



GYMNASIARCHY: REGULATING AN ANCIENT GREEK GYMNASIUM AND PALAESTRA, DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES WITH OUR MODERN TIMES

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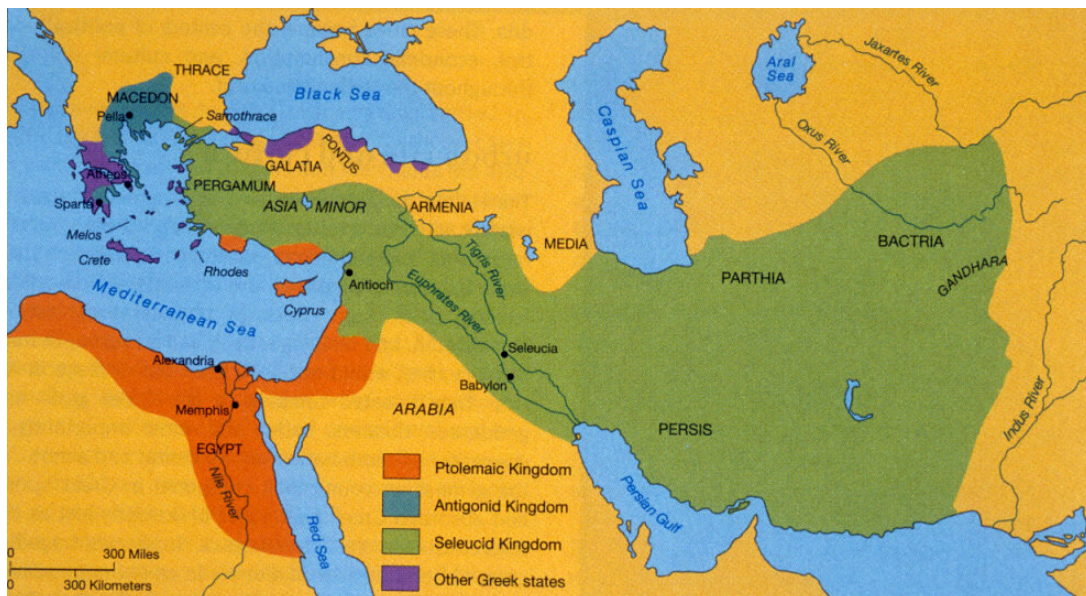
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INTRODUCTION

The Gymnasiarchical Law of Beroia, a two-sided marble stele of 175 cm and 40 cm wide with a horizontal crest, is a unique specimen about the functioning of the ancient Greek gymnasium and palaestra during Hellenistic times. It was discovered by accident in 1949 at Palaiochoros, Beroia (now days Veria, Macedonia, Greece), in a position identified as the area where the ancient *gymnasion* of the city was located. The inscription dates between 200 and 165 B.C. before the fall of the Hellenistic world to the Romans. It consists of 216 densely written verses and was found in second use as a cover of an early Christian tomb. The text of the front side due to damage is partially readable, while the rear face is more readable as it has suffered fewer wear. It is an exhibit of the Archaeological Museum of Veria. This paper seeks to find similarities and differences in operating and administrating an ancient Greek gymnasium and palaestra as well as the social standards during the Hellenistic era and today's educational institutions in Greece and internationally.

GENERAL HISTORICAL-SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE HELLENISTIC ERA: The Hellenistic period (323-31 B.C.), is characterized by the spread of the Greek language (in the form of the Common Hellenistic) and of the Greek way of life in the East, where the center of gravity of Hellenism was shifted. For the first time a unification of the Mediterranean world is established in a model which later on was adopted by the Romans.



Source: <https://www.usu.edu/markdamen/ClasDram/chapters/051clasgk.htm>

The political and social organization during that time changed with the division of the ancient Greek World into kingdoms. In the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. there are three types of governing in the Eastern Mediterranean:

1. **The Hellenistic kingdoms.** The Ptolemaic kingdom (ancient Egypt), the Seleucid Empire (former Persian Empire), in mainland Greece the kingdom of Macedon and in Asia Minor the Kingdom of Pergamon.
2. **Autonomous city-states.** Many City-states continued to be autonomous, such as Athens, Sparta, Rhodes and Delos.
3. **Federated states.** *Συμπολιτείες* (sympoliteíes) were federations involved in a central government which controlled foreign policy and military affairs, while leaving most of the local governing to the city states. These federations were the Aetolian League (est. 370 BC), the Achaean League (est. 280 BC), the Boeotian league, the "Northern League" (Byzantium, Chalcedon, Heraclea Pontica and Tium) and the "Nesiotic League" of the Cyclades.

The cities of the Macedonian kingdom (to which Veria belonged), although not completely autonomous (since they were constituent parts of a kingdom), were each governed by their own civic government which had the right to formally make decisions on behalf of the entire community. S. M. Murray (2018), p. 37. In such a political environment the legislation of the *Gymnasiarchy* was contacted.



The plain of Thessaloniki during the 1st century B.C. according to Struck (Konstantinidis K. 1989)

ANALYSING THE LAW: This fragmented epigraphic text is of unique importance, since it is the only example of a complete law, giving us information's on how the Hellenistic Gymnasium and palaestra functioned as well as the importance that city authorities gave to the athletic development of its youth. It was a code of conduct and essentially set the standards for behavior as well as the punishment for non-compliance with the law.



Picture 1 - The Palaestra of ancient Messene (Peloponnese 3rd century BC)

On the front side (face A) of the *stèle* the passing of the law is recorded as well as the oath to be sworn by the officials, while the actual law is engraved on the rear (face B) and more readable side of the inscription, where the regulating conditions of the "gymnasion" are specified in detail. Authority over everyone and everything falls primarily to the gymnasiarch, who can impose penalties which included monetary fines and flogging among other things.

The "law" administrated and regulated the following:

- The way the Gymnasiarch (director of the gymnasion-headmaster) was elected
- His qualifications and responsibilities (rights and obligations)
- The oath given

- The selection of the pedotribes (educators) – their duties and obligations
- The disciplinary responsibilities of the trainees
- The exclusion of a large number of social groups
- The organization of religious festivals and athletic competitions

Paidotribēs (παιδοτρίβης/'boy-trainer') were originally responsible for the sports training of boys in the *palaestra* (wrestling-school, sports grounds). From the time of Plato onward, palaestrai are recorded that are named after their paidotribai. Employed in gymnasia, they may also have trained professional athletes. A distinction was made from teachers of gymnastic exercises (gymnastēs) and teachers of athletes (aleíptes).

The gymnasiarch, whose duties and responsibilities were very serious and had to be exercised with a high sense of responsibility and ethos, was proposed and chosen by the city. The head of this institution had to be between thirty and sixty years of age. An indication of the prestige and prominence that this position gave to the appointed citizen was the recorded religious oath which he was called to take before the city authorities and the people. Ethos (ἦθος; *êthos, character*) was primarily a philosophical concept and as such concerned man's free actions with regard to specific moral criteria. It was accordingly the result of a decision to behave in a certain way and it conferred merit upon the actor depending on the degree to which that behaviour corresponded to the relevant ideal of virtue. In the literary field, ethos served to characterize the different people in a work, whereas in rhetoric it had from the earliest times a fundamental function for persuading and convincing.

The law also regulates the selection of the *Paidotribes* (educators). The disciplinary responsibilities of both trainers and trainees, as well as the Gymnasiarch himself. Penalties are also provided for trainers if they are inconsistent in their working hours.

The ones attending the gymnasium were generally male, offspring's of free citizens and of higher social class. The law provides details on the activities of the trainees, who were obligated to daily exercise in wrestling, in the use of the javelin, archery and armed close combat. They were divided in different age groups, the "παῖδες" (*paides* 14-18 years), the "νεανίσκοι ἢ ἔφηβοι" (*neaniskoi or epheboi* 18-20 years) and the "νέοι και ἄνδρες" (*neoi and andres* 20-30 years). It was forbidden for the different age groups to interact, the strict order in which the groups trained was predetermined.



Picture 2a,b-Στλεγγίς (stlengís): Scraper, to remove the oil and dirt from the skin in the bath or after the exercises of the Palaestra. Exhibits of the Archeological Museum of Veria.

Social discrimination is also visible in the content of the text, certain social groups were forbidden from entering the Gymnasium and Palaestra, many of them with good reason since the moral integrity and *ethos* of the youth was paramount. Not allowed to strip himself in the gymnasium is a slave, a freedman, nor the sons of such, or an apalaistros («ἀπάλαιστρος»), or prostitutes, tradesmen in the agora or the sons of such, drunks, nor madmen.

The gymnasium (Greek: γυμνάσιον) in Ancient Greece functioned as a training facility for competitors in public game(s). It was also a place for socializing and engaging in intellectual pursuits. The name comes from the Ancient Greek term *gymnós* meaning "naked". Only adult males were allowed to use the gymnasia. Athletes

competed nude, a practice which was said to encourage aesthetic appreciation of the male body, and to be a tribute to the gods. *Gymnasia* and *palestrae* (wrestling schools) were under the protection and patronage of Heracles, Hermes and, in Athens, Theseus.

A *palaestra*, also *palestra*, (*παλαίστρα*) was the site of ancient Greek wrestling schools. Events that did not require a lot of space, such as boxing and wrestling, were practised there. The *palaestra* functioned both independently and as a part of public *gymnasia*; a *palaestra* could exist without a *gymnasium*, but no *gymnasium* could exist without a *palaestra*.

Apalaistros is an interesting word (*ἀπάλαιστρ*). The word, a complex adjective consisting of the word *palaestra* (*«Παλαίστρα»*), probably meaning the foreign in the ways of the *palaestra*. Similar to the other complex adjective *αγύμναστος* (*agýmnastos*) which in Ancient Greek meant, unexercised, unfit, untrained, one lacking practice, a word still in use in Modern Greek with the same meaning.

According to Gauthier & Hatzopoulos (1993, p. 19), the term *apalaistros* means a person who, although of citizen status, cannot practise in the *gymnasion*, perhaps due to a physical infirmity, and is therefore a person exempted. While the manual of exhibits for visiting schools, of the Archaeological Museum of Veria translates the word as “the ones unrelated to wrestling”.

If any of those mentioned above entered the *gymnasion* and this was in the knowledge of the *gymnasiarch*, or to use a phrase of the original text, allows them to be anointed (with olive oil), then he was heavily fined (1000 drachmas) and punished. No one is allowed to insult or speak badly to the *gymnasiarch*; otherwise he is punished with a fine of 50 drachmas. If someone hits the *gymnasiarch* he is fined with 100 drachmas, as well as those present during the episode, who are obligated by the law to intervene (or if possible prevent the assault), but did not do so.



Picture 3 - Face A of the stele



Picture 4 - Face B of the stele

Another important duty of the *gymnasiarch* was to organize religious festivals three times annually, with most important the one dedicated to god Hermes “*Τα Ἑρμαία*” (“The Hermaia”). He appoints a Committee (“*ἱεροποιοί*”) consisting of three men elected by lot, with the duty to carry out the contests and the imposition of a fine for malpractice. He appoints prizes for “*εὐεξίαν*” (vigour), “*εὐταξίαν*” (discipline) and “*φιλοπονίαν*” (diligence) for students who are up to 30 years of age.

The criteria of success in the competition of «*εὐεξίαν*» (vigour) were a strong and healthy body, well developed and symmetric. Accordingly, for “*εὐταξίαν*” (discipline) the most disciplined of the students in the *gymnasion* is rewarded and finally for “*φιλοπονίαν*” (diligence) the one that had trained the hardest during that year. The winners of the day wear a crown made of olive branches, or a red ribbon if one so chooses. During the festivities a torch relay “*λαμπαδηφορία*” by groups of children and adolescents takes place. (Verse 60).

Based on the contents and the general spirit of the Gymnasiarchal Law, the character and orientation of the Gymnasion of Veria in the 2nd century BC, was primarily military. By analyzing this unique finding we can clearly see differences as well as similarities between the standards and ethics of this time period and in nowadays Greece and the world in general.

In our modern world, Human Rights are constituted and considered a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. Although until the late 20th century discrimination by race, color, sex and social status was still a reality, although in some countries basic rights are being violated even today, fundamental human rights are universally protected. The notion that someone would be forbidden from entering an athletic facility, as it was the case in the “Gymnasion of Veria”, on the account of one’s social status or his line of work may seem incomprehensible to us, but one has to take under account the standards and ethics of this time period before judging harshly. Off course even in our times there are cases where one cannot enter an institution without being a member, sometimes determent by ones financial and social status, nevertheless the right of every individual to physical exercise is not questioned.

The training of the youth in the gymnasium was for physical and military preparation for enrolment in the king’s army, where as today in Greece and worldwide the purpose of physical exercise in educational institutions is to insure the student’s health as well as teaching them the importance of lifelong exercise. Specialized military orientated schools do function in many countries but are not for the general population.

As we have seen the Gymnasiarch is elected by the city, according to the law of the time, something not practiced today where the head of an institution is appointed by Boards of Education or in the case of Greece by the Ministry of Education. The head of the institution at that era had a very important and sacred duty and took his administration very seriously. His position gave him great powers in managing the *gymnasion*, rewarding those who earned recognition and punishing, even physically, those who did not follow the law. Physical punishment as a practice in educational institutions may have been abolished since, but consequence for not complying with regulations still remains a method of keeping order in all athletic and sports organizations. Rewarding with symbolic gifts for excelling in athletic and other competitions was among the duties of the heads of the institution and the authorities. Virtues obtained through physical education and competition were awarded in the ancient *Gymnasion* of Veria, with the purpose to prepare and train obedient soldiers. The goal of building character and cultivating virtues in students is an integral part of physical education and athletic competition and is awarded even today. Although today, the orientation of educational institutions in Greece and in the world is to prepare citizens and not soldiers.

What was and still is essential, is the protection of the youth from physical advances of sexual nature. Also unchanged and fundamental in the evolution of athletic institutions from the Classical times of Athens and the city states through to Macedonia and the Hellenistic era and finally to our times, remains the need to organize as efficient as possible the governing of an athletic institution.

The text of “The Gymnasiarchal Law of Beroia”

Face A: When Hippokrates, son of Nikokrates, was chief magistrate, on the nineteenth of the month Apellaios (the second month of the Makedonian calender, approximating to November) the assembly having been convened, Zopyros, son of Amyntas, the gymnasiarch, Asklepiades, son of Heras, Kallipos, son of Hippostratos, have proposed; since all the other magistracies are exercised according to the law and in those city-states in which there are gymnasia and anointing (Anointing, throughout the law, does not mean only the act of applying olive oil on the body; it denotes, more generally, the participation in the activities of the gymnasion) the laws of the gymnasiarchs are deposited in the public archives, it is proper the same to be done in our polis and to put what we have given to the *exetastai* in the *gymnasion*, being inscribed on a *stele*, in the same manner another copy is to be deposited in the public archives; for, when this has been done, the younger people will be restrained and will obey the leader and their revenues will not be wasted, the gymnasiarchs elected each year being, according to the law, the officials and liable. The *polis* has decided that the law of the gymnasiarchs put forward by Zopyros, son of Amyntas, the gymnasiarch, Asklepiades, son of Heras, Kallipos, son of Hippostratos, will be valid and will be put in the *gymnasion* on a *stele*. It was approved on the first of the month Peritos (the fourth month of the Makedonian calendar, approximating to January).
Law of the gymnasiarch: The *polis* shall elect a gymnasiarch, not younger than thirty years old not older than sixty years old, at the same time that other magistrates are elected, and the elected gymnasiarch shall exercise his magistracy having sworn the following oath: “I swear by Zeus, Earth (*Ge*), Sun (*Helios*), Apollon, Herakles, Hermes, that I shall exercise the duties of gymnasiarch, according to the law of gymnasiarchs, and when there is no provision in the law according to my judgement of what is just and moral, without favouring friends or harming enemies against the law and I shall not myself appropriate the existing revenues of the young people or deliberately allow anyone else to do so, in any way under any pretext; if I act according to the oath I shall be blessed with abundance, if not, the opposite.” The elected gymnasiarch, when he is to assume his post, shall

convene an assembly in the *gymnasion* on the first day of Dios (the first month of the makedonian calendar, approximating to October) in which he will propose three men to be elected by showing of hands; these three, having sworn the following oath, will, together with the gymnasiarch supervise the youths, according to the instructions they receive, and will follow the gymnasiarch every day to the gymnasium [...] of the gymnasiarch with what he will need [...] and the second day of Dios [...] the politarchai and the *exetastai* [...] the *gymnasion* together with the aforementioned men [...] from them [...] in the anointing and so [...] and if anyone does not do any of the above, he will pay [...] and the revenue collector (*praktor*) will exact the penalty, the *exetastai* having signed, and if they do not sign they are to pay a fine equal to the penalty and one-third shall go to the denouncer.

Provision of wood: [...] together with the *exetastai** [...] the existing property [...] deciding a case [...] we swear by Zeus, Earth (*Ge*), Sun (*Helios*), Appolon, Herakles, Hermes [...] and when there is no provision in the law according to our judgement of what is just and moral, without appropriating the existing revenues of the young people or favouring friends or harming enemies, against the law, in any way or under any pretext, if I act according to the oath I shall be blessed with abundance, if not, the opposite [...] of the boys and the elected gymnasiarch...

Face B: No one younger than thirty years old is allowed to strip himself after the signal has been lowered (probably a kind of a flag was raised, perhaps accompanied by a sound) unless the leader (*aphegoumenos*) agrees; when the signal is lifted nobody else is to strip himself, unless the leader agrees, and nobody is to be anointed in another athletic arena (*palaistra*) in the polis; if he does, the gymnasiarch will reprimand him and will impose a fine of fifty drachmas; the persons frequenting the *gymnasion* will obey the person appointed by the gymnasiarch as the leader, as they obey the gymnasiarch; the person who does not obey, if he is not a free citizen, the gymnasiarch will whip him, and if he is a free citizen the gymnasiarch shall impose a fine. The ephebes and those less than twenty-two years old will practice every day javelin throwing and archery, when the boys are anointed, and likewise, if there is a need, in other disciplines.

About boys Neaniskoi (in the law, young men 20-30 years old are designated as *neoi* or *neaniskoi*) are not permitted either to enter the area of boys or to speak to them; if they do, the gymnasiarch will reprimand and impose a fine to anyone violating this provision; the *paidotribai* shall come twice a day to the gymnasium, at the time the gymnasiarch will fix, unless one of them is ill or has any other immediate occupation; if not, he is to inform the gymnasiarch; if it seems that any of the *paidotribai* is negligent and does not come to the boys at the fixed time, the gymnasiarch shall impose a fine of five drachmas for each day; and the gymnasiarch will be responsible for punishing the undisciplined boys and the *paidagogoi* (slave with responsibility for a child) if they are not free citizens, with lashes, and if they are free, to impose a fine on them; the *paidagogoi* have the duty to examine the boys three times a year every four months and the gymnasiarch shall appoint judges who shall award a crown of olive leaves to the winner. *apalaistros* means a person who, although of citizen status, cannot practise in the *gymnasion*, perhaps due to a physical infirmity, and is therefore a person exempted. People not allowed to take part in the *gymnasion*: any slaves, freedmen or their sons, any male prostitute, any *apalaistros* (means a person who, although of citizen status, cannot practise in the *gymnasion*, perhaps due to a physical infirmity, and is therefore a person exempted), anyone practising a trade in the agora; neither any drunkard or mentally ill person permitted to strip himself in the *gymnasion*. If the gymnasiarch allows any of the above mentioned to be anointed, deliberately or after being denounced to him, he shall pay a thousand drachmas; in order that the amount will be exacted, the denouncer is to lodge a complaint with the *exetastai* of the polis, and they will notify the revenue collector (*praktor*) and if they do not notify or the revenue collector does not exact, they are to pay an equal fine and to give one-third of it to the denouncer; if the gymnasiarch thinks that the complaint is unjust, he can raise objections in the ten days the case will be decided in the appropriate court; and the future gymnasiarchs shall obstruct the people who want to be anointed despite the laws, if not they will be liable to the same fine. Nobody is allowed to insult the gymnasiarch in the *gymnasion*; if anyone does, he shall pay fifty drachmas; if anyone beats the gymnasiarch in the *gymnasion*, the people present shall stop him and not allow him to continue, and likewise the offender shall pay a hundred drachmas and, moreover, he shall be liable to prosecution according to the existing laws; and if anyone present does not help, although he can, he shall pay fifty drachmas. About the festival of Hermes: The gymnasiarch shall organize the festival in honour of Hermes in the month of Hyperberetaios (the twelfth month of the Makedonia calendar), approximating to September and he shall make a sacrifice to Hermes and he shall offer as a prize a weapon and three other (prizes) for vigour and discipline and diligence to those up to thirty years of age and the gymnasiarch shall make a list of seven people from those in the gymnasium, to judge on the vigour, and from those seven, three will be allotted to judge after swearing by Hermes that they decide fairly, who has the best shaped body, without any favour or enmity; and if the allotted persons do not judge and do not swear that they are not capable (of judging), the gymnasiarch shall impose a fine of ten drachmas to the person who fails and he shall replace him with someone else chosen by lot; the gymnasiarch will decide about discipline and diligence, having sworn by Hermes, about who was, in his opinion, the most disciplined among those up to thirty years of age, and about diligence who was, in his opinion, the most diligent in this year among those up to thirty

years of age; and the winners that day shall wear the crown and they can be decorated with a ribbon; the gymnasiarch shall organize during the festival of Hermes, a torch-race for boys and those between twenty and thirty years of age; the cost of the weapons will be paid by the existing revenue. For the celebration of the festival of Hermes, the *hieropoioi** will receive from every person frequenting the *gymnasion* up to two drachmas and they will organize the feast in the gymnasium; they are to elect their successors who will be *hieropoioi* of Hermes the following year. And the *paidotribai* shall sacrifice to Hermes, at the same time as the *hieropoioi*, receiving not more than one drachma from each boy and they will prepare portions of raw meat from the animal to be sacrificed, and the *hieropoioi* and the gymnasiarch shall not provide any spectacle during drinking. The prizes which the winners receive shall be dedicated, within eight months into the term of the next gymnasiarch; if they do not, the gymnasiarch shall impose a fine of a hundred drachmas and he shall punish with lashes and fines those who cheated and competed unfairly, and similarly if anyone hands down victory to someone else. Election of *lampadarchs*. The gymnasiarch is going to elect three lampadarchs from those in the *gymnasion*, in the month of Gorpiasos (the eleventh month of the Macedonian calendar, approximating to August) and the elected shall provide olive oil to the *neaniskoi*, each for ten days; and he shall elect three *lampadarchs* among the boys, who shall provide olive oil, each for ten days; and if anyone of the elected or his father or his brothers or the orphanophylakes (Guardians of the orphans). It was their responsibility to protect the property of the minors from maladministration objects on the ground that the individual is unable to be a *lampadarch*, he will be excused having sworn an oath within five days after the election; if he does not perform the duties of a lampadarch or does not swear the oath, he shall have to pay fifty drachmas and in addition he shall provide olive oil and perform the duties of a *lampadarch*; and equally if the person who was excused seems to have sworn with no valid motive, after having been found guilty by the gymnasiarch and the young men, he shall pay fifty drachmas and he will provide olive oil and perform the duties of a *lampadarch*; and the gymnasiarch shall elect another *lampadarch* to replace the person who presented a valid excuse, and he shall organize the torch-race for boys, selecting among those who frequent the *gymnasion*, those who seem to him to be qualified, in the same way torch-race of the the *neaniskoi* will be organized. About brabeutai: The gymnasiarch will appoint as judges of the games persons who seem to him to be qualified, in the torch-race of the festival of Hermes and in the long-distance run and in the other games, and if anyone accuses one of the judges and claims that he was wronged, the judge shall be liable to prosecution according to the laws of the *polis*.

The gymnasiarch shall administer the revenues of the *gymnasion* and he shall pay the expenses from the revenues; at the end of his term in office, he is to put down the revenue on a board and anything that was paid in the way of fine or of judicial decision and the expenses, and display this board in the *gymnasion* in the month of Dios (the first month of the Makedonian calendar, approximating to October) in the following year, and he shall give his accounts to the *exetastai* of the *polis* every four months and it shall be allowed, if anyone wants, to take part in the scrutiny of his accounts; he shall give any surplus to his successor within thirty days after the end of his tenure; and if he does not provide the accounts or the surplus as it is prescribed, he shall pay to the *gymnasion* a thousand drachmas, and the revenue collector (*practor*) shall exact the money after notification by the *exetastai* and the gymnasiarch will equally submit his accounts and the surplus. The person who buys the revenue of *gloios* (the mixture of olive oil and sweat was called *gloios*. The right to collect it and dispose of it was sold according to the law) will assume the function of the guardian of the athletic arena (*palaistra*), obeying the orders of the gymnasiarch, for what is proper in the gymnasium, and if he does not obey or he is undisciplined, the gymnasiarch shall whip him. And if anyone steals anything from the *gymnasion*, he shall be liable to the same punishment as in the case of being convicted for sacrilege in the appropriate lawcourt. The gymnasiarch shall write the reason for all the fines he imposes, he shall proclaim them in the *gymnasion*, he shall display the names of the fined on a whitened board and he shall notify the revenue collector; and the revenue collector, having exacted the fine, will give it to the gymnasiarch; and if anyone claims that he was unjustly fined, he shall be allowed to raise his objections and be judged by the appropriate authorities and if the fined person wins, the gymnasiarch shall pay back the fine increased by fifty per cent; and in addition the one-fifth and the one-tenth. Anyone willing can hold the gymnasiarch accountable within twenty-four months following the end of his tenure, and the judgment on these affairs will be issued by the appropriate lawcourts. Handed down by the *politarchai*. There was one vote against this decree.

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