *gushtingiri* and the like [cf. Vorontsov, Korobeynikov, 2020]. In particular - in the descendants of the nomads of the great steppe - it is Horse Wrestling, as in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In this form of wrestling, the wrestlers fight hand-to-hand but on horseback and try to throw the opponent off the horse.

Traditional Mongolian wrestling, on the other hand, have been cultivated since the times of the Hun empire. Currently, as part of the Naadam festival, they are part of powerlifting, next to traditional archery and horse racing. Naadam is both a celebration and a traditional sport (Napierała, 2006). The former exercises of warriors are today a show of physical fitness and bravery, quasi-religious and quasisport.

Throughout history, influences may have been multidirectional over the past three thousand years. We don't know who borrowed more from whom in terms of technical skills and fighting arts training. In addition to the Turkic and Mongolian peoples, this also applies to the Finno-Ugric peoples neighboring the Ario-Slavic peoples.

3. India and Iran

The Aryans conquered the lands of what is now Iran and India, establishing new kingdoms and spreading their knowledge (Veda, Avesta). They appeared in Hindustan in the second millennium BC (Klyosov & Rozhanskii, 2012). Ancient Indian reliefs depict fighting wrestlers. It can be assumed that the wrestling went to India along with the brave Aryan warriors, although they could have been cultivated in these areas earlier. The Aryans started the *brahmin* and *kshatriya* castes. The *kshatriya* (warrior) class typically practiced archery, wrestling, boxing, and swordsmanship as part of their education (Auboyer, 1965: 580).

"Everything is here from ages past. The compacted red ground of the arena. Oiled, scarred bodies of warrior athletes. Their focus and seriousness. Honor and prestige of coaches. Rule instead of regulations. (...) In the

Pakistani Punjab, on the border with India, there are also the last akharas (training places) where ancient Indian wrestling are grown." (Kobiela, 2018). *Kushti* or *kuṣṭi* is the name of traditional Hindu wrestling. *Mukna* and *pehlwani* wrestling are also cultivated today, with *pehlwani* and *malla-yuddha* being ancient forms. What Alter calls specific nationalism is simply patriotism associated with the cultivation of a centuries-old tradition (cf. Alter, 2002). Traditional sports contribute to national identification by integrating the society. *Vajramushti* (diamond fist) was a martial art of the descendants of the Aryans practiced from the 10th c. BC, originally in northern India, by professional brahmin wrestlers. Lind suggests the influence of this martial art on *kalaripayattu* (South India) and Chinese *Shaolin quanfa* (Lind, 1996: 912; cf. Alter, 1992). The mentioned *kalaripayattu*, also known simply as *Kalari*, is an Indian martial art with its origin in the martial arts timeline dating back to at least the 3rd century BCE. It is related to Ayurveda, Indian traditional medicine. Both *vajramushti* and *kalaripayattu* are more than just supplies. They take into account a wider range of hand-to-hand combat, and in the case of the latter - also the use of numerous types of traditional weapons.

Iran has developed various martial arts, influencing traditions in this regard in other countries. To this day, styles such as *selembam* (or *silembam* - wielding the stick and other weapons) and *varma kalai* ("the art of vital points", similar to original karate) are still practiced there. But wrestling is still very popular here. The contemporary outstanding Iranian wrestler was, among others, Gholam Reza Takhti (1930-1968), a three-time Olympic medalist and two-time world champion.

Iran's martial arts are akin to Indian to some extent, derived from the Aryans. Traditional Persian fencing is similar [cf. Kurochkin, Khorasani 2015]. However, wrestling have their own specificity here. The training room is called *zurkhaneh*. This is where Iranians practice the traditional system of exercises called *varzesh-e pahlavani* or *varzesh-e bastani*. It was developed centuries ago by the Persians to train elite warriors. It combines martial arts, gymnastics, strength exercises and music, and the main emphasis is on the development of strength, endurance and flexibility (cf. Khorasani 2010, 2014).

4. 20th century

Graham Noble (2003) looks at the traditions of Indian wrestling in the distant past. It describes six prominent figures in the history of wrestling operating in the 20th century. These are: Gulam (India), The Great Gama (born as Mian Ghulam Muhammad), Imam Bux, brother of Gama (India), Benjamin F. Roller (USA), Stanislaus "Zbyszko" Cyganiewicz (Poland, coach of the American wrestler), and Kalloo Pahlawan (India). The beginning of the 20th century was a time of competition between athletes from different wrestling traditions, which usually took place in circus arenas. The years 1890–1914 are called the Golden Age in the history of wrestling. Four out of the six champions mentioned above represented Indian wrestling. For example, Gama came from a family that had cultivated wrestling for at least several generations, and had trained himself from the age of five. Gama defeated Roller in the direct confrontation, but drew with "Zbyszko" Cyganiewicz.

Jan Stanisław Cyganiewicz (1.04.1881-23.09.1967) was the professional world wrestling heavyweight champion 1921-1925. Earlier, he competed with Ivan Poddubny (Ukrainian, Russian champion), which, however, did not bring a decision. He gained great worldwide fame (more, Pease, 2017). However, he was not the first Pole in this discipline. Well, Władysław Pytlasiński, better known as Ladislaus Pytlasinski (July 26, 1863 - November 10, 1933), is rightly called "the father of Polish wrestling". He practiced mainly the classical, Greco-Roman style, then called the French fight. In 1898 he won a golden belt in Paris; later he won several times. In 1901 his student and assistant was the famous Stanisław "Zbyszko" Cyganiewicz, with whom they made a tour of circuses in Polish cities that were then under Russian rule. Pytlasiński founded an athletics school in Odessa, which he then transferred to Łódź. He founded a second school in Warsaw. He was a trainer and promoter of wrestling (cf. Pytlasiński, 1929; Godlewski 1994), the initiator of the establishment of the Polish Athletic Society. In the USA, the super champion of professional *catch-as-catch-can* wrestling was Frank Gotch (1878-1917), the world champion in 1906-1911. The Olympic Freestyle later developed from this fighting style. The classical, Greco-Roman style was practiced at the same time. The beginning of the 20th century was full of circus shows of strength and wrestling fights. Strong men lifted weights and fighters challenged each other and the audience. For example, in Europe, the Austrian baron Hubert Kinger von Kingerstorff and the German *jujutsu* teacher from Berlin - Erich Rahn, both of whom were honored with the highest degree of 10 dan in *jujutsu*, fought in Europe. *Jujutsu* representatives from Japan, boxers and wrestlers fought. So a bit similar to ancient fights to the delight of the audience, a bit like today's fights in rings and cages (MMA). Mitsuyo Maeda, a *judo* and *jujutsu* competitor, before becoming a teacher of Brazilian *jujutsu* creators, also competed successfully in Olympic wrestling. In conditions of difficult competition, the descendants of the former Ario-Slavic warriors - wrestlers from India, Iran and Slavic countries also compete. First, there were fights in circus arenas, then - on the mats of sports competitions, including the Olympic ones. It can be said that from the circus arena wrestlers went on the one hand to the sport of great feat, and on the other - to a show called professional wrestling, popular especially in the USA. There are still shows with wrestling matches, but in a specific convention, with a manifestation of male strength and aggression (Czarnecka, 2019).

Sports wrestling is still popular - both in India and in Slavic countries (cf. Korobeynikov et al. 2020; Singh Suhag, 2020), although in Poland now as if less. Once the winner was a two-time classic Olympic champion in the up to 100 kg class, Andrzej Wroński (Soeul 1988, Atlanta 1996), who was also the World Champion (Tampere 1994) and a three-time European Champion. In the plus 100 kg freestyle category, Adam Sadurski was the bronze medalist of the Olympic Games and the World Championships. Poland still had gold medalists of the Olympic Games: Kazimierz Lipień and Włodzimierz Zawadzki (both -62 kg), and Ryszard Wolny (-68 kg), all of them in the classic style. However, in the medals in the modern history of wrestling, Ukraine ranks higher, and Bulgaria, Russia and the Soviet Union even higher.

DISCUSSION

Even though traditional wrestling from ancient times in their original form have not been preserved in Poland (cf. Bronikowska, 2013; Bronikowska & Laurent, 2018), but this does not mean that they were not cultivated. Rather, it is a folk form of physical culture of a ludic or sometimes ritualistic nature (like the original Japanese sumo), but in the early Slavic community of the so-called war democracy, every man was also a warrior. It can be expected that similar tests of strength and relatively safe competition were often carried out at that time. Currently, the old Polish word "*kulać*" (literally: to roll) is used to mean "fight lying down" and to describe "ground fighting" in sports *jujitsu* and mixed martial arts (MMA). *Kulać* is a clue about language research. If its origin is Old Slavic, it may mean old wrestling preferences of the Lechite Slavs.

Jujitsu, which has been cultivated in Poland since the beginning of the 20th century (Grzegorz & Walendowicz, 2008; Cynarski, 2012), is an Old Japanese art of self-defense related to wrestling. Namely, it is based mainly on wrestling type techniques. It is also the name used to describe many related hand-to-hand combat techniques derived from the original Old Japanese wrestling, *sumo* preforms. *Judo* and modern sports *jujitsu* allude to traditional *jujitsu*.

Sports *jujitsu* is a discipline in which Poles win the highest laurels in international competition (more: Cynarski & Siekanski, 2019). Co significant, structure of personality of person training *jujitsu* and wrestling is similar, too (Litwiniuk et al., 2009). These circumstantial evidence allows only a regression inference, that is, from today's effects to probable causes. It is about drawing conclusions about giftedness and relatively high interest in this type of sport.

While in ancient Russia the rural people practiced fist fights, in today's Poland it has not been confirmed so far. Poles mainly practiced fencing, hence pole fights were very popular, but mainly among the young nobility (Sawicki, 2020). Hand-to-hand combat was actually just an accessory to fencing. First of all, the young Pole had to wield a saber well, ride horses, shoot a bow and firearms.

The successes of competitors from Slavic countries in combat sports, such as *judo*, contact *karate*, boxing, MMA, but also fencing, may indicate the ethos of old warriors and fighting spirit preserved here (Cynarski & Obodyński, 2005). As long as only Western martial arts and *judo* could be practiced in Poland, there was no shortage of young people interested in boxing and wrestling. From the breakthrough of 1989/1990 and the systemic changes that took place at that time (democratization and the opening of the country to the West), martial arts and combat sports of Asian origin gained great popularity here. Of course, individual sports associations are still operating successfully and successive successes are noted, including wrestling, *judo*, fencing and boxing (Godlewski, 1994; Sikorski, 2009; Chełmecki, 2012; Szajna & Cynarski, 2018; Kolodziej et al., 2020; Rutkowska & Gierczuk, 2020]. The commercialization process is currently accompanied by the professionalization of wrestling and boxing.

Perhaps the category of "national character" introduced by Erich Fromm would be helpful here? More hypotheses are born that will not be easy to test. Is the national character (and to what extent) decisive for the sports interests of youth (Cynarski, 2004)? Perhaps the sports successes of Belarusians and Ukrainians, Poles and Russians in combat sports are related to this. But it is also possible that the causes are much more complicated.

After the stage of folk traditions and circus performances, wrestling for sports dominates. This sport, like boxing and *judo*, was supported in Poland until 1989 by the army and the security service (the so-called guard division) (Kolodziej et al., 2020; Kulpinski, 2020). Currently, there is not enough support from state institutions or trade unions. Young Poles, or their parents, more often choose *karate*, football or other sports.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the circumstantial evidence gives us a series of premises and the possibility of deduction with probable origins - from the present state to the possible earlier. Today, Poles and other Slavic nations are doing well in sports wrestling and related sports *jujitsu*. We can only infer the ancient forms of wrestling indirectly, by analogy to other traditions preserved to this day. Since the peoples growing out of the same genetic (biologically

and culturally) stem and the neighboring peoples retained the original forms of wrestling, probably also in the ancient Lechites (i.e. Western Slavs) similar forms of exercise and competition were practiced.

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