

REVIEW

A NEW EDITED VOLUME ON POLYBIUS

Volker Grieb and Clemens Koehn, edd., *Polybios und seine Historien*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013. Pp. 359. Hardcover, €62.00. ISBN 978-3-515-10477-7.

Based on a conference held in Hamburg in April 2010, *Polybios und seine Historien* reflects the current resurgence of scholarly interest in Polybius and his work. It is the second of two major edited volumes dedicated to the Megalopolitan historian to have been published in the year 2013—the first being Bruce Gibson and Thomas Harrison’s *Polybius and his World*, written in memory of the prominent Polybian scholar Frank Walbank.¹

While Grieb and Koehn concede in the introduction (7–12) that there was unfortunately no time to engage with that slightly earlier publication—an undertaking which would undoubtedly have yielded significant results—this second project fortunately has a very different aim and there is only limited overlap with the Walbank *Gedenkschrift*. Its focus is much broader, as it attempts to bring new light to Polybius’ position within his own contemporary environment, as well as within wider ancient and modern historiographical developments, by reassessing the *Histories* within the context of recent developments in Hellenistic scholarship. The contributors endeavour to bring new life to older areas of contention, while also contributing to the investigation of aspects that are not so clearly represented in Polybius’ work and have therefore remained understudied: economy, art, philosophy, and religion. The Editors readily acknowledge that comprehensive coverage of the field was impossible due to constraints of space: there is, for example, little engagement with social history or areas such as imperialism and Polybius’ relationship with Rome, which have received considerable scholarly attention. Yet, despite these omissions and the lack of engagement with *Polybius and his World*, the contents of this volume still touch upon a wide range of topics and make a distinctive contribution to current Polybian scholarship.

The fluidity of its purpose naturally also influences its arrangement. Contributions are rather loosely organised in a progression from methodological and historiographical concepts and stylistic influences, to military, political, and cultural features. The sequence of sixteen articles also tends to position

¹ B. Gibson and T. Harrison, edd., *Polybius and his World: Essays in Memory of F. W. Walbank* (Oxford, 2013).

the more traditional topics of discussion at the beginning (e.g. universal history), while those that have only a marginal role within the *Histories* and have consequently received less attention appear towards the end (e.g. art and religion). One has the feeling that alongside the promotion of a deeper understanding of the environment which shaped Polybius as a historian, the presentation of the material is also intended to create a sense of the direction of movement intended by the Editors towards closer connections with wider research on the Hellenistic world. However, if this is its intention, it is not apparent, and a more concise and clearly set agenda would certainly have benefited the overall cohesion of the book.

The first contribution, by Hans Kloft (13–24), explores the reception and development of Polybius' concept of universal history in eighteenth-century German scholarship. The article focuses more on the German scholarly and intellectual tradition and the later development of universal history, particularly in reference to Friedrich Schiller and August Ludwig von Schöser, than on Polybius himself. However, the influence of the ancient historian on this historiographical development, as its creator, is aptly contextualised. While universal history is an often discussed subject in Polybian scholarship, Kloft's article offers valuable insights into the ancient historian's reception and his influence on German historiography.

Andreas Mehl next explores the issue of continuation within Greek and Roman historiography (25–48), discussing how the extensions of a historical text, whether written by the same author or not, interact with the goals of the original. A comparison is made between the works of Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, and Cato, and reveals that not only was continuation by original authors common practice, but that it was also equally expected of later authors, as shown by Xenophon's open address to a hypothetical continuator. There is unfortunately only limited engagement with Polybius' work in this piece: the main point in this respect is that, while the historian tried to unify his original and extended plans, his additions often still fluctuated between the continuation of the same subject and a fresh start with a new one.

The third contribution is a brief article by Helmut Halfmann, who reviews the much-discussed relationship between Polybius and Livy (49–58). Halfmann discusses Livy's use, agreement with, and 'mistreatment' of Polybius' work, while also speculating about what Polybius' view of Livy might have been. While a discussion of Livy is valuable to any general survey of Polybian scholarship, this article does not offer much new ground.

Josef Wiesehöfer offers a piece which again places Polybius within the wider historiographical context of the Hellenistic world, and reflects upon the date of Rome's inclusion within the historical succession of the world empires

and Polybius' contribution to her admission into it (59–70).² It is ultimately established that Polybius did play an important role in formulating the image of Rome's interest in world domination, but did not contribute to her inclusion into the succession of world empires. It was Pompey the Great in the first century BC who was later responsible for the extension of this model—and his was not a historiographical contribution.

The much-disputed topic of *Tyche* is reassessed by Jürgen Deininger in a systematic review of the meaning and nature of *Tyche* in Polybius' *Histories* (71–112). Particular emphasis is laid on the problematic relationship between 'superhuman' *Tyche* and 'human' *aitiai* as the two main components of Polybius' conception of historical causality. Alongside his textual analysis, Deininger also includes an overview of various recent interpretations of *Tyche*'s function within the *Histories*, notably Ziegler, Walbank, Pédech, McGing, and Hau. While earlier studies have lent towards rhetorical functions, divine manifestations, and dual or multiple conceptions in describing the nature of *Tyche* in Polybius, Deininger sees it rather as a consistent real, but non-divine, force that emerges as a factor in determining events beyond human reasoning.

Frank Daubner contributes to the discussion of Polybius' performance in the field of geography (113–26), addressing the long-standing issue of whether the historian may be seen as a 'new Herodotus' or should be denied any originality or usefulness in that respect. Daubner claims that geography did not constitute an end in itself in Polybius' work and, as a result, his accounts are often sporadic, vague and based on hodological practices rather than mathematics. However, his geographic descriptions, which often use familiar spatial concepts and geometric shapes, were an essential part of his historical-didactic purpose in making past events easily understandable and were to an extent novel in themselves. It is concluded that, while Polybius was not wholly innovative in developing historical geography, his practices still make him worthy of the label of 'new Herodotus'.

Next, Polybius' role as a military historian and his place within the wider tradition of ancient technical and military literature from the fourth century BC is discussed in an innovative article by Burkhard Meißner (127–58). The prominence of war and military matters within the *Histories*, and their appearance in both descriptions of active warfare and discussions of its meaning and effect within institutions, are quantified by charting the frequency of the terms

² For a discussion of this topos see, for example, J. Wiesehöfer, 'The Medes and the Idea of the Succession of Empires in Antiquity', in G. Lanfranchi, M. Roaf and R. Rollinger, ed., *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia* (Padua, 2003) 391–6, and J. M. Alonso-Núñez, 'Abfolge der Weltreiche bei Polybios und Dionysios von Halikarnassos', *Historia* 32 (1983): 411–26

containing the stems *polem-*, *strat-* and *-polit-*. Following this analysis, it is concluded that, while situated in a long tradition of technical/military literature, Polybius' concern for causality makes him an innovator in the genre, particularly as he believes that war should be embedded in social, institutional, and mentality related contexts.

Clemens Koehn adds to the discussion of Polybius' stylistic characteristics and his intellectual background by reassessing the extent to which the language of official documentation influenced the ancient historian's own linguistic usage (159–82). Through the comparison of semantic and syntactic structures, Koehn concludes that, overall, epigraphic language had only a limited effect on Polybius and contemporary historiography. For the historian, this is made apparent by his absorption of the Achaean League's use of *stèle* as a technical term for the documents recording the admission of new members.

In the following chapter, Volker Grieb investigates Polybius' view of democracy (183–218). Here it is asserted that Polybius' aristocratic Achaean background greatly affected his representation of other democratic states. Only a few cities are explicitly described by the ancient historian as democracies—Achaëa, Epirus, Messene, and Crete—and only Achaëa is considered a 'true democracy' (*ἀληθινὴ δημοκρατία*) and receives a positive depiction. Athens, not described constitutionally at all, is cast under an especially negative light, because of the political tensions which arose between Achaëa and Athens in the third century BC. Interestingly, there is no distinction within Polybius' statements between *polis*-democracy, league-democracy, and the democratic element as it appears in the Roman Republic. In his account of various democratic constitutions, therefore, Polybius is convincingly shown to be far more the patriotic politician than the objective historian.

Linda-Marie Günther then follows Grieb in an investigation of Polybius' representation of Greek diplomacy and interstate relations (219–32). She concludes that, although Polybius' historical assessment and evaluation of the motives of diplomatic contacts may affect the reliability of his account at certain points, the ancient historian can generally be attributed with sufficient credibility in his representation of diplomatic affairs. This conclusion, however, is not quite convincing in light of the very points that Günther makes in the first part of her paper about the historian's omission of uncomfortable Achaean actions, his anger at the passivity of Athens, and the opaqueness of his exaggerated criticism of Ptolemy IV's character and policy. Furthermore, Grieb's assertions in the previous chapter about Polybius' biased representation of democratic states and his lack of detail in describing the differences between *polis*- and league-based democracy also compromise the credibility of Polybius as a political historian, and therefore put a strain on Günther's argument. Had

there been more interaction between the two contributors, perhaps this conflict could have been brought out more forcefully, and a possible solution sketched.

Supplementing his earlier contribution to *Polybius and his World*, Boris Dreyer takes up the discussion of Polybius' representation and evaluation of Hellenistic monarchs (233–50). He reassesses Welwei's influential view that Polybius' Achaean connection limited his objectivity towards monarchs, despite his tendency to avoid schematic categories of evaluation.³ However, Dreyer argues that, while Polybius clearly took up contemporary negative attitudes towards kingship and certainly possessed Achaean sympathies, there was still no influence of this bias in his assessments. Instead, Polybius primarily judged each monarch on how consistently he pursued his own goals. The assertion that the ancient historian considered Philip V and Perseus indecisive at certain points is not entirely persuasive, and I hope to return to this problem elsewhere; however, Dreyer's contribution brings promising new life to the work on kingship in Polybius.

Martin Tombrägel discusses the first of the four topics addressed in this volume which appear only as marginal elements within Polybius' work, but are central in current research on the Hellenistic world: art and its place within the *Histories* (251–68). Tombrägel points out the difficulty of building a general picture of contemporary art from Polybius' work, as it holds little interest for the author and most mentions are casual and superficial, or limited to accounts of its destruction, damage, or theft. A number of reasons for this apathy are postulated, including the historian's distaste for Athens, the difficulty of conveying artistic quality in comparison to technical skill, and the effects of the destruction of his hometown Megalopolis by Kleomenes on the historian himself. However, Polybius' emphasis on accounts of destruction, damage, and theft of art also imputes negative qualities to the individuals and peoples who committed such crimes, and therefore possesses a very specific Polybian moral/didactic purpose.

In the following article, Alain Bresson explores the reasons why Polybius was not an economic historian, while still useful in providing information about certain aspects of ancient economies for the modern historian (269–84). He notes that Polybius had very traditional views about economic affairs, being influenced by Aristotle and Xenophon, and considered facts and figures primarily data to play with, rather than objects worthy of further analysis. He was more interested in the results of economic processes, rather than how certain economic conditions came about. This piece complements, but also to an extent overlaps with, the recent contribution by J. K. Davies in *Polybius and his*

³ B. Dreyer, 'Frank Walbank's *Philippos Tragoidoumenos*: Polybius' Account of Philip's Last Years', in Gibson–Harrison (2013) 201–11.

World; however, while the two are closely related, Davies' article focuses more systematically on the different types of economic information supplied by Polybius, while Bresson investigates how it is revealed to us.

Peter Scholz's contribution explores the influence of philosophy on Polybius, reasserting the view that Stoicism did play a significant role in the *Histories*, even though it contains very few references to philosophy. In his analysis, Scholz points out a number of similarities in Polybius' views and terminology with the Middle Stoics Diogenes and Panaetius and the school's increasing interest in politics in the second century BC (285–300). Yet, it is asserted that while Polybius shows understanding of this philosophical turn, these references are only general and vague and do not represent a strong connection with the Stoic school, only a familiarity instilled through education (*paideia*).

In the final contribution, Wolfgang Spickermann reassesses the difficult topic of Polybius' attitude towards religion (301–18), concluding that it is not possible to determine whether he was an atheist, as some have claimed, or a follower of 'civic religion'. The historian's comments about the evil character of those who commit *asebeia*, his financial contributions to the temple of Zeus in Megalopolis, and his praise of the Roman integration of superstition into public acts are at odds with other statements concerning the humanisation of the gods, and his overall distaste for rituals, cults and superstitions, matters which he considered only suitable for the attention of the masses.

The volume is completed by an excellent bibliography (319–35), and a reliable *index nominum* (337–43) and *index locorum* (344–59).

Much as one may criticise its relative lack of cohesion, the unresolved contradictions among several contributions, and the relative lack of engagement with aspects of current scholarship, this volume is certainly an invaluable contribution to Polybian scholarship. It opens the way for closer interaction between Polybius' *Histories* and Hellenistic scholarship, and will undoubtedly prove a springboard for further research in that direction.

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