

TRADITIONAL PHYSICAL CULTURE OF BELARUSIANS

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<https://doi.org/10.29038/2220-7481-2017-03-116-121>

Abstract

Relevance. The study of the history of physical culture makes it possible to reveal the laws of its development, the relationship with socio-political and economic factors. **The aim of the research** is to substantiate the essence, types and structure of the traditional physical culture of Belarusians. **Results of the Research.** Traditional physical culture has been the main type of physical culture of the Belarusian people for about a thousand years. It is regarded as the activity of the society aimed at the formation, development and support of the physical qualities of a person with the goal of educating the personality of an owner, a protector of the family, and the clan. **Conclusions.** Traditional physical culture includes the following basic subsystems: general physical culture, professionally applied physical culture, remedial fitness, social institutions of the physical culture, spiritual values of physical culture and it performed world-view, aesthetic, communicative, and transformative functions.

Key words: history of physical culture, physical culture of Belarusians, traditions, functions.

Олександр Шамак. Традиційна фізична культура білорусів. Актуальність. Вивчення історії фізичної культури дає змогу виявити закони її розвитку, взаємозв'язок із соціально-політичними та економічними факторами. **Мета дослідження** – обґрунтування сутності, видів та структури традиційної фізичної культури білорусів. **Результати дослідження.** Традиційна фізична культура була основним типом фізичної культури білоруського народу протягом тисячі років. Вона розглядається як діяльність суспільства, спрямована на формування, розвиток та підтримку фізичних якостей людини з метою виховання особистості власника, захисника сім'ї та клану. **Висновки.** Традиційна фізична культура включає в себе такі основні підсистеми: загальну фізичну культуру, професійно-прикладну фізичну культуру, корекційну придатність, соціальні інститути фізичної культури, духовні цінності фізичної культури, а також здійснює світогляд, естетичні, комунікативні та трансформаційні функції.

Ключові слова: історія фізичної культури, фізична культура білорусів, традиції, функції.

Александр Шамак. Традиционная физическая культура белорусов. Актуальность. Изучение истории физической культуры позволяет выявить закономерности ее развития, отношения с социально-политическими и экономическими факторами. **Целью исследования** является обоснование сущности, типов и структуры традиционной физической культуры белорусов. **Результаты исследования.** Традиционная физическая культура была основным видом физической культуры белорусского народа в течение тысячи лет. Она рассматривается как деятельность общества, направленная на формирование, развитие и поддержку физических качеств человека с целью воспитания личности владельца, защитника семьи и клана. **Выводы.** Традиционная физическая культура включает в себя следующие основные подсистемы: общая физическая культура, профессионально прикладная физическая культура, лечебная физкультура, социальные институты физической культуры, духовные ценности физической культуры, а также выполняются мировоззренческие, эстетические, коммуникативные и преобразующие функции.

Ключевые слова: история физической культуры, физическая культура белорусов, традиции, функции.

Introduction. Scholars refer to the culture and society of the Middle Ages as the traditional culture and traditional society. Traditionalism is the main feature of a medieval society, to which all spheres of its life activity were subordinated. And if so, tradition as a mechanism for preserving and transferring collective experience in a medieval society could not bypass its need for the development of the physical characteristics of a person. Of course, physical culture and the concept of «physical culture» itself in modern interpretations in traditional society did not exist. But, if we consider physical culture as an activity of a society to develop physical characteristics of a person, then such activity was undoubtedly conducted.

But, first of all, we will consider the basic concepts of traditional culture in general. In modern science, there are a number of terms denoting the culture of the Middle Ages. These are: «traditional», «pre-industrial», «agrarian», «peasant», and «pre-literate» culture. The existence of a great number of concepts associated with one object is the result of the investigations of traditional culture by various scientific disciplines: ethnography, history, sociology, philosophy, and philology.

The content of a concept is a collection of essential features of an object or class of homogeneous objects reflected in this concept. We will not consider all the above-mentioned definitions separately, we

shall single out the essential element in them to which all researchers address. This concept is «tradition». By «tradition» they understand the totality of elements of social and cultural heritage that are passed down from generation to generation and preserved in a certain society, classes and social groups for a long time and cover objects of social heritage (material and spiritual values) as well as processes and methods of their transmitting» [10].

The mechanism of the formation of the tradition is as follows:

- the basis of any tradition is the experience of the social group to which the tradition belongs;
- in the course of time the most valuable part of the general experience is selected and fixed with the help of a stereotype. A stereotype is a typical solution to a typical situation;
- tradition is a set of stereotypes, but it is important that they are not random, they are interrelated and mutually extractable because only such a system allows to ensure the transition from one situation to another.

Thus, we can make the following pattern of tradition formation: the accumulation of experience → selection → stereotyping of experience → transmitting of a stereotype → re-creation of a stereotype. This scheme shows that the traditional culture is oriented primarily not towards creation of something new, but towards re-creation of the already known and preservation of the most valuable knowledge.

Several generations are involved in the formation of traditional culture elements, but this does not exclude the contribution of an individual within the framework of the culture elements that society has developed. Thus, the final result is a synthesis of collective and individual experience based on tradition.

At the same time, in a feudal society there were no traditions acceptable for all groups of society. The psychology of social groups, everyday experience, behavior, clothing, and forms of relationships were strictly regulated both within the group and between different social groups, which makes certain traditions senseless or inaccessible to representatives of other groups. Each social group had its own tradition in the sphere of culture and considered it unique.

It is necessary to mention variability as an important regularity of traditional culture. The number of options is large, but they all have equal value and the measure of the value of each option is different. It is necessary to distinguish the concepts of «tradition» and «traditional». E. S. Markaryan defines the common and distinctive in the terms «tradition» and «cultural tradition». «Tradition is a way of fixing, transmitting, and re-creation of culture in social memory», but «cultural tradition» is a social group experience that takes the form of a stereotype.

Tradition should be considered by the subjects of activity, i.e. the bearers of tradition. In the framework of the ethnographic and class approaches in the scientific methodology of the USSR period, the traditional culture, which was more often called «folk», was attributed only to the proletarian strata of the society and, above all, to the peasantry. This approach, formulated by V. Ya. Propp [6] and conserved by the Marxist-Leninist methodology, completely denied involvement of such subjects of medieval society as the nobility and townspeople in traditional culture. Traditions existed in all layers and groups of medieval society. Examining the subculture of only one social group – the peasantry, we impoverish the culture of the nation as a whole [2].

Thus, traditional culture is a historical systemic formation consisting of three significant subsystems [7]. This is a subsystem of the feudal elite of society (nobility, gentry, chivalry, Cossacks, etc.); subsystems of urban and peasant traditional cultures.

The aim of the research is to substantiate the essence, types and structure of the traditional physical culture of Belarusians.

Materials and methods of research: analysis of literary sources and archival materials, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, and historical method.

Results of the Research. Discussion. The laws and principles that formed the traditional culture of the Belarusian Middle Ages fully apply to the traditional physical culture. Traditional physical culture is an ethnic tradition, a combination of elements in material and spiritual life, as well as the ways of its transmission.

The values of physical culture were transmitted from the older generation to a new generation. Forms and types of traditional physical culture were relatively stable: a new generation repeated what their ancestors did. Anyhow, in the system of traditional physical culture there are gradual changes connected with a change in the culture and practical life of society.

The development of traditional physical culture by a new generation took place in the process of life activity: labour, participation in wars, hunting, games, dances, and rituals. Traditional physical culture should not be reduced to a peasant one. It took place in the life activities of all classes, social strata and social

groups of the Belarusian medieval society. The basic forms and types of traditional physical culture within the boundaries of one class were supported by the majority of its representatives, fixed in a system of concepts, moral attitudes, ideals, and images that were role models. The task of traditional physical culture is to ensure the physical development of a personality according to the ideals of a particular social group or class.

Traditional physical culture was experimental-empirical in nature. Elements of physical culture were developed and tested by historical practice. They were combined and improved through the selection and development of the most valuable and necessary ones based on the principle of utility for a particular social group, its ideal of a personality.

Traditional physical culture is a part of the culture of traditional society and it existed in syncretic unity with other forms of traditional culture. At one time, it was not considered as something independent, it's like modern physical culture and sport are perceived nowadays. And this trend persisted not only in Belarus, but also in other Slavic countries [5; 8].

Traditional physical culture differs from modern one in form and content. Therefore, the direct transference of the concepts of modern physical culture to the traditional one is not permissible. The physical culture of the Middle Ages is specific in form and content.

Let's outline the time frame for the existence of traditional physical culture of Belarus. This is a period from the 10th to 18th century. In the 10th –13th centuries, the physical culture of the feudal elite and the layers of society adjacent to it already became an independent trend of life activity. Later (the end of the 14th century) the formation of traditional physical culture of townspeople began. Peasant traditional physical culture remained almost unchanged until the beginning of the 19th century [4].

What main goal was pursued, what motivated the use of traditional physical culture in the Belarusian medieval society? The goal of traditional physical culture is physical development of a person according to the ideal of the social group of a medieval society. The main ideal of each social group of the traditional society of Belarus was an owner (*gaspadar* in Belarusian). All social groups put the following meaning in this concept: an owner is a man who can be the head of a family or a clan, who is able to use property for the benefit of the family and the clan. The main content of the concept of «owner» was the same in all social groups of the Belarusian medieval society, but each of them specified it with additional elements related to the specificity of life activity and the position of the social group.

The Belarusian feudal lords highly valued physical strength and health. Feudal lords were not physically weak people who spent their lives in comfort and idleness, as it was believed in the Soviet period of our history. The formation of the mentality of an owner and a warrior, who was able to stand up for his own and «take someone else's belongings with a sword» did not leave room for physical weakness, psychological instability, and lack of will. The patrimonial morality demanded from an heir preservation and augmentation of property, and he was brought up to own, to inherit ancestral property and protect family's honour.

An owner and a knight were ideals, which the Belarusian feudal lords tried to form, raising their descendants. The main element was professional military training. Male gentry were the only social group of the Belarusian medieval society, who, practically all, performed military service. Service in the army and participation in wars were the main duties of the gentry. That is why every nobleman had to have a certain level of physical and military training. The noblemen considered the concept of a master (*gaspadar*) to be a priority. The Grand Duke of Lithuania had the title «*Gaspadar (an owner)*». The expressions «*We, gaspadar ...*», «*our gaspadarstva*» were used in many articles of the Statute of 1588. The szlachta (nobility) not only considered themselves owners of the country, but also codified their aspirations in legal documents.

The nobleman's second concept was the one of knighthood associated with knightly deeds, and it did not contradict the first concept: «If a son performs his knight service and his father, who stays at home, dies during his son's absence, the son must take the estate and property in his hands when he returns from a foreign land» [9].

A townsman-craftsman could become an owner, having good physical conditions, which allowed him to master a craft in order to continue his family business. A town craftsman was obliged to participate in militia service in the period of 14–18 centuries. Rich townsmen, who owned land, performed military service on the same conditions as nobility. During that period certain changes occurred in physical culture of townspeople. They were connected with the development of crafts, the duty of a citizen to perform military service, as well as the specifics of urban life. At the end of the fourteenth century Belarusian cities began to receive Magdeburg law (the first one was Brest in 1380), according to which they were given self-management in solving pressing issues of urban life. At the same time, city citizens and elected city authorities were

assigned tasks to defend the city. A characteristic element of the physical culture of townspeople was applied military and physical training necessary for the city defense and guard service.

The population of cities increased not only because of natural growth, but also at the expense of peasants coming from villages. Therefore, some elements of the traditional physical culture of the Belarusian peasantry functioned among townspeople. The physical education of urban youth was a family affair, closely related to the father's craft and the family's belonging to a trade guild. The family transferred all cultural traditions to a young generation: practical skills in craft, moral and religious values and values of everyday life. Sons as heirs inherited not only their fathers' business but also the duty to replace them in military service.

An owner was an ideal for all social groups of townspeople. Each craftsman was an owner of apprentices, pupils and members of his own family. Sons of the owner could become owners, having mastered the craft of their father and continuing family business. For this, they required not only professional, but also physical readiness and health.

A peasant ran an individual farm, which was based on physical strength of his family. It is no accident that the peasants said: «With good health, there'll always be work». A significant number of children's games imitated peasant's labour. Physical education was utilitarian and practical. Peasants were interested in a person's ability to work in agriculture. Physical education was subordinated to this goal and first it was in the form of play, and later of work [1].

According to the Belarusian folklore, the cult of physical force was a part of peasant's life. The main character of many fairy tales is *asilak*, i.e. a person endowed with unusual power, but at the same time he is highly moral, open, and honest. It is noteworthy that physical force is not idealized by itself, *asilak* is always a defender of people [3].

The development of feudalism and the reliance on nobility in the military affairs allowed the Belarusian state to seek assistance from peasants in rare cases and to a small extent in the 14th and 18th centuries. The bulk of the peasants practically did not know military service and they did not have motivation to master military-applied physical culture. Besides, peasants were forbidden to have weapons. To raise an owner, who can support a family, was the main task of parents. The need to be an owner and to run a farm so deeply rooted in the mentality of the Belarusian peasants that in the 19th century (year 1863) during the period of K. Kalinovsky's uprising, he, encouraging peasants to support the rebels, appealed to the sense of *gaspadar* (an owner) and signed himself «*Yasko, an owner, from Vilnius*» in his appeals in «*Muzhytskaya Pravda*» [4].

In view of the above and without being exhaustive, we suggest a definition of traditional physical culture: «Traditional physical culture is an activity of traditional society intended to form, develop and support physical qualities of a person with the goal of educating an owner, and a defender of a family and a clan.»

Traditional physical culture is a complex, dynamic and open system, including three main subsystems that correspond to the three main classes of Belarusian society: gentry, townspeople, and peasants. Between these subsystems there was a certain exchange and interaction (primarily in games), but at the same time, each of them retained its isolation during the Middle Ages, from the 10th to the end of the 18th centuries.

Traditional physical culture of a particular historical period, class or social group is a concrete way of existence of systemic relations in the unity of the general and the specific, the necessary and the random. The author has analyzed the object «traditional physical culture» and has identified the most significant and characteristic elements of the structure that are fixed in all periods of functioning of traditional society and are more or less present in all social groups [9]. We believe that traditional physical culture of Belarusians includes the following basic subsystems.

- I. General physical culture.
- II. Professionally-applied physical culture.
- III. Remedial Fitness
- IV. Social institutes of physical culture.
- V. Spiritual values of physical culture.

The first three subsystems correlate with the types of traditional physical culture. The fourth subsystem enables the functioning of traditional physical culture in social groups. The fifth subsystem defines the value dimension of physical culture as a socially-oriented phenomenon, which gives purposefulness to the entire system of traditional physical culture and helps to identify generic human qualities. As we can see, in the structure of traditional physical culture there is no subsystem of a material and technical base, compared to a modern model of physical culture. There was practically no special sports equipment used for the formation of physical qualities. Professional, household and natural objects were used instead.

General Physical Culture. This subsystem includes the following elements: everyday physical skills (horse riding, swimming, hunting, games, dancing); physical recreation (active rest). The main function of

this subsystem is the formation of general physical culture of a person according to the ideals of the society or a social group. At the same time, general physical culture performed educational and recreational functions.

A person of traditional society received significant physical activity, in comparison with a modern man. Horse riding, hunting, the need to walk a lot, and physical work required motor activity, considerable physical efforts even from privileged classes. The bearers and transmitters of general traditional physical culture were, first of all, parents, relatives, and educators.

Professional-applied Physical Culture (in the Broad Definition of the Concept). The subsystem of this type of traditional physical culture includes elements of special physical training related to professional activity, which, like a tradition, was transmitted within the family, or in the process of training by an experienced, outside professional. The main function is individual's socialization. Within the framework of this subsystem we distinguish the following areas:

– military-professional physical culture which was used in the system of troop training. It was relevant to knighthood, armored boyars, Cossacks, and gentry;

– military applied physical culture, i.e. military physical training of the urban militia, certain social groups of peasants and townspeople who were required to perform military duties when it was needed: farm servants, hajduks, chosen infantry (peasant infantry of the Radzivil family), and urban militia;

– professional physical culture, i.e. physical training necessary for the performance of some professional activity. Peasants prepared themselves for agricultural work, handcrafts or certain types of craft. Townspeople trained to become artisans.

Remedial Fitness. This kind of physical culture involves the use of certain exercises for diseases treatment. Its main function is recovery of a person. Remedial fitness included not only physical exercises, but also magical and sacred means, which was the norm, in accordance with the ideas of the medieval society. This subsystem of traditional physical culture of Belarusians is fixed by scientists, first of all, in the system of peasant traditional physical culture [1] and specific female gymnastics – gymnastics of the Belarusian charmers. Massage as an element of remedial fitness has been widely used among urban residents since the 16th century [3].

Social Institutes of Physical Culture. State and educational organizations, as well as specialists who controlled and participated in the processes related to the functioning of traditional physical culture. Specialists who conducted military-professional training included rotmisters, fencing masters, and riding masters. Military-applied training of citizens was conducted by officers of the garrisons. Compulsory gymnastics classes have been recorded in the statutes of educational institutions and the schedules of training sessions since the 16th century.

Spiritual Values of Traditional Physical Culture. This subsystem includes ethical and aesthetic elements of traditional physical culture, formation of the owner's personality, knightly etiquette, ideas of different layers of traditional society about physical beauty of an individual, reflection of the ideology of strength, health, and military qualities in literature and journalistic works. The verbal folklore of peasants reflected traditional physical culture in fairy tales and songs through the ideology of strength, health, and courage.

Traditional physical culture performed fewer functions than modern one. The functions with identical goals had different content because they realized the needs of specific social groups of the traditional society of Belarus. We have identified the most significant functions. The function of physical transformation relates to the development and formation of physical qualities of a person through the motor skills and abilities necessary in the life activity of a particular social group. The function of socialization is the acquisition of social experience and social status in the sphere of traditional physical culture of a social group. The worldview function is the formation of a system of views on the physical culture, its place in the life of a person and social group. The aesthetic function was manifested through the ideas of physical beauty, health and strength, in accordance with the requirements of a social group of traditional society. The communicative function was realized, first of all, within a social group of traditional society as an exchange of empirical knowledge in traditional physical culture.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. Traditional physical culture has been the main type of physical culture of the Belarusian people for about a thousand years. It has been regarded as the activity of society in the formation, development and support of physical qualities of a person with the goal of educating the personality of an owner, a protector of the family, and the clan. Traditional physical culture includes the following basic subsystems: general physical culture, professionally applied physical culture, remedial fitness, social institutions of the physical culture, spiritual values of physical culture and it performed world-view, aesthetic, communicative, and transformative functions.

In the future it is necessary to investigate traditional means of the physical culture of Belarusians.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 29.09.2017 р.