



TYPES OF PHYSICAL EXERCISE IN MEDIEVAL SERBIA (XII-XIV CENTURY)

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Abstract Of all the Serbian lands established and extinguished during the Middle Ages, the most significant and the most respected one was that of the great ruler Stefan Nemanja. His dynasty was founded in the seventh decade of the 12th century. His descendants had been on the Serbian throne for two centuries before the dynasty ended in 1371 with the death of Stefan Uroš V (The Weak). In contrast to the enemy armies, which had greater experience, arms and more men, Serbian people had the courage, constancy and strong will to substantiate their warrior skills. Serbian folk poems represent basic sources of knowledge about the physical and social life in Serbia germane to the history of physical education. They are also a source of information on the types of physical exercise in medieval Serbia.

The beginnings of Serbian poetry reach back to the distant past, to the period of pre-Christianity, which can be elucidated through epic poetry. Those poems inspired chivalrous acts and in that way they were instrumental in forming a combatant spirit and high morale in younger generations. However, the greatest part of epic poetry is an “endless exultation against violence, slavery and inhumanity”. But this celebration of our ethics is not only stylistic, it is represented in the contents, in characters and acts of the heroes. That is why Serbian poetry from the period of the House of Nemanjić represents an interesting field of research for the history of physical education, i.e. research into the types of physical training and activity.

Key words: Epos, epics, physical exercise, poems, the House of Nemanjić

INTRODUCTION

It is often said of a nation that *it is as rich as its history*. All the efforts and desire to get to the roots of our past lead us inevitably to the Middle Ages and connect us to the spirit of the rule of the House of Nemanjić. A profound influence this dynasty exerted on the history of the people of Serbia points out their greatness and significance. Serbian army from the period of the Nemanjić reign was famed for its bravery, agility, endurance, persistence, wisdom and skillfulness varying by the type of warfare. Brave voivode and warriors were the apple of Serbia's eye, which in turn caused heroism to become a lifestyle.

Of all Serbian lands which were established and which perished during the Middle Ages, the most significant and respected one was that of the great ruler Stefan Nemanja. It was founded in the seventh decade of the 12th century. His descendants had been occupying the Serbian throne for two centuries before the dynasty ended in 1371 with the death of Uroš V Nežak (The Weak). During his reign Stefan Nemanja began to integrate Serbian territories and parishes into one homogeneous country. He succeeded in spreading Serbian territory through wars and in rendering it independent of Byzantium. Actually, he was not a conqueror; he just rebuilt, fortified and upgraded his miserable inheritance [11, p. 23].

The successor to Stefan Nemanja, his son Stefan Nemanjić, became the first Serbian king in 1217. It meant a great political flourishing of the Serbian state and its rulers as well because Serbian independence was officially acknowledged internationally. Stefan Nemanjić was crowned the first Serbian king by his own brother Rastko (St. Sava) in 1220. Accordingly, he called himself Stefan the First-Crowned. Stefan's sons, Radoslav, Vladislav and Uroš, ruled the country from 1228 to 1276, when Uroš's son Dragutin officially came to the throne. He ruled for a very short time (1276-1282), but his successor king Milutin exerted strong influence on the Serbian state. He markedly enlarged the territory to the south, and to the north for the first time the Serbian border reached the right bank of the Danube, between Smederevo and the Poreč River. During the long reign of king

Milutin (1282-1321) there were several attempts to solve the problem of his successor. The pretenders to the throne were Dragutin's son Vladislav, and Milutin's sons Konstantin and Stefan. Eventually, Milutin's elder son, Stefan Dečanski, came to the throne. He was succeeded by Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (The Mighty) [8, p. 29].

During Dušan's reign Serbia was in its prime and encompassed the vastest territory ever; Dušan was crowned as Tsar in Skopje in 1346. He drew up Legal Code (1349), Serbian medieval constitution, which was vital for solving the country's internal affairs. With the death of his son, Tsar Stefan Uroš V, the last legitimate ruler of the House of Nemanjić, the two-century reign of the great dynasty ended [1, p. 43].

This very dynasty was described in many epic poems, thus creating a great source of information about the lifestyle of the Serbian people in the Middle Ages. In those epic poems one can find specific types of physical exercise important for the history of physical training and activity in the Middle Ages. Interpreting the poems from Pre-Kosovo period is very important, but they were superficially researched in the respect that only the forms of training were cited. Therefore, the authors of this paper decided to make a more thorough analysis of their theoretical character. This research will advert to forms of physical exercise in Europe in this period of time

The origins of epic poetry are to be found in the distant past. Parallel to the development of the cult of ancestors, mythology and the overall advancement of the society, heavily influenced by fairy tales, epic poetry was gradually emerging. Epos (Greek word) means: word, speech, narration, short story. Epic poetry is a narrative which tells about man's life cycle, and describes events in which he takes part and his distinctive behavior. In other words, epic poetry describes human relationships and life situations [3, p. 14].

Its basic aim is to imprint into our memory the knowledge of our worthy ancestors, important persons and events in general, and especially of brave warriors and heroes. To develop the epics, certain social relations were necessary to form. Such a social climate was created also on the Balkans during the great Serbian war against the Ottoman Empire. People lived in poverty and misery, crowded in Serbian villages far from crossroads and main roads, in patriarchal communities, surrounded by land and forest, without doctors and medical help. They started believing in the impossible and creating their own folklore, which was often described by minstrels.

Those poems depicted heroes who fought for freedom and justice. The poems were mostly created during the long winter social gatherings, when the elders narrated to the young. These stories celebrated the heroes and their deeds exactly as people had imagined them to be, wanted and needed them to be. The narration often endowed the heroes with supernatural and superhuman qualities necessary for a long lasting fight against the Ottoman Turks.

From the literary point of view, the Battle of Kosovo was an ideal topic for epic poetry and its form. The battle was the most important and central historical event for Serbian people. It was considered to be the turning point from one epoch into another, the crucial moment from which to start counting the time – as the time before and the time after the battle. It is exactly in those motives and poems that we can find characteristic kinds of physical exercises which were important for the history of physical training and activities in medieval Serbia.

We cannot precisely determine when Serbian epic poetry was created because the first poems were collected in the 16th century, but it is only logical to assume that they were created much earlier. Vuk Karadžić, the greatest collector of Serbian folk lore, confirmed this: "I think that Serbian people had epic poems even before the Battle of Kosovo, but as those changes were so radical, almost everyone forgot what had happened before that moment, and started telling and singing those poems again and again" [4, p. 14].

The poems handed down to us got their final form and meaning during the Ottoman reign, when the Orthodox Christian nation was united in their rebellion against Turkish feudalism. That is why all of them were permeated with the same revolutionary national spirit and blended into one entity, not only by their content but also by their form (all of them were rendered in decasyllable).

The greatest part of the epic poetry represents an "endless battle cry against violence, slavery and inhumanity". But, this battle cry of our ethics is not only embodied in some stylistic words, but also in the contents, in the characters and deeds of the heroes. Thus Serbian poetry from the period of the House of Nemanjić represents an interesting field of research for the history of physical education, i.e. research on the types of physical training and activities specific only to Serbia. Socio-economic circumstances were different in Europe, which caused specific development of types of physical exercise.

Sport activities in medieval Europe consisted of folk games played by local peasants, tournaments staged for knights and nobles, archery contests, and activities in which animals were brutalized [5]. The folk games, often violent and dangerous and sometimes organized to maim or kill animals, emerged in connection with local peasant customs. The tournaments and archery contests were linked with military training and the desire for entertainment among the feudal aristocracy and those who served them [2, p. 62].

It should be mentioned that those types of physical exercise for the people from the upper social status were different from those in the lower strata, in Europe as well as in Serbia. This paper treats the upper and the lower social classes in Serbia. Peasant games had little structure and few rules, and were played in peasant villages. The upper class paid little attention to peasant games, and had access to more equipment and facilities. Their ownership of horses allowed them to indulge in various forms of horse racing, hunting and hawking [2, p. 63].

In the ruling circles of Europe knights tournaments and jousts were favored, but the patricians and traders from the cities imitated the aristocrats and organized their own knights performances [6, p. 316].

Epic poetry in Serbia can be observed from several different angles. One of them is analyzing heroic poems through the prism of physical exercises and activities specific for the period of the Nemanjić dynasty. Thus, the objective of this paper is the research and analysis of the epic poetry from this period, or, more precisely, analyzing the cycle of Pre-Kosovo poems (*Uroš and the House of Mrnjavčević*, *The Building of Skadar*, *The Wedding of Tsar Dušan*, *The Wedding of Sibirjanin Janko*, *Banović Strahinja* and *The Wedding of King Vukašin*).

Thus, the aim of this paper is to introduce the wide audience to sublime Serbian epic poetry as an important part of the history of physical training and activities in Serbia during the Nemanjić dynasty and also to make it available to the expert audience. In this way, we could encourage further research of this period. Actually, this obliges us towards a better explanation of the overall concept of physical exercise during the reign of the House of Nemanjić. Therefore, for the history of physical training and practice, Serbian epic poetry represents a basic source of knowledge about the social circumstances, and particularly the types of physical exercise in the Middle Ages in Serbia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is historical and comparative, based on the chronological problem-method. For this reason we used the *historical method*. This is actually a method used primarily in the historical sciences, from which it originates [13, p. 129]. By using the historical method we tend to discover and explain more thoroughly what happened in the past. Besides, it is very interesting for this kind of research to find out how and why some events happened. The significance of the historical method should not be neglected when used in other types of research [12, p. 25].

In this research the *descriptive method* was also used. The descriptive method helped in describing certain processes, i.e. a certain reality. However, recognizing this reality is actually a basis for changing it. To get to know a reality means not only getting familiar with its external manifestations, but also getting to the core of its internal relationships. Actually, it is an attempt to reach the very essence of a process or a phenomenon. A contribution of the descriptive method is in that a researcher pays attention to practical work as well, in other words it is the basis for all other methods [13, p. 24].

At the end, a *synthesis* was carried out in order to present the relevant literature reference adequately from the aspect of analyzing the types of physical exercises and activities. It was applied in a form that is specific for research with theoretical-applicative characteristics.

TYPES OF PHYSICAL EXERCISES IN THE PERIOD OF THE HOUSE OF NEMANJIĆ

In our literature, folk epic poetry represents the greatest achievement and the most exhaustive source of knowledge about the social circumstances and the types of physical activity and exercise in the early Middle Ages. Epic poetry was created during the ever-waging battles of our people, in the first place against the Ottoman invaders, and these were always battles for freedom. As war was one of the dominant events in the society, the basic motive of the epics was celebrating the bright examples of heroism, which, at the same time, set the example for the young population in a warlike spirit.

A historical basis of the Pre-Kosovo collection of poems was the epic which described the individuals and events that had happened before the battle of Kosovo. Those individuals are the famous men from the Houses of Nemanjić and Mrnjavčević. Among the rulers and the aristocracy of Nemanjić and Mrnjavčević ancestry, the most outstanding figures were Stefan, Rastko-Sava, Dušan and Uroš Nemanjić, then Vukašin and Uglješa Mrnjavčević. The poems belonging to this period were: *Uroš and the House of Mrnjavčević*, *The Building of Skadar*, *The Wedding of Tsar Dušan*, *The Wedding of Sibirjanin Janko*, *Banović Strahinja* and *The Wedding of King Vukašin*.

Folk epics most often describe events and physical performance of certain heroes who competed in running, jumping, climbing, throwing, shooting, riding, fencing and mace fighting.

The poem *The Wedding of Tsar Dušan* tells the story of the heroism of Miloš Vojinović, Tsar Dušan's nephew, who, disguised as a "young Bulgarian" helped his uncle to take Roksanda, the bride, to Serbia and marry her. He had to show the qualities of a hero and fight on behalf of the Tsar for the beautiful Roksanda: he shot an apple through a ring, jumped over three horses with flaming swords on them, killed a three-headed Latin, and singled out Roksanda among the three girls presented to him. In this poem, we can see exactly the fantastic moments which are characteristic of these poems, as well as larger-than-life heroism.

*"He flung his golden six-flanged mace:
So slightly did he strike him
That he knocked him out of his war saddle;
Then he drew his deadly spear,
Pinned him down to the green grass,
And cut off each of his three heads,
Into his horse's food bag he threw them..."*

From the poem "The Wedding of Tsar Dušan" [9, p. 99].

Knight duels were frequent in the medieval Serbia as well. The main weapons in knight duels were spears, sabers, maces and shields. Sometimes, smaller daggers were used to win the battle. Handling the mace was a real art, considering their weight and specific shape. A good hero had to exercise every day so that he could use it properly in a battle or a duel. The mace weight varied, but we suppose it was from five to ten kilograms. Considering this weight, we can claim with certainty that men who used this weapon had to be very strong and skillful, because they most often used both hands. That was exactly what distinguished the Serbian heroes.

*“Miloš Vojinović threw his spear,
Fastening the fair-faced Latin youth,
Fastening him to the Ledyan gate,
So he cut off his fair-haired head,
And threw it to his horse’s food bag...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Tsar Dušan” [9, p. 94].

There were tournaments and jousts in Europe as well. Tournaments were held in West Europe, whereas in East Europe, where Serbia belonged at the time, there were jousts. West Europe was distinguished for heavy armored cavalry, always ready to act on. There, the knights fought in heavy armors, with shields, long spears and swords. The East European army was different, light-armored and highly mobile. The fighters were armed with spears for throwing, maces and light swords. Vital parts of their bodies were protected with hauberks and armets [14, p. 137].

Throughout the medieval period, the most popular sporting events among the upper class men were tournaments consisting of war games to keep the knights and nobles ready for battle. Some tournaments resembled actual battlefield confrontations. Deaths and serious injuries occurred, victors carried off opponents’ possessions, and losers were often taken prisoner and used as hostages to demand ransom from opposing camps. Later versions of tournaments had lower stakes, but they also involved injuries and occasional deaths [2, p. 63].

Because of the heavy armor both on himself and his horse, the European knight moved with difficulty as a foot soldier; while mounted, he was used to moving lordly even on the most unpropitious ground, thus compromising his agility. Therefore, towards the end of the century most knights started to use lighter armor to gain mobility.

The jousts in Serbia were adorned by the good fighter and the good horse. These two were one entity in combat. The horse had to obey his master and execute his commands. That means that the horse was well trained by his master. One of the skills was jumping over different obstacles: fires, canals, ropes and vertically set spears. A heavy and clumsy horse could not perform; only the tall, fast and well trained could. Winged horses were also often mentioned, as well as those with other extraordinary qualities. In today’s tournaments, it is not unusual to see horses jump two meters up or aside.

*“He took up his dun steed’s reins,
And spurred him out from among the wedding guests,
Kept prodding him with his sharp spurs:
So he jumped three-spear lengths aside,
And four-spear lengths high in the air,
How far ahead could not even be measured;...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Tsar Dušan” [9, p. 90].

Climbing walls was a skill that distinguished only those heroes who besides their strength and agility had a perfect coordination of movements necessary for climbing. They most often climbed castle walls and mountain cliffs using table-cloths. Those were the skills in which they had to show their agility and swiftness, strength and endurance. Very often, the life of the hero depended on these skills. Nowadays, in different competitions there always have to be rock-climbing or free climbing as one of the disciplines. This corroborates the fact that the Serbian heroes were really strong, agile and skillful. In the poem *The Wedding of King Vukašin* Voivoda Momčilo used the cloth which his sister had thrown to him to climb the castle walls.

*“Jevrosima, my dear little sister,
Lower a strip of cloth down to me,
So I can flee into the city.”*
.....
*Momčilo grabbed hold of the cloth
So up the city wall he climbed;
But just as he was about to jump over,
His unfaithful love rushed thither...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of King Vukašin” [10, p. 27].

Physical exercising of peasants in Europe was not organized and it occurred through immediate working activity. However, they had some forms of physical exercising. At the peasant festivals/games some competitions were organized in a few events. Running, bag races, throwing stick quarterns, several variations of bowling, wrestling, different kinds of dancing and stick fights were favorite.

Running as a form of public competition did not have strict rules. These were often made on the spot, and the most important thing was to beat the opponent, be it on a longer or a shorter track. In a difficult situation, running was a way to escape [14, p. 183]. We can find examples of this in the poem *Uroš and the House of Mrnjavčević*, when Marko runs away from his father so as to avoid being slain by him. Running was both a diversion and a combat skill, when it was used directly in battle. In every village, during the religious festivities and at village squares and crossroads, people organized competitions in running. Running with legs tied or in bags was a very interesting discipline. There were no special preparations or equipment; runners usually took off some clothes, and the old ran together with the young. Running was a special form of exercise that did not require any equipment or weapons. There is no information about whether the winners were awarded prizes, but they were surely celebrated and respected.

*“Off Marko ran around the white church,
Around the white church of Samodreža
Off Marko ran, and the king was after him,
Until they closed three reels
Around the white Samodreža church...”*

From the poem “Uroš and the House of Mrnjavčević” [10, p. 67].

Jumping was often described. Epic heroes jumped over several horses and jumped into the saddle of the last one. They even leapt over horses with flaming swords on them. It was immensely appreciated when someone jumped over an obstacle while riding [14, p. 184]. This kind of exercise was both an entertainment act and a combat skill. Every skill exercised for entertainment's sake was also useful in battle or in everyday situations. In their description of jumping, the poems mentioned the starting position but did not state its length. In truth, a good and long jump required an adequate starting position. A special jumping technique was used, which differed between the high jump and the long jump. There were some combined jumps as well, the examples of which can be traced in the following poems: *The Wedding of Tsar Dušan*, *The Wedding of Sibirjanin Janko* and *The Wedding of King Vukašin*.

*“From the other side he came forward,
And took a run across the plain field,
Over three knight horses he jumped,
With three flaming swords on top of them...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Tsar Dušan” [9, p. 95].

*“When Voivoda Momčilo heard that
He shed tears down his hero face,
He jumped off his dun steed,
In three leaps he got to the city;
But the city gate was locked,
Locked and bolted...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of King Vukašin” [10, p. 27].

*“Do not worry, bridegroom Janko,
You will need me there,
So he took a run as a swallow,
And jumped over nine good horses,
Straight into the saddle of the tenth...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Sibirjanin Janko” [15].

Throwing the spear, and occasionally the mace, was a very important skill of the medieval heroes, often used in battles. Hurling a stone from the shoulder was a skill also described in poems, but it was used in competitions when the heroes were required to show who was stronger. This was a kind of qualification discipline, an exercise that distinguished the strong competitors from the weak ones. The distance achieved was the result of a strong body, especially arms and shoulders, and the hurling technique. It was also a good preparation for handling the mace or the sword, or carrying the shield. Throwing the mace was a somewhat more difficult discipline, because the heroes

were expected to hit the target. It could be on the ground or in the air, or it could be a rider, for example. Considering its weight, the spear was the easiest to throw. The heroes threw it farthest, but they needed to be extra skillful and precise because there were no corrections, especially in battle. Any failure could be fatal for them.

*“He flung his golden six-flanged mace:
So slightly did he strike him
That he knocked him out of his war saddle;”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Tsar Dušan” [9, p. 99].

*“And the fair-faced Latin threw his spear
At Miloš, at the hero’s chest...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Tsar Dušan” [9, p. 94].

Fencing was used in battles and duels. Handling and fighting with sabers greatly emphasized the hero’s courage and skill at arms. The amount of attention given to fencing can be seen in the fact that knights themselves were present when their swords were forged and ornamented. Knowing their physical abilities, they even gave the swordsmiths instructions as to where to double the layer of their swords, or how to ornament them. The sword had to fit well into the knight’s hand, but it also had to be heavy enough to kill and light enough to handle. Very often, good swords were inherited inside the family, and were handed down to another generation. Even today there are preserved traditional fencing elements in certain competitions of the entertaining and promotional character. A good example is Ljubičevske Igre (Ljubicevske Games) organized in Ljubičevo, near Požarevac. There is a discipline where a cavalier in full gallop cuts a stuck spear, slashes watermelons on a stand, and finally hits the target with his sword. This is just one of the many examples of the saved traditional forms of physical exercises and competitions from the Nemanjić dynasty.

*“Jabučilo the Steed trampled on more
Than Momčilo struck down with his sharp saber...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of King Vukašin” [10, p. 27].

The bow and arrow were used in public all-around-competitions, or when heroes defended the honor of their masters or relatives. Shooting “an apple through the ring” was most frequently described. Bows and arrows were significantly improved in the Middle Ages. They could cripple the enemy at large distances without close contact. To hit the target with the bow and arrow was quite a skill. Precision was very important and only under that condition were the heroes efficient and could survive. Precision had also an entertaining character, which was even a part of the wedding ceremony. Similar customs have been preserved even to this day in some areas of our country. On the wedding day, as they come for the bride, the bridegroom and the best man have to shoot an apple at a very large distance. Only then can they enter the yard and take away the bride. A good marksman has always been respected. The best shooters are given the most precise weapons such as sniper guns, and some other important duties and responsibilities. This skill is not something inherited but it is gained by persistent exercise and constant improvement. Today, professional competitors train at least six hours a day.

*“Miloš headed to the white tower,
Knocked an arrow upon the golden string,
Shot the apple through the ring,
Took it into his white hands,
And brought it to the honorable Tsar...”*

From the poem “The Wedding of Tsar Dušan” [9, p. 96].

Wrestling, just as throwing the spear or the mace, was a very important skill and was used in the closing part of combat. In village games, young men wrestled in order to show their strength and skills. A good wrestler was always respected in the circles of Serbian heroes.

*“They chipped away each other’s sabers,
Cut them all the way up to the handles;
Then they threw away what remained of them,
Jumped off their swift horses,
Grabbed each other by their white throats,
So the two dragons clashed
On the flats of Goleč Mountain,
And they fought all the summer’s day till noon...”*

From the poem “Banović Strahinja” [10, p. 113].

Horsemanship was a very important and useful skill, especially so in duels and battles. A good horse, which was very fast, agile and strong enough to carry its rider, and also well trained for combat, was respected as the man's best friend. Jumping over obstacles on the horse was a skill which showed the relationship and understanding between the horse and its rider. For this discipline the horse had to be well trained and drilled, and the rider had to be very skillful. An example of a well trained horse with the rider is seen in the discipline of the gallop with the relay of mail-bags. It is a very simple discipline at first sight, but when it is considered that the rider has to dismount, switch the mail-bag with the horse standing still beside him, mount again and break into gallop, one can see that it can also be very difficult. Only the most skillful horses and riders can win in this discipline.

*"Then he jumped on his knight horse's back
And flew off like a gray falcon..."*

From the poem "The Wedding of of Sibirjanin Janko" [15].

Hunting was a favorite pastime for the aristocracy and it was organized only on Sundays. Greyhounds followed their masters, while falcons were used in bird hunting. The nobility hunted big game and it was not only entertainment, but also a practical military activity, since the precision of shooting at game could prove very useful in duels and battles.

*"Every morning on the holy Sunday
Early he goes hunting in the Lakes..."*

From the poem "The Wedding of King Vukašin" [10, p. 23].

The main occupation of West European nobility were war and hunting. Both activities required thorough training in handling arms, horse riding, and high levels of physical abilities (strength, speed, endurance and agility) which were possible to obtain only through systematic physical exercise [7]. A variety of weapons was used in hunting, such as short spear, axe, knife, bow and arrow. It is interesting that women took part in falconry.

Cited types of exercise from the time of the House of Nemanjić were also seen in Europe in the form of the knightly skills (riding, swimming, hunting, archery, fighting with sword and spear, and wrestling).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Secular culture of medieval Serbia included two important factors: literacy of laymen and the knightly cult in its practical form. The skill at arms was a necessity and a diversion at the same time, and was modified in sport and contest. Exercising and training in the use of arms were a part of general lifestyle. Professional soldiers were expected to train regularly and to gather occasionally for joined training and learning.

Physical exercise in Europe as a part of education was mostly represented in the upbringing of knights, and later of craftsmen's and merchants' children. The knights' education comprised the abovementioned knightly skills. The main goal of developing those skills was to make people ready and able to protect faith, the sovereign, and a lady.

The House of Nemanjić ruled Serbia for over 200 years (1166-1371) as the most important medieval Serbian governing dynasty. Their importance in Serbian history comes from the fact that during their reign the establishment of the independent medieval Serbian state was accomplished, with its greatest territorial, economical and cultural influence, as well as that of Serbian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

Serbian people were ready for the Middle Ages. In their own country, in a sophisticated and enlightened monarchy, battles, war and military service in peace were regulated by laws. The law books written by St. Simeon and St. Sava also incorporated military law, which regulated military service and the whole system of defense. These laws must have been valid for a long time, because Stefan the First-Crowned quoted them, and some 150 years later Tsar Dušan's Code confirmed and improved military rights and obligations.

A philosophical basis for fighting as well as the moral and ethic principles were drawn up by Rastko Nemanjić (St. Sava). This set of beliefs was very different from all other fighting systems, because its main features were humanity, struggle for justice, non-aggression, and self-defense. It very strictly forbade crossing the limit which distinguished good from evil, God from the devil.

Along with the development of the society itself, through ancestor cult, mythology, and under the great influence of fairy tales, epic poetry developed in Serbia. Its main aim was to save the memory of the ancestors and the brave warriors who by their brave deeds endowed the people. Epic poetry was the greatest achievement of Serbian literature, while it is also a source of information on the medieval social circumstances and types of physical exercise and training at the same time.

The reason why epic poetry deserves our special attention lies in its value and its specific character. Although it contains numerous hyperboles, which were necessary to maintain the spirit of freedom in the enslaved people, it can be used for a study into types of physical exercising in this period. All exercise was

actually directed to strengthening young people's physical abilities, as well as fortifying patriotism, courage, bravery, determination and honor. Types of physical exercise had a direct influence on developing the spirit of heroism and manliness. Some forms of physical exercise had a prominent entertaining character (climbing walls, riding, running and jumping), while others had an immediate military and practical value (throwing the mace and the spear, fencing, marksmanship, wrestling, horsemanship, and hunting). We can conclude with great certainty that these types of physical exercises were dominant in developing the psycho-physical ability in Serbian knights.

These forms of physical exercise were strongly connected to the tradition of preserving and cultivating folk customs. As people lived in villages, far away from cities, and occasionally far even from the Ottoman invaders, the most popular kinds of entertainment for young people were dancing (combined country-dance which is the basic form of dancing) and competitions in board jump, hurling a stone from the shoulder, wrestling, swimming and diving. These forms of folk competitions can be seen even today during celebrations in some villages.

Therefore, for the history of physical education, epic poetry represents a basic source of information about social circumstances and, more specifically, types of physical exercise, their importance and practical value.

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