

REVIEW

POLYBIUS AND HIS WORLD

Bruce Gibson and Thomas Harrison, edd., *Polybius and his World: Essays in Memory of F. W. Walbank*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi + 416. Hardcover, £89.00 / \$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-960840-9.

Nearly four decades ago, having just finished my dissertation on Hellenistic historiography, I sought outside guidance and sent chapters to Arnaldo Momigliano, Frank Walbank and another prominent European scholar. I wrote essentially the same letter to each, including the flattering declaration that each was, in my opinion, the expert on the subject. I received a quick and incisive reply from Momigliano. But as these things inevitably go, I included the letter addressed to Walbank in the envelope to the third scholar, and, of course, vice-versa. A few weeks later, I received a generous and extremely helpful critique from Walbank who also rendered the horrifying news that I had sent him the letter addressed to the third scholar. Several months later, a graduate student of that third scholar wrote me that his teacher was too busy to look at my chapters.

This personal anecdote illustrates what anyone who has ever had the distinct pleasure of knowing Frank Walbank is well aware of: how truly marvellous a person he was. And this is certainly demonstrated by the contributions in the book under review. *Polybius and His World* contains chapters on Polybian topics from a 2007 conference that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the first volume of the great Polybian *Commentary*. Walbank could not attend the conference (he sent a warm salute) and died fifteen months later. Thus the celebratory volume became *in memoriam*.

In their introduction, the editors, Walbank's Liverpool colleagues Bruce Gibson and Thomas Harrison, don't simply summarise the subsequent contributions. Rather, they discuss Walbank's life and history writing. The volume concludes with a candid contribution from Walbank's daughter Mitzi Walbank, who illuminates the family she was part of—full of accomplishment, disappointment, unexpected pleasures, and the simple nobility of living good lives. At close inspection of his life, both personal and professional, Frank Walbank shines ever more brightly.

Gibson and Harrison offer a valuable interpretation of Walbank's confrontation with culture and decline: themes that obviously percolated

throughout Polybius' life, and ones that equally confronted a vibrant intellectual living through and being shaped by events of the twentieth century. Unlike his subject, however, Walbank always faced an uncertain future with great optimism (reference to J. B. Bury's *The Idea of Progress* might be warranted here). They also rightly see Gaetano De Sanctis as inspiration for Walbank's lifelong belief that the historian should make moral judgments. It would also be interesting to know whether Walbank was influenced by Benedetto Croce, whose belief that history should be written as a demonstration of and in the service of liberty seem at least congruent with Walbank's sympathies. The editors point to new directions in Polybian studies after Walbank, in particular investigations into rhetoric and narrative strategies. I add that Polybius' relationship to philosophy remains a fertile, if complex, field.

John Henderson's research into the Oxford University Press archives is priceless. The young Walbank, searching for a larger project after his *Philip V*, inquired about a commentary on Tacitus' *Histories*. But the OUP editor replied that it had been promised to Ronald Syme who was then in Turkey 'on war work.' The editor encouraged Walbank to think further, because 'we like central books' When Walbank proposed a commentary on Polybius, the Press consulted Momigliano, who acknowledged that it might not sell well, but that the press 'could not choose a more useful subject in the field of ancient history. Walbank seems to me to have the right blend of youth and wisdom for such a magnificent enterprise.' Arnold Gomme, however, also consulted, expressed doubt that Walbank had as yet demonstrated the required 'historical judgment and imagination'. While things hung in the balance, Syme, writing from Turkey, backed out of the Tacitus commentary. The Press, with only one money-losing, large scale commentary at hand, gave Walbank his choice of Tacitus or Polybius. The Press preferred the former, but by now Walbank was set on Polybius. The rest, as they say, is history. Some thirteen years later, on the eve of publication of volume one, the Oxford editor reminded Walbank that they had never discussed payment (Walbank no longer considered himself a Marxist, and he would learn to bargain a bit harder on the later two volumes). Correspondence by the Press and the scholar about logistics is inspiringly idealistic, gaining heightened glory as it occurred in an age of book manuscripts written in (often indecipherable) long hand.

There follow seventeen more traditionally scholarly articles of very high quality. John Marincola starts off with a discussion of tragic history. He argues that Polybius does not oppose tragic history because it was emotional, but rather because it was false or at least exaggerated. Moreover, it is not Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history that frames Polybius' discussion, but rather more broadly the contrast between history and genres

which provoke pity and anger. This second point is absolutely convincing and moves us (finally) beyond seeing Polybius as being in combat with a specific authority. Regarding the first, the evidence, as Marincola admits, is ambiguous. But ambiguity suggests that the earlier, narrow identification of tragic history with emotional writing is far too simplistic. Once again, it seems less accurate to tie Polybius to a specific brief, and here, too, we are now progressing toward a far more nuanced, if broader, understanding of the nature of Polybian polemics.

Andrew Meadows correctly emphasises that Polybius (1.3.1–2; 4.1.9–2.5) does not give us a precise terminal date of 220 for Aratus' *Memoirs*, and posits the provocative and highly plausible suggestion that for events down to 218 Polybius could draw on Aratus' journals (*ephemerides*). This leads to a surgical examination of Polybius' organising principles just after 220, showing that, despite his proclamation that he will continue to treat the three theatres separately, he, in fact, interweaves them. Questions remain about Polybius' early construction and use of Aratus (Meadows is candid about the limitations of *Quellenforschung*), and Meadows has done an excellent job of opening up new areas of investigation.

John Briscoe, with a perspective on an author he has thoroughly mastered, has grown far more compassionate toward Livy, regretting his own use of the term 'howlers' regarding Livy's transmission of the Polybian narrative. Briscoe softens some of Livy's obvious misreadings, but as well points out that Livy seems to be blindly copying Polybius' temporal references to events and customs of his own day. This is an interesting contrast: between inaccuracies caused by misunderstanding of the original text and inaccuracies caused by copying precisely temporal indicators.

We are then treated to several chapters that focus on narratological strategy. Hans Beck tackles the aspects of Polybius' *προκατασκευή* that concern Rome. Beck agrees with Walbank (against Gelzer and Laqueur) that the *προκατασκευή* was not added after 146, as some sort of apology for earlier events, but rather was organic to the *Histories*. Still, it has its problems: although Polybius declares it will be *ἀποδεικτικὴ ἱστορία* ('supported by full reasons') it is more often *κεφαλαιωδῶς* ('summarily as introduction'). Most interesting in this piece is the support for Bleckmann's investigation of Dio/Zonaras as a somewhat countervailing source to Polybius (who most likely followed mainly Philinus).

Craige Champion continues his highly provocative reading of indeterminacy in P. Effectively, Polybius believed that Rome was well-governed through the third century (the apogee of the mixed constitution), after which he had concerns about Roman domestic and foreign behaviour as the balance tipped toward popular sovereignty. Scholars who debate the passage over who made the decision within the Roman polity to aid the Mamertines

(οἱ πολλοί: 1.11.2), a decision that began the First Punic War, usually miss the point. Polybius has intentionally hidden the identity behind his general desire to promote indeterminacy during a period when he otherwise believed that Rome's government made correct decisions.

Bruce Gibson offers what is not only a highly original piece, but one that may well set us in a new direction. He begins by problematising Polybius' treatment of the Mercenary War. Of course, Polybius is comparing Carthaginian dependence on mercenaries to Roman use of the citizen-soldier. But coverage seems disproportionately long for its purpose. Comparison with Xenophon's *Anabasis*, a work he knew and referenced, suggests that Polybius may have drawn from it much of the structure of his argument in suggesting the parallel decay of Persia and Carthage.

Brian McGing pays serious attention to what is a promising entry into what might seem a largely unrewarding subject by focusing on the young Philip V. There are some significant gains here for scholarship as McGing harvests Polybius' attitudes toward youth and explores how he manipulates the narrative to display Philip's early promise, brought on by personal qualities, especially speed and clarity of decision, and a dependence on Aratus, but dashed by eventually taking the advice of Apelles.

In a spirited, but necessarily somewhat speculative work, Boris Dreyer follows immediately with an inspection of Philip's later life as tragic history, offering a corrective to Walbank's early, famous article. Polybius offers two stories here: his own analysis of Philip (and Perseus) as unable to follow through at key moments, and the morality tale provided by a Macedonian court source (originally proposed by Walbank and Pédech).

John Thornton breaks out of the circumscribed world of the Classics to apply the theories of dialogical repression and resistance of political scientist and anthropologist James Scott. Thornton sees both a public and hidden transcript in Polybius' representation of Roman rule, effectively considering the work as one long speech, 'a mediated adhesion to the public transcript' (229). Polybius' purpose was to reframe the way in which Rome might best rule in his own day, so as to improve the position of his Greek homeland. The approach has potential, but the other piece is to consider how any audience receives an extended work in multiple scrolls. Reception theory—contemporary and future audience—has been around for some time, and it needs also to be combined with consideration of the physical qualities of the written transcript.

Andrew Erskine has offered a provocative analysis of Book 6. In a broadening of *πολιτεία* from 'constitution' to 'system of government,' we can appreciate Polybius' frequently criticised description of Roman army organisation (6.19.5–20.7) as more a 'Platonic ideal' and as an explanation of how that organisation contributes to Roman success (withstanding the de-

feat at Cannae, in particular). The discussion of an aristocratic state funeral at the end of the preserved book (6.53–4) becomes an effectively crafted investigation of Roman violence and the sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of the state. All of this points to Polybius' warning to Greek states about the ferociously single-minded purpose of their antagonist. This essay will long be debated.

Robin Seager follows Polybius' defence of his omissions (6.11.3–8) to argue that his 'distortions' in presenting the Roman constitution as mixed were deliberate. What was Polybius hiding in this obviously artificial construction? That the real power in the state lay with the Senate. Polybius suppressed (from himself?) this truer analysis because he acknowledged that Rome was the most successful state and that, to P, a mixed constitution was in fact the best. Seager ends with a salutary note that Greeks, including P, may have always—and fatally—read the Romans too literally.

Erich Gruen, who has played such an important role in igniting current American interest in the Hellenistic world and in creating the transatlantic connection for Frank Walbank, contributes a study of Polybius and Josephus. The parallels between these two historians are remarkable, not least because their own homelands engaged in a 'rash and headlong destructiveness' in their relations with Rome. Some of the similarities are well established, but Gruen has pushed the comparisons further. Both are 'slyly subversive and cautiously cynical' about Rome. Indeed, careful and close readings reveal that both have deep and troublesome concerns, and both can imagine an eventual end to Rome rule.

Christel Müller analyses Polybius' problematic description of Boeotian decadence on the eve of Antiochus III's invasion of Greece in 192/1 (20.4–7). Müller is suspicious of the historicity of the discussion, believing it primarily a literary device, cleverly examining previous tradition (the 'vertical intertext') and the broader Polybian text (the 'intratext'). Müller argues that the intratextuality derives from Polybius' view of Roman, rather than of Greek, decadence. There is important textual analysis here.

Hans-Ulrich Wiemer writes on Zeno and his history of Rhodes. Despite his criticisms of Zeno's historical habits, Polybius seemingly relies on him—perhaps significantly so. Wiemer does not present a unified thesis, but rather extensively examines Zeno's early history, especially as transmitted by Diodorus Siculus.

Michael Sommer re-examines an oft-told tale—the relationship between Polybius and Scipio Aemilianus—making a spirited argument on behalf of the long discarded idea of a Scipionic Circle. But he has an even bigger target here: he examines *φιλία*/*amicitia* as reflecting an idealised relationship between the two men, a relationship that, because Polybius naturally em-

braced more the Greek notion of friendship, in turn helps explain Polybius' idealised picture of the Roman polity in Book 6.

John Davies asks how much economic information is contained in P, and the answer is: quite a bit. But it requires disaggregation by identifying the raw economic material, suggesting how to gain indirect inference from economically-related material, and typologising some of Polybius' patterns of information that have an economic reference. Davies concludes by discussing Polybius as an unconscious economic historian. There is so much provocative structure to this chapter that it may well do to Polybius specifically what Davies' famous *CAH* chapter did to the Hellenistic economy generally.

The final scholarly article, by Josephine Crawley Quinn, is a profoundly destabilising one. Arguing that Polybius' conception of Rome's *οἰκουμένη* (1.3.3–4.1) is an 'imagined community' (echoing Benedict Anderson's now-famous interpretation of Walter Benjamin's attack on historicism), Quinn sets out to show that the picture of Romans and Greeks engaged in building a cultural and political empire is largely an intellectual construction. Quinn follows Benjamin and Anderson in suggesting that this imposes a linear, integrated sense of time. Through synchronism of events, the use of the Olympic calendar, and his addressing both Greek and Roman readers, Polybius has constructed a 'pan-Mediterranean community,' one that in some way actually existed by 167, but certainly did not in 220, to which point Polybius traces the *συμπλοκή*. While the military victors are the Romans, they share their *συμπλοκή* with the Greeks. Quinn translates *κοινὰς πράξεις* of 39.8.6 as 'shared experiences'. But whether they are shared experienced or events in common (and there may be a difference), the concept does not limit or define all experiences or outlooks of participants: for some, these events may be essential; for others less so. Thus Quinn also sees within Polybius a second, though subordinate, interpretative strain in which Romans stand, and could have remained, outside the imagined community. This contribution, too, will long be debated.

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Every scholar of the ancient world knows what a difficult challenge Walbank faced with the *Commentary*. Unlike (say) Gomme's equally magnificent effort with Thucydides (left incomplete by Gomme because of a terrible happenstance), Walbank had to control a broad historical canvas of enormous complexity and duration; more, because of emerging scholarship largely inspired by his own work, considerations were changing as rapidly as he wrote: a truly Sisyphean task. For this task, Walbank possessed a quality rare among classical scholars: the ability to change his mind in face of new

facts or better interpretations, and to do so with grace and enthusiasm. The scholars of this volume have offered a great number of new insights, some in disagreement with Walbank's own thoughts on the subject. No one, we may be quite certain, enjoyed the debate more than the honorand of this splendid volume.

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