

THE INVENTION OF THE GYMNASIARCH IN RURAL PTOLEMAIC EGYPT

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In this paper, I shall look at the early stages of the development of the office of gymnasiarch in the gymnasia of villages in Ptolemaic Egypt. I intend to show how the rural gymnasia originally had the structure and status of simple private associations and then became more institutionalised entities invested with some sort of public importance or character, although never becoming fully public institutions controlled by the central or local administration. This process seems to have been well on its way already towards the end of the third century, and by the end of the Ptolemaic period gymnasia occupied a social position of such a kind that made them ready to play the new role with which Roman rule eventually invested them¹. In identifying the development of the legal status of Ptolemaic gymnasia, the organisation of the governing body plays a particularly important role, and that is why it is the object of special attention.

As we know, Ptolemaic gymnasia – unlike those of the Roman period – are found not only in the three Greek *poleis* and in the nome-capitals, but also in the villages, especially in the Arsinoite nome, where a great quantity of land was reclaimed and allotted to cleruchs after the drainage of marsh-land by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. In the three *poleis*, the gymnasium presumably followed the civic constitutional traditions of a Greek *polis*² : it is therefore not surprising at all that the oldest attestations of gymnasiarchs in Egypt concern the Greek *poleis* of Alexandria and Naukratis, and date to the third century³.

Gymnasiarchs in the nome-capitals and villages appear from the second century onwards – supposed examples from the end of the third century are in fact doubtful⁴. The fragmentary state of our evidence certainly contributes to the patchy picture, but I think that at least in this case we have enough reasons to believe that until the end of the third century gymnasiarchs had not yet been introduced for the gymnasia in the Egyptian *chora*.

One papyrus from the Zenon archive is particularly relevant here ; it is the oldest document giving us evidence for some internal organisation of a rural gymnasium⁵. A donation was given for the village gymnasium to Demeas, at the time when he was president ; but since he did not spend this donation, it is requested that the money be passed on to the two new presidents, Agelaos and Philios⁶. It is the only evidence for the office of president, director, superintendent or chief (προεστηκός) of the gymnasium.

It seems that the president was the official person in charge of controlling the activities of the gymnasium : he was its representative, the person responsible for the administration,

¹ All dates are BC.

² It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the status of the civic gymnasium (with the question of the presence of civic magistrates in charge of it, the relationship with the citizenship and the city assembly, the council and its link to the council of the elders) : on the matter, see Ameling (2004) ; Gauthier (1995) ; Von Hesberg (1995) ; Schuler (2004).

³ I.Louvre Bernard 12 (III), SB IV 7456 (III/II) and P.Oxy. XXVII 2465 (after 270, a literary papyrus preserving Satyrus' *On the Demes of Alexandria* and giving an account of the celebrations in honour of the deified Queen Arsinoe : the term is supplemented in ll. 10–11) deal with Alexandria ; I.Delta II 14 (221–205 ?) is from Naukratis.

⁴ I.Prose 15 (Luxor [Upper Egypt]) : it is generally dated to 222–180, but Fraser (1961) 145 no. 26 thought that a date in the third or second century was unlikely. SB I 2138 + PP VI 17159 (201–181, from Beni Hassan [Hermopolite nome]) is a very fragmentary dedication to the King and Queen where in l. 5 the term gymnasiarch has been supplied by Seymour de Ricci in Launey (1987) 846, n. 3 : though dedications to the sovereigns from gymnasiarchs are attested (I.Delta II 14), there is not enough evidence to be entirely sure that this is correct.

⁵ PSI IV 391a (Philadelphiea, 242/241).

⁶ 5–8 : τὸ δοθὲν παρ' ἡμῶν Δημέαι εἰς τὸ γυμνάσιον, ἡνίκα προεστήκη ; 15–16 : ὁ Δημέας τ[ότε προ]εστηκός ; 19–21 : ἀποδοθήτω τοῖς νῦν προεστηκόσιν Ἀγελάωι Φιλίωι. On Demeas, see Pestman (1981) 311.

and entrusted with control of financial matters. As such, with the duties of treasurer, he personally received and administered the money contributed from private funding and he presumably had to pay for the expenses of the gymnasium. The charge could also be shared by more than one person : undoubtedly, in this way, the administrative and financial burdens would become lighter.

The nature of the role (and the name) of the president-chief was strictly connected to the formal character of simple association which the Ptolemaic gymnasium appears to have originally had : a group of private individuals who decided to gather around a common meeting-place, privately funded and run, in the form of a club with a president-in-chief (προεστηκός), who took care of the organisation and represented them when necessary.

A similar term (προστάτης) is indeed normally employed to define presidents of various private associations⁷. Some of them can be connected to the gymnasium⁸. With the exception of this text from the Zenon archive, the office of president / chief of the gymnasium is otherwise unattested⁹.

Firstly, it is striking that the duties of the president resemble those of the gymnasiarch. The gymnasiarch was indeed in charge of the general organisation of the gymnasium ; he was responsible for paying the daily expenses and the other expenses which the gymnasium might incur¹⁰. He took care of the management of the finances, being responsible for the good order of the accounts of the gymnasium. In short, he was the person who bore overall responsibility.

This being so, one would seriously wonder what a gymnasiarch would have to do in the gymnasium of Philadelphieia during the presidency of Demeas. The most logical answer would be to suppose that there was no gymnasiarch at all. And, as I have already said, I think that this is indeed true : the president was established before the introduction of gymnasiarchs in village gymnasia, regularly attested from the second century.

In the beginning, gymnasia in villages were simple meeting centres for the few people whose background was Hellenic : with a desire for group identity typical of immigrants in a foreign country, they met as a small association in what was often probably a simple hall and courtyard (or not much more), used for physical activities and recreational gatherings. That place was probably what most sharply reminded them of the gymnasia, and therefore the term was immediately adopted for its simplicity and familiarity, and for the ring of Greekness attached to it.

The lack of sources for the period certainly biases our research, but from the evidence which is available to us, I am inclined to see a Macedonian heritage influencing the original character of the rural gymnasia of Egypt ; or at least one could see in it a case in support of this interpretation. In Macedonia, gymnasia are made the object of regulations by the city around late third / early second century, as the gymnasiarchic law from Beroea and an ephebarchic law from Amphipolis seem to attest¹¹. Before that time they seem to

⁷ For instance, SB XX 14728, with n. 102. See also Fraser (1972) II 476, n. 21 : « ... προστάτης, which is more commonly used of posts outside the royal administration ... ».

⁸ I.Th.Sy. 303 (Setis [Upper Egypt] 143/142) : an association of *basilistai*, where the term *prostates* was corrected from *kosmetes*, previously inscribed – this is a clear sign that the association or at least some of its members were connected to the gymnasium ; SB I 5022 (Theadelphia [Arsinoite nome], II/I cent.) : association of the *neaniskoi*. One might add I.Prose 49 : an association of landowners from Psenemphaia in the Augustan period, with a priest-president-komarch.

⁹ Interestingly enough, forms of, or deriving from, the verb προίστημι are never employed in the later Ptolemaic Egyptian gymnasia context, whereas they do occur elsewhere and refer either to the gymnasiarch or to his job.

¹⁰ On the defrayal of the price for the oil necessary for the gymnasium in the Hellenistic *poleis*, see Fröhlich (2009).

¹¹ Respectively EKM 1 Beroia 1 (180) and Hatzopoulos (1996) II no. 42 (221–168), which is a fragmentary inscription transmitting what could be ephebarchic legislation that was later re-codified under Roman rule in a yet not fully published Amphipolitan ephebarchic law of 24/23, discussed by Gauthier / Hatzopoulos (1993)

have functioned as independent private associations¹². In fact, even after being put under the supervision of the city, the internal administration was carried out independently : the members of the gymnasium took their decisions and managed their private funds in complete autonomy. The interference of the city in the gymnasium's business related to the gymnasiarch only : from that moment onwards he became a civic magistrate, was elected by the city and was responsible to the city for the gymnasium's accounts, on which he was compelled to give reports to the city's magistrates in charge of the public accounts (ἐξεταταί). But the city neither financially supported nor directly controlled the gymnasium¹³ : after recognising the importance of such an institution in the framework of civic life and for the physical (and military) education of the youth, it regulated its governing body in a first attempt to establish an influence on it – royal interest behind this process may well be supposed¹⁴.

The original Macedonian element among the cleruchs in Egypt is well attested¹⁵ : one founder of a gymnasium, out of the five we know, was most probably a Macedonian (that is what his name, Peukestes, suggests)¹⁶ ; he founded the gymnasium in the village of Mouchis in the Arsinoite nome in the second half of the third century¹⁷. At all events, the Macedonian version of the gymnasium (rather than, say, the Athenian one after the reform of 334) suited perfectly the social environment of the Egyptian countryside of early Ptolemaic times, where cities and even proper urban centres were absent¹⁸ : what the cleruchs needed was a centre in which to gather and perform physical exercises and hold religious ceremonies, without implications of citizenship or dependence on civic institutions. After all this is what occurred in the gymnasia of Macedonia up to the third century too¹⁹ : the

161–163. The date of the gymnasiarchic law from Beroea has been object of debate : some think it comes from the period after the Roman conquest ; see Giovannini (2004) 480–489 and Kah (2004) 82 ; *contra* Hatzopoulos (2004) 95–96. The existence of gymnasiarchic laws in the Royal period is nonetheless attested by Hatzopoulos (1996) II no. 16, 1–3 (Amphipolis, 183) : εἰς τὸν γυμνασιαρχικὸν νόμον καταχωρηθήτω τὸ ὑπογεγραμμένον εἶδος. Codified gymnasiarchic laws are presented as common practice in those cities of Macedonia which had gymnasia (some therefore did not have any – similarly the final unpublished lines of Hatzopoulos (1996) II no. 16 apparently contained dispositions for those cities which did not have gymnasiarchs) in EKM I Beroia 1, A 6–8 : ἐν αἰεὶ πόλεσιν γυμνάσιά | ἔστιν καὶ ἄλειμμα συνέστηκεν οἱ γυμνασιαρχικοὶ νόμοι κείνται ἐν τοῖς δημοσίοις.

¹² In some *poleis* this state of affairs continued well into the Hellenistic period : see Gauthier (1996).

¹³ On financial support, one may want to see public funds for the ointment in the term ἄλειμμα (A 7). The editors do not seem to do so : see Gauthier / Hatzopoulos (1993) 127.

¹⁴ See the royal diagraphma of Philip V asking the magistrates of the cities of Macedonia to have the gymnasiarchs register foreign athletes arriving in the country to take part in the panhellenic games : Hatzopoulos (1996) II no. 16 (Amphipolis, 183).

¹⁵ See Bagnall (1984) 7–20.

¹⁶ He is the namesake of the commander-in-chief who issued the order SB XIV 11942 (ca 331), who could be identified with Peukestas son of Makartatos to whom Alexander the Great entrusted part of the troops upon leaving Egypt in 331 ; see Turner (1974) 239–242.

¹⁷ SB XVIII 13837 (224–218). Macedonians are connected to the gymnasium Herakleion of Sebennytyos (in the central Delta) in SB I 1106. This is a revised edition through *opus ingenii* by Van't Dack [1984] = SEG XXXIV 1605 : he suggested that the mention of *sympoliteuomenoi* and of soldiers stationed in service in the inland point to a later date than III BC (given in the *ed. pr.*). The inscription is now lost.

¹⁸ On the Athenian version, see Culasso Gastaldi (2009). On the social environment of the Egyptian countryside, see Clarysse / Thompson (2006) II 95–100.

¹⁹ Macedonian cities were not quite comparable to the Greek *poleis* : they were in fact administrative units, not independent within the kingdom (although they had a certain degree of autonomy in their administration, especially for tax-farming and local militia, and in some relationships with foreign cities), with a three-fold level or type of citizenship (the federal honorary citizenship reserved for a military elite favoured by the Kings, the tribal citizenship and the local town-citizenship). The citizens of the Greek city-states would not understand that. See Giovannini (1977) ; Hammond / Griffith / Walbank (1972–1988) II 197–199 and 647–652. On the treatment of former Greek *poleis* incorporated into the kingdom by Philip II, see II 348–382 ; on the situation under Philip V, see III 474–484 ; Hammond (1989) 9–11 ; Errington (1990) 229–235. The Macedonian gymnasium was apparently open to the free-born, regardless of their citizenship : see Gauthier / Hatzopoulos (1993) 87.

youth trained, anointed themselves with oil and held races, sacrifices and banquets independently of the city ; and not only the youth, but adults as well²⁰. The lack of urban centres and the history of the settlements must have played a particularly important role in this respect : how many independent *palaestrae* which the adults could use instead of the gymnasium might there have been in a village ? Probably none²¹.

Besides, the gymnasium in the Egyptian countryside was introduced by and for those who had settled in the new country from various parts of the Hellenistic *oecumene* : they were military men and later emigrants, obviously adults, and the gymnasium had to meet their needs first, and eventually those of their future offspring. The gymnasium had to perform the job of a club, and, although sharing the same name, its original internal structure and size were not quite comparable to those of the civic gymnasia.

For practical reasons there was soon a need for someone among the users of rural gymnasia who would oversee their management and stand at the head of their gathering places (thus the use of the perfect participle of *προίκτημι*). From this perspective, a shared chairmanship-presidency would not seem to present a problem, as long as the two presidents were able to run the place in orderly fashion. It was a different business for the gymnasiarchy proper, which in Egypt was a yearly charge (as is clearly stated in some documents) and can therefore be used for dating²² : for that reason and from some hints in the texts, it does not seem plausible that there was more than one gymnasiarch (for one gymnasium – which often meant for one town / village) at a time²³.

With the passing of time (perhaps from the last decades of the third century ?), the village gymnasia increased in their importance, the number of users, the size and range of activities and their position in society : they began a process of institutionalisation which eventually led to the recognition of rural gymnasia as places with public importance. An influence of the civic gymnasia can be reasonably supposed : often the members of rural gymnasia were not extraneous to the life of their civic counterparts. In a completely different environment, though, without any civic background, the members of the rural gymnasia started to recreate in the villages what they saw in the *poleis*. Village gymnasia therefore gave up their under-stated status and started to adopt the internal organisation of the gymnasia in the Greek *poleis*, although formally remaining private associations²⁴. Presidents were no longer of use : there were now gymnasiarchs, *kosmetai* and all the rest²⁵.

²⁰ According to the new interpretation of Giovannini (2004) 476–477, adults would also use the gymnasium in Beroea, at different times from the youth. But in Beroea gymnasia celebrations, races and feasts were reserved for the youth ; this does not seem to be the case for Egypt : see BGU VI 1256, with a lampadarch for a torch-race of men.

²¹ We have evidence of private *palaestrae* in Alexandria : P.Lond. VII 1941 + P.Cairo Zen. I 59060 (= P.Edgar 11) + P.Cairo Zen. I 59061, P.Lugd.Bat. XX no. 51. PSI IV 418 (Philadelpheia) would seem the only exception, although it is uncertain whether it deals with a *palaestra* in the village : in fact, I believe that it refers to Alexandria like the other texts. All the texts belong to the Zenon archive. A *palaestra* is also attested at Naucratis : I.Delta 20 (late IV/III).

²² « Gymnasiarch during year x » : SB IV 7456 (Alexandria, III/II) ; SEG VIII 504 (Thmouis [Delta], II) ; I.Fayum II 103–104 (Theadelpheia, 150/149) ; SB III 6665 (Alexandria [?], II/I) ; SEG XLIV 1448 (Ptolemais [?], II/I) ; BGU VIII 1772 (Herakleopolis, 57/56) ; BGU IV 1189 (Bousiris [Herakleopolite nome], 1 BC). Eponymous gymnasiarch : I.Louvre Bernand 12 (Alexandria, III).

²³ See for instance BGU VIII 1772, 33–34 (Herakleopolis, 57/56) : [τοῦ δέινου | τοῦ τὸ ἰβ̄ ἔτος [γυμ]νασιάρχικαντος τῆς μητροπόλεως τοῦ Ἡρακλεοπολίτου. Other places in the Hellenistic world show a different tradition, with the gymnasiarchy held collegially : see for instance Helly / Te Riele / Van Rossum (1979) 232–234 (Thessaly) ; Cordiano (1997) (Syracuse) ; Cordiano (2001 and 2009) (Cyrene).

²⁴ Existence of magistrates or any civic body, such as a council, is out of the question in the Ptolemaic *chora*.

²⁵ Gymnasiarchs : SEG VIII 504 (Thmouis [Delta], II) ; I.Fayum II 103–104 (Theadelpheia, 150/149) ; P.Tor.Choach. 12 (Thebes, 117) ; SB VI 8964 (Euhemeria [? Arsinoite nome], II). *Kosmetai* : I.Th.Sy. 303 (Setis [Upper Egypt], 143/142). Lampadarchs : BGU VI 1256 (Philadelpheia, 147/146 or 136/135 – on the date, see PP VIII 825).

The chronology of the attestations of ephebes in village gymnasia seems also to agree with this picture : like the gymnasiarchs, they also appear from the second century onwards. Obviously I do not intend to say that young people were not allowed into the gymnasia before that time : simply, they were probably not formally organised as ephebes strictly speaking.

Similarly, I think that the first steps of this process of institutionalisation can be traced in a petition to the king : P.Enteux. 8 (Samareia [Arsinoite nome], 221). The cleruch Apollodoros, founder of the gymnasium in Samareia, left Polykleitos heir to his fortune. Polykleitos lives in the capital and appoints another cleruch, the Macedonian Aristomachos, to act as superintendent (προεστηκώς) and to administer his assets in Samareia²⁶. The gymnasium is seen to be part of Polykleitos' properties. Hence, Aristomachos has been taking care of it for some time on his behalf. The man is writing to the King because a certain Dallos and his purported wife acted wrongly towards the gymnasium²⁷ : the passage is unfortunately fragmentary and not clear, but it seems that the two occupied the building (or part of it) illegally and went on living there. The gymnasium is considered to be and treated as private property belonging to the founder's family. The summarizing docket written by the office of the *strategos* on the back of the petition pointedly reads « Aristomachos against Dallos, about buildings »²⁸ : the case brought forward to the attention of the authority is considered merely a private dispute, without any mention of the gymnasium.

Nonetheless, a passage in the text may be worthy of particular attention : Aristomachos obtained permission from the *strategos* before demolishing a collapsing construction built upon the gymnasium²⁹. In this case, Aristomachos' behaviour may also be connected to the circumstances, and to the type of document, a petition : he is keen to mention that he sought and obtained permission to demolish the building because he wants to strengthen his case, showing how his activity was legal and carried out with the approval of the authority ; but it also points towards a developing public character of the gymnasium.

Rather than thinking about a direct control of the gymnasium by the local administration (which is nowhere attested ; the contrary, in fact, seems very clear from the text), it seems closer to the truth to think that the authority was considered somehow interested in the building. As one sees in the few other cases of requests for permission to demolish, this can only be the case because the gymnasium had started acquiring a position of local public importance³⁰ : owing to the kind of activities carried out in the premises with their sacred tone (sacrifices to the King and other links to the dynastic cult and the Royal House) and to a Hellenised local elite which tended to identify itself with the leading class (and very often was part of it), the gymnasium started playing the role of a publicly embedded place, where important men met and important events took place. One could even think that the gymnasium invested itself with the function of rendering public the sacred nature of the Sovereign and of introducing him into the daily life of the Greek-speaking communities of the villages of the Egyptian *chora*.

I think that by the end of the third century the public character of rural gymnasia must have been distinctive and generally perceived, and this eventually led to the introduction of the rural gymnasiarchs, whose complete diffusion is attested in the second century. And

²⁶ The appointment of the superintendent was later strengthened in the 20th year of Ptolemy III Euergetes (228/227) by a decision of the *chrematistai*, who had their seat in the quarter Alpha of Alexandria (where Polykleitos must have lived). P.Enteux. 8, 6–7 : κατὰ σύγκρισιν χρηματιστῶν τῶν τὰ προσπίπτοντα κρινάντων ἐν τῷ Ἄλφα. See Fraser (1972) I 34.

²⁷ 15 : Δάλλος καὶ ἡ λεγομένη αὐτοῦ γυνή . . . [.

²⁸ Verso, 2–3 : Ἀριστόμαχος πρ(ὸς) Δάλλον | περὶ οἰκημάτων.

²⁹ 9–11 : καθελόντος μου τὴν ἐπ[ί] τοῦ γυμνασίου ἐποικοδομημένην | οἴκησιν [c]υμπίπτουσαν, Ἀφθονήτου τοῦ στρα[τ]ηγέαντος χρηματίσαν[τ]ο[ς] . . . [.] . . . [.] : καθαρέσεως τ[ο]ῦ ἱε[ῶ]ς (ἔτους) | δι' ἐντεῦ[ξ]εως.

³⁰ Permission to demolish : P.Enteux. 6 (= P.Lille II 9 ; 222) : shrine of Isis ; P.Enteux. 7 (221) : a temple ; P.Enteux. 5 (224–218) : weaving industries. They all come from the village of Magdola (Arsinoite nome).

this process continued as time went on : at the end of the Ptolemaic era, the gymnasium occupied such a position in the local community that it was made the object of official visits by the *strategos*, who offered sacrifices in it and held special audience with its members³¹. A similar picture is offered for the role of gymnasiarchs, who could also occupy a semi-official position of authority as the first port of call for financial quarrels among the local population³².

I am aware that it is often here the case of an *argumentum e silentio*, but I hope to have made clear enough how the evidence at our disposal seems to testify that the gymnasiarchy in the rural gymnasia of Egypt developed from the presidency of simple private associations to a more institutionalised role, thus also attesting the evolution of the social status of the gymnasia themselves.

The rural gymnasium in Egypt was born thanks to private euergetism as a recreational centre for a few Hellenic immigrants who gave a local interpretation to the old classical (or rather traditional Macedonian ?) gymnasia institution, as an answer to the necessity of having a gathering place where to meet in association. It then became a communal centre for public feasts, contests, cults and ceremonies : a sort of institutionalised gentlemen's club. Still privately run and used by clubs and associations, it acquired public importance and character at local level as place of the community and was recognised and visited by central and local authorities : an official public meeting place of the Greek-speaking community, whose most visible members belonged to the rich or well-to-do class, with more or less tight connections to the army, the central bureaucracy and the Royal House.

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³¹ BGU VIII 1768 (64–44) and BGU VIII 1767 (64/63), from the Herakleopolite nome.

³² SB VI 8964 (Euhemeria [? Arsinoite nome], II AD) and BGU VIII 1849 (Herakleopolis, 48–46). See also Haber-mann (2004) 344 and Zucker (1930–1931) 494–495.

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