Interpreting the Plural ‘Gymnasia’ within the Context of Ruler Cult: Buildings or Festivals?

Summary

Gymnasiarchy turned into an euergetic magistracy of a few wealthy families in late Hellenistic and Roman periods. Inscriptions from Asia Minor record iterated gymnasiarchies over several years and even monthly or daily periods of office, and describe gymnasiarchs who supervised several, even as many as 7, gymnasia simultaneously. The scanty archaeological evidence challenges the idea that so many gymnasia really constituted buildings within a single polis-territory. This paper suggests to interpret such multiple gymnasia in the sense of event cycles or small-scale periods of gymnasiarchy within the festivities of ruler cult. Already in Classical times, γυμνάσια could be generally taken to mean bodily exercises. A similar meaning may apply to the epigraphic record from the Roman East.

Keywords: Gymnasiarchie; Moschion; Cratippus; Pasparos; Nikephoria

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According to a recently discovered inscription from Roman Syria, a gymnasiarchy that spanned several provinces existed alongside the traditional civic gymnasias. This gymnasiarchy was related to the ruler cult. During the same time in Pergamon, a priest of the imperial cult appears to have held the function as ‘gymnasiarch of the Sebasta Rhomaiia in the five gymnasias’. Also, the formulation used in another Pergamene career inscription, according to which an office-holder was in charge of no fewer than ‘six gymnasias’ within the context of the provincial games of Asia also sounds somewhat unusual. Are such deviations from the standard designations of civic gymnasias just exceptional cases? Research to date has mainly and – according to the Classical and Hellenistic Periods – legitimately studied ‘the gymnasium’ (always expressed in the singular) within the context of its architectural features and development. Whether differences based upon the respective geographical or institutional conditions play a role is seldom investigated. The epigraphic tradition raises many questions concerning the different use of the term γυμνασίον from Hellenism to the Roman Imperial period. In particular, if we examine gymnasiarchies within the context of supra-regional ruler cults and consider the different usages of the plural ‘gymnasia’ from Classical times onwards, the prevalent view that 1.) the competence of gymnasiarchs was restricted to the territories of individual poleis and, 2.) the term γυμνασίῳς was exclusively used to denote buildings, starts to crumble.

1 A supra-regional gymnasiarchy in Syria

An honorary inscription from Tyre dated to the local year 169 (= 43/44 AD) represents the first explicit evidence of a “gymnasiarch of the four eparchies”, Δώδεκα ημιαρχήσας τῶν Δ ἐπαρχιῶν / τὸ ἘΣΡ ἔτος (‘Diodoros, son of Idas, was gymnasiarch of the four eparchies, (local) year 169’). The ambiguous Greek term ἐπαρχίαι (or provinciae in Latin) refers primarily to the administrative sub-divisions within the gubernatorial province of Syria (such as Phoenice or Comagene). However, studies to date have suggested that gymnasiarch’s services usually did not cover groups outside a particular polis, as stated by previous scholars such as H.-I. Marrou or P. Gauthier. W. Ameling even suggests that ‘acting for the gymnasium does not apply to any group beyond the polis’. In contrast to this, the new Tyrian inscription mentions four eparchies as the area of authority covered by the gymnasiarch Diodoros; this area went far beyond Tyre. The clarifying clause τῶν Δ ἐπαρχιῶν in the inscription has proved to be an addition made by another stonecutter in a comparably careless execution, as the inscription seems to be simply a grafitto. It is not possible to determine when this addition was made. In any case, someone wished to specify the extraordinary area of responsibility of Diodoros’s office after his magistracy as gymnasiarch.

This interesting testimony from Tyre doesn’t stand alone in Syria’s epigraphic documentation: an inscription from Gerasa (today’s Jerash, in Jordan) provides the earliest parallel reference for such supra-civic offices in the context of ruler cult in Roman Syria. The stele, dat-

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1 See most recently the comprehensive survey of Curty 2015 on the Hellenistic inscriptions honouring gymnasiarchs.
3 Gehlke 2004, 413, points out that the situation was more varied and complex: “Eher könnte man von ‘Hellenistischen Gymnasien’ statt von ‘dem Hellenistischen Gymnasium’ sprechen. Anders gesagt: Die grundlegende und primäre Problematik im Forschungsfeld Gymnasion besteht jetzt eher darin, das Feld von Gemeinsamkeiten und Differenzen abzustecken [...]. Hierin sehe ich eine wichtige Aufgabe”; cf. also 418–419.
4 I. Tyros II 53–54 no. 54 incl. fig. 54 a–d; Vitale 2014, 172–174 incl. fig. 1; also cf. Rey-Coquais 1981, 32; Sartre 2004, 173–174; most recently Daubner 2015, 159–162. Year 169 is based on an enumeration of years from the moment of its acquisition of autonomia in 126/125 BC.
5 In Asia Minor and Syria, in particular, a gubernatorial provincia/επαρχίαι was subdivided into several administrative sub-provinces that were likewise called provinciae/ἐπαρχίαι. On this particular territorial arrangement of the Roman administrative geography and the corresponding denominations of the administrative units, cf. Marck 1993; Ziegler 1999, 157–153; Butcher 2003, 114; Marek 2003; Sartre 2004, 179; Marek 2010, passim; Vitale 2012a, passim; Vitale 2013, 43–48; in detail Vitale 2016, 85–89.
7 Ameling 2004, 130: “Handeln für das Gymnasium gilt keiner über die Polis hinausreichenden Gruppe”.
8 Sartre 2004, 178, reaches the logical conclusion “que Tyr abrite des concours communs aux quatre éparques, mais que ce n’était pas encore le cas sous Claude”. Under Claudius, the gubernatorial province of Syria contained only three eparchies, namely SyriaPhoeniceCilicia, as Caligula had already returned Comagene to his friend Antiochos IV. as a kingdom in 38 AD and Judea was not involved in organising the provincial imperial cult. However, during the first century AD, Cappadocia may at least temporarily have formed one of the “four eparchies” of Syria in question.
ing from the early part of Hadrian’s reign, names Diogenes, son of Emmeganos, as a “(former) priest of the four eparchies in the metropolis Antiocheia” (ἱερασάμενος τῶν τεσσάρων ἐπαρχείων ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῇ μητροπόλι). Likewise, the respective centres of the provincial imperial cult and workplaces of the γυμνασίαρχοι or ἱερεῖς τῶν ἐπαρχείων bore similar titles. For example, Laodicea had literally the privilege of being “metropolis of the four provinces”, as shown by city coinage from Caracalla to Elagabalus. The full title reads colonia Laodicea metropolis IIII provinciarum on coins.10

Diodoros’s designation as a gymnasiarch τῶν Δ ἐπαρχιῶν raises a number of questions that we are not really able to answer, given the currently sparse documentary evidence from the former Seleucid Empire.11 In any case, it is unlikely that the Tyrian gymnasiarch was simultaneously or consecutively in charge of the gymnasia of several subdivisions of the province of Syria, as the ἱερασάμενος in Antioch on the Orontes was not the federal ‘chief priest’ of all the temples in Syria either, but was chosen to direct and (co-)finance the jointly held events of the imperial cult. Rather, Diodoros must have been referred to by this title on the occasion of the ‘common/federal games of the four provinces’ held in Tyre – perhaps, as a so-called ‘festival gymnasiarch’.12 There are occasional hints that this function of a ‘Festgymnasiarch’, whose ‘office’ lasted as long as the festivals, also existed within the koina of Macedonia, Lycia and Cyprus.13 As there are no exact parallels for such a gymnasiarchy, it remains unclear whether Diodoros’s gymnasiarch title was based not only on an occasional ‘Festgymnasiarchie’ – the definition of which is vague in any case – but rather on a permanent official function, an annual or monthly termed ἄρχη, because provincial assemblies convened at least once a year in the major seats of the provincial commonalties.

2 Multiple gymnasias on the provincial level in Pergamon

Comparably numerical descriptions of areas of responsibility within the context of the provincial ruler cult, such as those found in the Syrian inscriptions for Diodoros and Diogenes, can be found in several provinces of Asia Minor. In particular, the function of gymnasiarchs, who could supervise several “gymnasia” at once or one “gymnasion” for the entire province,14 is attested within the context of the provincial imperial cult in inscriptions from Pergamon,15 one of the earliest metropoleis of the province of Asia.16 During the 1st century AD, for example, Pergamon – the former royal seat of the

9 SEG 7, 847 – Jones 1928, 137 no. 16; on this, cf. the extensive commentary in Sartre 2004, 167–186. In Syria – similarly to the koinon of Galatia under Augustus – the highest priestly offices were not referred to literally as ἄρχη, but merely as ἱερασάμενος, “priesthood”; Despite the different wording of ἱερασάμενος versus ἱερεύοντα, it is obvious that the functions of the ‘ordinary’ priesthood were equivalent to those of the so-called ‘arch-priesthood’ in other provinces. In fact, the graphical evidence of the title ἱερεύοντα (τοῦ κοινοῦ) τῆς ἐπαρχείας in Thrace provides an exemplary touchstone for our argument; IGBlg 5, 5392, ll. 3–4 cf. SEG 55, 1377, 1386. In an agonistic inscription for the athlete Artemidoros, dating from the Flavian period, Antioch is already referred to as the host city of the joint provincial games in association with the κοινὸς Συρίας Κιλικίας Φοινείκης ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ (IAG 183–186 no. 67, ll. 15–16).

10 The title appears abbreviated as METR(O) IIII – METR IIII PROV – METROPOL IIII PR; cf. Meyer 1987–1988, 89–92, no. 115, 116, 119, 122, 129; Lindgren and Kovacs 1985, 111 no. 2098; see the full discussion by Vitale 2013, 125–112 and, more recently Vitale 2013, 96–99; Vitale 2014, 172–174. Accordingly, in the period from Emperor Claudius to the first half of the third century AD, like Antioch or Laodicea, the Phoenician city of Tyre, workplace of a “gymnasiarch of the four eparchies”, served as the metropolis of an administrative area covering several eparchies. We know of at least one other case of ‘pan-provincial’ organization, the provincial assembly of the so-called τεσσάρων eparchiae (Cilicia-Iasauria-Lyciaonia), which was not restricted to the individual sub-provinces alone but covered the whole territory of the gubernatorial province. E.g. Tarsos, in inscriptions and coins, styled itself ‘first and greatest and most beautiful metropolis set before the three eparchies of Cilicia, Isauria and Lycaonia, twice pious’ (ἡ πρώτη καὶ μεγίστη καὶ καλλίστη μητρόπολις τῶν γ΄ ἐπαρχείων Κιλικίας Ἰσαυρίας Λυκαονίας προκαθεζομένη καὶ β΄ κοις ὀκορός), in competition with Anazarbos that claimed identical privileges; for Tarsos: IGR 1, 879–880; 881; IGR 12; for Anazarbos: Sayar 2000, 23–26 no. 13; cf. Sayar 2000, 18–19 no. 4 (Caracalla); 22–24 no. 11 (Macrinus); 24–25 no. 12 (Elagabal). See the summary in Vitale 2013, 29–30, 43–48; according to Sartre 2004, 168, besides Arabia and Syria, this “supra-provincial” commonality would have had to include the neighbouring gubernatorial provinces of Judea and Cilicia; see Vitale 2012a, 62–65 on the provincial koinon of Asia and Vitale 2012a, 313–319, on the provincial assembly of the so-called τεσσάρων eparchiae (Cilicia-Iasauria-Lyciaonia).

11 On the amount of source material, see Daubner 2015, 149–150.


13 Macedonia: Nigdelis 1995, 179–182; Libya: IGR III, 495; cf. Foulis VII, no. 69 and 233; Cyprus: Nigdelis 1995, 181 incl. n. 60. However, Nigdelis 1995, 181, notes that this liturgy did not exist in all eastern koina in the same way.


15 Already pointed out by J.-P. Rey-Coquais in I. Tyros II, 34.

Attalids – presents C. Iulius Sacerdos as the “gymnasiarch of the twelfth Sebasta Rhomaia in the five gymnasia” (γυμνασιάρχος τῶν δωδεκάτων Σεβαστῶν Ῥωμαίων τῶν πέντε γυμνασίων). 17 M. Tullius Cratippus was appointed as “gymnasiarch in the common/federal games of the province of Asia for the six gymnasia” (γυμνασιάρχος ἐν τῷ κοινῷ τῆς Ἀσίας τῶν ἑξ γυμνασίων) between 18/17 BC and 1.4 AD. 18

Even though the Tyrian gymnasiarchy “of the four provinces” does not correspond word for word to these multiple gymnasiarchies from Pergamon, they do have in common a close connection with the provincial imperial cult and to the events associated with it. The combination of C. Iulius Sacerdos’s titles in particular provides tangible evidence for identifying ‘provincial’ gymnasiarchies in Pergamon: as ‘temple warden’, πρεσβύτερος, of the imperial temple of the Goddess Roma and priest of Tiberius, Sacerdos was simultaneously “gymnasiarch of the five gymnasia within the twelfth Sebasta Rhomaia” 19 The Sebasta Rhomaia are attested in inscriptions from 20 BC to the 2nd century AD, 20 according to Cassius Dio these ‘holy competitions’ were inaugurated in the year 29/28 BC. 21 Most probably, they are an older and/or alternative designation for the ‘common (provincial/federal) games’ (the so-called κοινὸς Ἀσίας). 22 The Sebasta Rhomaia were not just a civic festival, but explicitly organised by the koinon of the province of Asia (τὰ Σεβαστὰ Ῥωμαία τὰ τιθέμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς Ἀσίας). 23 If we assume a penteteric sequence of the Sebasta Rhomaia, the twelfth edition superintended and, probably, also financed by Iulius Sacerdos must be dated to the year 14/16 AD. Logically, before Iulius Sacerdos held his office, other gymnasiarchs were responsible for the previous eleven Sebasta Rhomaia. This suggests that a specific gymnasiarch in Pergamon was set up for the regular holding of events within this context (besides the presidency over the provincial assembly and the provincial ‘arch-priesthood’ as well as other federal/provincial offices). Up to the late 2nd century AD, we are able to list seven festivals which were organised in Pergamon in connection with the ruler cult. 24 At least every year, province-wide festivals for the ruler cult were celebrated. Does the excessive number of ‘five (or seven; see below) gymnasia’ in Pergamon refer to such games? Did a ‘gymnasiarch of the five gymnasia’ supervise all the gymnasion users, especially the participating athletes, and the contests of five provincial festivals?

The respective festival or the cycle in which it was held seems to have been decisive in defining such ‘specialised’ gymnasiarchies. Perhaps, there were two levels of gymnasiarchical office-holding: one level of provincial gymnasiarchies and another level of merely civic gymnasiarchies.

Such multiple and supra-regional office holdings, which were linked to the ruler cult, constituted a significant difference to the early Hellenistic forms of gymnasiarchy, which formerly was a regular one-year magistracy limited to one gymnasion. 25 As the phrase ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων (“from his/her own funds”) appears in the imperial honorary decrees for gymnasiarchs comparatively more frequently than during Hellenism, scholars attribute these changes primarily to the increasing economic problems of the polis elites – ‘Mangel an Amtsträgern’ – 26 suggesting that the gymnasiarchy developed into an energetic-liturgical office held by a few wealthy families. 27 In fact, several (either consec-
that from the early Hellenistic period of the 1st century BC onwards, a model of magistrates' gymnasiarchies developed that differed from the liturgical gymnasiarchies of classical Athens (Schuler 2004, 172–178); over the course of the Imperial period, this office took on a more energetic and liturgical character once more and became the concern of a few wealthy families (for example, towards the end of the 3rd century AD in Egypt, the gymnasiarch was even awarded on a daily basis to different wealthy families (for example, towards the end of the 3rd century AD). The honorand, T. Claudius Pieron, was literally and δις γυμνασιαρχός δόμηται συνεδρίων Μακεδονίας καὶ πρῶτος τῆς ἐπαρχίας. Depending on our reading of the word order, the decision seems to reveal that he was appointed by the decision of the delegates of the Macedonian koινὸν to his office of gymnasiarch. This example fits well with

28 E.g. Quaest 1993, 316; Schuler 2004, 189–191. Cf. the commentary by Blümel in I. Iasos no. 84: followed by Schuler 2004, 190. However, at least there is no question of interpretation in these formulations, for the iteration of the office is made unequivocally clear as such in inscriptions by the use of numerical symbols and numerical words, usually as ordinals (e.g. IG V, 1, 555: ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ γυμνασιαρχεῖ). That gymnasiarchs were indeed gymnasial administrators, not only for the city-state involved, but also for other foreigners and for the Romans.

29 On the accommodation for groups from outside the polis, see Mango 2004, 275–278; similarly, Chaniotis 1995, 156–161; e.g. OGIS 319 = I. Sestos 1, II. 20–33: γυμνασιαρχὸς τε ἐπί τῆς τε εὐταξίας τῶν ἐφήβων καὶ τῶν νέων προοίμων, ἐπί τῆς τε ἄλλης εὐσχημορίας τῆς κατὰ τὸ γυμνασίου ἀντελάβετο καλῶς καὶ φιλοτίμως μηδὲνα παραλιπὼν οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐνοίκων αὐτῶν, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τῶν παρεπιμέλητων ξένων σὺν παισίν ἐλευθέροι.

30 The administrative use of the term ἐθνος is attested both in literary sources of the third century AD, for example in Cassius Dio (Freyburger-Galland 1997, 34–35 Sherwin-White 1973, 437–444: cf. part. Bertrand 1982, 173–174 incl. n. 56), as well as in inscriptions from the early Principate (Eck 2007, 197–198); see in general Vitale 2014; in detail, cf. Vitale 2012a, 31–38. The Lycian league in particular (Behrwald 2000, 170–173), but also the koine of Asia, Bithynia, Galatia and Macedonia (cf. Deininger 1965, 137 for the ἐθνος of the provinces of Asia (e.g. TAM 5.2.987), Lycia, Bithynia, Galatia, Macedonia) or Pamphylia (cf. Sahin 2004, 19–20 no. 294, 42–43 no. 311; Iplikçioğlu, G. Çelgin, and V. Çelgin 2007, 69–70 no. 13: see the discussion in Vitale 2012a, 275–277) were each referred to respectively as ἐθνὸς in imperial inscriptions, mostly as an alternative to the more common term koινὸν. On the accommodation for groups from outside the polis, see Mango 2004, 275–278; similarly, Chaniotis 1995, 156–161; e.g. OGIS 319 = I. Sestos 1, II. 20–33: γυμνασιαρχὸς τε ἐπί τῆς τε εὐταξίας τῶν ἐφήβων καὶ τῶν νέων προοίμων, ἐπί τῆς τε ἄλλης εὐσχημορίας τῆς κατὰ τὸ γυμνασίου ἀντελάβετο καλῶς καὶ φιλοτίμως μηδὲνα παραλιπὼν οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐνοίκων αὐτῶν, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τῶν παρεπιμέλητων ξένων σὺν παισίν ἐλευθέροι.

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the definition of gymnasiarchies as an ὑπηρεσία ἑθνικῆ in Hadrian’s constitution.

3 Multiple gymnasium on the civic level in Asia Minor

There are many epigraphic examples of multiple gymnasiarchies which do not reveal any direct link to the ruler cult or to province-wide events. However, they all point to a specific aspect of provincial gymnasiarchies: the listing of several gymnasium could also express cycles of events or terms of office (most likely monthly terms). During Hadrian’s reign, for example, a “gymnasiarch over the seven gymnasium” (γυμνασίαρχος τῶν ζ’ γυμνασίων)34 named Tib. Claudius Menogenes officiated in Pergamon. During the 1st century AD, the “participants of the third gymnasion” (μετέχοντες τοῦ τρίτου γυμνασίου) in the Lydian city of Thyateira honoured Tib. Claudius Antyllos, the “(former) gymnasiarch of all gymnasium” (γυμνασίαρχος πάντα τὰ γυμνάσια).35 In these cases, as in further cases of ‘three’, ‘four’ or ‘all’ gymnasium in Iasos, Perge or Miletus,36 some scholars argue that the honorands presided over different age categories, perhaps in different premises (παιδείς ἐφηβοῦ νέος πρεσβύτεροι).37 As it happens, the services provided by a multiple gymnasiarchy could have had beneficiaries other than just “age groups”, as seen e.g. in an honorary inscription from Miletus, where τῶν πολειτῶν are mentioned too,38 or an inscription from Kaunos that honours the “(former) gymnasiarch of all age groups and everyday class”.39 Nevertheless, the mention of several γυμνάσια need not necessarily and exclusively refer to several different ‘gymnasia’ in the sense of buildings or rooms for different age categories/groups of users. In the inscription from Thyateira, for instance, it is striking that the μετέχοντες (i.e. the “participants of the third gymnasion”) are not specified as a particular age category. The expression “third gymnasion” implies a rank or an order, which does not fit for buildings. A funerary inscription on a marble base from Tralleis dating from the second half of the first century AD provides a prime touchstone for this argument: “[Claudius Epigonion] financed from his own funds the first four-month period of the three gymnasium”.40 According to this, the gymnasiafi nanced a four-month period, namely the “first”: An entire year has 12 months that is exactly “three” four-month periods, which apparently correspond to the τρία γυμνάσια within the same phrase. This plural form cannot refer to buildings but refers to time periods of a gymnasiarch’s office.41

It is especially four-month terms of office that are illustrated by several inscriptions from Western Asia Minor. A so-called prophetes inscription from Didyma attests a four-month gymnasiarchy (ἐπὶ τετράμηνον) over three different groups of users at one time.42 Contemporary honorary inscriptions from Magnesia report separately both a four-month (τετράμηνον) and a two-month (δίμηνον) term of gymnasiarchal office for Moschion, son of Moschion.43 In Stratonikeia even daily terms of office are witnessed: An inscription of Aelia Glykina and
her husband Ti. Claudius Aristeas Menander (from the end of the second century AD) describes them as having been the “first” (πρῶτοι) in the city who held their (contemporaneous!) gymnasiarchies just during the two days of the annual procession called the κλειδός πομπή at the site of Hekate’s cult in Lagina in Stratonikeia. A further inscription from the early third century AD mentions “the key-bringing on the insurmountable day of the goddess in the sacred month.” Therefore, we can plausibly infer that Aelia Glykina and Ti. Claudius Aristeas Menander took their office as gymnasiarchs not only for two days (as emphasized by the inscription I. Stratonikeia 701) but formally for the whole duration of the “sacred month”: the gymnasiarchies of Aelia Glykina and Ti. Claudius Aristeas Menander was most probably a one-month magistracy. Thus, aside from different groups of users, a gymnasiarch could also preside over many events or finance monthly (or even daily?) small-scale periods of office respectively which were likewise called gymnasia.

4 Different usages of the plural gymnasia (classical period third century AD)

Similar different, technical-formulaic usages of the term gymnasion, especially in its plural form in the Greek East, had long been known from the Late Classical and Hellenistic literary records, as shown by F. Ferruti and Y.T. Tzifopoulos. For instance, in relevant text passages of Plato, Aristotle and the early imperial Greek geographer Strabo, the plural γυμνάσια could refer specifically to ‘bodily exercises’. Particularly in connection with Cretan gymnastic traditions of military training Aristoteles observes that slaves in Crete were conferred almost the same rights as free citizens, “except that they are forbidden gymnastic exercises (γυμνάσια) and the possession of arms.” Some centuries after Aristoteles, Strabo also stresses the fact that freeborn Cretans “were accustomed from childhood to the use of arms, and to endure fatigue. Hence they disregarded heat and cold, rugged and steep roads, blows received in gymnastic exercises and in set battles (ἐν γυμνασίοις καὶ μέχρις)”. The alternative usage of the term γυμνάσια, taken as meaning ‘bodily exercises (primarily for military purposes)’, is comparable to the different usage of the plural term δρόμοι (the singular form δρόμος originally meaning “racetrack”) in Classical Crete. According to the Byzantine grammarian Aristophanes (3rd century BC), the ephebes in Crete were simply called ἀπόδρομοι because, in contrast to an adult δρόμος, they weren’t sufficiently trained for the “common footraces” (κοινοὶ δρόμοι). Accordingly, the Suda, a 11th-century Byzantine lexicon, even explains that in Crete the plural terms δρόμοι and γυμνάσια were used with the same mean-
ing.53 However, this non-architectural word usage of “γυμνάσιον” does not apply only to the situation in Classical Crete because it’s not a question of local epigraphic habit or linguistic phenomenon within a specific period of time. Rather, it is a more general problem of our philological understanding. For the word γυμνάσιον already existed as a term in the general use for ‘bodily exercises’ in late Classical literature, for example in Herodotus, talking about Tisamenus’s training for athletic contests (ὁ μὲν δὴ ἀμαρτών τοῦ χρηστηρίου προσέχει γυμνασιασία ὡς ἀναφερόμενος γυμνικοὺς ἀγώνας),54 or in Hippocrates’s reflections on the treatment of dislocated limbs, particularly legs (οὗτοι δὲ καρτερόν γίνεται τὸ ύποκείμενον σκέλος: ἐν τῷ γάρ τῇ φύσει διατάται, καὶ τὰ γυμνάσια προσκρατεῖν αὐτὸ).55

Some centuries later, analogous variations in meaning for the Latin transcription ‘gymnasia’ are traceable in the epigraphic habit of Roman North Africa, particularly Africa proconsularis.56 The interest in Greek athletics emerged mainly during the first and second century in these exclusively Latin speaking regions. This phenomenon was connected to Africa’s great prosperity and improving political position, especially in the reign of Septimius Severus.57 According to the 2nd century Latin author Tertullian from Carthage, “acting Greek” became fashionable also in clothing style.58 As already pointed out by G. G. Fagan and R. Lafer, the closer philological analysis of African inscriptions from the period between the reigns of Trajan and Probus reveals that also the gymnasia commemorated there cannot be just buildings or rooms.59 On the contrary, according to the inscriptions these gymnasia were ‘dedicated’ (dedicare), ‘staged’ (praestare and exhibere), ‘offered’ (praebere), ‘ordered’ (decernere), ‘issued’ (edere) or, expressly, ‘financed’ (insumere);60 accordingly, the gymnasia are always ‘given’ as benefactions to the populus or to other groups and sometimes games, meals and cash handouts are specified.61

Thus, in our epigraphic record from late Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor and Syria too, the Greek term γυμνάσιον did shift in meaning depending on where it appeared; its meaning was contextually, not absolutely, determined. Especially in regard to the six [reign of Augustus], five [reign of Tiberius] and seven [reign of Hadrian] gymnasia attested in Pergamon, the idea both of several gymnasium buildings or of different age groups is problematic for the reason alone that we have no archaeological or literary explicit evidence for so many buildings or age groups.62 The chronological order of our attestations, six or five or seven gymnasia, does not necessarily correspond to a presumptive steadily growing number of gymnasium buildings in the polis-territory of Pergamon. At the most, we could assume that, besides the four traditional age categories, other groups of gymnasium users (e.g. festival delegations, Romans, foreigners) had been added to the official group of recipients of gymnasiarchical services but, with this explanation, the inconsistency between the numbers of groups still remains a difficulty.

Nevertheless, e.g. J. Delorme, L. Robert, H.-I. Marrou and W. Radt relate the high number of gymnasium to buildings within the polis territory of Pergamon.63

53 Ed. A. Adler, 141 no. 1533: “Δρόμοις- τοῖς γυμνασίοις κατὰ Κρήτης”.
54 Hdt. 9.33.2: Τισαμενῷ γὰρ μαντευομένῳ ἐν Δελφοῖσι περὶ γόνου ἀνεῖλε εὔρηκα, ἄλλωστε ἀλλὰ μετέωσε καὶ ἠναφερόμενος γυμνικοὺς ἀγώνας, ἀσκεώς δὲ πεντάεθλον παρὰ ἓν πάλαισμα ἔδραμε νικᾶν Ὀλυμποὺς γυμνασίοισι ὡς ἀναιρησόμενος γυμνικοὺς ἀγῶνας ἡ Πυθίη ἀγῶνας τοὺς μεγίστους ἀναιρήσεσθαι πέντε. ὃ μὲν δὴ ἁμαρτὼν τοῦ χρηστηρίου προσεῖχε γυμνασίοισι κατὰ Κρῆτας οὕτω δὲ καρτερὸν γίνεται τὸ ὑγιὲς σκέλος: ἐν τῷ γάρ τῇ φύσει διατάται, καὶ τὰ γυμνάσια προσκρατεῖν αὐτὸ.
55 Ἡρ. Αρτ. 58 ὥς, ἐν τῷ γάρ μη προσχρέηται τῷ σιναρῷ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ, μετέωρο τοῖς γυμνασίοις κατὰ Κρῆτας, ὀπῆδε τῷ σεατρών γίνεται τὸ ύποκείμενον σκέλος: ἐν τῷ γάρ τῇ φύσει διατάται, καὶ τὰ γυμνάσια προσκρατεῖν αὐτὸ. Μετέωρο, τὴν ἀναφερόμενος σκέλος τοῖς γυμνασίοις κατὰ Κρῆτας οὕτω δὲ καρτερὸν γίνεται τὸ ύποκείμενον σκέλος: ἐν τῷ γάρ τῇ φύσει διατάται, καὶ τὰ γυμνάσια προσκρατεῖν αὐτὸ.
56 See the detailed compilation of sources in Lafer 2013, 60–61.
57 Fagan 1999, 263, draws the conclusion that there is no “universally-applicable meaning to gymnasia”. On the broad view, the word seems to have had no more precise a meaning than “things to do with exercise”. Similarly, Lafer 2013, 66: “gymnische Aufführungen”, “athletische Agone”.
58 We have evidence for, at most, five age groups as an exception in the context of games and festival events; on this, cf. Weiler 2004, 31–33. On an earlier stage of my research I proposed to search these gymnasion ‘staged’ (praestare and exhibere), ‘offered’ (praebere), ‘ordered’ (decernere), ‘issued’ (edere) or, expressly, ‘financed’ (insumere). Accordingly, the gymnasium are always ‘given’ as benefactions to the populus or to other groups and sometimes games, meals and cash handouts are specified.
59 Delorme 1960, 178–181; Radt 1999, 113–134; in part. 113–114; H.-I. Marrou goes a step further in identifying not only the conventional civic gymnasia in Pergamon, but also a kind of “arch-gymnasiarch” or “gymnasiarch général” (Marrou 1965, 174). However, his assumption is doubtful: while the position of a “gymnasiarch” or sub-gymnasiarch (cf. Schuler 2004, 178 and Nilsson 1955, 54) is attested, none of our multiple gymnasiarchs appear specifically as
Based on the formulation of an honorary decree for Diodoros Pasparos, four gymnasion buildings were located in Pergamon (Schröder, Schrader, and Kolbe 1924, 152 no. 1, l. 58: [ - - ὤς γὰρ ἐπίλιπτος τὴν εἰς τὰ τέσσαρα γυμνατ[σεως - - -]]. Due to the poor state of conservation of the inscription – the text sections directly before and behind the relevant passage are completely damaged –, we cannot safely say to what context these four gymnasia are to be related within the career of Diodoros. With respect to the problematic source situation, W. Radt points out that the location of such a large number of gymnasia remains an unsolved problem, not to mention the ‘seven gymnasia’ of Tib. Claudius Menogenes. Given the ambiguity of the term γυμνασ¬σια, perhaps our suggestion to interpret multiple gymnasia in the sense of event cycles within the festivities of ruler cult or gymnasiarchical office-periods respectively, would provide, in many questionable cases, a possible answer to the controversa quaestio, at least in regard to architectural archaeology.

The ‘four gymnasia’ of Diodoros Pasparos may be put in relation with our body of imperial-period examples of multiple gymnasiarchies taken from the context of supra-regional ruler worship, for in a further inscription Diodoros Pasparos is honoured by decree of the demos because, among other things, he served as gymnasiarch in the twenty-ninth Nikephoria, that is, the cyclical games and sacrifices instituted by the Attalid kings after their victories over the Galatians and celebrated in honour of ‘victory-bearing’ Athena. The mention of the Nikephoria in these few inscriptions is not intended solely as ‘formulaic’ date information for Diodoros’ gymnasiarchy, as suggested for example by L. Meier and A. Chankowski,66 for a large number of Pergamene inscriptions combine the prytanis and a priest in the official dating formula (ἐπὶ πρυτάνεως καὶ ιε¬ρέως).67 Rather, the mention of the Nikephoria refers to the gymnasiarch’s concrete involvement in this specific festival, most probably in its agonistic features.68 At least one of Diodoros’s four gymnasiarchies thus seems to have been held within the Nikephoria. As R. von den Hoff has recently shown,69 the Attalid kings are materially present in the Pergamene ‘Great gymnasion’ in terms of sculptural and epigraphic remains – significantly, the relevant statues all appear to be wearing military uniform. Apparently, in Pergamon the gymnasion was also a place where the Attalid dynasty was worshipped. This Worship was probably related to the Nikephoria.

5 Closing remarks

It is not surprising that as dynastic festivals, the Nikephoria have their origin in the ruler cult, too. According to Cassius Dio’s review of the genesis of the province-wide imperial cult in Asia Minor, Pergamon was one of the first poleis to possess an officially recognized site for the emperor’s divinization and worship.70 Therefore, the staging of the imperial cult in Pergamon in particular required that the services of the gymnasiarch be expanded accordingly.71 Probably, for the same reason the office of a ‘gymnasiarch of the four eparchies’ emerged

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64 Radt 1999, 113: “Ein bisher ungelöstes Problem ist die Lokalisation dieser großen Zahl von überlieferten Gymnasiaten”.
65 Hepding 1907, 313 no. 56, ll. 4–5: γυμνασιαρχοῦντα ἐν τοῖς ἐννεακαιεικοστοῖς / Νικηφορίοις; Hepding 1927, 311 no. 34, l. 3: γυ¬

in the province of Syria. However, in light of the scant sources from all other poleis, we need still more epigraphical testimonies for the conclusive answer to the question of whether such “provincial” gymnasiarchies were only created *ad hoc* or were established as regular official functions. However, the fact, that imperial inscriptions frequently mention multiple “gymnasia” as superintended by the same office holder, cannot be exclusively explained by the existence of so many different gymnasion buildings within the relevant city territory or so many groups of gymnasion users. Rather, the relatively high numbers of gymnasia may be related to the growing number of cyclical games and festivities on the provincial level in the respective centers of ruler cult on the one hand and to the growing number of merely monthly period offices of gymnasiarchy on the other hand. As also Classical and Hellenistic literary sources demonstrate, the term ‘gymnasion’ could assume different meanings depending on the context.
Ameling 2004

Behrwald 2000

Bertrand 1982

Burrell 2004

Butcher 2003

Campanile 2007

Chankowski 1998

Conze and Schuchhardt 1899

Curry 2015

Daubner 2015

Deininger 1965

Delorme 1962

Dreccoll 1997

Eck 2007

Fagan 1999

Fayet 1976

Fernoux 2007

Ferrutti 2004

Freyburger-Galland 1997

Frontrier 1879

Gauthier 1995

Gauthier and Hatzopoulos 1993
Gehrke 2004

Gross-Albenhausen 2004

Habicht 1969

Hepding 1907

Herrmann 1994

von den Hoff 2004

Iplikcioğlu, G. Çelgin, and V. Çelgin 2007

Jones 1928

Kah 2014

Kah 2015

Kohl 2002

Lafer 2013

Lindgren and Kovacs 1985

Mango 2004

Marek 1993

Marek 2003

Marek 2006

Marek 2010

Marrou 1965

Meier 2012

Mellor 1975

Mellor 1981

Meyer 1987–1988

Mitchell 1993

Moretti 1953

Moretti 1954

Nigdelis 1995
Nilsson 1955

Oehler 1912

Peleket 2014

Quass 1993

Radt 1999

Reitzenstein 2011

Remijsen 2015

Rey-Coquais 1981

Robert 1962

Robert 1967

Rocci 1974

Şahin 2004

Sartre 2004

Sayar 2000

Schäfer 2000

Scholz 2015

Schröder, Schrader, and Kolbe 1904

Schuler 2004

Sherk 1992

Sherwin-White 1973

Slater 1986

Strubbe 1987

Tzifopoulos 1998

Vitale 2012a

Vitale 2012b

Vitale 2013

Vitale 2014
Vitale 2016

Weiler 2004

Williamson 2013

Wörle 2007

Ziegler 1999

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