

LEARNING FROM HISTORY ΠΑΡΑ ΔΟΞΑΝ: A NEW APPROACH TO POLYBIUS' MANIFOLD VIEW OF THE PAST¹

Abstract: Scholars have seen a contradiction in Polybius' view of history because, on the one hand, he talks of cycles and recurrent actions, but on the other is aware of the unpredictable aspects of history (as seen, e.g., with *tyché*). The present paper seeks to show that there is no contradiction in Polybius' thought, since alongside the belief that the future can be deduced by drawing logical (*κατὰ λόγον*) conclusions from the past, there is another strand in Polybius which recognises and indeed highlights the importance of contingency in history, and the fact that many events occur contrary to human reckoning (*παρὰ λόγον*). Although Polybius does not discuss the latter explicitly, he nonetheless underscores it by the use of counterfactual thinking and of narratives that emphasise accidental occurrences. Both approaches serve, although in different ways, the paideutic purposes of Polybius' work.

‘When he came to historical narrative, he forgot cycles.’ Confronted with apparently blatant contradictions in the *Histories*, the famous Italian scholar Arnaldo Momigliano found no explanation for Polybius' twofold approach towards explaining past events.² Polybius seems to have a circular idea of history, but this conception does not match his account of Rome conquering the Mediterranean region between 264 and 145 BC.³ Therefore, others like Petzold or Lendle joined Momigliano in blaming Polybius for not presenting a coherent view of history.⁴

¹ I would like to thank Uwe Walter, John Marincola, John Moles and the anonymous referees for many helpful comments. Translations from Polybius are from the Loeb edition (sometimes modified).

² Momigliano (1977c) 169. See also Momigliano (1977b) 189: ‘But the main consideration is that outside the constitutional chapters, in the rest of his history, Polybius operates as if he did not hold any cyclical view of history.’

³ Trompf (1979) 64 does not find an explicit cyclical idea of the past outside Book 6, ‘however, simple cyclical models were frequently presupposed in his interpretations.’ Cf. Ferguson (1998) 22, who attributes Polybius' cyclical conception to his Stoic roots. The rest of Polybius' account has often been described as teleological: cf. Hoffmann (2002) and Labuske (1977) 405, 408.

⁴ Petzold (1969) 1, in charging the Greek historian with being inconsistent throughout the whole text, regarded it as impossible ‘Polybios in ein System zu bringen’. Ziegler (1952) 1498, despite largely refraining from criticising Polybius, attests an ‘Unlogik im theoretischen Bezirk’. Similarly van Hooff (1977) 102: ‘In my opinion Polybius was not a deep historical thinker, let alone a historical philosopher avant-la-lettre.’ See also Wolf (1960) 7 and Lendle (1992) 233.

In line with these criticisms, the *Histories* of Polybius have always been considered as a text which is clearly limited by contradictions. Some scholars puzzled about another 'inconsistency': on the one hand, the Greek historian deduces the unavoidable rise of the Roman empire both from its constitution and its superior tactics in battle. This might suggest a somewhat deterministic idea of history: the course of events obeys eternal historical laws, and results in Rome's dominating position from the 3rd century BC.⁵ On the other hand, scholars also found themselves encountering 'irrational' elements like *tyché*,⁶ which emphasises an unpredictable and contingent space for actions.

Given these issues, is Polybius' reputation as an historian—apart from his famous digressions on how to write history properly—doomed to suffer severely from such alleged contradictions? Does Polybius lack a coherent idea of the past? Does he forget cycles or does his narrative represent his genuine view on past events? What exactly is his conception of history?⁷

Although it is not possible to solve such problems in short compass, I would like to address some of these questions, in an attempt to demonstrate that Polybius is unfairly criticised for being inconsistent. Taking up the 'contradiction' sketched above (determinism vs. contingency), I will show that there exist two ideas of history within the *Histories*, both of which result from, on the one hand, explicit remarks by Polybius and, on the other, his narrative.⁸ After considering which of these two concepts prevails, my discussion

⁵ Pol. 18.28–32. Cf. also 4.8.10–11. Similarly, Book 6 seems to support a general theory of a predestined and incontrovertible course of historical events, which displays more conspicuously a deterministic idea of history: cf. Reinhardt (1960) 136; Klingner (1961) 308–309; Stern (1967); further examples in Petzold (1999) 253.

⁶ The problem of *tyché*'s influence on the historical course of events within Polybius' work has attracted many scholars' attention: cf. e.g. de Coulanges (1858); Rösiger (1880); Allègre (1889) 125–33; von Scala (1890) 178; Hercod (1902) 122; De Sanctis (1916) 210; Ziegler (1952) 1539–40; Walbank (1957) 16; Pédech (1964) 331–54; van Hooff (1977) 126; Labuske (1977) 412; Roveri (1982) 321; Lendle (1992) 233. However, all attempts to give an exact definition have failed, as Polybius makes widespread and manifold use of this term.

⁷ With regard to this question, I would like to leave out what most scholars have regarded as contributing most to the irrational and open history, i.e. *tyché*. Instead, I will focus on other elements (such as narrative strategies), by which Polybius establishes contingency within his idea of history.

⁸ It is striking that scholars have never been much interested in analysing Polybius' idea of the past using his narrative—in sharp contrast to Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, all of whom enjoy much attention in this respect: see Heitsch (2007); Bassi (2007); Dominick (2007); Scardino (2007); Rood (2007b), (2007c); Schwinge (2008); Baragwanath (2008); Grethlein (2009), (2010a), (2010b), (2010c); Tsagalis (2009); Lang (2011), to name but a few from recent years. Instead, many have relied on extracting concepts from Polybius' well-known digressions (particularly Book 6, but also Book 12), which do not fit

will also aim to shed light on what role the *paideia*–objective plays with regard to this problem. As Polybius claims many times in his work that his readers (mostly statesmen and generals) will benefit enormously from the lessons of history, I will show that he fulfils his promise by presenting an instructive guide of how to cope with a contingent reality—without being inconsistent.⁹

I

Before I come to Polybius' idea of a contingent past, I would like to start with the opposite of this concept by drawing on Polybius' allegedly deterministic perception of past events.¹⁰ One cannot overlook his technique of describing history as a process which follows predictable courses. But in contrast to what has been said before, I would like to show that it is not a deterministic idea of the past. A few examples to support this opinion can be found, not in Book 6, which has been discussed extensively, but in Polybius' narrative.

In 4.2.10 Polybius outlines the 'new era' in the Mediterranean, when, within a short period around 220/219 BC, certain heirs to the throne had come to power.¹¹ He deduces the consequences of these events from a general law. Having framed the rule that turning points in so many political centres inevitably bring about new developments, Polybius immediately comes to the predictable consequences of this structure with regard to the present situation: 'Since therefore the personalities of the rulers were everywhere new, it was evident that a new series of events would begin, this being the natural and usual consequence. And such indeed was the case'—as the laws of history have proven. Note that Polybius closely links the past with the future with a polyptoton (*τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ πέφυκε καὶ φιλεῖ συμβαίνειν κατὰ φύσιν*), which draws on natural (*κατὰ φύσιν*) regularity.

in with most parts of the *Histories*. For rare narratological approaches to Polybius, see Rood (2007a), Miltisios (2009), and Hau (2011).

⁹ Again, I do not intend to give a full examination of Polybius' extremely complex idea of history, but rather to present some preliminary considerations on these matters, which will be thoroughly elaborated in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

¹⁰ For the term 'determinism' applied to Polybius, see e.g. Champion (2004) 80 and Davidson (2009) 131, with additional literature.

¹¹ Philip V, despite being a child, inherited the throne of Macedonia, Achaeus 'had now not only the state, but the power of a king', Antiochos III succeeded his brother Seleucus in Syria, Ariarathes IV became king of Cappadocia at the same time, Ptolemy Philopator king of Egypt, and not long afterwards began the reign of Lycurgus in Sparta. The Carthaginians also appointed Hannibal to be their general.

When describing the *stasis* which took place in Messene around 219 BC,¹² Polybius interrupts his narrative to provide a short sketch of Philip's character. Again, the historian tries to explain the past (reactions of the people in connection with the king's behaviour) by rational arguments, this time using a somewhat mathematical principle (7.11.8–10):

He was the darling of the whole of Greece owing to his beneficent policy [...] But after his attack on Messene all underwent a total change, and this was only to be expected. For as he totally changed his principles and constantly pressed the consequences of this farther, it was inevitable that he should totally reverse also other men's opinion of him, and that he should meet with totally different results in his undertakings.

Most intriguing is Polybius' method of bringing forward his line of argument, i.e. certain conditions lead to certain outcomes, e.g. good behaviour leads to a good reaction. According to the apparently calculable structure of history, inverse constellations trigger inverse results (*τὴν ἐναντίαν*). History becomes explainable and foreseeable. As Philip shifted from a beneficent ruler to a bad king (*εἰς τὰναντία*), the people headed in the opposite direction (*ἐναντίαις ἢ πρότερον*) and events happened in compliance with logical rules (*καὶ τοῦτο συνέβαινε κατὰ λόγον*). In particular, Polybius' subtle use of contrasting terms and the carefully balanced structure of reasoning contribute to the impression that history is shaped by a calculable pattern. Furthermore, the succinct but concise final words *καὶ τοῦτο συνέβαινε* (which also can be found in the example above and becomes established as a leitmotif throughout the entire text of the *Histories*) mark the past as it happened again in accordance with the rules.

Polybius not only points to the rational course of history, but goes even further in his explanation. Given that these rules might occur again in forthcoming times, the future also becomes predictable. This is made clear when we look at Polybius' advice for his readers, which explicitly suggests a predictable future (12.25b.3): 'For it is the mental transference of similar circumstances to our own times that gives us the means of forming presentiments of what is about to happen.' By adapting key situations from the past to one's present condition (*ἐκ γὰρ τῶν ὁμοίων ἐπὶ τοὺς οἰκείους μεταφερομένων καιρούς*), people can actually foresee what is about to come (*προϊδέσθαι τὸ μέλλον*). Thus, Polybius seems to believe that history is structured by ration-

¹² Some scholars believe the *stasis* took place at around 215, thus linking it with Plut. *Arat.* 49.2; cf. Seeliger (1897) 12; Porter (1937) 44; Walbank (1940) 72; but Mendels (1980) 247 convincingly shows that Polybius' account refers to the *stasis* in 219 BC.

ally deducible regularities, which both explain why something happened in the past and will explain similar events in the future. One sees this as well in 6.3.2:

For there is no difficulty in reporting the known facts, and it is not hard to foretell the future by inference from the past (οὐδ' ὅλως εὐχερὲς οὔτε περὶ τῶν παρόντων ἐξηγήσασθαι διὰ τὴν ποικιλίαν τῆς πολιτείας, οὔτε περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος προειπεῖν).¹³

Here Polybius combines his idea of the past with the didactic objective of his work.¹⁴ The study of history provides knowledge of general patterns, as it gives reliable information about the truest intentions of every player involved. Since human beings always act in unchanging manners, these *exempla* can be used in timeless contexts.¹⁵

According to Polybius, therefore, the past conspicuously proves that individuals can shape history, if they use the past as a guideline for their own actions.¹⁶ A significant example of this is the account of Xanthippus, the Spartan mercenary who utterly defeated the Romans in 256 BC during the First Punic War. Polybius briefly touches upon the hopeless situation which confronted the Carthaginians before Xanthippus arrived. Then Polybius elaborately stages the mercenary's entrance by emphasising his analytical and rational counteractive measures.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Xanthippus' plan succeeded and Rome suffered a devastating defeat. Having recounted that episode Polybius does not proceed with the events that followed, but interrupts his account to point to the historical meaning of Xanthippus' triumph:

One man and one brain (εἷς γὰρ ἄνθρωπος καὶ μία γνώμη) laid low that host which seemed so invincible and efficient, and restored both the

¹³ Cf. also 16.28.2, where Polybius claims that we can even outplay *tyché* if she is against us by using rational (τῷ λογισμῷ) tactics based on past regularities.

¹⁴ Cf. 1.1.2 (ἀληθινωτάτην μὲν εἶναι παιδείαν καὶ γυμνασίαν πρὸς τὰς πολιτικὰς πράξεις τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας μάθησιν), 1.65.6–7, 2.56.12, 3.7.4–5. The topic of *paideia* in Polybius is extensively treated by Ziegler (1952) 1501, Walbank (1957) 6, Pédech (1964) 30, Petzold (1969) 7, Mohm (1977) 161, Gelzer (1982) 274, Meister (1990) 159, and Luce (1997) 127.

¹⁵ Pol. 3.31.7–9.

¹⁶ See especially 3.1.7, where Polybius again highlights the possibility of concluding from the individual to general situations and vice versa; cf. Mohm (1977) 195. Instructive examples of how people succeeded in foreseeing the future by judging according to repeating principles (εὐθέως δηλὸς ἦν τοῖς ὀρθῶς σκοπουμένοις) can be found in 1.8.5 and 2.36.5–6.

¹⁷ Pol. 1.32.1–4. The reader is struck by how Xanthippus infers the winning strategy from his own observations, which leads to a tremendous victory by the Carthaginians.

fortunes of a state which in the eyes of all was utterly fallen and the deadened spirit of its soldiers.¹⁸

In close keeping with this quotation, Polybius calls the Carthaginian general Hamilcar a 'draught-player' (*πεπτευτής*), as he outmanoeuvred his opponents with tactics based on rational and past-experienced guidelines, and thus succeeded with his plans.¹⁹ This appraisal of Hamilcar in particular and on the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit*²⁰ of men in general suggests that past and future alike happen according to specific rules (as is the case with board games, where players have full control over their pieces) and that a rational and prudent plan based on study from history will always work out.²¹

Considering these points, it looks as if Polybius does assume that history follows a necessary path, which can be traced by underlying preconditions. Moreover, he apparently stresses his readers' potential to shape history and takes for granted the possibility of being able to cope with every task and succeeding, if only the reader acts prudently according to the logical principles which can be learned from the past.²² Since this idea of history does not entirely correspond to the word 'deterministic', I would like to introduce into scholarly discourse the term *katalogy*,²³ which more adequately refers to

¹⁸ Pol. 1.35.5. Note that Polybius uses a quotation from Euripides (*ἐν σοφὸν βούλευμα τὰς πολλὰς χεῖρας νικᾷ*) to emphasise the historical dimension of what Xanthippus achieved. A similar example is Polybius' account of the Persian and Gallic invasions of Greece, which—according to him—were repelled only due to the logical reasoning of the Greeks (*ἡ τῶν σὺν νῶ καὶ μετὰ λογισμοῦ κινδυνευόντων αἵρεσις*, 2.35.8).

¹⁹ Pol. 1.84.5–8.

²⁰ I would like to introduce this German term into English-language scholarship because it usefully encompasses the idea that men are able to make history, thereby controlling all factors that might have an influence on the course of events.

²¹ The importance of one man's power in history is also highlighted in 32.4.2, when Polybius remarks on the death of Lyciscus: 'So great it seems is the power exercised by men's natures that not only armies and cities, but national groups and in fact all the different peoples which compose the whole world, experience the extremities sometimes of misfortune and sometimes of prosperity, owing to the good or bad character of a single man.'

²² This is true even if it becomes obvious that men cannot completely change the surroundings they are living in. Every man has to deal with the specific situation with which he is confronted, rather as Marx once wrote in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'

²³ The wording *κατὰ λόγον* often occurs in the *Histories*. It usually displays Polybius' assessment of historical events as happening according to what might have been expected (e.g. 2.38.5), its opposite being *παρὰ λόγον*.

Polybius' conception of history *κατὰ λόγον* and therefore comprehends the logical structure of history as well as its value for prediction of the future.²⁴

II

Polybius, however, did not actually believe in the *katalogy* of history—in considerable opposition to what I have tried to illustrate in the previous section. He was utterly aware of the past being contingent and proceeding along unpredictable ways. In this section, I seek to demonstrate that this contrary idea of the past—I coin it the *paralogy* of history—far exceeds the *katalogy* within Polybius' text. In addition, I will show that the *paralogy* has not been fully elaborated by Polybius in one of his famous and admired digressions, which makes it difficult to uncover; instead, its presence rises gradually from his narrative, a part which scholars tend to ignore.

Before I get into the text, I would like to clarify the term 'contingency', since it has experienced such an extensive, but rarely coherent, use in many social sciences in recent years. By definition, contingency is a space for actions, where events are neither necessary nor impossible.²⁵ Thus, contingency turns out to be the exact opposite to what Polybius' *katalogy* of the past seems to claim: if history is contingent, there is neither any course of events determined by certain preconditions nor any number of causes leading necessarily to a certain result. Everything might happen differently from what is being presumed.²⁶

Still, how does one prove Polybius' awareness of contingency, particularly in the light of his *katalogic* conception sketched above? Since he, as previously mentioned, does not offer one of his famous digressions to discuss what role contingency plays in history, we must thoroughly examine his narrative. With new approaches in historical and philological sciences, it is possible to retrieve his perception of contingency by different methods, some of which I turn to now.

In his widely renowned book *Ungeschehene Geschichte* Alexander Demandt, following what Niall Ferguson had proclaimed some years before, remarked

²⁴ It should finally be mentioned that this paradigm of 'logical history' is closely linked to Polybius' purpose in writing history: that the reader can learn from the past. 'Logical' history serves as an essential background, which provides the pragmatic conditions by delivering analogous contexts: cf. Heitsch (2003) 162–3.

²⁵ See Luhmann (2002) 152, who sums up that contingency describes 'was weder notwendig ist noch unmöglich ist; was also so, wie es ist (war, sein wird), sein kann, aber auch anders möglich ist.'

²⁶ Note that contingency should not be mistaken for chance, as Bubner (1998) 11 sensibly points out; see also Grethlein (2010b) 5–10

that counterfactual thoughts are a basic method of writing history, as they offer a view on 'crucial situations', in which the past could have taken other paths than what actually was the case. Demandt suggests that by counterfactual thoughts every historian steps away from the factual course of events and lays emphasis on the unrealised possibilities.²⁷ Thus it is counterfactual considerations uttered by a historian that allow us to draw conclusions about his idea of the past, since they give evidence of an author's efforts to diminish the role of necessity.

If we turn to Polybius now, one should not overlook that he frequently confronts his readers with counterfactual thinking. For example, when reporting Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, Polybius alludes to the manifold dangers the Carthaginian general had to deal with. Gallic tribes, particularly the Allobroges, after having occupied advantageous positions on a road, were very close to inflicting heavy casualties on Hannibal and his men: 'Had they [the Allobroges] only kept their project secret, they would have utterly annihilated the Carthaginian army.'²⁸ Note the striking contrast whereby Polybius gives just a brief comment but simultaneously points out tremendous consequences by questioning the whole campaign that was to follow if the Gauls had exploited their tactical advantage over their enemies. Despite Hannibal's accurate and prudent preparations, which were an evident cause of his success, these preconditions did not assure that success. History could have taken a different path, and it was simply a minor flaw in the Gauls' strategy which prevented the Carthaginians from suffering a fatal blow.²⁹

Polybius' counterfactual thinking may be illustrated by a further example. In connection with the sea battle of Tyndaris, which took place between the Romans and Carthaginians during the First Punic War around 257 B.C., Polybius tells us how close the Roman advance guard came to being sunk by their enemies. The Carthaginians managed to surround the oppos-

²⁷ Demandt (2001) 16–23. See also Ferguson (1998), with his groundbreaking introduction to the book *Virtual History*. Recent scholarship attaches more and more importance to the idea of counterfactual thought: cf. for example Tellenbach (1994); Olson–Roese–Deibert (1996); Tetlok–Belkin (1996); Cowley (1999); Bulhof (1999); Squire (1999), Brodersen (2000); Rosenstein (2005); and many other articles published in recent volumes of *History and Theory*. Classicists have, of course, also studied counterfactual history in ancient historiography, see, e.g., Morello (2002) on Livy's Alexander digression.

²⁸ Pol. 3.50.4.

²⁹ It is worth mentioning that Polybius does not produce more details in his counterfactual thinking (i.e. telling what would have become of all the battles the Romans subsequently fought with Hannibal). Instead, he leaves it to the reader to imagine an alternative course of events. Perhaps due to this brevity, scholars have not paid much attention to Polybius' counterfactual thinking. Walbank (1957) 389, for example, makes no comment on this interesting opinion uttered by Polybius.

ing fleet along with the flagship of the commander, C. Atilius. Although some Roman ships were conquered, C. Atilius managed to escape: ‘They sank the rest ... and almost (*παρ’ ὀλίγον*) took the admiral’s ship with his crew. However, as it was well manned and swift, it foiled their expectation (*παραδόξως*) and got out of danger.’³⁰ Here the reader is confronted with an alternative course of events (the capture of Atilius’ ship), which must have appeared even more probable to the protagonists than what actually happened (the rescue of Atilius’ ship); the adverb *παραδόξως* lays emphasis on the slim chance of the Roman’s escape. Every reader can immediately realise how history could have ended up quite differently, and by no means followed a path which seemed predictable.³¹

With these counterfactuals, which can be found throughout the *Histories*, the reader is able to trace an awareness of contingency within Polybius’ text. The past appears to be a space of actions in which virtually everything is possible and nothing necessary. But there is further proof for Polybius’ concept of *paralogic* history: beyond counterfactual thinking, a semantic analysis of lexical fields like *εἰκός* or its opposite *ἀνάγκη* shows that Polybius applies only the parameter of probability, which does not presuppose any predestined course in history.³² In addition, many rules deduced from past patterns, mentioned in §1 above, lose their applicability within different contexts, and

³⁰ Pol. 1.25.3.

³¹ Besides these explicit counterfactual remarks by Polybius, we find much implicit counterfactual thinking in his work. Bernstein (1994) 98–99 in analysing Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*, stresses the fact that whenever an author embeds the speeches and intentions of certain characters into his text he presents an alternative course of events which happened to be a probable prospect yet did not come about. So despite being ‘secondary’ history because of a ‘factual deficit’, these virtual developments serve to underline the openness of the past and to illustrate its contingent structure; cf. also Demandt (2001) 19, 37. For more examples of this, see my forthcoming PhD thesis on Polybius (in press). Furthermore, by confining his own counterfactual thinking to short sentences instead of continuing with hypothetical assumptions about the possible consequences, Polybius lets the ‘real’ course of events prevail, but emphasises their contingency at the same time.

³² Polybius makes use of words like *δεῖ*, *ἀνάγκη*, *χρή* or *δεοντῶς*, all of which suggest a necessity and inevitability within the historical process, only in Book 6 to describe the consequences that arise from certain preconditions in different constitutions: see Mauersberger (1975) 91–3, 432–3 and id. (2004) 1072–4. Everywhere in his narrative we find the semantic field of *εἰκός*, which oddly is translated by Drexler as ‘notwendig’ (e.g. 10.36.7), and by Pédech as ‘cause naturelle’ (e.g. 1.61.3), which suggests a natural necessity (the same applies to Paton in his translation of the same passage). However, *εἰκός* and its derivative forms hint at a *probability*, thus denying an outcome that is *necessary* in respect to the underlying conditions.

thus lack universal validity.³³ The reader realises that history is contingent and the structure of the past neither predictable nor limited to rules of necessity.

Next, I would like to contrast Polybius' *paralogic* view of history with the aforementioned paradigm which claims the calculability of the future. My starting point will be the following consideration: the assumption that men are able to make history and to have full control like a *petiteutés* continues to be valid only if the number of influencing factors remains limited. Yet as soon as the number of influential agents increases, the historical space of action becomes contingent, suspending the principles of regularities, and the conception of *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* collapses.

This can be seen in Book 1: in the aftermath of the First Punic War, the Carthaginians were at risk of being unable to pay their mercenaries. As a result, tensions increased until Carthage managed to raise enough money to settle their debts. As the Carthaginian leaders Hanno and Hannibal Gisco seemed to gain control over the messy situation, another turning point completely altered the carefully constructed balance and triggered an unparalleled and violent war. Astonishingly, it is not one of the 'great men' (as Thomas Carlyle would have put it) who sets the ball rolling, but an almost insignificant seeming factor:

There was a certain Campanian, a runaway Roman slave, called Spendius. ... He was afraid of his master coming to claim him, when, if given up, he would by Roman law be tortured and put to death.³⁴

The focus is placed on a slave initiating a disastrous course of events, and even more surprising is the fatal consequence of his absolutely personal mo-

³³ Despite deducing certain patterns from the past, Polybius does not insist on their transtemporal applicability. Book 3 provides an instructive example: while operating against Hannibal in Southern Gaul, Scipio includes in his calculations the unreliability (*ἀθεσία*) of the Gauls. His reckoning proves to be false, although in a previous battle, Roman generals rightly counted on the Gauls' *ἀθεσία* (2.32.8; other examples of people calculating Gallic unreliability: 3.70.4 and 3.78.2). Another striking instance can be found in Book 1: there Polybius seems to establish the pattern that 'whenever [note the iterative form with *ὅταν* and subjunctive] they give way, they continue their flight for two or three days, trying to get as far away as possible.' But the Carthaginian leader Hanno, relying on this assumption, was to fail tremendously in his judgement (1.74.7).

³⁴ Pol. 1.69.4–5. A reader in ancient times, however, may have foreseen the fatal power of Spendius, as Polybius introduces him with *ἦν δέ τις Καμπανός*, a phrase that might have even at that time already been established as an allusion to crucial consequences: cf. the famous *ἦν δέ τις ἐν τῇ στρατιᾷ Ξενοφῶν Ἀθηναῖος* in Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.4 and Herodotus' introduction of Themistocles with *ἦν δέ τῶν τις Ἀθηναίων ἀνὴρ ἐς πρώτους νεωστὶ παριών* (7.143.1).

tive, which owes nothing to a higher idea like liberation from suppression. Thus this proof of Spendius' *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* has profound implications for the conception of a calculable future. Since Spendius emerges from the micro-structure of history and does not belong to well-known factors that are established as key players in the course of events, anyone reading Polybius becomes aware that history was not, and will not be, decided by a limited number of protagonists.³⁵ Rather, this example emphasises that even the smallest factor in history is capable of utterly influencing the course of events. Hence, the paradigm of calculable future is dramatically constrained: How does one predict prospective events, if even tiny structures trigger considerable eruptions whose concussions have an impact on the macro level of history?

Before addressing such questions, I would like to give another example of Polybius' *paralogic* idea, which provides a clearer understanding of which contemporary events the Greek historian was most certainly influenced by. In the *Histories*, accidental events and complex fields of action, which are contingent and happen *para doxan*, come about on account of the permanent interaction of players from many different places in the whole of the Mediterranean. Polybius' personal experience in these events had a deep impact on his idea of history and hugely shaped his concept of contingency as informed by the *symplokê*—the entanglement of the political space that followed the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean area.³⁶ This becomes quite obvious in the foreword to Book 3 where Polybius presents the most important protagonists to follow: the Romans, the Carthaginians, Philip, Antiochus, Ptolemy, the Rhodians, Prusias, Attalus, the Aetolians, the Galatians, Eumenes, Ariarathes, Pharnaces. Such a long list of key players already indicates what kind of consequences are entailed by the huge expansion of the political arena, particularly as regards the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* influenced by micro-factors. All of a sudden, the *dramatis personae* of history become remarkably more numerous and what I would like to describe as the entropy of history greatly increases.³⁷

³⁵ Cf. above my example referring to the achievements of Xanthippus, who also was a historical 'nobody' before arriving at Carthage. At this point we recognise the ambivalent character of the Xanthippus episode: on the one hand, it proves that men can shape history; on the other, it shows the paralogic consequences which emerge from the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* of apparently minor factors—or actors.

³⁶ Surprisingly, Polybius' concept of the *symplokê* has not yet been analysed by modern scholarship with regard to his idea of history, but has always been related to his methodological aspects: see Ziegler (1952) 1515–19; Pédech (1964); 496, Walbank (1975); Mohm (1977) 68–91; Roveri (1982) 56–59.

³⁷ As in physics, where entropy serves as a quantitative measure for disorder in a thermodynamic system and a higher entropy indicates an increased degree of randomness

Polybius' narration of historical events in Book 5, focusing on the struggle for power over Seleucia between Ptolemy IV and Antiochus III during the Fourth Syrian War (219–217 BC), provides a strong example of this aspect. If we jump to the end of the story, both opponents, Ptolemy and Antiochus, appear to be in complete control during the battle of Raphia. Prudently commanding their troops, they act like *petteutai*, shaping the course of events according to their plans and tactics. Both Ptolemy and Antiochus find the right spot for encamping some days before battle (5.80.1–7); Polybius then goes on to describe their battle order (5.82.1–13), which evokes the impression that it was to be a personal fight between two kings without any other parameter involved. Lastly, Ptolemy's important role with reference to the outcome of the battle is highlighted and recognised in a summary (5.85.8 und 5.86.1). But if we return to the beginning of the story, a completely different picture arises. Polybius subtly divulges how Ptolemy continued to be king only by chance, when multiple dangers which were fully out of his sphere of influence threatened his reign. The first threat was the Spartan King Cleomenes, who was granted asylum in Egypt at that time.³⁸ Cleomenes suddenly wished to return to Sparta, since king Antigonos was dead and the Achaeans were at war and the Spartans had allied with the Aetolians against the Macedonians.³⁹ These combined incidents, which by coincidence lead to a unique situation and come into being far from Egypt without any possibility for Ptolemy of having control over them, are responsible for Cleomenes deciding to go back to Sparta and attempting to seize the throne. This, however, provokes conflicting interests, as Ptolemy fears a mighty Cleomenes in Sparta and attempts to prevent this by any means. Interestingly, Polybius does not describe the following acts from Ptolemy's point of view, but from the perspective of Sosias, the king's top adviser, who was in charge of all government affairs at that time.⁴⁰ Thus Polybius keeps the reader on a

and disorder due to a larger number of interacting particles (see, e.g., Sasse (1979) 14–15) Polybius considers the entanglement of some political spaces as cause for the *paralogy* of history. I am completely aware of the fact that the scientific term 'entropy' does not fully match the historical constellation I have sketched out, but my aim is to establish a term which concisely covers a complex matter.

³⁸ Pol. 2.69.11 and 3.35.1. Note that Polybius characterises Ptolemy at the beginning of this story as 'careless' and 'indifferent' (*ὀλίγωρον δὲ καὶ ῥάθυμον*) to what happened in his empire outside of Egypt. Since Polybius points out that Ptolemy's predecessors were far more able to exercise control over Syria, Coile-Syria and Cyprus, we get a short glimpse both of what *might* have happened to Ptolemy (but has not) and which factors were to happen autonomously without any influence of Ptolemy's.

³⁹ Pol. 5.35.2.

⁴⁰ Pol. 5.35.7–5.36.7.

second narrative level, which becomes independent from Ptolemy's sphere of influence and a separate unit within the narrative.

Next, the reader is given potential outcomes from Sosias' perspective, i.e. how to subtly remove Cleomenes, since he is feared as a potential threat both in Egypt and in Sparta. The prospects seem to be desperate, with no solution in sight. But suddenly, an incident (*συνέργημα*) occurs which shifts the balance of power. Sosibius meets the Messenian Nicagoras, who, he discovers, is a fierce enemy of Cleomenes. He assists with Sosibius' plot, which has deadly consequences for the Spartan king. In this final act, Polybius tells us from Cleomenes' perspective how his own attempted rescue fails owing to accidental circumstances which prevent the Spartan king from escaping the trap.⁴¹

A close analysis of Polybius' narrative yields several points. First, Polybius intended to show that Ptolemy's position of power, which is the actual result of the whole episode beginning from the Cleomenes affair to Raphia, cannot be attributed to any skills employed by the king, but rather should be considered as a random series of several interferences in the action carried out by different protagonists. Second, how closely Ptolemy's reign teetered on the brink of disaster is highlighted by Polybius' elaborate technique of interlacing different levels of narration. After the exposition regarding the Egyptian monarch, the narrative switches to the second 'Sosibius' level, on which all lines of action happen independently of Ptolemy's range of influence. Subsequently, the narrative reaches a third 'Nicagoras' level which similarly ties together a couple of events causally connected with Egypt but also characterised by an autonomous momentum which is far away from Ptolemy's realm. In between these different levels, the actions of many key players intersect and affect one another, leading to accidental occurrences, which then directly or indirectly influence Ptolemy's situation. Interestingly, Ptolemy is not mentioned in the text. If we look at the interplay of all narrative levels, we immediately realise that the greater the number of protagonists involved in the action, the larger the spectrum of possibilities which history could have followed.

Ptolemy's final success at Raphia, therefore, stands in sharp contrast to his manners and his behaviour displayed before and during the battle against Antiochus. By his subtle narrative technique, Polybius brings out that the Egyptian king's success in keeping power should be attributed less to his leadership qualities (which Ptolemy did indeed reveal at the battle of Raphia and which Polybius was indeed bound to emphasise) than to the

⁴¹ Pol. 5.37.1–5.37.12. Not surprisingly, the fatal effect of Nicagoras' appearance is introduced with quite closely corresponding wording: *Νικαγόρας τις ἦν Μεσσηνίος* (see above, n. 34).

cumulative effect of a random series of interventions in the action by different protagonists.

These few examples stemming from Polybius' narrative should raise our awareness that the *paralogic* idea of history is a ubiquitous element within the text of the *Histories*. Although Polybius stresses the predictability of past and future in his digressions, his historical account adds a layer of contingency to this conception, which suggests an incalculable structure of reality.⁴²

III

When reading Polybius, then, we are confronted with two ideas of the past, which seem to be completely opposed to each other. We therefore face further key questions: Does either the *katalogy* or the *paralogy* prevail in Polybius? Why did Polybius not smooth out this obvious antagonism within his text? Or did he even perceive this coexistence of two contrasting conceptions of history not as an opposition, but rather a complementary synthesis?

In the following section I would like to discuss how *paralogy* is Polybius' actual view on the past. Furthermore, *katalogy* does not prove to be an overlooked or contradictory opposite, but represents another discourse on a different level, which is closely connected with the *paideia*-objective of the *Histories*.

It is evident that Polybius, despite being characterised by some scholars as a historian who reveals a deterministic structure of the past, was convinced of the contingent structure of both history and future events. Moreover, he did not intend to depict the past as consisting of calculable patterns, as my examples for his counterfactual thinking and for the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* have made plain. Beyond these two narrative strategies, Polybius' *paralogic* conception becomes explicit, particularly within a text ignored by scholars. In Book 2 Polybius sets forth the concern of his work, after having described the events that took place in Italy, Sicily and Africa up to the Roman victory against the Insubrians in 223 BC. As he would like to turn towards what happened in the eastern part of the Mediterranean area, he makes a significant statement at the outset (2.37.6):

As for Asia and Egypt, it will suffice to mention what took place there after the above date, since [in] their previous history [...] Fortune has

⁴² I owe the following observation to Professor Uwe Walter, who made me aware of the strikingly ambivalent structure displayed in 4.2.10 (the passage which has been used to introduce the *katalogy* of history above): on the one hand, the 'new era' points to a calculable pattern; on the other, the emergence of many new rulers introduces contingency, as unknown factors come into play, whose interaction increases the entropy of history.

wrought no such surprising change in these countries as to render any notice of their past necessary. But as regards the Achaean nation and the royal house of Macedon it will be proper to refer briefly to earlier events, since our times have seen, in the case of the latter, its complete destruction, and in the case of the Achaeans, as I said above, an unexpected growth of power and a political union.

According to this programmatic comment, Polybius skips the ancient history, since it does not provide any events that happened unpredictably (*μηδὲ παράλογον*). But the history of the Macedonians and Achaeans does require a detailed account with the former experiencing an unexpected downfall, and the latter an unforeseeable rise (*παράδοξος*). This wording mirrors what Hermann Lübbe once proclaimed to be the most genuine character of narrating history: ‘Durch das, was passiert, wird aus dem, was man tut, eine Geschichte.’⁴³ Polybius directs his attention only to what happened unexpectedly, when protagonists accomplished something that either seemed to be beyond any prospect (the Achaeans) or exceeded their realm of influence; or, Polybius turns towards events, in which something *happened* to the protagonists and was not *made* or *controlled* by them. Polybius neither wanted to systemise history nor was he prone to adjust all historical events into a regular pattern. By analysing his narrative, we comprehend his chief interest, i.e. the contingency of past and future events, which for Polybius represents the inner mechanism of history that is worth talking about.

One might argue that the term ‘contingency’ does not correspond with Polybius’ idea of the past, since it is a modern notion and runs the risk of being inappropriately applied to an ancient historian. To this objection, two points must be made. First, as the opposite to the *katalogic* idea I did not initially introduce contingency, but the term *paralogy*, which is derived from Polybius’ own statements and implies the conception of both an unpredictable past and future. Second, as contingency admittedly forms a part of the *paralogy*, this term perfectly matches Polybius’ idea of the past, since its conception was developed along with the contemporary philosophical context. I have already mentioned Luhmann’s definition of contingency, which fully

⁴³ Lübbe (1977) 75. See also Danto (1965) 236–7, who postulates that every narration about historical events might seem to give an account of powerful individuals. But all stories told actually give an account about ‘what happened’ instead of ‘what was done’. Lübbe, in accordance with Jauß (1973) 558, points out that ‘störungsfreie Handlungen’ (actions that happen *kata logon*) are in fact recipes, which give repeatable instructions, but have nothing to do with reality. Therefore, all historians by their very nature tend to recount events that happened *para logon* to avoid writing a history that turns out to be a success story of mankind.

meets Polybius' description with regard to the content.⁴⁴ In addition, this large temporal distance gets intermingled, if we look at the philosophical background. When establishing his definition, Luhmann referred to Aristotle, who in his *Analytica Priora* calls contingency τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον: 'I call a thing possible (ἐνδεχόμενον) if when, not being necessary, it is assumed to be true, no impossibility will thereby be involved.'⁴⁵ If we return to Polybius, who in Book 2 recounts the Aetolians' defeat by the Medonians, Polybius uses the following words 'The unlooked-for calamity of the Aetolians was a lesson to mankind never to discuss the future as if it were the present, or to have any confident hope about things that may still turn out quite otherwise (ἐνδεχόμενόν ἐστιν ἄλλως γενέσθαι).'⁴⁶ Thus, he undoubtedly quotes Aristotle by underlining that reality can always happen differently, a concept which again Luhmann makes use of.⁴⁷

Still, the question remains whether Polybius was not aware of this obvious contradiction, pointing out to rules and regularities in history on the one hand, but stressing contingency on the other. As we have seen, being inconsistent and writing history without any system is one of the main charges of which Polybius has been accused. However, in contrast to what I have tried to elucidate, scholars have based their criticism largely on the discrepancy between Book 6 and the rest of his work, which somehow did not fit in with a circular course of events, as well as the apparent inconsistencies with regard to the role of *tyché*.⁴⁸ Both of these arguments lack substantial support:

⁴⁴ See above §II. The modern term contingency, which means *quod nec est impossibile nec necessarium* is a translation of the Aristotelian ἐνδεχόμενον by Boethius, cf. Hoffmann (2005) 58–64 and Grethlein (2010c) 6. On recent debates, see Seifen (1992) 23–29, Makropoulos (1997) 7–32, Wetz (1998) 27–34, Graevenitz/Marquard (1998), and Walter (2009) 38.

⁴⁵ Arist. *APr.* 32a18. Furthermore, Aristotle defines what 'to be possible' (ἐνδεχόμενον) exactly means: 'what generally happens but falls short of being necessary' (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ γίνεσθαι, 32b5). For this concept (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ) see von Staden (2002) and de Ste. Croix (1975), 47–53, who gives a very useful explanation of Aristotle's discussion of ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ and its consequences for the work of historians. Conversely, 'to describe the indeterminate' refers to 'what is capable of happening both in a given way and otherwise' (ὁ καὶ οὕτως καὶ μὴ οὕτως δυνατόν).

⁴⁶ Pol. 2.4.5.

⁴⁷ Polybius not only makes use of Aristotle's concept of contingency, but actually quotes him: ἐνδεχόμενόν ἐστιν ἄλλως γενέσθαι takes up τοῦ δ' ἐνδεχομένου ἄλλως ἔχειν (*EN* 1140a1) and τὸ μὴ ἐνδεχόμενον ἄλλως ἔχειν ἀναγκαῖόν φάμεν (*Metaph.* 1015a34).

⁴⁸ It is for this reason that I omit *tyché* from this article and focus on other means used by Polybius to underline his *paralogic* idea of history. In my forthcoming thesis, I will discuss the matter with a narratorial approach and come to a completely different result, from those which, for example, Walbank and Pédech proposed. For a similar view to mine, see Hau (2011).

‘The relation of Polybius’ circular view of constitutional change in Book 6 to the rest of his account is a notorious problem’,⁴⁹ and *tyché*’s precise influence on history may be doubted. It is considerably more practical to analyse Polybius’ narration of historical events and to extrapolate a similar antagonism, which may raise the same questions, but better responds to the text’s inner logic.

I would like to show that the so called ‘inconsistency’ in the *Histories* does not represent a flaw due to an inaccurate revision or lack of philosophical proficiency. The coexistence of *katalogic* and *paralogic* ideas can be resolved, if both discourses are kept strictly divided, as each of them functions on a separate level. Polybius’ *paralogic* depiction of historical events symbolises his understanding of the past, the *katalogic* framing represents the answer Polybius wants to provide his readers, enabling them to cope with contingency in the future.

Here, the *paideia*–agenda of the *Histories* comes into play. Polybius was all too aware of the fact that reality is shaped by contingency and that human intentions and plans do not match the results they have been drawn up for; he knew that, caused by a *symplokê*, interferences of action arise at all stages of history, which thwart the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* of the individual. Polybius also knew that—according to his claim for a truthful coverage of the past—he was obliged to mention the numerous failings of historical protagonists; but the Greek historian proved to be far removed from giving an extensive account of human misfortune and calamities. This was the purpose of so-called ‘tragic historiography’, in contrast to which Polybius clearly wanted to be regarded as completely opposed.⁵⁰ In 15.36 Polybius justifies his presentation of the past by emphasising the historian’s task of avoiding discussion of unexpected events and fatal turnarounds. He says that if he wants to grant his readers a benefit from studying history,

It is true we are interested in seeing or hearing of them once for all and at first, just for the sake of observing that what seemed to be impossible is possible, but once we are convinced of this no one takes any pleasure in dwelling on the unnatural, and there is none who would have the least wish to meet with frequent references to the same event of this class’ (15.36.5–6).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Rood (2007a) 180.

⁵⁰ Cf. 2.16.13–15; 2.56–2.63; 3.47.6–48.12; 3.58.9; 7.7; 10.27.8; 12.24.5; 15.34–15.36; see also Walbank (1960), Sacks (1981) 162–5, Meister (1975), and Mohm (1977) 107–18.

⁵¹ In another passage (9.13.8), Polybius again emphasises that it is certainly important to know that what seems impossible may be possible and what seemed possible may be

Polybius does not want his readers to commit themselves to the challenging task of dealing with the *paralogic* structure of the future. Instead they should try to achieve as much as possible through reasonable and prudent planning, which is based on certain regularities one might draw from experience but which are not guaranteed to happen. Therefore, he occasionally attempts to deduce regularities from the past to provide rules of thumb (despite being completely aware of their limited applicability) while simultaneously making this clear in his narrative, even warning his readers about it. As he wants his readers to benefit from his work, he tries to give helpful advice for coping with contingency.

This sort of *paideia* becomes more obvious if we turn towards the question of what kind of advice appears to be useful in a contingent environment in which nothing is impossible or necessary. In 9.12 we receive an instructive glimpse of what Polybius wanted his readers to keep in mind. There Polybius' admittance of only a limited realm of control for generals in war does not open out into a nihilistic swan song or a surrender to the impenetrable future. Despite illuminating potential problems, Polybius also stresses the possibility—not the guarantee—of being successful in the majority of cases with a rational approach to a particular challenge (9.12.1):

The accidents attendant on military projects require much circumspection, but success is in every case possible (*δυνατόν*) if the steps we take to carry out our plan are soundly reasoned out (*σὺν νῶ*).⁵²

Provided we advance with logical and prudent understanding of the current situation, there is a chance of meeting our aims even in a complex sphere of actions. Still, Polybius acknowledges how difficult it will be to succeed in a contingent reality. In a rather theoretical statement, he clarifies that an absolutely accurate and flawless plan is necessary for a positive result, but not sufficient by itself: 'nature makes a single trivial error sufficient to cause failure in a design, but correctness in every detail barely enough (*μόλις ἱκανά*) for success' (9.12.10). Each reader realises that generals are bound to operate in a complex environment, in which they can partly influence the course of events, but also in which the *Geschichtsmächtigkeit* is out of reach. However, it is crucial to realise that no one should surrender to the uncertainty of the near future. How then does one increase the odds of being successful in a

impossible. But to come across such stories all the time turns out to be a deterrent and not useful for readers.

⁵² Polybius uses the verb *εὐστοχεῖν*, which mirrors his idea of contingency as it suggests 'competent aiming at' rather than 'achieving' a certain target.

battle or other future challenges? With reference to this issue, Polybius gives us two instructions: first, it is necessary not to despair of the *paralogic* structure of both past and future events. Instead, generals and politicians should take their fate into their own hands, meaning they must take action. Polybius warns about being inactive and indifferent, and exhorts men to seek the initiative in every situation and not to be shy of taking a maintainable risk:

It is not for the purpose of extolling the Romans or the Carthaginians that I have offered these remarks—I have often had occasion to bestow praise on both peoples—but rather for the sake of the leaders of both these states, and of all, no matter where, who shall be charged with the conduct of public affairs, so that by memory or actual sight of such actions as these, they be moved to emulation, and not shrink from undertaking designs, which may seem indeed to be fraught with risk and peril, but on the contrary are courageous without being hazardous, are admirable in their conception, and their excellence, whether the result be success *or failure* alike, will deserve to live in men's memories for ever, always provided that all that is done is the result of sound reasoning (9.9.9–10, my italics).⁵³

Second, he advises learning from history inasmuch as we shall keep in mind some regularities, which may occur in the future again (but equally may not) and to operate prudently in action, at least in order to maintain prospects for success.

IV

Starting from Momigliano's remark about Polybius' ambivalent approach to history, I aimed at achieving a closer look at this discrepancy from another perspective. While not intending to provide complete coverage, I focused on some passages from the narrative, most of which have been passed over by scholars, as they do not belong to Polybius' elaborate explicit statements.⁵⁴

⁵³ For this reason, Polybius does not criticise the Roman general T. Sempronius Gracchus, who got trapped by Lucanian mercenaries and was utterly defeated. According to Polybius, Gracchus is not to blame, since he acted prudently (*κατὰ λόγον*), but was overwhelmed only by certain circumstances which could not be influenced (8.36.1). For a similar guide to action, see 2.7.1–3; 9.8.2–12.

⁵⁴ Paradoxically, it has not been to Polybius' advantage that scholars like Ziegler (1952), Walbank (1957), or Pédech (1964) have provided extensive and detailed analyses on the *Histories*. Despite collecting tremendously helpful compilations to crucial aspects of Polybius' work (e.g. composition, method, Book 6, *tychê*), they set the tone for a great many

Although Polybius claims throughout his work that one can learn from history and he sometimes highlights some calculability of both past and future, the Greek historian attaches great importance to the contingent structure of past and future times alike. What has possibly prevented many scholars from paying attention to this *paralogic* idea is that Polybius does not elaborate on it as he does with his famous digressions about how to write history. Instead, he lets his readers grasp the openness of history by different narrative strategies like counterfactual thinking or his emphasis on accidental occurrences. However, the apparent antagonism of a *katalogic* and *paralogic* view neither stems from a failure in revision nor represents a Polybian lack of philosophical perspicacity. Rather than blaming Polybius, as some scholars have done, we should consider these co-existing concepts as an awareness of contingency in history and a reaction to it. With regard to the *paideia*-objective of the *Histories*, this double perspective provides substantial support for readers to cope with unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances. Polybius has a *paralogic* idea of the past, but as he wanted his readers to benefit from his work, he pointed at possible patterns, which might occur in a similar fashion in the future, and presented advice to cope with a contingent reality.

But which background may have influenced Polybius to provide such a didactic approach to history? It is certainly Polybius' own environment, the milieu in which he grew up, where this exhortation to act comes from. If we look at the normative message of his work—the obligation to act—we see that Polybius was largely influenced by his aristocratic origin and his early contact with statesmen like Lycortas or Philopoemen. Those politicians and generals represented, as Eckstein has perspicuously illustrated, the ideal of an active conduct of life.⁵⁵ Living in a time when the Roman empire seemed to absorb the whole political sphere, and yet public interactions in Greece grew more complex, people like Philopoemen insisted on seizing the reins and being active despite being confronted with these manifold challenges. Eckstein called this class the 'nobility of action', meaning an aristocratic ethos which proclaims the active statesman.⁵⁶ Polybius learned these ideals

publications following, which only focused on the same subjects: cf. e.g. Mohm (1977); Sacks (1981); and McGing (2010), with Hau (2012).

⁵⁵ Eckstein (1995) 272. For Polybius on his education see 34.6.8 and 36.1.4–5.

⁵⁶ Eckstein (1995) *ibid.* Cf. also Marincola (1997) 25: 'When Polybius wrote, the states of Greece were only coming to know their Roman master, and there was still a role for political men to play, even under a Roman hegemony, as Polybius' own later career made plain.'

from his early life; thus his numerous obituaries on protagonists who finally failed in action are intended to be an inspiration for readers to imitate.⁵⁷

This is the reason why Polybius appears to reveal an unsystematic approach to history, because he opposes *paralogy* and *katalogy*, the latter being due to the didactical claim of his work and his call to the ‘duty of action’; and as he deduces regularities from history to help his readers, although he utterly knows the limited validity of these ‘rules of thumb’, the coexistence of *paralogy* and *katalogy* comes into being, which does not constitute a conflicting idea of history.⁵⁸

In consideration of this twofold challenge—writing history as a contingent past and giving useful advice that has to deny contingency at first in order to cope with the complexity—Polybius is forced to ‘shift’ between different levels of narrating and commenting on events. Yet his account of the past proves not to be inconsistent but rather the result of two discourses, one of which was clearly shaped by Polybius’ contemporary context. Or, to refer back to Momigliano, Polybius did not forget cycles; rather, he took note of repeating patterns (including those beyond Book 6) in history, thereby teaching his readers how to deal with a reality that does not follow a circular or calculable model.

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⁵⁷ Cf. 11.2.3, where an appraisal for the Carthaginian commander Hasdrubal, who fulfilled Polybius’ claim to act (*καλῶς δὲ καὶ γενναίως τὰς περιπετείας καὶ τὰς ἐλαττώσεις διετέλει φέρων*), startlingly alludes to the main objective of the *Histories* (*τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς γενναίως ὑποφέρειν*, 1.1.2). See also 15.15.3: Hannibal despite being defeated at Zama gets freed from blame, since ‘he had done in the battle and before it all that could be done by a good general of long experience.’

⁵⁸ Besides the influence of the ‘nobility of action’ (Eckstein), we can actually notice similar concepts in different genres (medicine, philosophy, literature) in Polybius’ contemporaries. I shall elaborate on these aspects in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

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