

FROM THE ACROBACIES OF THE ANCIENT ACROBATS ON TIGHTROPE, TO THE BALANCE BEAM OF THE HUMANITARIANS

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SUMMARY PLUS

Balance exercises in tight rope have been extensively used worldwide through the ancient times. Both in the Greek as in the International Literature there are no specialized studies on the balance beam. The aim of this study was to investigate: a) the acrobatics of ancient tight ropewalkers and their relation to balance beam routines, and b) the birth of the balance beam and the introduction of the apparatus and routines in the Humanists' gymnastic methods and literature.

The collection of the data presented in the present study was based on written primitive sources of the following writers: Hippocrates, Plutarch, Galinos, Grigoras, Guts Muths, Vieht, Jahn. At the same time, information provided by several modern writers such as Diem, Decker, Gasch, Emanuel, Kröger, Borrman, Spieht, Reble, Mouratidis, Kaimakis and other were also included.

The tightrope balance routines performed by special acrobats-artists had an uninterrupted presence in the entertainment life in Antiquity. It is worth mentioning the fact that the movements, posture and poses of these acrobats refer to those of the modern balance beam. Ancient Greek writers, such as Hippocrates, Plutarch and Galinos cite such acrobats, who actually performed under musical accompaniment. According to bibliography and also to other evidence (paintings), balance routines were also developed during the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well.

Humanists (mid 18th, early 19th), recognizing the great utility of balance routines, comprised them in their methods and literature for gymnastics. In order to develop this skill, among other apparatus, beams of a variety of sizes and shapes were used as well. The first to use this apparatus in his school (Philanthropeio) was Basedow, who used a horizontal totally round laying shelled pine tree wood trunk. This primitive balance beam gave birth to GutsMuths, Vieht and other's balance beam apparatus, which were elevated and supported by poles, the height of which could be increased or reduced respectively.

It should be pointed out that Gut Muths dedicated a great part of his book to different balance apparatus and especially the beam, while he was the first to separate and

denominate the different kinds of balance routines. He also underlined the basic points for their methodology while providing other useful guidelines. In order to develop the above routines and obtain the required different kinds of kinetic skills, he recommended the beam as being the most suitable apparatus. In general, the beam as much as Guts Muths whole gymnastic philosophy consisted an educational mean.

From the Humanists, the balance beam was adopted and used by almost all the great gymnasts-educators of the 19th century (each one in a different way and sometimes in a different form). But the balance beam found its paramount role as a multiple-use apparatus (especially in its square shape) in the Swedish gymnastics system, established by Pier Ling as we all know.

As from the early decades of the 19th century, the balance beam was used (in combination with other apparatus) in several medical-gymnastic institutes owned by either doctors or gymnasts, as a means of treatment and rehabilitation of difficult muscular-bone diseases of certain girls. Apart from this fact, this gymnastic apparatus, which is presently used in Competitive Gymnastics exclusively by female athletes, was actually discovered and used for many decades exclusively by male athletes.

In European Unions and Federations, where the German gymnastic system was used, the balance beam was included in the competitive apparatus, while in the Swedish system, this apparatus held an important place everywhere (for both men and women). In the above system, the beam was used as both a balance and multiple-use apparatus as a substitute for the high bar. It is worth mentioning that in modern school Gymnastics, the balance beam is a multiple-use apparatus, intended for use by both boys and girls, with no discrimination.

In conclusion, balance routines on tight rope, performed by special acrobats-artists and developed mainly for spectacle and entertainment purposes have an uninterrupted present from the Ancient times to date. It is worth mentioning the similarity between these routines with those performed on the balance beam today, since the movements, the poses and the posture of the acrobats – tight ropewalkers refer to those that are performed on the modern balance beam.

Recognizing the great utility of these balance routines, the Humanists included them in their gymnastic methods and literature. In order to develop balance, Humanists used amongst other apparatus, beams of different sizes and shapes. This way, they were the first to establish the basics and consequently promote it (as an exercise apparatus), in physical education and sports. From them, the beam was adopted by all great gymnasts and gymnastic systems of the 19th century.

Key words: tight ropewalkers, routines, spectacle, Basedow, Guts Muths, Vieht

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