Readings for 22 May: Polybius (John Marincola)

There are five passages from Polybius, taken from the Penguin translation by Ian Scott-Kilvert (London, 1979), and one introductory essay by James Davidson, taken from *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge, 2009) 123–36.

Passages from Polybius

1. Introduction (Book 1, chs. 1–4, pp. 41-45)
Polybius explains why he writes his history and what is unique about it.

2. Hannibal Crosses the Alps (Book 3, chs. 35–59, pp. 211–31)
Most of Polybius' history is lost, and we have comparatively few connected passages of narration. This one from Book 3 gives some idea of how Polybius treated events.

3. Forms of States (Book 6, chs. 3–9, pp. 302–11)
From Book 6 this is perhaps one of the best known passages from Polybius, giving his ideas about how societies come together and govern themselves.

4. The Roman Funeral (Book 6,chs. 53–55, pp. 346–8)
A description of the Roman funeral and its effects, as Polybius sees it.

5. The Effective Historian (Book 12, chs. 25d–28a, pp. 441–51)
Polybius talks about the writing of history more than any other author from the ancient world; these pages are part of his discussion of the qualities needed in a good historian. He is criticising a predecessor, the Sicilian historian Timaeus of Tauromenium (ca. 350–255 BCE), who composed a massive history of Sicily that covered its earliest history down to 288 BCE, and who was highly regarded in his time.

To keep the selection within the scope of a single volume some passages had inevitably to be excluded; but it has been possible to include virtually all the most interesting and most typical parts of what has survived of the original *Histories*.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In preparing this translation, I am deeply indebted to Professor Walbank's Commentary on *The Histories* and to his personal assistance in providing much helpful and constructive criticism and advice for the text and notes.

IAN SCOTT-KILVERT

BOOK I

Introduction

1. If earlier chroniclers of human affairs had failed to bear witness in praise of history, it might perhaps have been necessary for me to urge all readers to seek out and pay special attention to writings such as these; for certainly mankind possesses no better guide to conduct than the knowledge of the past. But in truth all historians without exception, one may say, have made this claim the be-all and end-all of their work: namely that the study of history is at once an education in the truest sense and a training for a political career, and that the most infallible, indeed the only method of learning how to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of Fortune is to be reminded of the disasters suffered by others. We may agree, then, that nobody at this time need feel himself obliged to repeat what has been so often and so eloquently stated by other writers. Least of all does this apply to my own case, for here it is precisely the element of the unexpected[1] in the events I have chosen to describe which will challenge and stimulate everyone alike, both young and old, to study my systematic history. There can surely be nobody so petty or so apathetic in his outlook that he has no desire to discover by what means and under what system of government the Romans succeeded in less than fifty-three years[2] in bringing under their rule almost the whole of the inhabited world, an achievement which is without parallel in human history. Or from the opposite point of view, can there be anyone so completely

1. The element of the unexpected plays an important part in Polybius' approach to history. The idea derives from the Hellenistic historians, who in turn borrowed it from Greek tragedy; Aristotle defines its function as the arousing of fear and pity. In the context of the rise of the Roman Empire it is the unseen and irrational factor, controlled by *Tyche* (Fortune), which often works in favour of Rome.

2. From 220 B.C. – the start of the Second Punic War – to 167 B.C.

absorbed in other subjects of contemplation or study that he could find any task more important than to acquire this knowledge?

2. The arresting character of my subject and the grand spectacle which it presents can best be illustrated if we consider the most celebrated empires of the past which have provided historians with their principal themes, and set them beside the dominion of Rome. Those which qualify for such a comparison are the following. The Persians for a certain period exercised their rule and supremacy over a vast territory, but every time that they ventured to pass beyond the limits of Asia[1] they endangered the security not only of their empire but of their own existence. The Lacedaemonians after contending for many years for the leadership of Greece at last achieved it, but were only able to hold it unchallenged for a bare twelve years.[2] The rule of the Macedonians in Europe extended only from the lands bordering the Adriatic to the Danube, which would appear to be no more than a small fraction of the continent. Later, by overthrowing the Persian Empire, they also became the rulers of Asia;[3] but although they were then regarded as having become the masters of a larger number of states and territories than any other people before them, they still left the greater part of the inhabited world in the hands of others. They did not even once attempt to dispute the possession of Sicily, Sardinia or Africa, and the most warlike tribes of western Europe were, to speak the plain truth, unknown to them. The Romans, on the other hand, have brought not just mere portions but almost the whole of the world under their rule, and have left an empire which far surpasses any that exists today or is likely to succeed it. In the course of this work I shall explain more clearly how this

1. Both Aeschylus and Herodotus associate this overstepping of the frontier with *hubris* (mortal arrogance) which attracts *nemesis* (retribution). The events in question were Darius' Scythian expedition and his and Xerxes' invasions of Greece.

2. Polybius, who was not favourably disposed to Athens, makes no mention of the preeminence of the Athenians in the fifth century B.C. The Spartan hegemony is reckoned from 405 B.C. (Lysander's defeat of the Athenians at Aegospotami) to 394 B.C. (the defeat of the Spartans by Conon the Athenian at Cnidos with the help of a Persian fleet).

3. After Darius' death in 330 B.C. Alexander became the Great King and ruler over Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and the eastern provinces of the Persian Empire.

supremacy was acquired, and it will also become apparent what great advantages those who are fond of learning can enjoy from the study of serious history.

3. The starting point for my history will be the 140th Olympiad,[1] and the events with which it begins are these. In Greece the so-called Social War, the first which was waged by Philip of Macedon, the son of Demetrius and father of Perseus, in alliance with the Achaeans against the Aetolians; in Asia the war for the possession of Coele–Syria,[2] fought between Antiochus and Ptolemy Philopator; and in Italy, Africa and the neighbouring countries the war between Rome and Carthage, which most historians call the Hannibalic War.[3] These events immediately follow those which are recorded at the end of the history of Aratus of Sicyon.[4] Now in earlier times the world's history had consisted, so to speak, of a series of unrelated episodes, the origins and results of each being as widely separated as their localities, but from this point onwards history becomes an organic whole: the affairs of Italy and of Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end. This, then, is the reason why I have chosen that specific date as the starting-point for my work. For it was after their victory over the Carthaginians in the Hannibalic War that the Romans came to believe that the principal and most important step in their efforts to achieve universal dominion had been taken, and were thereby encouraged to stretch out their hands for the first time to grasp the rest, and to cross with an army into Greece and the lands of Asia.

Now if we Greeks were familiar with these two states which disputed the rule of the world, there would perhaps have been no need for me to write of their previous history, or to explain what purpose impelled them or upon what resources they relied in embarking upon such an immense undertaking. But the truth is that most of the Greeks know little of the former power or the history

1. 220–216 B.C.

2. The fourth Syrian War, 219–217 B.C.

3. i.e. most Greek historians; they wrote from a pro-Carthaginian point of view and centred their account upon the personality of Hannibal. The Romans referred to the conflict as the Second Punic War.

4. This Greek statesman wrote a series of memoirs which occupied over thirty books.

either of Rome or of Carthage, and so I believed it necessary to prefix this and the succeeding book to the main body of my work. I was anxious that nobody, once he had become engrossed in the narrative proper, should find himself at a loss and have to ask what the Romans had in mind, and what were the forces at their disposal when they ventured upon that enterprise which finally made them the masters by land of our part of the world. On the contrary, I intended that these two books and the introduction they contain should leave my readers in no doubt that the Romans had from the outset sufficient reason to entertain the design of creating a world empire and sufficient resources to accomplish their purpose.

4. Now my history possesses a certain distinctive quality which is related to the extraordinary spirit of the times in which we live, and it is this. Just as Fortune has steered almost all the affairs of the world in one direction and forced them to converge upon one and the same goal, so it is the task of the historian to present to his readers under one synoptical view the process by which she has accomplished this general design. It was this phenomenon above all which originally attracted my attention and encouraged me to undertake my task. The second reason was that nobody else among our contemporaries has set out to write a general history; certainly if they had done so I should have had far less incentive to make the attempt myself. But as it is I notice that while various historians deal with isolated wars and certain of the subjects connected with them, nobody, so far as I am aware, has made any effort to examine the general and comprehensive scheme of events, when it began, whence it originated, and how it produced the final result. I therefore thought it imperative not to overlook or allow to pass into oblivion this phenomenon – the achievement of Fortune which is the most excellent and profitable to contemplate. For although Fortune is forever producing something new and forever enacting a drama in the lives of men, yet she has never before in a single instance created such a composition[1] or put on such a show-piece as that which we have witnessed in our own times.

It is impossible for us to achieve this comprehensive view from

1. Polybius' conception of Fortune here is of a force in the universe which takes pleasure in change for its own sake, and also acts as a dramatic producer, fashioning a design out of men's destinies.

those histories which record isolated events: one might as well try to obtain an impression of the shape, arrangement and order of the whole world by visiting each of its most famous cities in turn or looking at separate plans of them, an approach which is not in the least likely to yield the right result. It has always seemed to me that those who believe they can obtain a just and well-proportioned view of history as a whole by reading separate and specialized reports of events, are behaving like a man who, when he has examined the dissected parts of a body which was once alive and beautiful, imagines that he has beheld the living animal in all its grace and movement. But if anyone could reconstruct the creature there and then, restoring both its shape and its beauty as a living being and show it to the same man, I believe he would immediately admit that his conception was nowhere near the truth, and was more like something experienced in a dream. The fact is that we can obtain no more than an impression of a whole from a part, but certainly neither a thorough knowledge nor an accurate understanding. We must conclude then that specialized studies or monographs contribute very little to our grasp of the whole and our conviction of its truth. On the contrary, it is only by combining and comparing the various parts of the whole with one another and noting their resemblances and their differences that we shall arrive at a comprehensive view, and thus encompass both the practical benefits and the pleasures that the reading of history affords.

5. In this book I shall take as my starting-point the first occasion on which the Romans crossed the sea from Italy. This event occurs at the point where Timaeus' history leaves off, namely in the 129th Olympiad.[1] It will therefore be my task to describe first of all how and at what date the Romans established themselves in Italy, and what considerations impelled them to cross to Sicily, which was the first country beyond the shores of Italy on which they set foot. The actual cause of their crossing must be stated without comment, for if I were to pursue the cause of the cause, I should fail to establish either the starting-point or the fundamental principle of my history. The starting-point, then, must be fixed at a moment

1. 264–260 B.C. For Timaeus of Tauromenium (*c.* 350–*c.* 255), see Introduction, pp. 18, 24, 26, 33.

also as hostages. For a naval force he left with his brother Hasdrubal fifty quinqueremes, two quadriremes and five triremes, thirty-two of the quinqueremes and all the triremes being fully manned. He also provided him with a contingent of cavalry consisting of 450 Libyans and Libyo-Phoenicians, 300 Ilergetes, and 1,800 Numidians drawn from the tribes of the Massyli, Masaesyli, Maccaei and Maurusii who inhabit the coastal districts of Africa. His infantry strength consisted of 11,850 Libyans, 300 Ligurians and 500 Balearians, together with twenty-one elephants.

The accuracy of these details concerning Hannibal's war establishment need not surprise the reader, even though anyone actually engaged in mobilizing the troops would have found difficulty in matching it. At the same time I need not be condemned as if I were imitating those historians who try to make their inaccuracies convincing. The fact is that I discovered on Cape Lacinium[1] a bronze tablet which Hannibal himself had had inscribed with these details while he was in Italy, and since I considered this to be an absolutely trustworthy piece of evidence, I had no hesitation in following it.

34. After Hannibal had put in hand all the necessary measures for the security of Africa and Spain, he still waited anxiously for the messengers he was expecting from the Celts. He had thoroughly informed himself concerning the fertility of the regions at the foot of the Alps and near the river Po, the density of the population, the bravery of its men in war, and above all their hatred of Rome, which had persisted ever since the earlier war, which I described in my last book in order to enable my readers to follow what I am now about to relate. Hannibal therefore harboured great hopes of these tribes, and had been at pains to send envoys who bore lavish promises to the Celtic chieftains, both those living south of the Alps and those who inhabited the mountains themselves. He was convinced that he could only carry the war against the Romans into Italy if, after having overcome the difficulties of the route, he could reach the territory of the Celts and engage them as allies and partners in his campaign.

At last his messengers returned with the news that the Celts

1. A cape in the extreme south-east of Italy, near Croton, the modern Cape Colonna.

were ready to cooperate and eagerly awaited his arrival; they also reported that the passage of the Alps was arduous and difficult but by no means impossible, and so at the approach of spring he assembled his troops from their winter quarters. At the same time he received the news of the reception of the Roman embassy in Carthage, which served to raise his spirits, and so, trusting that he would be supported by popular feeling at home, he openly appealed to his men to join him in the war against Rome.[1] He impressed upon them how the Romans had demanded that he and all the senior officers of his army should be handed over to them, and at the same time he told them of the wealth of the country they were about to invade and of the friendly feelings and active support of the Gauls. When he saw that the soldiers were as eager as himself to start, he praised their spirit, ordered them to be ready on the day fixed for their departure, and dismissed the assembly.

35. After completing during the winter the arrangements I have already described, and having thus provided for the security of Africa and Spain, he began his march on the appointed day with an army of about 90,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. Having crossed the Ebro, he set about subduing the tribes of the Ilergetes, Bargusii, Aerenosii and Andosini as far as the Pyrenees. He made himself master of all this territory, took several cities by storm, and completed the campaign with remarkable speed, but he was involved in heavy fighting and suffered some severe losses. He left Hanno in command of the whole territory north of the Ebro and placed the Bargusii under his brother's absolute rule; this was the tribe which he distrusted most on account of their friendly feelings towards the Romans. He detached from his army a contingent of 10,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry to be commanded by Hanno, and deposited with him all the heavy baggage of the expeditionary force. At the same time he sent home an equal number of troops. In doing this he had two objects: first to leave behind a number of men who would be well-disposed to himself, and secondly to hold out to the rest of the Spaniards a good prospect of returning home, not only for those who were serving with him but for those

1. The Roman ultimatum was not delivered at Carthage until late in March 218 at the earliest and possibly not until June, so that this speech may well be imaginary.

who remained behind, so that if he were ever in need of reinforcements they would all enthusiastically respond. With the rest of his force, which had been disencumbered of its heavy baggage and now consisted of 50,000 infantry and about 9,000 cavalry, he pressed on through the Pyrenees towards the crossing of the Rhône. The army he commanded was formidable not so much for its numerical strength as for its efficiency, since it had been highly trained in a continual series of campaigns against the Spanish tribes.

39. At the time of which we are now speaking the Carthaginians ruled the whole of that part of Africa which faces the Mediterranean, from the Altars of Philaenus[1] on the Greater Syrtes as far as the Pillars of Hercules. The length of this coastline is more than 16,000 stades. They had also crossed the straits at the Pillars of Hercules and made themselves masters of the whole of Spain as far as the promontory on the coast of the Mediterranean known as Emporiae, where the Pyrenees which separate the Celts from the Spaniards meet the sea. This spot is about 8,000 stades from the outlet of the Mediterranean at the Pillars of Hercules. The distances which make up this coastline are: 3,000 stades from the Pillars to New Carthage, from which Hannibal started out for Italy; 2,600 stades from there to the Ebro; 1,600 stades from the Ebro to Emporiae, and about 1,600 stades from Emporiae to the crossing of the Rhône. This last part of the road has now been carefully measured by the Romans and is marked with milestones at every eighth stade. From the crossing of the Rhône, if one follows the bank of the river upstream as far as the foot of the pass from the Alps into Italy, the distance is 1,400 stades. The length of the pass which Hannibal was to cross to bring him down into the plain of the Po is about 1,200 stades. Thus, starting from New Carthage, he had to march in all a distance of some 9,000 stades.[2] By the time that he reached the Pyrenees he had completed nearly half the journey in terms of mileage, but in terms of difficulty the greater part of his task still lay before him.

1. These originally marked the boundary between Carthage and Cyrene; they were situated near the modern El Agheila, south-west of Benghazi.

2. This is a rounded-off total: the distances actually quoted add up to about 8,400 stades, amounting to about 1,000 Roman miles.

40. Hannibal was now engaged in attempting to cross the Pyrenees, where the Celts caused him great anxiety because of the natural strength of the passes which they occupied. Meanwhile the Romans had received from the envoys they had sent to Carthage a report on the speeches that had been made and the decisions taken there. The news also reached them, sooner than they had expected, that Hannibal and his army had crossed the Ebro,[1] whereupon they decided to put the consuls with their legions into the field and to send Publius Cornelius Scipio to Spain and Tiberius Sempronius Longus to Africa.[2]

At the same time as they were engaged in enrolling the legions and making other preparations, they were also pursuing the scheme which had already been voted in the assembly for establishing two colonies in Cisalpine Gaul. They took active steps to fortify the towns and ordered the colonists to present themselves there within thirty days; 6,000 of them had been assigned to each city. One, which was founded to the south of the Po, was named Placentia; the other, which lay north of the river, Cremona. These two colonies had hardly been established when the Gallic tribe of the Boii rose in revolt. They had long been waiting for an opportunity to throw off their allegiance to Rome, but had not found a suitable occasion. Now, encouraged by the messages they had received telling them that the Carthaginians were close at hand, they seceded from Rome, abandoning the hostages they had handed over at the end of the war which I described in my last book. They appealed to the Insubres, who readily joined them because of their long-standing grievance against the Romans; then the two tribes overran the lands which had been allotted to the colonies, and when the settlers took to flight, pursued them to Mutina, another Roman colony, and laid siege to the city.

Among those who were shut up there were three men of high rank who had been sent out as commissioners to supervise the

1. It is not certain whether this news reached Rome before the return of the envoys; it may even have preceded their mission to Carthage.

2. Scipio, with an army of 8,000 legionaries, 14,000 allied infantry, 600 Roman and 1,600 allied cavalry was to proceed to Massilia and thence invade Spain. Sempronius with another 8,600 citizen troops, 16,000 allied infantry and 1,800 cavalry was to establish a base in Sicily for the eventual invasion of Africa.

distribution of land: Gaius Lutatius, a former consul, and two former praetors. These men requested a parley, to which the Boii agreed, but when the three officials left the city, the tribesmen treacherously seized them, hoping to use them to recover their own hostages. The praetor Lucius Manlius was in command of a body of troops occupying an advanced position to defend the region, heard of what had happened, and marched to the rescue. The Boii, however, had learned of his approach and prepared ambushes in a forest which lay on his line of march, attacked him from all sides as soon as he entered the woods and killed many of the Romans. The survivors at first took to flight, but when they reached some higher ground they rallied sufficiently to enable them with some difficulty to make an orderly withdrawal. The Boii followed close behind and shut up this force too, at a village named Tannes. When the news reached Rome that the fourth legion was surrounded and closely besieged by the Boii, the people immediately sent off the legions which had been voted to Scipio to relieve it, placed this force under the command of a praetor, and ordered the consul to enrol other legions from the allies.

41. In my second and third books I have now surveyed the course of Celtic affairs and their outcome, from the earliest times up to the moment of Hannibal's arrival.

Meanwhile the Roman consuls, having completed the necessary preparations for their respective assignments, set sail in the summer[1] to carry out the operations which had been planned. Publius Cornelius Scipio was bound for Spain with a fleet of 60 ships, and Tiberius Sempronius Longus for Africa with 160 quinquiremes. The latter appeared to be preparing an armada of an overwhelming size: he collected forces from every quarter and put in hand such ambitious preparations at Lilybaeum as to give the impression that he was about to sail up to Carthage and lay siege to it forthwith. Meanwhile Scipio sailed along the coast to Liguria, crossed from Pisae to the neighbourhood of Massilia in five days, anchored off the first mouth of the Rhône, which is known as the Massiliot mouth, and disembarked his troops. He had heard that Hannibal was already crossing the Pyrenees, but because of the difficulty of the country on his route and the number of Celtic tribes which

1. Actually in August 218 B.C.

lay between, he felt sure that the Carthaginians were still many miles away.

Hannibal, however, had bribed some of the Celts to let him pass, and forced his way through the territory of others. Then he continued his march, keeping the Sardinian Sea on his right, and suddenly appeared with his army at the crossing of the Rhône long before anybody had expected him. When the news of his arrival was reported to Scipio, the general could hardly believe that the enemy could have marched so quickly, but he was anxious to discover the exact truth. He therefore dispatched a reconnaissance party consisting of 300 of his bravest cavalry, and sent with them a number of Celts who were serving with the Massiliots as mercenaries to act as guides, and supporting troops. He himself stayed behind to rest his men after the voyage and to discuss with the military tribunes what was the best ground on which to give battle to the enemy.

42. Meanwhile Hannibal had arrived in the neighbourhood of the river, and immediately set about trying to cross it at a point where the stream is still single, some four days' march from the sea. He used every resource to make friends with the natives living by the bank, and bought up all their canoes and boats, of which there was a large number, since many of the inhabitants of the Rhône valley are engaged in sea-borne trade. He also obtained from them the kind of logs which are suitable for building canoes, so that within two days he had mustered an innumerable quantity of small ferry-boats, for in this situation every soldier was anxious to be independent of his neighbour and relied on his own efforts for his chance of getting across. But in the meanwhile a large force of barbarians had gathered on the opposite bank to prevent the Carthaginians from crossing. Hannibal took note of this and decided that he could neither force a passage in the face of such a large body of the enemy, nor stay where he was, for fear of being attacked on all sides. Accordingly, on the third night he detached a part of his army, gave them native guides and sent them off under the command of Hanno, the son of Bomilcar the Suffete.

This contingent marched upstream following the bank of the river for 200 stades, at which point the river divides, forming an island, and there they halted. They found plenty of timber ready

to hand; then, by lashing or nailing a number of logs together they quickly built a large number of rafts strong enough for their immediate purpose, and on these they made the crossing safely and met no opposition. They occupied a naturally strong position and rested there for a day, partly to recover their strength after so much physical effort, and partly to prepare for the movement they had been ordered to carry out. Meanwhile Hannibal was occupied with similar preparations for the main body of the army; the problem which caused him the greatest difficulty was how to get his thirty-seven elephants over the river.

43. On the fifth night[1] the force which had crossed earlier under Hanno started off a little before daybreak marching downstream along the opposite bank towards the barbarian army. Meanwhile Hannibal also had his troops ready and was waiting for the moment he had chosen to cross. He had filled the boats with his light cavalry and the canoes with his lightest infantry. The large boats were placed the furthest upstream and directly against the current and the lighter ones below them, so that the heavier craft should absorb the main force of the water and the canoes be less exposed to risk in crossing. The plan for the horses was that they should swim astern of the boats, with one man on each side of the stern guiding three or four by their leading reins, and in this way a large number of the animals were brought over with the first wave of troops. The barbarians, as soon as they saw what the enemy were attempting, poured out of their camp in scattered groups without any order, since they felt sure they could easily stop the Carthaginians from landing.

As soon as Hannibal saw the column of smoke which was the pre-arranged signal that Hanno's force was close at hand, he ordered all those in charge of the ferry-boats to embark and push out against the stream. This was immediately done, and a most dramatic and thrilling spectacle followed. The men in the boats cheered and shouted as they tried to outstrip one another and strained against the strength of the current. All this time the two armies faced one another at the very edge of the river, the Carthaginians following the progress of the boats with loud cheers and sharing in their comrades' agony of suspense, while the barbarians

1. i.e. after the army had first arrived at the Rhône.

yelled their war-cries and challenged their enemies to battle. But at this moment, when the barbarians had completely deserted their camp, Hanno's force on the far bank suddenly delivered their attack. Some of them set fire to the encampment, while the main body fell upon those who were opposing the crossing. The barbarians were taken completely by surprise; some of them rushed back to save their tents, while others defended themselves against this attack from the rear. Hannibal, when he saw that the battle was proceeding exactly as he had intended, immediately formed up his first division as it landed, addressed a few words to the men, and at once engaged the barbarians. The Celts had no time to form their ranks, they were again taken by surprise by this manoeuvre, and soon turned and took to flight.

44. The Carthaginian commander, having thus won control of the bridgehead and defeated the enemy, immediately set about transporting the men who had been left on the other bank. In a short while he had ferried his whole army across, and encamped for that night beside the river. The next morning he learned that the Roman fleet was anchored off the mouths of the Rhône; whereupon he selected a body of 500 Numidian horsemen, and sent them off to reconnoitre the location and the strength of the enemy and to observe their movements. At the same time he ordered the men who had the charge of ferrying over the elephants to set about their task. Next, he paraded the army, presented to them Magilus and the other Celtic chieftains who had come to him from the plains of the Po, and with the help of an interpreter explained to the troops what had been the decision of the Celtic tribes, as their leaders had reported it. What most encouraged his men was first of all the actual appearance of the envoys who were inviting them to come and promising to join them in the war against Rome, and secondly, the confidence they could feel in the promises of the Gauls to guide them by a route on which they would be abundantly supplied with necessities and which would lead them rapidly and safely to Italy. Besides this, the envoys had much to say of the size and the wealth of the country where they were going, and of the eager spirit of the men who would fight by their side in their battles against the Romans.

After they had addressed the troops to this effect, the Celts

withdrew and Hannibal came forward and spoke to his men. He began by recalling their past achievements and reminded them that although they had engaged in many dangerous operations and fought in many a battle, they had never failed in one when they followed his plans and advice. Then he urged them to take heart in the knowledge that the hardest part of their task had already been achieved, since they had already forced the passage of the river and had seen and heard for themselves the evidence of their allies' goodwill and readiness to help them. He appealed to them to have confidence and leave to him those details which were his own business, and to obey orders and show themselves to be men of courage and worthy of their own past record. The army received his words with great enthusiasm and loud applause, whereupon Hannibal praised the men, offered up a prayer to the gods on behalf of all, and then dismissed the assembly. He gave out orders that they should take their rest and make their preparations with all speed, as the march would be resumed on the following day.

45. After the assembly had been dismissed, the Numidian horsemen who had been sent out to reconnoitre returned to camp; the greater number of the party had been killed and the rest arrived in headlong flight. Quite near their camp they had met the detachment of Roman cavalry sent out by Scipio for the same purpose, and the engagement had been fought with such courage and fury that the Romans and Celts lost some 140 horsemen and the Numidians more than 200. After the action the Romans rode on in pursuit right up to the Carthaginian camp, surveyed it, and then galloped back to warn their general that the enemy had arrived. They reached the Roman camp safely and delivered their report, whereupon Scipio immediately had the troops' baggage loaded on to the ships, and marched off with his whole army up the river bank in the hope of meeting the Carthaginians.

At dawn the day after the assembly had been held Hannibal dispatched the whole of his cavalry in the direction of the sea to act as a covering force, and moved his infantry out of camp and set them on the march, while he himself waited for the elephants and the men who had been left with them to cross the river. The method by which they were transported was as follows.

46. A number of solidly built rafts were constructed, and two

of these were lashed together and firmly fixed to the bank at the point where the raft entered the river,[1] their combined width being about fifty feet. Other rafts were then attached on the riverward side so as to form a pontoon which projected into the stream. The side which faced upstream was made fast to trees growing on the bank, so that the whole structure should remain securely in place and not be dislodged by the current. When the whole pontoon had been extended to a length of some 200 feet, they attached two solidly built rafts to the far end; these were strongly fastened to one another, but so connected to the main pontoon that the lashings could easily be cut. They made fast to the two rafts several towing lines; these were to be taken up by boats whose task was to tow the rafts, prevent them from being carried downstream, and hold them against the current, thus transporting the elephants which would be on them. Next they piled up quantities of earth along the whole pier of rafts until they had raised its surface to the same level as the bank, and made it look like the path on the land which led down to the crossing. The elephants were accustomed to obey their Indian mahouts until they arrived at the edge of the water, but they would on no account venture into it. This time they led the elephants along the earthen causeway with two females in front, whom the rest obediently followed. As soon as they were standing on the last rafts, the ropes holding these were cut, the boats took up the strain of the tow-ropes, and the rafts with the elephants standing on them were rapidly pulled away from the causeway. At this the animals panicked and at first turned round and began to move about in all directions, but as they were by then surrounded on all sides by the stream, their fear eventually compelled them to stay quiet. In this way, and by continuing to attach fresh rafts to the end of the pontoon, they managed to get most of the animals over on these, but some became so terror-stricken that they leaped into the river when they were half-way across. The drivers of these were all drowned, but the elephants were saved, because through the power and the length of their trunks they were able to keep these above the surface and breathe through them, and also spout out any water which had entered their mouths. In this way most of them survived and crossed the river on their feet.

1. i.e. the first two rafts rested wholly on land.

47. After the elephants had been put across in this fashion, Hannibal formed them into a rearguard together with the cavalry, and proceeded up the river bank, marching away from the sea in an easterly direction, as though he were heading for the centre of Europe. The Rhône has its source beyond the recess of the Adriatic Gulf[1] on the northern slopes of the Alps and facing the west, and then flowing in a south-westerly direction it falls into the Sardinian Sea. For much of its course it runs through a deep valley, to the north of which lives the Celtic tribe of the Ardyes, while its southern side is entirely enclosed by the northern slopes of the Alps. The plains of the Po, which I have described at length in an earlier passage, are separated from the Rhône valley by a series of peaks of these mountains which, starting from Marseilles, extend to the head of the Adriatic. It was this range which Hannibal now crossed to enter Italy via the Rhône valley.

Now some of the writers who have reported this crossing of the Alps, through their desire to impress their readers with their descriptions of the wonders of these mountains, have fallen into the two vices which are the most alien to the spirit of history, by which I mean distortions of fact and self-contradictory statements. For example, they present Hannibal as a commander of unrivalled courage and foresight, but at the same time show him as totally lacking in judgement. Then elsewhere, since they can find no other way out of the labyrinth of falsehood into which they have strayed, they introduce gods and the sons of gods into what is supposed to be a factual history. They show us the Alps as being so rugged and inaccessible that so far from horses and troops accompanied by elephants being able to cross them, it would be difficult for the most agile of infantrymen to get through, and at the same time they represent the country as so desolate that if some god or hero had not met Hannibal and showed him the way, his whole army would have been lost and perished to a man. Reports of this kind are typical of the two vices I have mentioned – they are at once false and inconsistent.

1. This is one of Polybius' most startling geographical errors. Since he believed that the chain of the Alps ran east and west, and that the Rhône rose to the north of it, it follows that the river would be expected to flow in a westerly direction.

48. In the first place, could anyone imagine a more improvident general or a more incompetent leader than Hannibal would have been if, finding himself in command of such a large army on which all his hopes for the success of the expedition were placed, he had not familiarized himself with the roads or the lie of the country, as these writers suggest, and had no idea of where he was marching or against what enemy, or indeed of whether the whole expedition was practicable at all? In other words, what these authors are suggesting is that Hannibal, who had experienced no setback to mar his high hopes of success, would have committed himself to a plan which not even a general who had suffered a total defeat and was at his wits' end for a solution would have adopted, that is, to take his army into completely unknown territory. In the same way, their description of the desolation of the country and the extreme steepness and inaccessibility of the route is glaringly inaccurate. They have failed to bring to light the fact that the Celts, who live near the Rhône, have not once nor twice before Hannibal's arrival, but on many occasions, and those not in the distant past but quite recently, marched large armies across the Alps and fought side-by-side with the Celts of the Po valley against the Romans, as I related in an earlier book. They have not even discovered that there is a considerable population which inhabits the Alps themselves, but in ignorance of all these facts, they report that some hero appeared and showed Hannibal the road. The natural consequence of this is that they fall into the same difficulties as the tragic dramatists, who all need a *deus ex machina* to resolve their plots, because they are based on false or improbable assumptions. Similarly, these historians have to fall back on apparitions of gods or heroes, because the foundations of their narrative are inaccurate or unconvincing. For how is it possible to build a rational ending on an irrational beginning?

Of course Hannibal did not act as these writers imply, but pursued his plans with sound common sense. He had taken pains to inform himself of the natural wealth of the district into which he planned to descend and of the resentment which its people felt against the Romans, and to overcome the difficulties of the route he engaged as his guides and scouts natives of the country who were about to take part in his campaign. On these matters I can speak

with some confidence, as I have questioned men who were actually present on these occasions about the circumstances, have personally explored the country, and have crossed the Alps myself to obtain first-hand information and evidence.

49. The consul Publius Cornelius Scipio arrived at the place where the Carthaginians had crossed the Rhône three days after they had resumed their march. He was astounded to find that the enemy had already pressed on, as he had felt certain that they would never venture to advance into Italy by this route, partly because of their numbers and partly because of the fickle nature of the barbarians who inhabited the region. However, when he learned that they had taken this risk, he hurried back to his ships and immediately began to embark his forces. He then dispatched his brother to carry on the campaign in Spain, while he himself turned back and set sail for Italy; his plan was to march with all speed through Etruria and anticipate the enemy by arriving first at the foot of the pass by which they would descend from the Alps.

Meanwhile Hannibal, after marching for four days after his passage over the Rhône, reached a place which is known as 'The Island'. This is a thickly populated district which produces large quantities of corn and takes its name from its natural situation. It is triangular in shape: the rivers Rhône and Isère form two sides of the figure and meet at its apex. The size and the shape of the triangle are similar to those of the Nile Delta, except that the base of the latter is formed by the sea, into which the branches of the river discharge their waters, whereas here the base consists of a range of mountains which are difficult to approach or to penetrate – indeed, one might say, are almost inaccessible. When Hannibal arrived in this region, he found that the throne was being disputed by two brothers, each of whom confronted the other with an army that was ready to fight. The elder of the two approached Hannibal and appealed to him for his help in securing the throne, a request which Hannibal granted, since it seemed clear in the present circumstances that such action would turn out to his advantage. And indeed, after joining forces with this prince and driving out his rival, Hannibal received some valuable help from the victor. Not only did the new ruler supply the army with large quantities of corn and other provisions, but he replaced all their old and worn-

out weapons with new ones, thus re-equipping the whole force at exactly the right moment. He also supplied most of Hannibal's troops with new clothes and boots, which were of the greatest help to them in their crossing of the Alps. But he rendered an even more important service than this: because the Carthaginians were full of anxiety at the prospect of marching through the territory of the Allobroges, he used his troops to guard their rear, and in this way enabled them to reach the foot of the pass in safety.

50. After a march of ten days along the banks of the river,[1] during which he covered nearly 100 miles, Hannibal began his ascent of the Alps and soon found himself beset with great dangers. So long as the Carthaginians had remained in the plains the various chieftains of the Allobroges had left them alone because of their fear both of the Carthaginian cavalry and also of the barbarian troops who were escorting them. But as soon as the latter had set off for home and Hannibal's troops began to advance into difficult country, the Allobrogian chiefs gathered a large force and took up commanding positions alongside the road by which the Carthaginians would have to climb.[2] If they had only kept their plans secret, they would have completely destroyed the Carthaginian army. But in the event their scheme became known, and though the Celts inflicted heavy casualties on Hannibal's troops, they suffered at least as many themselves. Hannibal received intelligence that the barbarians had seized these points of vantage and he pitched camp at the foot of the pass; there he halted while he sent forward some of his Gallic guides to reconnoitre the ground and report on the enemy's dispositions and the general situation. His orders were carried out, and he then discovered that it was the enemy's habit to remain under arms in their positions and guard them carefully during the daytime, but to withdraw at night to a neighbouring town. So Hannibal revised his plans in the light of this report and devised the following stratagem. He advanced with his whole army quite openly,

1. The text refers only to 'the river', but the line of march strongly suggests the Isère.

2. Polybius' account of the passage of the Alps differs in various important details from Livy's because the two authors used different sources. Livy's description can most plausibly be interpreted as bringing the army over by a more southerly route across the Mont Genèvre pass, Polybius' by a more northerly across the Mont Cénis.

and when he approached the part of the road where further movement would be threatened, he pitched camp only a short distance from the enemy. As soon as it was dark, he gave orders for watch-fires to be lit and left the greater part of his troops in camp. He then led forward a picked force of lightly armed men, and passing through the defile seized the positions which the enemy had just left on withdrawing into the town according to their usual habit.

51. At daybreak the barbarians saw what had happened, and at first did nothing to press their attack. But later, as they watched the long train of pack animals and horsemen slowly and painfully making their way up the narrow track, they were tempted by this opportunity to harass the advance. When they went into action and attacked at several different points at once the Carthaginians suffered heavy losses, especially of their horses and baggage mules, and this was not so much at the hands of the enemy as because of the nature of the ground. The road leading up to the pass was not only narrow and uneven but flanked with precipices, and so the least movement or disorder in the line caused many of the animals to be forced over the edge with their loads. It was chiefly the horses which brought about this confusion whenever they were wounded: some of them, maddened by the pain, would wheel round and collide with the baggage mules, while others, rushing on ahead, would thrust aside anything that stood in their way on the narrow path, and so throw the whole line into disarray. When Hannibal saw this, he realized that even those who survived this ambush would have no chance of safety if their baggage train were destroyed, and so he took command of the body of troops which had seized the enemy's positions on the previous night, and hurried to the rescue of those at the head of the column. He killed great numbers of the Allobroges, as he had the advantage of attacking them from higher ground, but the losses were equally heavy among his own troops, since the turmoil and the mêlée in his main column were greatly increased, and now came from both directions at once on account of the shouts and struggles of those who were fighting higher up the slope. It was only when he had killed most of the Allobroges and driven off the rest in headlong retreat towards their own territory that the horses and the survivors of the mule train could make their way slowly and with great difficulty over the

dangerous stretch of the path. After this action Hannibal rallied as many of his troops as he could, and attacked the town from which the enemy had made their sortie. He found it almost empty, as all the inhabitants had been lured out by the prospect of easy plunder, and he at once took possession of it. The seizure of this place brought him several immediate as well as future advantages: he recovered a number of his baggage mules and horses, and many of the men who had been captured with them, and found a supply of corn and of cattle to last him for two or three days. But an even more important gain was that his victory inspired such fear among the tribes in the vicinity that none of those who lived near the ascent were likely to dare to attack him again.

52. He proceeded to pitch camp there and rested for a day before resuming his march. For the following three days he led his army safely over the next stretch of their route, but on the fourth he once more found himself in great danger. The tribes which lived near the pass joined forces to lay a treacherous plot against him. They came out to meet him carrying branches and wreaths, which are recognized among almost all the barbarian peoples as tokens of friendship, just as Greeks use the herald's staff. Hannibal, however, was inclined to be suspicious of the good faith of these people, and took especial pains to discover what were their intentions and the meaning of this approach. The Gauls told him that they were well aware of the capture of the city and the destruction of those who had tried to attack him. They explained that this was why they had come to meet him, since they had no desire to do him harm, nor to suffer any themselves, and they promised to deliver up hostages from among their own people. Hannibal was reluctant to believe these assurances and hesitated for a long time; then in the end he decided that if he accepted their overtures he might make them more pacific and less inclined to attack him, but that if he refused, he would only provoke them into open hostility. So he agreed to their proposals and pretended to accept their professions of friendship. The barbarians then handed over their hostages, provided him with large numbers of cattle, and indeed put themselves unreservedly into his hands, whereupon Hannibal trusted them so far as to engage them as guides for the next difficult section of his route. For two days they showed him the way,

but then the same tribe gathered their forces, and coming up behind the Carthaginians attacked them as they were passing through a steep and precipitous defile.

53. This time Hannibal's army would have been wiped out, but for the fact that his fears had not been allayed, and that having some foreboding of what might happen, he had stationed his mule train and his cavalry at the head of the column and the heavy infantry in the rear. The infantry covered his main body and were able to check the onslaught of the barbarians, so that the disaster was less serious than it might have been, but even so, a great number of men, pack animals and horses perished in the attack. The enemy had gained the higher ground and could move along the slopes, and from there some of them rolled down rocks, while others struck down their opponents with stones at close quarters. The Carthaginians were thrown into such confusion and felt so threatened by these tactics that Hannibal was compelled to spend the night with only half his force near a certain bare rock which offered some protection. Here he was separated from his cavalry and from the mule train, and waited to cover their advance, until after a whole night's struggle they slowly and with great difficulty made their way out of the gorge. By the next morning the enemy had broken off contact, and Hannibal was able to rejoin the cavalry and baggage animals and advance towards the top of the pass. He was no longer threatened by any concentration of barbarians, but at a few points on the route he was harassed by scattered groups who took advantage of the ground to launch attacks on his front and rear and carry off some of the pack animals. His best resource in this situation were the elephants, for the enemy were terrified by their strange appearance, and never dared to approach the part of the column in which they were stationed. On the ninth day of his march Hannibal reached the top of the pass, and there he pitched camp and halted for two days to rest the survivors of his army and wait for the stragglers. While he was there many of the horses which had taken fright and run away and a number of the mules which had thrown off their loads unexpectedly rejoined him: they had followed the trail of his march and now wandered back into the camp.

54. By this date it was nearing the time of the setting of the

Pleiades,[1] and snow was already gathering around the mountain crests. Hannibal saw that his men had lost heart because of the sufferings they had already endured and the hardships which they believed still lay ahead. So he called his troops together and strove to raise their spirits, and for this purpose he relied above all on the actual sight of Italy, which now stretched out before them, for the country lies so close under these mountains that when the two are seen simultaneously in a panoramic view, the Alps seem to rise above the rest of the landscape, like a walled citadel above a city. Hannibal therefore directed his men's gaze towards the plains of the Po, and reminded them of the welcome they would receive from the Gauls who inhabited them. At the same time he pointed out the direction of Rome itself, and in this way he did something to restore their confidence. The next day he broke camp and began the descent. During this part of his march he met none of the enemy except for a few prowling marauders, but because of the snow and of the dangers of his route he lost nearly as many men as he had done on the ascent. The track which led down the mountainside was both narrow and steep, and since neither the men nor the animals could be sure of their footing on account of the snow, any who stepped wide of the path or stumbled overbalanced and fell down the precipices. These perils they could endure, because by this time they had become accustomed to such mischances, but at length they reached a place where the track was too narrow for the elephants or even the pack animals to pass. A previous landslide had already carried away some 300 yards of the face of the mountain, while a recent one had made the situation still worse. At this point the soldiers once more lost their nerve and came close to despair. Hannibal's first thought was to avoid this impasse by making a detour, but a fresh fall of snow made further progress impossible and he was compelled to abandon the idea.

55. These conditions were so unusual as to be almost freakish. The new snow lying on top of the old, which had remained there from the previous winter, gave way easily, both because it was soft, having only just fallen, and because it was not yet deep. But

1. Taken literally this would mean early November, but it is possible that Hannibal was on the pass about the third week of September, and that the phrase is used in a general sense to indicate the beginning of the bad season.

when men and beasts had trodden through it and penetrated to the frozen snow underneath, they no longer sank into it, but found both their feet slipping from under them, as happens when people walk on ground which is covered with a coating of mud. What followed made the situation even more desperate. In the case of the men, when they found they could not get a foothold on the lower layer of snow they fell, and then, as they struggled to rise by using their hands and knees, slid downwards even faster on these, no matter what they clutched on the way, since the angle of the slope was so steep.

As for the animals, when they fell and struggled to rise they broke through the lower layer of snow, and there they stayed with their loads, as though frozen to the earth, because of their weight and the congealed state of the old snow. Hannibal was compelled to give up the idea of attempting a detour, and, after clearing the snow away from the ridge, pitched camp there. Then he set his troops to work on the immensely laborious task of building up the path along the cliff. However, in one day he had made a track wide enough to take the mule train and the horses; he at once took these across, pitched camp below the snow-line and sent the animals out in search of pasture. Then he took the Numidians and set them in relays to the work of building up the path. After three days of this toilsome effort he succeeded in getting his elephants across, but the animals were in a miserable condition from hunger. The crests of the Alps and the parts near the tops of the passes are completely treeless and bare of vegetation, because of the snow which lies there continually between winter and summer, but the slopes half-way down on the Italian side are both grassy and well-wooded, and are in general quite habitable.

56. After he had reassembled all his forces Hannibal resumed the descent, and three days after leaving the precipice I have just described he arrived in the plains. He had lost many men at the hands of the enemy, at the various river crossings and in the course of his march, while the precipices and difficult passes of the Alps had cost not only many human lives but even greater numbers of horses and mules. The whole march from New Carthage had taken him five months, and the actual crossing of the Alps fifteen days, and now when he boldly descended into the plains of the Po valley

and the territory of the Insubres, the army that was left to him consisted of 12,000 African and 8,000 Spanish infantry, and not more than 6,000 cavalry in all; he himself explicitly mentions these figures in the inscription on the column at Lacinium which records the strength of his forces.

At about this time, as I mentioned above, Publius Cornelius Scipio, the consul, had left the greater part of his forces under his brother Gnaeus to carry on the campaign in Spain and to take the offensive against Hasdrubal, while he sailed back to Pisae with a small body of men. He then marched through Etruria and took over from the praetors the command of the legions stationed on the frontier which were engaged in fighting the Boii. From there he advanced into the plain of the Po, pitched camp and waited for the enemy, whom he was impatient to bring to battle.

57. Now that I have brought my narrative and the generals on both sides and the war itself into Italy, I wish before beginning my description of the operations to say a few words about the kind of material which I believe to be proper to my history.

Some readers may well ask themselves why, since the greater part of my account of events concerns Africa and Spain, I have said nothing more about the mouth of the Mediterranean at the Pillars of Hercules, or about the Outer Sea and its special characteristics, or about the British Isles and the processes of extracting tin, or about the gold and silver mines of Spain itself, all these being topics concerning which other writers have provided lengthy and mutually contradictory reports. I have passed over these subjects not because I considered that they had no place in my history, but first of all because I was anxious to avoid constantly interrupting my narrative and distracting my readers from the main theme; and secondly because I decided not to refer to them merely in a haphazard fashion or in passing, but to allot them their due place and time in my scheme, and thus to provide as true a description as lies within my power. Let no one be surprised, then, if when I arrive at such places in the course of my history, I refrain from describing them for the reasons I have just given. Those readers who insist on such topographical digressions at every point fail to understand that they are acting like the type of gourmand at a dinner party who samples everything on the table, and so neither

truly enjoys any dish at the moment that he tastes it, nor digests it well enough to derive any benefit from it afterwards. Those who treat their study of history in this fashion likewise receive no true pleasure at the moment of reading, nor instruction for the future.

58. No province of historical writing stands in greater need of study or correction than this one;[1] there is plenty of evidence for this conclusion, but I may cite the following in particular. Nearly every writer, or at any rate the great majority, has attempted to describe the situation and the special features of the countries which lie at the extremities of the known world, and most have committed glaring errors at many points. We should, of course, on no account pass over their mistakes, and we should make our comments with due system and method, not haphazardly nor in passing; at the same time we should not find fault, or rebuke them, but rather recognize their achievements while correcting their imperfections, always bearing in mind that they too, if they had lived in our times, would have corrected and modified many of their statements. In the distant past, indeed, it is very rare to find a Greek who undertook to investigate these remote parts of the world; this was because of the practical impossibility of doing so. The sea offered so many dangers that it is difficult to calculate them, while those on land were more numerous still. And even if anyone succeeded, whether by design or by force of circumstances, in reaching the furthest confines of the world, this did not necessarily mean that he was able to accomplish his purpose. Some of these regions were so completely barbarous and others so desolate that it was often difficult to observe phenomena at first hand, and even harder to obtain information about what had actually been seen because of the differences in language. Again, even if a man was able to make himself an eye-witness, it was still more difficult for him to use moderation in his statements, to scorn travellers' tales of marvels and prodigies, to prefer truth for its own sake, and to tell us nothing beyond this.

59. In ancient times these problems made it not merely difficult but almost impossible to give a reliable description of the regions I have mentioned, and so we should not find fault with these writers for their omissions and inaccuracies, but rather, considering the

1. i.e. geographical information and its place in the writing of history.

period at which they wrote, praise and admire them for having at least discovered something and added to the sum of human knowledge on these subjects. But in our own times, partly because of the empire which Alexander established in Asia and the Romans in other parts of the world, almost all regions have become approachable either by sea or by land. At the same time our men of action in Greece have been released from the pressures of political or military ambition, and so have plenty of opportunities to pursue inquiries or research, from which it follows that we ought to be able to acquire a truer and more accurate picture of those regions which were once unknown. This, at any rate, is what I shall try to establish when I reach a suitable point in my history to introduce the subject, and it will be my aim to instruct in full detail those who are curious about such things. It was, in fact, with this express object that I underwent the dangers and hardships of making journeys through Africa, Spain and Gaul, and voyages on the sea which adjoins these countries on their western side; in other words to correct the imperfect knowledge of earlier writers, and to make these parts of the world known also to the Greeks.[1]

After this digression from my narrative, I shall return to the pitched battles which the Romans and the Carthaginians fought in Italy.

60. I have already described the strength of Hannibal's forces when he entered Italy. On his arrival he at once pitched camp at the very foot of the Alps, and his first concern was to rest his troops. The whole army had not only suffered terribly from the fatigue of the climb and the descent and the roughness of the mountain tracks, but they had undergone great hardships on account of the shortage of provisions, and the lack of the most elementary bodily necessities, so that under the pressure of continuous physical effort and want of food many of the soldiers had fallen into a state of utter dejection. It had proved impossible to carry enough provisions for so many thousands of men, and when the pack animals perished, the greater part of the supplies had been lost with them. The result was that while Hannibal started after the crossing of the Rhône

1. This passage was evidently written after Polybius' travels in Gaul, Spain and Africa, approximately between 151 and 146 B.C.

BOOK VI

From the Preface

2. Some of my readers, I know, will be wondering why I have postponed until this moment my study of the Roman constitution and thus interrupted the flow of my narrative. I have, however, already made it clear at a number of points that I have always regarded this analysis as one of the essential parts in my design. I touched on this subject in particular at the beginning and in the preliminary survey of this history; there I remarked that the best and most useful aim of my work is to explain to my readers by what means and by virtue of what political institutions almost the whole world fell under the rule of one power, that of Rome, an event which is absolutely without parallel in earlier history. Having made this my purpose, I could find no more suitable occasion than the present to direct attention to what I am about to say and to test the truth of my remarks. In private life, if you wish to pass judgement on the characters of good or of bad men, you would not, assuming that your opinion is to be subjected to a genuine test, examine their actions only at periods of unclouded tranquillity, but rather at times of conspicuous success or failure. The test of true virtue in a man surely resides in his capacity to bear with spirit and with dignity the most complete transformations of fortune, and the same principle should apply to our judgement of states. And so, since I could find no greater or more violent changes of fortune in our time than those which befell the Romans, I have reserved this place in my history for my study of their constitution.

The particular aspect of history which both attracts and benefits its readers is the examination of causes and the capacity, which is the reward of this study, to decide in each case the best policy to follow. Now in all political situations we must understand that the principal factor which makes for success or failure is the form

of a state's constitution: it is from this source, as if from a fountain-head, that all designs and plans of action not only originate but reach their fulfilment.

On the Forms of States

3. In the case of those Greek states which have time and again risen to greatness and then experienced a complete change of fortune, it is an easy enough task both to chronicle their past and to pass judgement upon their future. There is no difficulty in reporting the known facts, nor is it hard to guess what is to come from our knowledge of what has preceded it. However, in the case of the Romans it is by no means easy either to explain the present situation, because of the complicated nature of their constitution, or to predict the future, because of our ignorance of the characteristic features both of their private and of their public life in the past. The subject demands an exceptional measure of attention and of study if we wish to obtain a clear view of the distinctive qualities of their constitution.

Most of those writers[1] who have attempted to give an authoritative description of political constitutions have distinguished three kinds, which they call *kingship*, *aristocracy* and *democracy*. We are, I think, entitled to ask them whether they are presenting these three to us as the only types of constitution or as the best, for in either event I believe that they are wrong. It is clear that we should regard as the *best* constitution one which includes elements of all three species; this has been proved not only in theory but in practice by Lycurgus, who was the first to construct a constitution, that of Sparta, on this principle. But we cannot admit that these are the only three varieties of constitution, for we have seen examples of monarchical and tyrannical governments which differ very

1. Polybius is not necessarily referring here to the classic authors on this subject, such as Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle, but more probably to authors of the second rank who wrote nearer to his time.

widely from kingship,[1] even though they possess certain points of resemblance to it, and this is the reason why one-man rulers usurp and employ, so far as they can, the title of *king*. There have also been several oligarchic constitutions which bear certain superficial resemblances to aristocracies, though here again the difference is as wide as it is possible to be, and the same generalization applies to democracies.

4. The truth of what I have just said may be illustrated by the following arguments. We cannot say that every example of one-man rule is necessarily a kingship, but only those which are voluntarily accepted by their subjects, and which are governed by an appeal to reason rather than by fear or by force. Nor again can we say that every oligarchy is an aristocracy, but only those in which the power is exercised by the justest and wisest men, who have been selected on their merits. In the same way a state in which the mass of citizens is free to do whatever it pleases or takes into its head is not a democracy. But where it is both traditional and customary to reverence the gods, to care for our parents, to respect our elders, to obey the laws, and in such a community to ensure that the will of the majority prevails – this situation it is proper to describe as democracy.

We ought thus to name six kinds of government: the three commonly spoken of which I have just mentioned, and those which have certain elements in common with these, by which I mean one-man rule, minority rule and mob rule. The first of these to come into being is one-man rule, which arises unaided and in the natural course of events. After one-man rule, and developing from it with the aid of art and through the correction of its defects, comes kingship. This later degenerates into its corrupt but associated form, by which I mean tyranny, and then the abolition of both gives rise to aristocracy. Aristocracy by its very nature degenerates into oligarchy, and when the populace rises in anger to avenge the injustices committed by its rulers, democracy is born; then in due course, out of the licence and lawlessness which are generated by this type of regime, mob rule comes into being and completes the cycle. The truth of what I have just said will become

1. Polybius refers, for example, to Cleomenes of Sparta as a tyrant and despot (see p. 159).

perfectly clear to anyone who makes a careful study of the beginnings, origins and changes which are natural to each of these forms of government. For it is only by observing how each of these constitutions comes into being that one can see when, how, and where the growth, the perfection, the change and the end of each is likely to recur. I believe that the Roman constitution is a better subject than any other for this method of analysis, because its origin and growth have from the very beginning followed natural causes.

5. Now the process whereby the different forms of government are naturally transformed into one another has been discussed in the greatest detail by Plato and certain other philosophers. But as these analyses are complex and are developed at great length, they are beyond the reach of all but a few. I shall therefore try to give a brief summary of the theory so far as I think it applies to serious history and appeals to the common intelligence of mankind. If my exposition appears to leave out certain factors because I am speaking in generalities, the detailed discussion which follows should sufficiently compensate the reader for any difficulties which for the present I have left unsolved.

What then are the origins of a political society, and how does it first come into being? From time to time, as a result of floods, plagues, failures of crops or other similar causes, there occurs a catastrophic destruction of the human race, in which all knowledge of the arts and social institutions is lost. Such disasters, tradition tells us, have often befallen mankind, and must reasonably be expected to recur. Then in the course of time the population renews itself from the survivors as if from seeds, men increase once more in numbers and, like other animals, proceed to form herds. Because of their natural weakness it is only to be expected that they should herd with their own kind, and in this situation it is inevitable that the man who excels in physical strength and courage should lead and rule over the rest. This phenomenon can be seen at work among those animals which lack the faculty of reason, such as bulls, boars, cocks and the like, among which the strongest are indisputably the masters, and we must regard it as the teaching of nature in the truest sense. Originally, then, it is probable that men lived in this fashion, herding together like animals and following

the strongest and the bravest as their leaders; in this situation the limits of the leader's rule are defined by his strength, and the name which we should apply to this system is monarchy. But when in the course of time families and social relationships begin to develop in such communities, the idea of kingship is born, and then for the first time mankind conceives the notions of goodness, of justice, and of their opposites.

6. The manner in which these concepts originate and evolve is as follows. The intercourse of the sexes is a universal instinct of nature, and the birth of children is the result. But suppose that one of those who have been thus reared grows to manhood, and then so far from showing gratitude or helping to protect those who have brought him up deliberately injures them by word or deed; he will certainly displease and offend all those who have been associated with his parents, and have witnessed the care and the trouble they have spent in tending and feeding their children. Men differ from the other animals in that they are the only creatures to possess the faculty of reasoning, and it is certain that such a difference of conduct will not escape them as it does the animal species; they will notice what is done and be displeased at it, for they will look to the future and reflect that they might suffer the same treatment. Again, when a man who has been helped, or rescued from some difficulty, so far from showing gratitude to his benefactor actually tries to do him harm, it is clear that those who hear of the affair will naturally be displeased and offended at his behaviour, will share the resentment of their neighbour, and will imagine themselves to be placed in his position. In this way each individual begins to form an idea of the theory and meaning of duty, which is the beginning and end of justice.

In the same way, when one man stands out among all his companions in defending them from danger, and confronts or awaits the onslaught of the most powerful wild beasts, it is natural that he should receive marks of favour and of preeminence from the people, while a man who does the opposite will suffer their disapproval and contempt. Here again it is reasonable to suppose that some theory will develop among the people as to what is noble and what is base, and what constitutes the difference between them, with the result that one type of conduct will be admired and

imitated because of its advantages, and the other avoided. And so when the most prominent and most powerful man among the people constantly uses the weight of his authority to support the views of the majority on the matters I have just mentioned, and when in the opinion of his subjects he rewards or punishes each according to his deserts, then they will do his bidding not through fear of violence, but because their judgement approves him. They will join in supporting his rule, however old he may be, and will rally round him as one man, and resist all those who conspire against his rule. In this way, and almost imperceptibly, the monarch develops into a king when reason becomes more powerful than ferocity or force.

7. It is in this way, then, that the first ideas of goodness and of justice and of their opposites are naturally formed among men, and this is the origin and the genesis of true kingship. The people ensure that the supreme power remains in the hands not only of the original leaders but of their descendants, since they are convinced that those who are descended from and educated by such men will cherish principles similar to their own. But if they ever become dissatisfied with the descendants, they no longer choose their kings and rulers for their physical strength, but on the merits of their judgement and of their powers of reasoning, for they have come to understand from practical experience the difference between the one set of attributes and the other.

In ancient times, then, those who had been singled out for royal authority continued in their functions until they grew old; they built imposing strongholds, fortified them with walls, and acquired lands to provide for their subjects both security and an abundance of the necessities of life. While they were pursuing these aims they were never the objects of envy nor of abuse, because they did not indulge in distinctions of dress or of food or drink at the expense of others, but lived very much in the same fashion as the rest of their subjects, and kept in close touch with the people in their daily activities. But when rulers received their power by inheritance, and found that their safety was well provided for and their food more than sufficient, this superabundance tempted them to indulge their appetites. They assumed that rulers should be distinguished from their subjects by a special dress, that they should

enjoy additional luxury and variety in the preparation and serving of their food, and that they should be denied nothing in the pursuit of their love affairs, however lawless these might be. These vices provoked envy and indignation in the first case, and an outburst of passionate hatred and anger in the second, with the result that the kingship became a tyranny. In this way the first step was taken towards its disintegration, and conspiracies began to be formed. These did not originate from the worst men in the state, but rather from the noblest, the most high-minded and the most courageous, because such men find it hardest to endure the insolence of their rulers.

8. Once the people had found their leaders they gave them their support against their rulers for the reasons which I have stated above, with the result that kingship and monarchy were swept away and in their place the institution of aristocracy came into being and developed. The people, as if discharging a debt of gratitude to those who had overthrown the monarchy, tended to place these men in authority and entrust their destinies to them. At first the aristocrats gladly accepted this charge, made it their supreme concern to serve the common interest, and handled both the private and public affairs of the people with the greatest care and solicitude. But here again the next generation inherited the same position of authority as their fathers. They in turn had no experience of misfortunes and no tradition of civil equality and freedom of speech, since they had been reared from the cradle in an atmosphere of authority and privilege. And so they abandoned their high responsibilities, some in favour of avarice and unscrupulous money-making, others of drinking and the convivial excesses that go with it, and others the violation of women and the rape of boys. In this way they transformed an aristocracy into an oligarchy, and soon provoked the people to a pitch of resentment similar to that which I have already described, with the result that their regime suffered the same disastrous end as had befallen the tyrants.

9. The truth is that whenever anybody who has observed the hatred and jealousy which are felt by the citizens for tyrants can summon up the courage to speak or act against the authorities, he finds the whole mass of the people ready to support him. But

after they have either killed or banished the oligarchs, the people do not venture to set up a king again, for they are still in terror of the injustices committed by previous monarchs, nor do they dare to entrust the government to a limited class, since they still have before their eyes the evidence of their recent mistake in doing so. At this point the only hope which remains unspoiled lies with themselves, and it is in this direction that they then turn: they convert the state into a democracy instead of an oligarchy and themselves assume the superintendence and charge of affairs. Then so long as any people survive who endured the evils of oligarchical rule, they can regard their present form of government as a blessing and treasure the privileges of equality and freedom of speech. But as soon as a new generation has succeeded and the democracy falls into the hands of the grandchildren of its founders, they have become by this time so accustomed to equality and freedom of speech that they cease to value them and seek to raise themselves above their fellow-citizens, and it is noticeable that the people most liable to this temptation are the rich. So when they begin to hanker after office, and find that they cannot achieve it through their own efforts or on their merits, they begin to seduce and corrupt the people in every possible way, and thus ruin their estates. The result is that through their senseless craving for prominence they stimulate among the masses both an appetite for bribes and the habit of receiving them, and then the rule of democracy is transformed into government by violence and strong-arm methods. By this time the people have become accustomed to feed at the expense of others, and their prospects of winning a livelihood depend upon the property of their neighbours; then as soon as they find a leader who is sufficiently ambitious and daring, but is excluded from the honours of office because of his poverty, they will introduce a regime based on violence. After this they unite their forces, and proceed to massacre, banish and despoil their opponents, and finally degenerate into a state of bestiality,[1] after which they once more find a master and a despot.

Such is the cycle of political revolution, the law of nature according to which constitutions change, are transformed, and finally revert to their original form. Anyone who has a clear

1. This process is illustrated by the case of Cynaetha (see pp. 277–9).

grasp of this process might perhaps go wrong, when he speaks of the future of a state, in his forecast of the time it will take for the process of change to take place, but so long as his judgement is not distorted by animosity or envy he will very seldom be mistaken as to the stage of growth or decline which a given community has reached, or as to the form into which it will change. Above all, in the case of the Roman state this method of examination will give us the clearest insight into the process whereby it was formed, grew, and reached the zenith of its achievement as well as the changes for the worse which will follow these. For this state, if any ever did (as I have already pointed out), takes its foundation and its growth from natural causes, and will pass through a natural evolution to its decay. At any rate the reader will best be able to judge of the truth of this assertion from the narrative which follows.

10. At this point I propose to give a brief account of the legislation of Lycurgus, which has an important bearing upon my present theme. For Lycurgus understood very well that the changes which I have described came about through an inevitable law of nature, and he took the view that every type of constitution which is simple and founded on a single principle is unstable, because it quickly degenerates into that form of corruption which is peculiar to and inherent in it. For just as rust eats away iron, and woodworms or ship-worms eat away timber, and these substances even if they escape any external damage are destroyed by the processes which are generated within themselves, so each constitution possesses its own inherent and inseparable vice. Thus in kingship the inbred vice is despotism, in aristocracy it is oligarchy, and in democracy the brutal rule of violence, and it is impossible to prevent each of these kinds of government, as I mentioned above, from degenerating into the debased form of itself. Lycurgus foresaw this, and accordingly did not make his constitution simple or uniform, but combined in it all the virtues and distinctive features of the best governments, so that no one principle should become preponderant, and thus be perverted into its kindred vice, but that the power of each element should be counterbalanced by the others, so that no one of them inclines or sinks unduly to either side. In other words, the constitution should remain for a long

while in a state of equilibrium thanks to the principle of reciprocity or counteraction. Thus kingship was prevented from becoming arrogant through fear of the people who were also given a sufficiently important share in the government, while the people in their turn were restrained from showing contempt for the kings through their fear of the Senate. The members of this body were chosen on grounds of merit, and could be relied upon at all times to take the side of justice unanimously. By this means that part of the state which was at a disadvantage because of its attachment to traditional custom gained power and weight through the support and influence of the senators. For that very reason the result of the drawing-up of the constitution according to these principles was to preserve liberty for the Spartans over a longer period than for any other people of whom we have records.

Now Lycurgus through his powers of reasoning could foresee the direction in which events naturally move and the factors which cause them to do so, and thus constructed his constitution without having to learn the lessons which misfortune teaches. The Romans, on the other hand, although they have arrived at the same result as regards their form of government, did not do so by means of abstract reasoning, but rather through the lessons learned from many struggles and difficulties; and finally, by always choosing the better course in the light of experience acquired from disasters, they have reached the same goal as Lycurgus, that is, the best of all existing constitutions.

On the Roman Constitution at its Prime

11. From the time of the crossing of Xerxes to Greece, and more especially from a date some thirty-two years after that, the details of the Roman political system continued to pass through even more satisfactory modifications, and had arrived at its best and most perfect form at the time of the Hannibalic War.

I can well believe that to those who have been born under the Roman Republic my account of it may seem somewhat incomplete because of the omission of various details . . .

Romans rely on the bravery of their own citizens and the help of their allies. The result is that even if they happen to be defeated at the outset, the Romans carry on the war with all their resources, but this is impossible for the Carthaginians. For the Romans, knowing themselves to be fighting for their country and their children, can never weaken in the fury of their struggle, but continue to fight with all their heart and soul until the enemy is overcome. It follows that although the Romans are, as I have mentioned, much less skilled in the handling of their naval forces, they nevertheless prove successful in the end, because of the gallantry of their men; for although skill in seamanship is of great importance in naval battles, it is the courage of the marines which proves the decisive factor in winning a victory. The fact is that Italians in general have a natural advantage over Phoenicians and Africans both in physical strength and in personal courage, but at the same time their institutions contribute very powerfully towards fostering a spirit of bravery in their young men. I quote just one example to illustrate the pains taken by the Roman state to produce men who will endure anything to win a reputation for valour in their country.

53. Whenever one of their celebrated men dies, in the course of the funeral procession his body is carried with every kind of honour into the Forum to the so-called Rostra, sometimes in an upright position so as to be conspicuous, or else, more rarely, recumbent. The whole mass of the people stand round to watch, and his son, if he has left one of adult age who can be present, or if not some other relative, then mounts the Rostra and delivers an address which recounts the virtues and the successes achieved by the dead man during his lifetime. By these means the whole populace – not only those who played some part in these exploits, but those who did not – are involved in the ceremony, so that when the facts of the dead man's career are recalled to their minds and brought before their eyes, their sympathies are so deeply engaged that the loss seems not to be confined to the mourners but to be a public one which affects the whole people. Then after the burial of the body and the performance of the customary ceremonies, they place the image of the dead man in the most conspicuous position in the house, where it is enclosed in a wooden shrine. This image consists

of a mask, which is fashioned with extraordinary fidelity both in its modelling and its complexion to represent the features of the dead man. On occasions when public sacrifices are offered, these masks are displayed and are decorated with great care. And when any distinguished member of the family dies, the masks are taken to the funeral, and are there worn by men who are considered to bear the closest resemblance to the original, both in height and in their general appearance and bearing.[1] These substitutes are dressed according to the rank of the deceased: a toga with a purple border for a consul or praetor, a completely purple garment for a censor, and one embroidered with gold for a man who had celebrated a triumph or performed some similar exploit.

They all ride in chariots with the fasces, axes, and other insignia carried before them, according to the dignity of the offices of state which the dead man had held in his lifetime, and when they arrive at the Rostra they all seat themselves in a row upon chairs of ivory. It would be hard to imagine a more impressive scene for a young man who aspires to win fame and to practise virtue. For who could remain unmoved at the sight of the images of all these men who have won renown in their time, now gathered together as if alive and breathing? What spectacle could be more glorious than this?

54. Moreover, the speaker who pronounces the oration over the man who is about to be buried, when he has delivered his tribute, goes on to relate the successes and achievements of all the others whose images are displayed there, beginning with the oldest. By this constant renewal of the good report of brave men, the fame of those who have performed any noble deed is made immortal, and the renown of those who have served their country well becomes a matter of common knowledge and a heritage for posterity. But the most important consequence of the ceremony is that it inspires young men to endure the extremes of suffering for the common good in the hope of winning the glory that waits upon the brave. And what I have just said is attested by the facts. Many Romans have volunteered to engage in single combat so as to decide a whole battle, and not a few have chosen certain death, some in war to save the lives of their countrymen, others in times

1. The man chosen was normally a member of the family, but there are instances of the deceased having been represented by an actor.

of peace to ensure the safety of the Republic. Besides this, there have been instances of men in office who have put their own sons[1] to death, contrary to every law or custom, because they valued the interest of their country more dearly than their natural ties to their own flesh and blood. Many stories of this kind can be told of many men in Roman history, but one in particular will serve as an example and a proof of my contention.

55. The story goes that while Horatius Cocles[2] was engaged in combat with two of the enemy at the far end of the bridge over the Tiber which gives entrance to the city on the west, he saw a large body of reinforcements approaching. Fearing that they would succeed in forcing the passage and entering the city, he turned round and shouted to those behind him to retire at once and make haste to break down the bridge. His comrades obeyed, and all the time that they were demolishing it Horatius stood his ground. He suffered many wounds, but he held back the enemy's attack and astounded them not so much by his physical strength as by his endurance and courage. Once the bridge was cut the enemy's advance was halted, whereupon Cocles threw himself into the river still wearing his armour and weapons. He deliberately sacrificed himself because he valued the safety of his country and the glory which would later attach itself to his name more than his present existence and the years of life that remained to him. This is a typical example, it seems to me, of the spirit of emulation and the ambition to perform deeds of gallantry which the customs of the Romans help to implant in their young men.

56. Again, the Roman laws and customs which concern money transactions are superior to those of Carthage. In the latter country no activity which results in a profit is seen as a cause for reproach, but to the Romans nothing is more disgraceful than to receive bribes or to seek gain by improper means. Just as they wholeheartedly approve the acquisition of money if the methods are

1. e.g. Lucius Junius Brutus for conspiracy (Livy, *Early History of Rome*, II. 5), and Titus Manlius Torquatus for indiscipline (Livy, op. cit., VIII. 7).

2. Polybius treats this famous legend as a historical event, and probably places it in the context of the wars against Lars Porsenna and the Tarquins. According to Livy's version (op. cit., II. 10), which is the source of Macaulay's poem, Horatius swam safely to land.

reputable, so they condemn it absolutely if the sources are forbidden. An illustration of this is the fact that among the Carthaginians bribery is openly practised by candidates for office, whereas at Rome it is a capital offence. And so, as the rewards offered to merit are precisely the opposite in the two countries, it is natural that the methods employed to obtain them should be equally dissimilar.

However, the sphere in which the Roman commonwealth seems to me to show its superiority most decisively is in that of religious belief. Here we find that the very phenomenon which among other peoples[1] is regarded as a subject for reproach, namely superstition, is actually the element which holds the Roman state together. These matters are treated with such solemnity and introduced so frequently both into public and into private life that nothing could exceed them in importance. Many people may find this astonishing, but my own view is that the Romans have adopted these practices for the sake of the common people. This approach might not have been necessary had it ever been possible to form a state composed entirely of wise men. But as the masses are always fickle, filled with lawless desires, unreasoning anger and violent passions, they can only be restrained by mysterious terrors or other dramatizations of the subject. For this reason I believe that the ancients were by no means acting foolishly or haphazardly when they introduced to the people various notions concerning the gods and belief in the punishments of Hades, but rather that the moderns are foolish and take great risks in rejecting them. At any rate the result is that among the Greeks, apart from anything else, men who hold public office cannot be trusted with the safe-keeping of so much as a single talent, even if they have ten accountants and as many seals and twice as many witnesses, whereas among the Romans their magistrates handle large sums of money and scrupulously perform their duty because they have given their word on oath. Among other nations it is a rare phenomenon to find a man who keeps his hands off public funds and whose record is clean in this respect, while among the Romans it is quite the exception to find a man who has been detected in such conduct.

1. In particular among the Greeks.

two false statements in a book and they prove to have been deliberately made, we know that we can no longer treat anything that is said by such an author as reliable or trustworthy. However if I am to convince those who are inclined to be captious, I must say something of the principle which Timaeus applies in composing the speeches of politicians, the addresses of generals, and the discourses of ambassadors, in short all such kinds of public utterance which summarize events and bind the whole history together. Can any of Timaeus' readers have failed to observe that his reports of these pronouncements disregard the truth and that this is done deliberately? The fact is that he has neither set down what was said, nor the real sense of what was said.[1] Instead, after first making up his mind what ought to have been said, he catalogues all these imaginary speeches and the accompanying details, just as if he were exercising on a set theme in the schools: in other words he tries to show off his rhetorical powers, but provides no account of what was actually spoken.

25b. Now the special function of history, particularly in relation to speeches, is first of all to discover the words actually used, whatever they were, and next to establish the reason why a particular action or argument failed or succeeded. The mere statement of a fact, though it may excite our interest, is of no benefit to us, but when the knowledge of the cause is added, then the study of history becomes fruitful. For it is the ability to draw analogies between parallel circumstances of the past and of our own times which enables us to make forecasts as to what is to happen: thus in some cases where a given course of action has failed, we are impelled to take precautions so as to avoid a recurrence, while in others we can deal more confidently with the problems that confront us by repeating a solution which has previously succeeded. On the other hand, a writer who passes over in silence the speeches which were actually made and the causes of what actually happened and introduces fictitious rhetorical exercises and discursive speeches in their place destroys the peculiar virtue of history. In this respect Timaeus is a persistent offender, and we all know that his books are full of faults of this kind.

25c. I may perhaps be asked how, if he is the kind of writer I

1. i.e. neither a transcript nor a résumé.

am now proving him to be, he has enjoyed such ready acceptance and credit from some of his readers. The reason is that his works are so full of criticism and abuse of his competitors that his readers do not judge him in the light of his own treatment of history or of his own statements, but rather by his capacity for attacking others; and here he seems to me to have shown an extraordinary industry and an outstanding talent. Indeed in this respect he very much resembles Strato of Lampsacus, the writer on physical science. He, too, is apt to shine most when he sets out to expound and refute the theories of others, but when he puts forward any original proposition or explains his own ideas, he appears to men of science to be far more stupid and dull than they had expected. For my part I think the same principle applies to literature as to human life in general, for here too it is easy enough to find fault with others, but difficult to behave impeccably ourselves. Certainly one sees often enough that those who are most ready to find fault with their neighbours are the most blameworthy in their own lives.

COMPARISON OF HISTORY AND MEDICINE

25d. Besides the matters which I have dealt with above, there is another point to be mentioned about Timaeus. Because he had resided in Athens for nearly fifty years,[1] where he could consult the works of earlier authors, he assumed that he was in possession of the most important resources for the writing of history, but here, in my opinion, he was much mistaken. History and the science of medicine are similar in this respect, that each of them may be said to be divided, broadly speaking, into three different departments, which correspond to the different dispositions of those who embark upon these callings. There are in the first place three departments of medicine: one is concerned with the theory of disease, the second with diet, and the third with surgery and pharmaceutics. Now the study of the theory of disease, which takes its rise chiefly from the schools of Herophilus[2] and of Calli-

1. The dates of Timaeus' stay are uncertain, either about 339–289, or 315–265 B.C.

2. Herophilus of Calchedon (fl. early third century) discovered the rhythm of the pulse and was especially interested in the causes of disease; he and his

machus of Alexandria, is certainly a proper part of medical science, but there goes with it a certain air of ostentation and pretentiousness, and its practitioners give themselves such an air of superiority as to suggest that no one else is master of the subject. But when you apply the test of reality by bringing a patient to one of them, you find them just as incapable of dealing with the needs of the situation as those who have never read a medical treatise at all. Indeed there have been a number of patients who had nothing serious the matter with them, but were impressed by a mere verbal display and actually endangered their lives by entrusting themselves to the care of such physicians, for these men are just like pilots who steer a ship by the book. And yet they travel from city to city with great éclat, and when they have collected a crowd they reduce skilled doctors to confusion, virtually singling them out by name. These may be men who have given proof of their skill in actual practice, but in spite of that the persuasive power of eloquence often prevails over the testimony of practical experience.

The third branch of medicine, which is concerned with producing genuine skill in each professional treatment of the several cases, is not only rare in itself, but is often eclipsed by sheer volubility and audacity because of the lack of judgement of the general public.

TIMAEUS' LACK OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY EXPERIENCE AND UNWILLINGNESS TO TRAVEL

25e. In the same way political history is also made up of three parts. The first consists of the industrious study and collation of documents; the second is topographical and includes the survey of cities, places, rivers, harbours, and in general the special features of land and sea and the distances of one place from another; while the third is concerned with political activity. And just as in the case of medicine, many people aspire to write history because of the

later followers came to be regarded as more concerned with aetiology than with cure. They tended to align themselves with the philosophy of Stoicism, while the empiricists, who were more concerned with treatment, inclined towards the Sceptic philosophy. Polybius believed that one should study the causes of disease so far as this was necessary for cure, but not for the sake of a mere display of theoretical knowledge.

high opinion in which political history has been held; but most of them bring to the undertaking nothing to justify their claim to write it except irresponsibility, recklessness and roguery. They court favour like vendors of drugs and will always say whatever the occasion may require for the sake of scraping together a living by this means. I need say no more about authors of this kind.

There is, however, another category of authors, who appear to be justified in undertaking the writing of history, but who in fact are just like the theoretical doctors. They haunt the libraries and become thoroughly versed in memoirs and records, and then convince themselves that they are properly equipped for the task;[1] but while they may appear to outsiders to bring everything that is needed to the writing of political history, yet in my opinion they provide no more than a part. Certainly the study of the memoirs of the past has its value for discovering what the ancients believed and the ideas which people formerly entertained about conditions, places, nations, states and events, and also for understanding the circumstances and eventualities with which each nation in earlier times had to deal. And certainly past events are relevant in making us pay attention to the future, provided that a writer inquires in each case into the facts as they actually occurred. But to persuade oneself, as Timaeus did, that the resources of documentary research alone can equip one to write an adequate history of recent events is naïve beyond words. It is as though a man were to imagine that he was a capable painter, indeed a master of the art, merely by virtue of having looked at the works of the past.[2]

25f. I can illustrate this point even more clearly through the passages which I propose to discuss, in particular those taken from certain parts of Ephorus' history. When this historian writes about war he seems to me to show some understanding of naval operations, but to be completely ignorant about battles on land. Thus if we look closely at his descriptions of the naval battles near Cyprus and Cnidus, in which the Persian King's commanders were fighting, in the first instance against Evagoras of Salamis

1. It is in this category that Polybius places Timaeus, as distinct from the quacks.

2. Polybius' point is that it is recent history in particular which demands some experience of public affairs.

and in the second against the Spartans,[1] we are bound to admire the writer for his descriptive power and for his knowledge of tactics, and we gain from these much information which is useful for similar circumstances. But this is certainly not the case when he reports the battle of Leuctra between the Thebans and the Spartans, or the battle of Mantinea between the same opponents, in which Epaminondas lost his life.[2] If we examine the details of these engagements and the battle formations and changes which took place during the actual fighting, Ephorus merely excites our ridicule because he gives the impression of being completely inexperienced in these matters and of never having seen a battle. The battle of Leuctra was, it is true, a simple operation and only one portion of the opposing forces was engaged, so that the writer's ignorance is not so very glaringly exposed. On the other hand his version of the fighting at Mantinea gives the illusion of being composed with a wealth of technical virtuosity, but in fact the description is quite imaginary, and the writer completely failed to understand what happened in the battle. This becomes clear if we establish an accurate picture of the ground and then check the movements which he describes as being carried out on it. The same criticism applies to Theopompus and above all to Timaeus, who is the subject of the present argument. When these authors provide only a summary account of such events their errors escape notice, but whenever they offer a minute and detailed description they show that they are in the same class as Ephorus.

25g. It is in fact equally impossible for a man who has had no experience of action in the field to write well about military operations as it is for a man who has never engaged in political affairs and their attendant circumstances to write well on those topics. And since the writings of mere book-worms lack both first-hand experience and any vividness of presentation, their work is completely without value for its readers. For if you remove from

1. The Persians defeated Evagoras, King of Cyprus, off Citium in 381 B.C. In 394 Sparta's naval supremacy, which she had established over Athens at the close of the Peloponnesian War, was ended at the battle of Cnidus, where the Spartans were defeated by a Persian fleet commanded by Conon the Athenian and largely manned by Greek crews.

2. The battle of Leuctra, July 371, put an end to the Spartan hegemony of Greece. The battle of Mantinea was fought in the early summer of 362.

history the element of practical instruction, what is left is insignificant and without any benefit to them. Again, when writers try to provide details about cities and places without possessing first-hand experience of this kind, the result is bound to be very similar, since they will leave out many things which ought to be mentioned and deal at great length with other details which are not worth the trouble. Timaeus often falls into this error because he does not rely upon the evidence of his own eyes.

25h. In his thirty-fourth book Timaeus remarks that he lived in Athens continuously for fifty years as a foreigner, and admits that he had no experience of fighting and never visited places to observe them at first hand. Accordingly, when he has to deal with such matters in his history he makes many errors and misstatements, and if he ever gets near the truth, it is rather in the manner of those animal painters who make their sketches from stuffed dummies. In these cases the draughtsman sometimes catches the correct outline, but there is none of the vividness and animation of real living creatures which it is the special function of painting to capture. This is just what happens with Timaeus, and generally speaking with all those who start out from this bookish approach. What is lacking is the vivid realization of the actual objects, since this element can only be created by the personal experience of the writer, and accordingly those who have never themselves participated in public life fail to arouse the interest of their readers.

For this reason the writers of the past believed that historical memoirs should possess such vividness that they would make the reader exclaim whenever the narrative dealt with political events that the author must have taken part in politics and had experience of public affairs; or when he dealt with war that he had known active service and risked his life; or when he turned to domestic matters that he had lived with a wife and brought up children, and similarly with the various other aspects of life. Now this quality can only be found in the writing of those who have played some part in affairs themselves and made this aspect of history their own. Of course it is difficult to have been personally involved and played an active role in every kind of event, but it is certainly necessary to have had experience of the most important and those of most frequent occurrence.

25i. The proof that what I am saying is by no means impossible to achieve is offered us by Homer, for in his poetry we find much of this kind of vividness. At any rate it would, I think, be generally agreed from the foregoing arguments that the study of documents is only one of the three elements which contribute to history, and stands only third in importance. The truth of this proposition can best be demonstrated from the various kinds of public utterance which Timaeus introduces: that is, the debating speeches of politicians, the harangues of commanders, and the discourses of ambassadors. There are few situations which allow scope for every possible argument to be set forth, and most leave room merely for the few brief statements which naturally present themselves. And even among these there are some which are appropriate for the present and others for the past; others again may be suitable for Aetolians, or for Peloponnesians or for Athenians. But what is quite untrue to the facts, besides being full of affectation and pedantry, is to expand a speech without point or occasion so as to include every possible argument, and this is what Timaeus with his trick of inventing arguments does to every subject. This practice has indeed caused many statesmen to fail and be brought into contempt, whereas the essential principle, on the contrary, is to select those arguments which are relevant and suitable to the occasion. But since there is no fixed rule as to which or how many of the possible arguments should be used in a particular instance, an unusual degree of attention and clarity of principle is called for on the part of the historian, that is if we intend to benefit rather than mislead our readers. It is never easy to formulate exactly what the situation demands, but it is not impossible to be guided towards it through precepts based upon personal experience and practice.[1] For the present, the best way of conveying my meaning is as follows. If historians first clearly describe the situation, the aims and the circumstances of those who are discussing it, and next report what was actually said, and finally explain to us the reasons why the speakers succeeded or failed, we shall arrive at a true picture of what happened. We shall also, by distinguishing what was successful from its opposite, and by drawing analogies from this have good prospects of success in dealing with any future situation that may confront us. However, it is difficult in my opinion to trace causes, but all too easy to string together phrases in books. And in the same way, while it is given only to a few to speak briefly and to the point and to discover the rules which govern this facility, to write at great length and to little purpose is a very common accomplishment indeed.

1. i.e. the precepts are offered to the statesman by the historian whose works he reads, these precepts being based on the historian's own experience and practice.

THE CAUSES OF TIMAEUS' FAULTS AND THE QUALITIES OF THE GOOD HISTORIAN

27a. The political part of Timaeus' history combines all his faults of composition which I have already described. I shall now explain the prime cause of his errors, one which many people will find improbable, and yet it will prove to be the truest explanation of the charges that have been brought against him. He seems to me to have developed a talent for detailed research together with a certain competence based on inquiry, and in a word to have approached the task of writing history in a painstaking spirit, and yet in certain respects I can think of no historian who appears to have been less experienced or to have taken less trouble. The following considerations will illustrate my point. Nature has provided us with two instruments, so to speak, with the help of which we make all our inquiries and obtain our information. I mean by these the faculties of hearing and of sight, and of the two, according to Heracleitus, that of sight is by far the more trustworthy. 'The eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears,' he informs us. Now Timaeus has pursued his inquiries through the medium which although the more agreeable is also the inferior, that is he has refrained completely from employing his eyes and preferred to employ his ears.[1] Moreover even the ear may receive its information in two ways, either by reading or by the examination of witnesses, and with the second of these, as I have indicated above, Timaeus took very little trouble.

The reason for his preference is easy enough to understand. You can busy yourself among books with very little danger or

1. i.e. by reading, here regarded as a function of the ears, not the eyes.

hardship, provided only that you have taken care to have access to a city which is well supplied with records[1] or to have a library close at hand. After that you need only pursue your researches while reclining on your couch, and you can compare the mistakes of earlier historians without undergoing any hardship. Personal investigation, on the other hand, demands much greater exertion and expense, but it is of prime importance and makes the greatest contribution of all to history. This is evident from the expressions used by historians themselves. Ephorus, for example, declares that if writers could be personally present at all events as they happen this would be the best of all modes of experience. Theopompus says that the best military historian is the man who has been present at most battles, and the best writer of speeches the man who has taken part in most debates, and that the same principle applies to the sciences of medicine and navigation. And Homer has been even more emphatic on this subject than the others. When he wishes to set before us the qualities that the man of action should possess, he presents the image of Odysseus in these words:

> Muse, let us sing of that man of many resources, the rover
> Far over land and sea . . .

and a little further on

> Many the cities of men he observed and the manners he noted,
> Many the hardships he bore in his wanderings over the ocean[2]

and again

> One who had suffered the shocks of the battlefield and of the tempest,[3]

28. It seems to me that the dignity which belongs to the art of history also demands a man of this kind. Plato contends that human affairs will go well when either philosophers become kings or kings study philosophy, and for my part I should say that it will be well with history when one of two conditions is fulfilled. Either the task should be undertaken by men of action, in which case they

1. Athens, where Timaeus worked, had little to offer as regards records concerning the western Mediterranean countries.

2. *Odyssey*, I, 1–3. 3. *Odyssey*, VIII, 183.

must approach it not in the fashion of the present, when it is treated as a matter of secondary importance, but in the conviction that this is their most necessary and honourable employment, and apply themselves to it with undivided attention throughout their lives. Alternatively those who set out to write history must understand that the experience of affairs is an essential qualification for them. Until that day comes, there will be no respite from the errors that historians will commit.

Now Timaeus never gave the least thought to these considerations. He spent all his life in one place of which he was not even a citizen, and he seems almost deliberately to have cut himself off from any active participation in war or politics, or any personal experience gained from travel and observation; and yet for some unknown reason he has acquired the reputation of being an eminent historian. The proof that this is a fair characterization of Timaeus can easily be found in his own words, for in the preface to his sixth book he remarks that some people suppose that it requires more talent, hard work and training to write rhetorical speeches than it does to write history. He points out that Ephorus had in his time disagreed with this view, but because he had been unable to reply adequately to those who held it, Timaeus himself undertakes to draw a comparison between history and rhetorical writing. But this is really quite out of place, because to begin with his statement about Ephorus is untrue. Throughout his work Ephorus is admirable in his phraseology, his treatment, and the working-out of his argument; he is most eloquent in his digressions and in the expression of his personal reflections, and in a word whenever he enlarges on any subject, and besides this it so happens that his remarks on the difference between historians and speech-writers are particularly persuasive and convincing. Timaeus, however, is anxious to avoid giving the impression that he is echoing Ephorus, and so besides making an inaccurate statement about him, he has also condemned all other historians. And so when he comes to discuss at great length and in a confused manner subjects which others have handled quite correctly, he imagines that not a living soul will notice what he is doing.

28a. His purpose in this passage is to glorify history, and so he says that the difference between this and declamatory writing is as

great as that between real buildings and furniture and the landscapes and compositions which we see in painted scenery.

Secondly he says that the collection of the materials required for writing a history is a more laborious task than the whole course of study for the business of declamatory speaking. He himself, he says, took such pains and incurred such expense in collecting his notes from Tyre[1] and in conducting research into the customs of the Celts, Ligurians and Iberians that he could scarcely expect either his own testimony or that of others to be believed. One would like to ask this writer which plan of research he considers the more laborious – to sit quietly in a town collecting notes and inquiring into the manners and customs of the Ligurians and Celts, or to obtain personal experience of the majority of places and peoples and see them at first hand? Or again, which requires the greater effort, to question those who were present at the various operations about the details of the order of battle, the sea-fights and the sieges, or to be present at the actual scene and experience the dangers and changes of fortune of these actions as they occurred? My own view is that the difference between real buildings and those depicted in stage settings, or between the composition of history and of speeches is not so great as the difference in all historical writing between a narrative which is based on participation or first-hand experience, and one which is derived from hearsay and the tales of others.

However Timaeus, since he has had no experience of the first mode of writing, naturally supposes that the task which is really of least consequence, and easiest to carry out, namely that of collecting records and questioning those who have knowledge of the various events, is the most important and most difficult. And yet even in this field men who have no first-hand experience are bound to make serious mistakes, for how is it possible for a man to examine a witness about a battle or a siege or a naval action, or to grasp the details of his narrative effectively if he has no clear conception of the subject himself? The truth is that the interrogator contributes as much to the narrative as his informant, since the recollection of the accompanying details leads on the narrator from one point to the next. On the other hand the man who lacks the

1. For his writings on Carthage.

experience of action is neither equipped to question those who have taken part in one, nor, even if he is present himself, can he understand what is happening: consequently even if he is on the spot, he might just as well not be there.

7

JAMES DAVIDSON

Polybius

Life and works

Both pivotal and celebrated, Polybius of Megalopolis looms large on the isthmus that divides and connects Greek and Latin historiography. Firmly embedded in the genealogy of Greek historians, the methodological heir of Thucydides, a continuator of the great third-century Sicilian historian Timaeus, his impact on later writers of all kinds, both Greek and Roman, is unusually demonstrable; few historians cite so often or so extensively the work of their predecessors, fewer of those are themselves so often cited.[1] Polybius compared the ideal historian with itinerant Odysseus (12.27.10–28.1), and, like his hero, he did indeed wander around the Mediterranean from Spain to Alexandria, seeing for himself.[2] But at times he seems more like Cercyon blocking the Isthmian road, ever ready to wrestle with his predecessors, and intimidating those who wrote after him, the intersection of a "two-way shadow" thrown by the light of posterity: casting a shadow, cast in shadow.[3] Even so learned and assured a writer as Strabo is circumspect when rising to correct him: "Someone could say, 'My dear Polybius…'"[4] More than a mere historian he is himself "un fait culturel," positioned between Greece and Rome by his biography and his *Bildung* as much as by his subject matter, a Romanizer in his vocabulary and, strikingly, his syntax, he was also a paradigmatic captive Greek who captivated his Roman conquerors.[5]

[1] For his general cultural impact, Henderson 2001a: 29–33. For a genealogical table of Greek continuators, Marincola 1997: 289. For Thucydides' influence on Polybius – some precise verbal echoes of statements of methodological principle, but little engagement with the content – Walbank 1972: 40–3; cf. Walbank 2002: 188–9, Hornblower 1995, esp. 59; Pédech 1969: xli thinks, not implausibly, that the influence was indirect: "il a pris des leçons chez les historiens plus récents." For Polybius' *Nachleben* see Ziegler 1952: 1572–8, esp. 1572–4 for later writers who made use of him, with the most pertinent passages cited, and Marincola 2001: 148–9 (but there is no need to play down Polybius' considerable impact on Greeks in order to emphasize his importance for Romans).

[2] Walbank 1957: 1.3–6. [3] Walbank 2005. [4] Strabo 2.4,3.

[5] Préaux 1978: 83, Dubuisson 1985, with Langslow 2003: 43–4, Gruen 1984: 257.

Born in Arcadian Megalopolis *c.* 200 BCE, he was destined for a leading role in the Achaean League: son of a two-time *stratēgos* of the League, Lycortas, bearer, "as a boy," of the ashes of its greatest statesman Philopoemen (d. 182) and author of his hagiography, appointed envoy to Egypt for 181/0, despite being under the legal age (24.6.5) and elected cavalry commander of the Achaean League at a critical moment in its history (170/69 – when he was at least thirty).[6] But his career as "man of action" (*aner pragmatikos*, 12.27.10) was abruptly interrupted when he was denounced as anti-Roman by the Achaean Callicrates. Along with about 1000 other suspect Greeks, he was deported to Rome in 167 after the Roman victory at Pydna that ended the Third Macedonian War, a victory Polybius always viewed as the climactic event in the history of Roman imperialism.

The hostages remained in detention for seventeen years, dispersed throughout Italy, their numbers gradually diminishing to fewer than three hundred, through escape, natural wastage, and suicide.[7] Polybius, however, obtained permission to stay in Rome and met a better fate, becoming confidant, mentor, and hunting companion of Scipio Aemilianus (Africanus Numantinus), hooking up early with a boy who would turn out to be the most remarkable soldier of his generation.[8] Such proximity gave him access to diplomatic missions, princes, and kings, providing him with a ringside seat at some of the great events of the second century and ultimately the opportunity to participate in them as a (semi-)official interpreter of Roman policy to his own conquered countrymen;[9] in Cicero's *De Re Publica* his Roman contemporaries refer to him as "Polybius, our guest (*hospes*)."[10]

Apart from the Life of Philopoemen which was made much use of by Plutarch, Polybius wrote at least two other lost treatises, a work on tactics and one on the long-drawn-out Numantine Wars that finally achieved closure with Scipio's cataclysmic siege (133).[11] His major work, the *Histories*, consisted of forty books covering the rise of Rome to a position of dominance in the Mediterranean, 264–146 BCE. The heart of this narrative, Books 3–29, was the period 220–168: "For who is so lightweight or lackadaisical, that he would not wish to know how and with what species of government the Romans managed to get nearly the entire inhabited world at their feet, subjected to their sole rule, in less than fifty-three years?" (1.1.5; cf. 3.1.9).

[6] Eckstein 1992: 398–404.
[7] On Polybius as hostage, Allen 2006: 201–23, on the deportation itself, 202–3 with notes; on the numbers Paus. 7.10,12 with Moggi and Osanna 2000 *ad loc.*
[8] Astin 1967. [9] 31.24 and 29, 8, 39.5. [10] Cic. *Rep.* 4.3.
[11] Walbank 1972: 13–16; Walbank 1957: 1.2 and 6.

The ostensible addressees were contemporary Greeks, but Romans were also assumed to be part of the potential readership as well as posterity.[12]

The first two books were presented as back-story (*prokataskeue*) to the 53-year period of "investigation" proper (*hē historia* – 1.3.8-10; 13.8), the last ten as its coda:

> to gain knowledge of what it was like for each region once everything had been subjected to Roman writ, right up until the period of disturbance and uncertainty that followed . . . about which I was provoked to write as if making a fresh start, chiefly because I was not merely an eyewitness to, but also at times a participant in, at times even an orchestrator of, events. (3.4.12–13)

This second introduction at the beginning of Book 3 was written after 146, but most scholars have concluded that it was a later insertion following a change of plan and a decision to extend the account into the period after Pydna and Polybius' detention. For there are references to Carthage as if it still existed throughout Books 1–15, which must have been written before 150. At one point the author expresses the hope that Tyche will give him time to finish his project before his death (3.5.7). She heeded his prayer (39.8); in another place he even seems to refer to events of the year 118, when the Via Domitia was laid through Southern France, in which case he was still making additions to the text in his eighties; indeed there is no reason to doubt the evidence of [Lucian] *Makrobioi* (22) that "he tumbled from his horse while riding up from the country, fell ill as a result and died at the age of eighty-two."[13]

The work as we have it is therefore a snapshot of a text that had been in constant or intermittent flux, augmented over the years with little insertions and annotations and subject to occasional partial revisions right up to Polybius' death, combining first impressions with afterthoughts, notes of events as they took place with recollections in the light of what transpired.[14] However, when exactly Polybius wrote what, and the degree to which a finished "first edition" was published, allowing him to respond to criticism, are controversial issues.[15]

This means that it is hard to be certain when an observation or commentary is deliberately pointed or ironic in the light of how things turned out. In particular, some have plausibly argued that the social disturbances and political uncertainty in Rome in the 130s and 120s are responsible for a

[12] Polyb. 1.1.1–2; 3.3–8; 2.35.9; 31.22.8. On the audiences for ancient works of historiography, see the chapters by Marincola and Dillery in this volume.

[13] 3.39.8, cf. Walbank 1972: 12–13, Eckstein 1992.

[14] Henderson 2001a: 43–4 reminds us that the text left unrevised is nevertheless the text Polybius left.

[15] Walbank 1972: 16–25, Ferrary 1988: 276–91.

surprisingly "sombre, pessimistic" tone in Polybius' account of Roman imperialism; more particularly, that he was provoked to revise his prognosis for the Roman constitution in light of the conflict between Scipio and his close relatives by birth, by adoption, and by marriage, the Gracchi, a time when the triumphant Republic seemed to some to have succumbed to demagoguery and infighting – seemed, like Thucydides' over-ambitious Athens, to be in the process of defeating itself.[16]

For his story was interrupted by three books of digressions, each as famous and influential as the historical narrative. The first, Book 6, concerned the Roman system of government; the second, Book 12, was a critique of historiography; while book 34 was entirely devoted to geography, including measurements of distances, and assessments of local ecosystems and the ways of life of their human inhabitants – "Polybius says that ... in his travels with Scipio he saw lions crucified so that the other lions might be deterred from hurting men for fear of a similar penalty" (16.2), "in the remote parts of Africa next to the Sudan, elephant-tusks are used in the home in place of doorposts ... says Polybius on the authority of Prince Gulusa" (16.1). He was as critical of geographers as of historiographers, even accusing the great Eratosthenes, in one infamous passage, of subscribing to "popular preconceptions" (*laodogmatika*).[17]

Although there is a lot of Polybius still around, it represents only a fraction of the original which would have filled twenty volumes of Loebs rather than the six that we now have. More important, the earlier parts of the history survived best: 207 Loeb pages for the first two books, 227 for the last thirteen. Only books 1–5 are complete. Books 6–18 survive in an abridged form. All we have of the second half of the *Histories* is wayward excerpts from Byzantine anthologies on diplomacy and virtues and vices, along with some often polemical quotations from his rivals and successors. That some of what is missing can be restored by using authors who used Polybius – i.e., Livy – is small compensation: "The later books, which contained the truly contemporary history that Polybius had witnessed and taken part in, would have been invaluable in their complete state."[18]

The skewing of Polybius' text through the unsystematic stuttering of the transmission process, transforming a *Histories* that expanded into the present into one that peters out, means that any conclusions we can draw as to what kind of a historian he was, or, more especially, what kind of historian he

[16] Walbank 1943: 85–9, esp. 88: "In a flash of illumination the bourgeois historian of Megalopolis began to recognize in the first signs of popular unrest, in the first symptomatic challenge from within to the rulers of an empire now unchallengeable from without, the herald of approaching ochlocracy." Cf. Thuc. 2.65.11-12.

[17] 34.5.14 and 12.2. [18] Marincola 2001: 117.

wasn't must be hedged about with qualifications. It is one thing to be a cool critical observer of deeds that don't affect you by men long buried in the ground; it is harder to be objective about events that involved your most intimate acquaintances and had a dramatic effect on your life. An historian who first appealed to the authority of his method, his critical analysis and his judgment ended up appealing to the authority of his personal connections. When Polybius comes to describe his friend Scipio (31.23–30) we see Philopoemen's uncritical biographer re-emerge and are reminded more of Xenophon on Agesilaus than of Thucydides on the causes of the Peloponnesian War. Modern historians would certainly have benefited if more of Polybius' later books had survived; it is not certain that the same would be said for Polybius' posthumous reputation. Tyche may not have been as unkind to him as is sometimes claimed.[19]

Between Greece and Rome

The first intertextual exchanges between Polybius and Romans were on an interpersonal level. Polybius' "friendship and intimacy" with Scipio was first established, he says, through "the use of books and chatting about them," a reference, almost certainly, to the great library of Perseus, looted by Scipio's father Aemilius Paullus. The Greek historian's Roman exile, therefore, provided him with readier access to a more extensive collection of Greek books than had been available to him, surely, in Greece, along with years of immobilization in which to read them.[20]

Potentially as momentous was Polybius' acquaintance with Cato the Censor, founding father of Latin historiography. Around 150, Scipio had asked Cato, who happened to be his sister's father-in-law, to intervene with the Senate to help secure the hostages' release. This having been secured, Polybius visited Cato to ask how best he might persuade the senators also to restore to the hostages their former honours. You are like Odysseus returning to the Cyclops' cave to fetch his hat and belt, said Cato to the Odysseus-identifying historian.[21] It is unlikely this was the only exchange between the Greek writing his *Histories* and the Roman writing his *Origines*, in Rome together during the last eighteen years of Cato's life, and writing up much of

[19] Marincola 2001: 116.

[20] Plut. *Aem.* 28.6, with Walbank 1957 *ad* Polyb. 31.23.4; the passage where Polybius says he described this first exchange in more detail has not been preserved.

[21] Polyb. 39.6 [= Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 9], cf. Walbank *ad loc.*: "probably draws on P. but hardly ranks as a fragment."

the same period.[22] Cato crops up six times even in the surviving remnants of the *Histories*, quoted once citing Homer, and once, approvingly, for his attack on the degeneration of young Romans into (Hellenistic) luxury; a number of parallels in the content of the two œuvres have been adduced and it is rather more likely that the influence went from the older Roman to the younger Greek, from the more finished to the less finished text, than the other way round.[23]

It is probable that Polybius was also personally acquainted with Sempronius Asellio, tribune at Numantia, whose opening statements of principle, with their focus on explaining causes rather than merely recording events, have been universally seen as both assuredly Polybian in character – "wie eine Übersetzung" – and as a watershed in Roman historiography, the Greek guest the catalyst, according to this narrative, for a decisive transformation in the character of the histories written by his hosts.[24] Polybius' emphasis on the importance of Rome's stable *qua* "balanced" constitution as a key factor in its success (with a generalized postscript, nevertheless, on its potential for moral corruption and, thereby, for tipping through demagoguery into mob rule, 6.57.5–8) provided both a benchmark and a plotline, it has been argued, for first-century historians of the disequilibrium of the late Republic.[25] Brutus was working on an epitome of Polybius on the eve of the battle of Pharsalus.[26]

In the Augustan age, as is well known, Livy sometimes followed Polybius very closely, reproducing even the order of points made in his speeches (Polyb. 15.6.4–7.9; cf. Livy 30.30.2–30).[27] His reading of Polybius also informed or authorized, it could be argued, Livy's emphasis on the role of Fortuna – Tyche – in human events, and of exemplarity and spectacularity in history, most obviously in this distinctively Polybian statement from the preface:

[22] Cato's first five books recounted the history of Rome down to Pydna; the last two covered more recent events, including some of his own speeches. Cf. Nepos *Cato* 3.3–4, with Peter 1914: 1.cxxx–cxlii, Chassignet 1986: x–xii.

[23] Polyb. 38.6.7; 9.10, 12, Astin 1978: 296, Nicolet 1974: 245–55, Chassignet 1986: xxvi–xxvii, Eckstein 1997: 192–8, Cornell 1995: 6, 404 n.15; cf. Musti 1974: 125–35.

[24] Asellio, FF 1–2 (Peter) [ap. Aulus Gellius 5.18.7] with Peter 1914: ccxlii–ccxlv, cf. Polyb. 11.19a, 12.25b.1–4, 3.20.5, Ziegler 1952:1573, Musti 1974: 139, Marincola 1997: 247, 236 n.104, von Albrecht 1997: 380–1 ("a new trend," "under the influence of Polybius"), Ledentu 2004: 44 "[Asellio] marque incontestablement un progrès supplémentaire dans l'évolution du genre historique … La filiation de cette méthode avec celle de Polybe est flagrante." Asellio may have been Polybius' heir but he was next-to-nobody's ancestor, i.e., he does not seem to have been much read.

[25] Fornara 1983: 84–7. [26] Plut. *Brut.* 4.8.

[27] Tränkle 1977 with the responses of Briscoe 1978 and 1993.

> In the study of history this is especially salutary and fruitful: to fix your gaze upon instances of every kind of *exemplum* arranged in a conspicuous monument. From there you may take models for you and your *res publica* to follow, and ugly things, ugly in their inception, ugly in their results, for you to avoid.[28]

In practice, to be sure, Livy's subtly different treatment of examples and of the gaze, and in particular his tendency to embed exchanges between author and readers as exchanges between actors within the text (Polyb. 18.46.14, cf. Livy 33.33.5; Polyb. 21.11.1, cf. Livy 37.25.4), results in a very different, less button-holing, relationship between *Histories* and its viewers, producing a more affecting but less provoking monument than Polybius' historical master class in statesmanship and warfare which uses images as if in a PowerPoint presentation.[29]

Two things serve to complicate this image of Polybius' impact on Romans. Many features of his *Histories*, e.g., the emphasis on impartiality, usefulness and the need for a historian to have practical experience; on the superiority of the sense of sight, the importance, therefore, of autopsy and his metaphor of *History* as *apodeiktikē* "demonstratory"; and on the role of Tyche, not to mention the "cycling" (*anakyklōsis*) of constitutions with the "balanced" as the most stable constitution, are part of the common intellectual inheritance of the "Hellenistic" Mediterranean.[30] Much-read Polybius was simply the channel through which these assumptions, principles and ideas were funnelled into Rome-centered *Histories* albeit in a newly applied, elaborated and/or categorical form.

Second, many "Polybian" features seem already deeply rooted in Roman practices and the Roman *imaginaire* if not in Roman historiographical discourse. If the notion of the historian as *aner pragmatikos* was an ideal for Polybius, in the Rome of Fabius Pictor, Postumius Albinus and Cato the Censor, where writing history seems always to have been the accompaniment of or a coda to a career in public affairs, it was the simple fact of the matter. More specifically, the peculiar course of Polybius' *Histories*, flowing down from the alpine heights of the first struggles with Carthage into the broad

[28] *Praef.* 10: "hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod uites."

[29] Cf. Chaplin 2000, esp. 23–5 and Feldherr 1998, esp. 1–12.

[30] Marincola 1997, index s.vv. "autopsy," "experience," "impartiality," "utility"; Walker 1993. The theory of the stable *qua* mixed constitution (cf. Champion 2004: 96–8, Lintott 2000, Ryffel 1949) is informed by the quintessentially anthropomorphic principle of *isonomia* of "powers" or humours – a healthy body (politic) is a body (politic) in equilibrium. The roots of the metaphor and the ideal can be traced at least as far back as the early classical Pythagorean philosopher Alcmaeon of Croton, who ascribed illness to a "monarchia" of one of the powers (F 4 D–K).

anecdotal flood plain of the present, i.e., from events of world-historical importance to something "suspiciously like memoirs," finds its closest, indeed only, model in the work of his Roman contemporary, Cato.[31] Again, the specific character of Polybian exemplarity, i.e., the hortatory vaunting of men of past times as paradigms to follow, finds its most vivid and immediate inspiration in the Roman funeral practice of parading ancestral *eikones*, as it is described and interpreted by Polybius, at least.[32] Finally, whether or not Fortune had played a starring role in Romans' histories, an array of cults of the goddess Fortuna – some considered by ancient commentators and modern archaeologists to be rather old, others more recently dedicated following military victories – were to be seen in Polybius' Rome, the goddess at least as central and important in the Roman world view as Tyche was in any Greek community.[33] What seems Polybian in later Roman authors, therefore, may have seemed Roman to Polybius' Greek contemporaries; his *Histories* offered his hosts an image of their own expectations of how history works and what histories are for, rendered more visible, articulable, and self-conscious through the mirror held up by the visitor from abroad.

Without a doubt, the extraordinary cultural and political interpenetration of Polybius and Rome – the Greek held hostage on suspicion of anti-Roman tendencies nevertheless allowed to situate himself, uniquely, close to the heart of Roman affairs where he assimilated the values, expectations, and language of his captors – was to a degree the result of a lucky chance: the discovery of a personal affinity developing into friendship and intimacy with an eighteen-year-old boy, Scipio, who would become a pre-eminent figure within the Republic. What has not always been properly appreciated is the extent to which this affinity was set up beforehand by a no less fortuitous myth. By the second half of the second century at the very latest, probably much earlier, it had come to be accepted that Rome had anciently been settled by a colony of Polybius' fellow-Arcadians led by King Evander, son of the nymph Carmentis, the Italian Sibyl and goddess of childbirth, who had her own *Flamen Carmentalis* and annual two-day festival.[34] This tenacious, *qua* cult-embedded, foundation myth, undislodged even by the triumph of the Trojan myths in the first century BCE, drew its cogency from a combination of bizarre specificity and banal generality. The epicenter of this "idea that there was something Arcadian about Rome" was the Palatine where the cave of Lupercal, nursery of Romulus and Remus, was located, and the Ara

[31] Marincola 1997: 188–95, esp. 192, cf. Chassignet 1986: xii.
[32] 6.53.6–54.3 cf. 55, 31.24.5 and 10. So Fornara 1983: 112–15.
[33] Graf 2004 for references and bibliography, plus Kajanto 1981: 503–6.
[34] Phillips 1996.

Maxima of Hercules in the adjacent Forum Boarium.[35] The Palatine was believed to be the site of Evander's original settlement, named after the Arcadian city of Pallantion or, according to Polybius, after Pallas, Evander's grandson.[36] The Lupercalia, with its wolfish name and its intimations of human sacrifice – a bloody knife pressed to the forehead of youths – was seen as a Roman translation of the equally wolfish and specifically Arcadian Lykaia; its goaty god, Inuus or Faunus, as whip-wielding Arcadian Pan. The cult of Hercules, performed *graeco ritu*, was also said to have been introduced by Evander who extended hospitality to the hero-god, his son-in-law according to Polybius.[37]

Evander was also used to explain perceived affinities between the Roman and Greek alphabets and the Latin and Greek languages (especially the Aeolian dialect!).[38] These affinities must have seemed more remarkable when set alongside the very different languages of, e.g., the Phoenicians and Etruscans. Moreover, older Latin inscriptions with which Polybius was familiar (3.22) revealed a language (and a script) that seemed in some ways closer to Greek: e.g., nominatives in *-os* and genitive plurals in *-om*. Finally, although the Evandrian myth gained acceptance and a position of centrality through seeming – in contrast, e.g., with Trojan genealogies – to be "désintéressée," a *Roman* myth rather than a gentilicial myth, one particular *gens* – who gave their name to one of the two groups of Luperci and who sometimes claimed descent from Hercules and Evander's daughter – was particularly attached to it: the Fabii, one of whose members, Pictor, had already written Evander and Hercules into the first history of Rome.[39]

Not only was Polybius thoroughly acquainted with Pictor's *Histories*, but when he first arrived in Rome he seems to have been more intimate with Scipio's elder brother, Fabius Maximus Aemilianus, adopted into the most prominent branch of the Fabian *gens*; indeed, Scipio remarked upon that intimacy one day as he left Fabius' house with Polybius.[40] Given this context and the importance of *parentés légendaires* in international relations in this period, it would be remarkable if the name of Evander was not invoked in Fabius' plea for Polybius to be allowed to remain at Rome, in the home of his forefathers, just as Aeneas recalls a common descent from Atlas to win over Evander, his host in the *Aeneid*.[41] Such myths, to which even Cato the Censor seems to have subscribed, served to complicate, at the very least, any

[35] Cornell 1995: 68–9, cf. Bayet 1920, with Hall 2005. [36] DH 1.32.
[37] Wiseman 1995a, 1995b: 39–42, 77–8.
[38] Fabius Pictor F1 (Peter), Tac. *Ann.* 11.14, Cato *Origines* F 19 (Peter).
[39] Bayet 1920: 64, Fabius Pictor, F 1 (Peter), Wiseman 1974: 154, Jones 1995: 235.
[40] 31.23.7-12. [41] Polyb. 31.23.5–6, Jones 1995: 236–8.

opposition between Greek and Roman, captive and captor, host and guest, and to symbolically pre-embed their mutual exchanges.[42]

The *Histories*

Polybius' unique position as an actor-spectator, hostage-guest, is what gives his *Histories* their distinctive character and helps to explain some of the ironies and complexities or even the "disjunctions" and contradictions in this paradoxical, occasionally even perverse, work and its reception: a powerfully linear plot mechanically interrupted by *tours d'horizon*, "monoeidic" yet composite, "finished" yet unfinished; an intrusive authorial presence, loudly self-reflexive, constantly editorializing, who conspicuously absents himself in order to view events through the eyes of the participants, a deterministic historian obsessed with the vicissitudes of Fortune, an amoral "Machiavellian" yet moralistic historian.[43]

Discursiveness and metahistoriography

These Polybian *problemata* are predicated upon what is perhaps the most salient feature of his work: its voluminousness (or uneditedness). Although his subject, *hē historia*, was a period of barely more than fifty years, from the start Polybius seems to have planned a work on a scale large enough to absorb many years of enforced leisure. The result is history characterized not so much by its grandeur as by its discursive expansiveness. Polybius is repetitive and digressive, chatty even, as if his putative Greek interlocutors somehow compensated for the actual society of Greeks of which his detention deprived him. Apart from the three book-length digressions on Roman institutions, historiography, and geography, he finds time to talk, for example, about the keeping properties of jujube wine (12.2), the lavishness of the houses of courtesans in Alexandria (14.11), and the dances performed by Arcadians (4.20–1). Typically, he concludes this last digression by explaining the need for it and concludes the explanation with a statement to the effect that the digression is now concluded (4.21.10–12); this is not an author anxious about word-limits or deadlines.

It is this volubility (such a contrast with discreet, tight-lipped Thucydides!), that has won him a reputation for methodological thoughtfulness and makes

[42] On Polybius' use of Evandrian myths, Bickerman 1952: 67, Ferrary 1988: 226.
[43] Cf. Henderson 2001a: 44–9, Marincola 2001: 125–8, 143–8, Eckstein 1995, Davidson 1998.

him so useful a source of quotations for students of ancient historiography.[44] Other historians assessed the work of their predecessors, thought about how to get the most out of informants, and wondered how to refer to themselves when they came to narrate events in which they themselves participated; only Polybius *quotes* his predecessors at length (Book 12), displaying the depth of his engagement with the texts he is criticizing; *dilates upon* the use of first person or third person when referring to himself (36.12); and *talks about* the importance of the interviewer's contribution to an interview, using his knowledge of the subject to structure the rambling discourse of the interviewee, for otherwise "even if he is present, he is, though present in a certain sense, not present" (12.28a.10).[45]

Gaze and metahistory

That clumsy attempt at a *sententia* could serve as a description of the historian's own role in the *Histories*. For this notably obtrusive author often "diverts the reader from the historian."[46] In other words, Polybius often writes of "what seems to so-and-so" even though these appearances are, we are told, deceptive; and actors not only observe and interpret their adversaries, the strength of cities, the difficulty of terrain, the results of battles and the state of play in other theaters of war, they also observe and interpret others' observations and interpretations.[47]

There is no real contradiction here; the actor's-eye view merely camouflages the grossest authorial impositions. Most straightforwardly, Polybius uses the viewpoint of others rhetorically as a feint of objectivity; Callicrates and his party are more effectively reviled not by Polybius *sua voce* but by bathers who refuse to get into a bath in which they have bathed, crowds who boo and hiss whenever honors are proposed, and children calling them traitors in the street (30.29). And it often turns out that the most experienced/successful generals share Polybius' own view of particular ventures, seeing past the *laodogmatika* of vulgar opinion and indeed using that "prevailing notion" (*he proüparchousa doxa*) to surprise their enemies, producing, e.g., the paradox that the most "impregnable" cities are the easiest to capture (7.15.2–4).

Since readers are also directed to observe like spectators in an arena (1.57.3), Polybius' evocation of the actor's-eye view shades the gaze in history into the gaze of history, as if readers are simply more distant spectators in a

[44] Marincola 2001: 133, cf. the entries for "Polybius" in the indexes, e.g., to Marincola 1997 and Fornara 1983.
[45] Marincola 1997: 188–92. [46] Walbank 2002: 11–12; cf. Marincola 2001: 127.
[47] Davidson 1991.

historical arena watching combatants who are engaged like themselves in observation, research, and analysis. This profound interpenetration of history and *hē historia*, the inquiry into (historical) events, is critical for any understanding of Polybius, how he thinks history works, what he thinks historiography is for. If Thucydides' *History* is fiatic, writing *The Peloponnesian War* into history even as it is in the process of being waged and long before it has reached any world-historical conclusion, Polybius' *Histories* is above all *pragmatikos* – "action history," "relevant inquiry" – i.e., a history of *praxeis* performed by *andres pragmatikoi* written for *andres pragmatikoi* by a *pragmatikos*.[48] Thus through his historical researches Polybius re-enters the field of history from which he had been removed through extradition. For historical inquiry – looking and paying attention – is itself statesmanlike activity, the equivalent of making war even, as Agelaus points out to Philip at Naupactus: "If it is action you are after (*pragmatōn oregetai*), then you should *direct your gaze* westwards and *turn your mind to* the wars in Italy" (5.104.7).

But this forceful imposition of the gaze of the historian on to the field of action, this weaving of *historia* into the plot of history, has a perverse effect: generals become performers, war becomes war-gaming (*hamilla*, *agon*), theaters of war become theaters, acts of war become impactful gestures: "The Romans seem to do this [massacre the inhabitants of captured cities] for its shock value (*kataplexeos charin*)" (10.15.5).[49] Thus an air of unreality and disengagement hangs over the history of this supremely realistic and engaged historian and instead of tactics, logistics, and joined-up strategy we are led into a virtual world of discrete contests, phantom fears, vain confidences, shadow-boxing, and second-guessing, as the actors read and interpret events or rewrite the script: "observing that the enemy were very confident in the natural strength of Dimale and the measures they had taken for its defense, there being also a general belief that it was impregnable, he decided to attack it first, wishing to strike terror into them" (3.18.3). This is the true irony at the heart of Polybius' *pragmatikos* project: *praxeis* become meta-*praxeis* and history itself becomes metahistory.

Further reading

Thanks to what I have called Polybius' volubility, engaging with his text can seem more akin to the process of rubbing along with a particular personality,

[48] Marincola 2001: 122 n. 9 cites the most pertinent discussions. On Thucydides, Davidson 2005:14.

[49] Davidson 1991: 15.

rather than that of analyzing an artefact: in that respect it is more like studying Xenophon or Cicero, perhaps, than studying Livy or Thucydides, so that a fondly admiring or alternatively a tetchy and impatient tone often characterizes Polybian scholarship, depending on the degree to which any particular scholar empathizes with the historian and his predicament (cf. Henderson 2001b).

For orientation there is, most briefly, Derow 1996, an undoubted empathizer; then the short analytical summaries of Pédech 1964: ix–xlv and Marincola 2001: 113–49 and then the judicious, fact-filled 139 columns of Ziegler 1952, by no means out of date. F. W. Walbank is without peer as the Anglophone student of Polybius, and his short but richly annotated monograph (1972) is an unblinkered view of an author in whose company he had already spent some decades, working on his three-volume commentary (1957–79). That commentary is one of the great monuments of postwar scholarship, but very much a "historical commentary," a *vade mecum* for historians of the third and second centuries BCE. More useful to students of historiography are Walbank's numerous articles on the author, collected in two volumes (1985 and 2002), the latter including a thorough review of Polybian scholarship from 1975 to 2000; one should be aware that Walbank has been known gracefully to modify his views in the course of his long career. The most insightful and intelligent monograph on Polybius' historical methodology remains Pédech's mighty tome (1964).

Scholarly debate has generally been conducted in a polite and orderly fashion but there are a number of long-running disputes: in particular, whether Polybius was for or against Rome and Roman imperialism; his amoralism; his analysis of causes; and the role of Tyche or indeed what he meant by that term. In fact debate is often focused on the meaning of certain key Polybian words and phrases – not just Tyche but *aitiai, pragmatike, apodeiktike*, etc. – and on the degree to which his usage is idiosyncratic. Since Polybius accounts for rather a large percentage of the surviving Greek prose literature of the second century BCE, it is often hard to tell, but the ongoing, newly revived *Polybios-Lexikon* (Mauersberger *et al.* 1956–) is helping.

Some debates have flourished because of the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions in what Polybius says about history and historical actors, with some scholars emphasizing certain statements and their opponents emphasizing others. Another approach involves explaining inconsistencies in terms of time of composition – i.e., Polybius changed his mind – but although it is quite likely that Polybius did indeed change his mind about important issues and quite certain that he left a text that had not been completely revised in line with his very latest thoughts, dating particular statements is difficult and there

is a danger of circular argumentation. Only comparatively recently have scholars begun to look at the Polybian text as a thing in itself with its own narrative logic, tensions, and subversions (Davidson 1991, Henderson 2001a, Champion 2004): "how the *Histories* work," rather than "what Polybius thought." Although this avoids the problem of having to date individual statements, like all such world-of-the-text approaches, it risks perfecting an imperfect Polybius and ingeniously discovering a different kind of orderliness that may or may not have been there.

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