MAINTAINING JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE GREEK GYMNASIUM: A "JEWISH LOAD" IN CPJ 3.519 (= P. SCHUB. 37 = P. BEROL. 13406)

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1. The Text

A Greco-Roman athlete’s participation in any series of athletic games presupposed a long period of training in the gymnasium. The gymnasium was one of the quintessential institutions for the transmission of Hellenistic culture. Individuals who had been fully trained in the gymnasium possessed a certain degree of “Hellenic” or “Greek” identity. A greatly neglected papyrus now in Berlin contains evidence that some Jews were quite willing to share in this identity.

The literary text was first edited and published by Wilhelm Schubart in 1950 and has since then been known as Papyrus Schubart 37 (= P. Berolinenses 13406). It was later republished as CPJ 3.519. The CPJ editors based their edition on Schubart’s text but unfortunately did not incorporate all the indications of doubt found in the sigla of
Schubart's edition. Schubart dated the papyrus on paleographic grounds to approximately 200 C.E. The contents have not been identified with any known text and the provenience of the papyrus is not known. The text was included in the CPJ because of its reference to an individual carrying "a Jewish load." The thesis of this article is that this individual was a Jewish athlete who was active in a Greek gymnasium.

2. The Setting of the Action of the Text

The content of the papyrus is a discourse on athletics. The text refers to the race of two stadia lengths (δίσταδος; lines 3-4), the long-distance race (δόλιχος; lines 4-5), and the short sprint of one stadium length (στάδιον; lines 6-7). The speaker mentions the evaluation of athletes to see if they qualify for competition (τῶν ἑκατέρων... ἐξελπαθηναντας; lines 34-37). The speaker also refers to the athletic training regimen (βίον καθεϊς... διαζητει; lines 42-46), running a race (τρέχειν; line 48), and competition and obstruction among contestants (ὁσπερ ἡμών τῶν ἀνταγωνιστάς καλλίεν πειρομένον ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τῶν οὐκ ἀνταγωνιστάς; lines 48-54). The speaker also mentions the division of youthful athletes into age groups (ἡλικίαι; line 65, possibly 83).

In one fragment of the text the speaker addresses a single interlocutor (lines 2-8). In the largest fragment of the text the speaker addresses a number of individuals (lines 20-21, 59). The speaker seems to include his or her own self at some level among the participants in the athletic events (lines 10, 49; possibly 24). There were a few famous female athletes, some ceremonial roles for females in athletics, and a few women's athletic events in antiquity. But ancient sports were