H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletics and the Jews*. The University of Wales, Cardiff (Trivium Special Publications), 1976. 124pp. £4.00.

A Hebrew version of this book was published in Tel Aviv in 1972. The author died before he could finish revising the typescript for publication in English and the task has been completed by I.M. Barton and A.J. Brothers. A list of Professor Harris' publications and a short biography have been added.

Professor Harris puts forward the thesis that not only did no Jew, however orthodox, disapprove of athletics after the Maccabees, but most Jews watched games, while some took part as amateurs or even possibly as professionals. In support of his case the author has collected many passages from Maccabees, Josephus and Philo, making skilful use of similes in Philo and archaeological evidence. In the end he shows convincingly that public games were indeed held in first century Palestine, that some Jews must have attended voluntarily, and, most remarkably, that Philo in contemporary Alexandria was completely fascinated by athletics and assumed that his readers were familiar with sporting technicalities. Professor Harris wished to put right a prejudice he found in too many writers on Jewish history that Jews and athletics were not compatible (he quotes Abba Eban on p.96). He has succeeded in his aim.

The author combined a deep understanding of Greek culture with a keen love of sport. The whole book is illumined by a rare ability to describe vividly both the technical details of Greek games and the spirit in which they were played (e.g. on p.31: throwing a discus in a palaestra, as Maccabees relates, 'would have been about as safe as hammer-throwing in a tennis court').

The interpretation of archaeological data is less sure. Harris assumes that the stadia and hippodromes of Galilee were built for an audience from that area to fill. They were huge and most local people were Jews, so the Jews must have gone to the games in large numbers. However, it is not certain that they were ever expected to be filled. Grand public buildings provided prestige more than anything else, and the Herodians were notoriously addicted to this form of self advertisement. Local taste in entertainment was not necessarily taken into account.

The author is least expert in his treatment of the Jewish background. The theory that by the first century A.D. no orthodox Jew was in principle opposed to athletics rests on two assumptions, both incorrect.

Harris says that if Philo, an 'orthodox' Jew, felt there to be nothing wrong with athletics, then neither did other orthodox Jews of the time. But Philo is by no means a type of the 'orthodox Jew' of the period. If Philo liked to watch and play sports, this says much of great interest about religious Alexandrian Jews of the first century, but nothing at all about Pharisees, Sadducees or any other Jews in Palestine.

Secondly, Harris asserts that no source after Maccabees records 'orthodox' Jewish opposition to athletics (p.96). This is to ignore the Tannaitic evidence which, though not large, does suggest that some Palestinian Jews in the second century disapproved of attendance at games in much the same way as the Maccabean hasidim had done. It is most likely that there were always some religious Jews holding such views throughout this period—their opposition was based on the general prohibition against excessive nudity and the sacrifices that took place before athletics meetings. The rabbis still consider theatres and stadia to be Gentile institutions and approve of Jews attending only rarely and for good reason (*t.A.Z 2.7* and *m.A.Z 1.7*). Theatres and stadia may have staged plays and gladiatorial fights, but Professor Harris is right to point out how often they are used for athletics (p.34).

Nevertheless, this book serves the useful purpose of reminding historians that the aspirations of religious zealots were not necessarily held by the rest of the population.
as well. Doubtless some Palestinian Jews shared Herod’s and Philo’s enthusiasm for watching athletics. The rabbinic strictures against attendance imply the existence of Jews who disobeyed.

Some rabbinic passages support Harris’s more general conclusions. In the Mekhilta of R. Shimon b. Yohai *Beshallah* 52:14 some rabbis appear to know details of Gentile chariot racing (though this does not show they attended). Lieberman demonstrated that *mShab*. 22:6 shows Jews wrestling and taking emetics to help their athletic prowess, and that the rabbis do not disapprove. *tShab* 5:11 concerns Jews treating running as a serious pastime. However, these small signs of interest in keeping fit do not add up to a passion for athletics like that of contemporary Greeks.

Some other small points should be noted. The ban on Gentile oil appears not only in Josephus but in rabbinic texts *passim* (p. 75). The explanation of the ‘menorah’ from the Priene gymnasium contains more ingenuity than plausibility. The nine-branched figure does not look much like a menorah, nor does quoting a five branched example from elsewhere help. The gymnasium was built in the second century B.C. whereas the menorah only became a common Jewish symbol in the second century A.D. — three centuries in which a graffitist innocent of Jews might draw a branch of a tree on a gymnasium wall. The appendix on Jews using Gentile names contains no new ideas apart from an unconvincing fanciful attempt to suggest the origin of the name of Peter.

Despite such faults this is an interesting book. The light that it sheds on Philo is considerable and unexpected, and the challenge to a long cherished misconception is welcome.

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The emphasis in the title of this book must be taken as falling on ‘Roman Rule’. Its subject is essentially the political relations, as expressed in public contact, between the Jews and their Roman masters. It is a natural sequel to the author’s valuable commentary on Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaum* and her articles on the behaviour of different Roman Emperors towards the Jews. Its strength lies in its thorough and meticulous accounts of specific incidents, with searching and cautious analyses of the available evidence on the Graeco-Roman side (for example the complete account of the career of that rather neglected figure Agrippa I). Its coverage too is impressive, from the beginning of the Hasmonaean, who come in as introduction, to the eve of the Christianization of the Roman Empire; and there is no scholarly work which collects together the material on the Diaspora for the last two hundred years or so of the period.

Miss Smallwood’s presentation of events is lucid and readable, but her explanations appear sometimes to be inadequate. Thus the Judaean troubles of 6–66 are briskly accounted for by the existence of a belligerent nationalist party, which objected, in the first instance, to Roman taxation. But the deep problem of why Persian, Ptolemaic and for some time even Seleucid rule had apparently been acceptable is not even hinted at. Nor is it easy to see how the story can be intelligibly told without investigation of the internal developments within Judaism which led to the emergence of the “Fourth Philosophy” and of the Zealot “movement”, though it is the author’s conscious decision to do just that. This narrowness of approach vitiates even her treatment of her own chosen area throughout the book. Thus, she needs to employ Jewish sources,