

## REVIEW

## A NEW COMMENTARY ON POLYBIUS I

David D. Phillips, *Polybius Book 1: A Commentary*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Michigan Classical Press, 2016. Pp. 269. Hardback, \$64.00. ISBN 978-0-9799713-7-2.

Polybius and his *Histories* have received much attention over the past two decades. Scholarship has shifted towards the investigation of the literary, didactic, and cultural-political aspects of this historian's work,<sup>1</sup> and at least four new edited volumes have appeared in the last six years.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there has been a gradual re-evaluation and even, in some quarters, unalloyed appreciation of Polybius' style, and it is no longer considered as unreadable or 'destitute of artistic skill' as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Strachan-Davidson once proclaimed—a condemnation of Polybius that has lingered unchallenged for centuries.<sup>3</sup> However, despite this surge of attention, there has not yet been a new commentary on Polybius' text in Anglophone scholarship since Frank Walbank's definitive *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* in three volumes, the last published in 1979. Moreover, while an essential work, Walbank's commentary is more useful to historical and historiographical investigation rather than to a full understanding of Polybius' language and style, and there has been little assistance in this regard since the classic works of Strachan-Davidson and Capes at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> David P. Phillip's commentary on Polybius Book 1 is therefore a long-awaited contribution to Polybian scholarship, as it focuses on the historian's language and style and opens up this difficult text to those in need of more direction. It will not (nor does it aim to) supersede Walbank's historical commentary, as it does not cover historical or historiographical points in significant detail. References to scholarly material are also kept to a minimum as discussion focuses more on aiding understanding and translation than on conducting broader investigations. As a volume whose primary purpose is to introduce the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Davidson (1991); Eckstein (1995); Golan (1995); Champion (2004); B. McGing (2010); Maier (2012); Miltios (2013); Moreno Leoni (2017); Wiater (2016); and Nicholson (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Gibson and Harrison (2012); Smith and Yarrow (2012); Grieb and Koehn (2013); and most recently Miltios and Tamiolaki (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. Hal. *Comp.* 4; Strachan-Davidson (1888) xiii. For this revision of opinion, see McGing (2010) 221 and Waterfield (2010) xxxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Strachan-Davidson (1888); Capes (1888).

reader to the intricacies of Polybius' Greek, it works very well and allows the reader to concentrate on the language unimpeded by tangential concerns.

The volume is separated into five sections: a preface (1–2); an introduction (3–18); Polybius' original Greek text based on the Teubner edition of Th. Büttner-Wobst (19–82); the commentary (83–245); and an index of Greek words (247–69). The preface briefly outlines the referencing practices used in the volume, provides a list of abbreviations for modern works, and offers an essential bibliography comprising recommended dictionaries, grammars, and historical works. The introduction gives a clear overview of Polybius' life, work, and language in four sections: 1) Polybius' Life and Works (3–5); 2) the *Histories*—detailing the content, purpose and structure of the *Histories* as a whole, with a summary of scholarly views (5–11); 3) Book 1—a longer discussion of the content and structure of this book (11–14); and 4) Language, Style and Tone. It is the fourth and final section of the introduction that is the most useful for those who set out to translate Polybius, as it reviews the historian's linguistic tendencies and language preferences (14–18). The author explains that, while Polybius generally sticks to the grammatical rules of Classical Athenian prose, requiring no new learning on the reader's part, he writes in a formal, literary Hellenistic *koinê* Greek: some of his vocabulary is therefore relatively foreign to earlier authors or has otherwise altered in meaning since the Classical period (14–15).<sup>5</sup> The unabridged and supplemented *LSJ* is therefore essential to a correct translation. Phillips goes on to summarise a number of Polybius' favourite words (e.g. μέρος and προειρημένος), characteristic deviations (including the use of διότι for ὅτι), and grammatical preferences: his proclivity for prepositional phrases in place of a bare genitive; for articular infinitives; for genitive absolutes and substantivised adjectives; for generalising κατὰ plus accusative as the equivalent of a substantive; for long, complex, and sometimes cumbersome periodic sentences; and his aversion to hiatus, sometimes resulting in unexpected word order, word choice, or grammatical construction (14–15). What might have been even more beneficial to the reader in emphasising the peculiarities of Polybius' Greek, as well as highlighting the direction of change in language since the Classical period, would have been a short list of these words and grammatical constructions which the student could refer to while translating.

The fact that this volume was used to and is intended to teach is clear from the presentation of Polybius' original text. The Greek is printed in a clear and easily readable font, the numbers of the passages are presented at the top of each page, and the individual passage numbers within the text are highlighted in bold for ease of identification. The Commentary is divided into three main parts with a number of sub-divisions: '1–5, Introduction to the *Histories*'; '6–64:

<sup>5</sup> See Koehn (2013) for further discussion of the influence of inscriptional documents on Polybius' language.

The First Punic War’ (further subdivided into nineteen sections); and ‘65–88: The Truceless War’ (further subdivided into ten sections). Perhaps dividing up the Greek text into the same divisions or indicating where the divisions in the commentary fall in the margins of the Greek would also have aided use of the commentary. This is not a significant issue, however, and such a practice would in any case have changed the appearance and reception of the original text. Throughout his commentary, Phillips offers thorough guidance on vocabulary and grammar, expanding organically and consistently on his earlier introduction to language, style, and tone, and refers to, and at times suggests changes to, Paton’s Loeb translation (including the revised version by Habicht and Walbank). The only slightly longer digression on content appears in reference to the problematic and long-disputed nature of *Tyche* in Polybius’ work (89–90), an insertion appropriate to any investigation of this historian. At the end of the volume Phillips has included a comprehensive Index of Greek Words (247–69)—a useful resource for students and scholars alike, allowing for analysis of the frequency and distribution of words and themes in Book 1.

In conclusion, it is clear that this commentary is mainly aimed at students, although it will also prove useful to scholars less familiar with Polybius. The volume mostly restricts itself to Anglophone scholarship; however, some essential if old works in French and German are included, such as P. Pédech’s *La méthode historique de Polybe* (Paris, 1964), A. Mauersberger et al. *Polybios-Lexikon* (Berlin, 1956–2004), and F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1957–).

While an excellent text for students in terms of content and structure, this book is currently only available in hardback, and its price is therefore high (\$65, c. £53). We can only hope that it will appear in paperback in the near future, and will therefore become more accessible. Despite this current difficulty, it will no doubt open doors to the teaching, analysis, and reception of Polybius. It will hopefully be the impetus for further linguistic commentaries on Polybius’ work, and the start of a new direction in the teaching of post-classical and *koiné* Greek.

*University of Exeter*

EMMA NICHOLSON  
e.l.nicholson@exeter.ac.uk

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