

HISTORIES 12.4b.1–c.1: AN OVERLOOKED KEY TO POLYBIOS' VIEWS ON ROME

Although he admits that Polybios' views on Rome are difficult to detect,¹ F. W. Walbank has argued that the Akhaian historian became increasingly pro-Roman during his long sojourn in Rome, during which time he composed the bulk of his monumental universal history; and many scholars have followed Walbank's assessment.² In this paper I argue that the question of an essentially pro- or anti-Roman Polybian view on Rome is wrongly framed, that Polybios intentionally adopted an ambiguous stance in his representations of Romans and that we may best understand this ambiguity by focusing on his intended audiences, and that a passage in Book 12 deserves greater scrutiny than it has received, as it underscores the complexity of the historian's representations of Romans.

I begin from the assumption that Greek representations of the Romans in the second century BCE were for the most part politically-instrumental. Greeks increasingly made appeal to the Romans, and Romans sometimes acted in ways that Greeks perceived to be in their own best interests. In such contexts Greeks represented Romans as 'honorary Greeks', admitting them to the Hellenic cultural commune of civilized peoples. The mysterious Akarnanian appeal to the Romans against Aitolian encroachments in the 230s BCE, the Korinthians' admission of Romans as 'honorary Greeks' to the Isthmian games in the aftermath of the First Illyrian war of 229/8 BCE, and epigraphical evidence for the Greek representation of the Romans as 'common benefactors' attest to this cultural-assimilationist Greek approach to Rome.³ On the other hand, whenever Romans acted in brutal fashion in

¹ E.g. F. W. Walbank, 'Political Morality and the Friends of Scipio', reprinted in *Selected Papers: Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* (Cambridge 1985) 157–80 at 160: 'Is he in fact for or against Rome in the final decision? The answer is not easy'.

² F. W. Walbank, *Polybios* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London 1972) 166–83; id. 'Polybios' Last Ten Books', in *Historiographia Antiqua: commentationes Lovanienses in honorem W. Peremans septuagenarii editae* (Louvain 1977) 155–62; but cf. B. Shimron, 'Polybios on Rome: A Re-examination of the Evidence', *SCI* 5 (1979/80) 94–117 for arguments that Polybios was essentially anti-Roman.

³ Akarnanian appeal: Just. *Epit.* 28.1.5–2.14; Strabo 10.2.25 (C 462) (reference to Roman Trojan origins and incorporation into Homeric tradition); Romans at Isthmia: Pol. 2.12.4–8; *MRR* 1.228–9 for further sources; for Romans as 'common benefactors' in Greek inscriptions, see e.g. *Syll.*³ i.630, lines 17–18 and *IG II*² 1134, lines 69 and 103, with A. Erskine, 'The Romans as Common Benefactors', *Historia* 43 (1994) 70–87; cf. id. 'Greekness and Uniqueness: The Cult of the Senate in the Greek East', *Phoenix* 51 (1997) 25–35.

Greek lands, and Polybios' description of the Roman sack of cities provides chilling evidence for the extent of this brutality, Greeks rebuked the Romans in the sharpest terms available in their politico-cultural vocabulary, referring to them as *βάρβαροι*.⁴

In his representations of Romans Polybios certainly exhibits the cultural-assimilationist approach whereby Romans become 'honorary Greeks'. There are many passages in which the Akhaian historian lauds Romans; this admiration and praise of Rome pervades his work, but it is not my intention in this short article to provide an exhaustive catalogue of passages. It is perhaps sufficient to point to one striking illustration early on in the *Histories* where Romans emerge as practitioners of Hellenic *λογισμός* against the reckless *θύμος* of barbarian Celtic tribesmen.⁵ Passages such as these provide the foundation for the position of Walbank and others that Polybios was essentially, and increasingly, as the work progressed, pro-Roman. And a favorable estimate of Romans should come as no surprise from an historian who, though technically a political hostage at Rome, had enjoyed considerable privileges and freedoms in relation to the other Greek detainees brought to Italy in the aftermath of Pydna, and who in a roughly twenty-year period had moved from Roman political prisoner to Roman mediator in the resettlement of Greece.⁶

But it is this very improvement in Polybios' political fortunes that would have called his patriotism into question in some Akhaian political circles. Some Akhaian politicians felt discomfiture and embarrassment concerning the Akhaian decision to join Rome against Makedonia in 198 BCE as a betrayal of a benefactor of long-standing; many Akhaian politicians were deeply suspicious of Aristainos and Diophanes for working in the Roman interest; many as well were frustrated by the long delay in the repatriation of

⁴ See 10.15-16 for Polybios' description of the Roman sacking of cities (Carthago Nova in 209); cf. Liv. 26.46.10; 28.20.6-7 (Iliturgis in 206). Polybios' description of Roman order and discipline in sacking cities does not fit the picture of the unbridled savagery of the *direptio* in Latin sources; see A. Ziolkowski, 'Urbs direpta, or how the Romans sacked cities', in *War and Society in the Roman World*, J. Rich and G. Shipley, eds. (London and New York 1993) 69-91. For Greek ideas of Rome's aggressive motivations, see Liv. 31.29.4-16; on harsh Roman war-making, see generally A. M. Eckstein, 'T. Quinctius Flaminus and the Campaign against Philip in 198 BC,' *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 119-42, at 131-42. For the Romans as *barbaroi* in Greek international political discourse, see J. Deininger, *Der politische Widerstand gegen Rom in Griechenland, 217-86 v. Chr.* (Berlin and New York 1971) 21-37.

⁵ 2.35. I have treated this passage in detail in my article 'Polybios, Aetolia, and the Gallic Attack on Delphi', *Historia* 45 (1996) 315-28, at 324-8.

⁶ For honours to Polybios throughout Greece for his mediation of the Roman settlement, see Paus. 8.9.2, 30.8-9, 37.2, 44.5, 48.9, with K. Ziegler, 'Polybios', *RE* XXI.2 (1952) cols. 1462-4.

the Akhaian exiles; and the Roman sack of Korinth in 146 left indelible scars on the Akhaian national psyche.⁷ Now Polybios states that he writes for both a Roman and a Greek audience.⁸ It is my argument that a focus on the historian's Greek audience suggests a political motivation for subverting the image of Romans as 'honorary Greeks', thereby asserting Polybios' independent political agency; and consideration of Polybios' bipartite audience makes it understandable that the historian would present conflicting and competing representations of Romans.

As I have suggested, the most forceful language available in Polybios' politico-cultural heritage for subverting this image of the Romans as 'honorary Greeks' was to refer to them as barbarians. The charge of Roman barbarism appears indirectly in the speech of Agelaos at Naupaktos in 217 BCE (5.104.1-2), and the Akarnanian ambassador Lykiskos explicitly refers to Romans as barbarians in an address to the Spartans in 210 BCE (9.37.5-6). Furthermore, another Greek ambassador, probably the Rhodian statesman Thrasykrates before the Aitolian Confederation in 207 BCE, calls the Romans *βάρβαροι* (11.5.1-2, 6-8). I do not wish to contest the historicity of these Greek ambassadors' charges against the Romans; the references to Romans as *βάρβαροι* were most likely integral, passionately-felt parts of these orations. But given the classical historiographical practice with recorded speeches, in which the historian engaged in what we should call authorial license, we must concede that, in his decision to record these anti-Roman sentiments, Polybios was doing more than simply being a good historian; he was also making a political choice.⁹ In addition to these three speeches, Polybios gives the brief reports of Makedonian reconnaissance scouts to Philip V of the movements of the Roman *βάρβαροι* at a decisive moment in the battle at Kynoskephalai (18.22.8), and at Livy 31.29.4-16, a passage Nissen showed long ago to be of Polybian derivation, a Makedonian ambassador at the *Panaitolika* in 199 BCE repeatedly rails against the Roman barbarian. These passages would seem to exhaust the indications in Polybios' work that Romans were barbarians, but in none of them does the historian make the suggestion in his own narrative voice.

⁷ For Akhaian discomfiture concerning the *volte-face* of 198, see Arkhon's statement at Liv. 41.24.12-15; suspicion of Aristainos and Diophanes: Pol. 22.10.14-15; 24.13.10; exiles: Pol. 30.32.1-12; 33.1.3-8, 3.1-2; on the trauma of the sack of Korinth, see Diod. 32.26.2.

⁸ See Walbank 1972 (op. cit., n. 2 above), 3-6 and nn. 16-19 for a catalogue of passages, stressing the Greek readership, to which add 1.42.1-2. But I cannot accept Walbank's dismissal of 31.22.8, where Polybios states that his work will be read above all by Romans.

⁹ For Polybios' authorial license in recording Agelaos' speech at Naupaktos, see my article 'The Nature of Authoritative Evidence in Polybios and the Speech of Agelaos at Naupaktos', *TAPhA* 127 (1997) 111-28.

Walbank has used this fact, that is, that these passages relay the words of others, in order to argue that Polybios never refers to the Romans as *βάρβαροι*.¹⁰ As I have said, I believe that we cannot dismiss the political implications of Polybios' decision to record these anti-Roman sentiments so lightly.¹¹ Yet scholars have also overlooked a crucial passage in which I maintain that Polybios does indeed call the Romans barbarians in his own voice. In 12.4b.1-c.1 Polybios chastises Timaios for his charges against Theopompos and Ephoros, and he proceeds to list a series of Timaios' own blunders. First among these is Timaios' discussion of the 'October Horse' ceremony at Rome. There Timaios stated that the Romans sacrifice a horse in the Campus Martius on an appointed day each year in order to commemorate their disaster at Troy, because the famous wooden horse had led to the sack of Rome's ancestral city. Polybios calls this a most childish statement (*πρᾶγμα πάντων παιδαριωδέστατον*). In making his point against Timaios, Polybios argues that the Roman practice is a common custom among almost all the barbarians (*πάντας τοὺς βαρβάρους*).¹² He says that, if we were to follow Timaios, all barbarians must be descendants of the Trojans, because nearly all of them sacrifice a horse on the eve of battle. Within the framework of our discussion, we may note that in asserting the Roman connection to Troy Timaios was engaging in a Greek politics of cultural assimilation of the Romans to Hellenism—a politics that Polybios here explicitly denies. In this instance, Polybios takes exception to both Timaios' linking of Rome to the Homeric tradition and his implication that the original Romans were refugees from the civilized city of Troy. Greater learning and diligence, Polybios maintains, would have led Timaios to realize that the answer was much simpler: horse-sacrifice is nearly universal among barbarian peoples. Romans, as barbarians, act according to a widespread barbarian custom. If Timaios had realized this, he would not have relayed the silly story of the Trojan horse in this context.

Now Polybios places the utmost importance in historiography on providing causal explanations, *αἰτίαι*, for historical events. Nowhere is this emphasis more evident than in the historian's elaborate discussion of the causes

¹⁰ *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. 2 (Oxford 1967) 176 ad 9.37.6; id. 1985 (op. cit., n. 1 above) 152-3; cf. M. Dubuisson, *Le latin de Polybe: les implications historiques d'un cas de bilinguisme* (Paris 1985) 284-5, who argues that Polybios' long familiarity with Romans precluded him from calling them barbarians.

¹¹ I argue this point regarding Polybian speeches in greater detail in my article 'Romans as BAPBAPOI: Three Polybian Speeches and the Politics of Cultural Indeterminacy,' forthcoming in *CPh*. {published in *CPh* 95 (2000) 425-44}

¹² Walbank, *Commentary*, vol. 2 (Oxford 1967) 328 ad 12.4b.2 ('not including the Romans, whom P. never calls barbarians except in reported speeches') misses Polybios' obvious point.

of the Hannibalic war, where he carefully distinguishes true causes, *αἰτίαι*, from precipitating events, *ἀρχαί*, and formal pretexts, *πρόφασεις* (3.6.1–7.3). He justifies this lengthy discussion of terms as follows:

In speaking at such length on this matter, my object has not been to censure previous writers, but to rectify the ideas of students. For of what use to the sick is a physician who is ignorant of the causes (*αἰτίας*) of certain conditions of the body? And of what use is a statesman who cannot reckon how, why, and whence each event has originated? The former will scarcely be likely to recommend proper treatment for the body and it will be impossible for the latter without such knowledge to deal properly with circumstances. Nothing, therefore, should be more carefully guarded against and more diligently sought out than the first causes of each event, since matters of the greatest moment often originate from trifles, and it is the initial impulses and conceptions in every matter which are most easily remedied.¹³

It is highly unlikely that the historian for whom causal explanations are so important would fail to give his own reasons for horse sacrifice at Rome in the course of refuting Timaios' account. But any reading which denies that Polybios is here calling the Romans barbarians must assume that in his impassioned attack on Timaios, Polybios fails to provide his own cause for the 'October Horse' ceremony at Rome. In the light of Polybios' own historiographical prescriptions, then, we must admit that in this singular passage the Akhaian historian calls the Romans barbarians in his own voice, even if the charge comes as a (perhaps inadvertent) by-product of his castigation of Timaios. We may then add 12.4b.1–c.1, a passage in which Polybios is speaking in his own voice, to the indirect suggestions in the historical narrative that the Romans were *βάρβαροι*.¹⁴ The correct interpretation of this passage should stimulate further discussion of the fascinating question of Polybios' complex views on the cultural identity of the Romans.

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¹³ 3.7.4–7, trans. W. R. Paton; for the crucial importance of *αἰτίαι* in Polybios' historiographical conceptions, see P. Pedech, *La méthode historique de Polybe* (Paris 1964) 54–98; Walbank 1972 (op. cit., n. 2 above), 157–60; S. Mohm, *Untersuchungen zu den historiographischen Anschauungen des Polybios* (Saarbruecken 1977) 151–7.

¹⁴ I examine the indirect suggestions of Roman barbarism in the historical narrative proper in my 'Romans as BAPBAPOI' (art. cit., n. 11 above), section II.