

The Interest of the Romans For Physical Activities During the Reign of Constantine

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The impetus for this paper has been provided by a reconstruction model of Rome during the days of Constantine (306-25) A.D. The model is exhibited at the museum of Roman civilization in Rome. An examination of the model reveals that the city was literally surrounded by six thearmae. North-West of the city lay the thearmae of Trojan and Titus, in the West the Thearma of Constantine, in the South the thearmae of Negro and Agrippa, in the East the thearma of Antoninus. The thearmae were gymnasium complexes of enormous proportions with facilities for swimming, wrestling, boxing, track and field, ball playing and other activities which could accomodate a large number of participants.

Martial provided a vivid picture of how an average Roman would spend his day. According to this latin writer, the first and second hour were used to bring greetings (matutine alutatio) to the person from whom he depended for favors. During the third hour our Roman citizen would listen to lawyers perorating their cases in the forum. During the fourth and fifth hour he would attend to his own affairs. The sixth and seventh hour were siesta time; however, the eighth and ninth hour were dedicated to physical activities at the thearmae.

Martial provided a description of the daily life of the Romans living during the first century A.D.; however, there are no indications that the daily routine of the Romans had changed drastically in the age of Constantine. In fact, this emporer, the last great one before the fall of the empire in the West, built another thearmae for public use.

Ammianus Marcellinus, who wrote about Rome twenty years after the death of Constantine, depicted a society which was less decadend than the society described by Juvenal three hundred years earlier. Sidonius, who was in Rome less than ten years perior to the barbarian invasion, noted that little had changed in the Urb.

Outwardly, the Romans went about living their lives as they had traditionally done. Inwardly, though, a continous erosion of the old ideals had gone on for centuries. Initially, the questioning philosophy of the Greeks; later, the Christians preaching for love and peace weakened the bellicose spirit of the Romans.

The result of this investigation indicates that the Roman empire in the west fell to the barbarians because the Roman citizens lacked patriotic spirit and not for want of physical fitness as some writers have insinuated. To the last, it appears the Romans were not only spectators but also actors.