

## THE BULL OF PHALARIS AND THE HISTORICAL METHOD OF DIODORUS SICULUS\*

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*Abstract:* The problems surrounding the bull of Phalaris have exercised ancient historians for well over a century now. The present study aims to open a new perspective in dealing with these problems by questioning the key assumptions that underlay earlier explanations—and which still, indeed, underlie some recent discussions: namely, that the scholiast on Pindar, *Pyth.* 1.185 (95) transmits Timaeus more accurately than do the historians Polybius and Diodorus, and that Timaeus himself was right in his original claims, whatever exactly they were. From this new perspective, Polybius' observations concerning the authenticity of the bull from Carthage should be accepted; both Polybius' and Diodorus' versions of what Timaeus wrote emerge as more trustworthy than the scholiast's; the faulty logic of the scholiast's account is explained by its origins; Timaeus' errors are exposed; and a convincing biography of the bull can be reconstructed.

Diodorus' historical methods concerning these problems are also re-evaluated in the light of recent rehabilitation of his work. His discussion of Phalaris' bull does not provide evidence of lack of intellect, carelessness or slavish reliance on sources, but on the contrary shows that he interrogated his sources and responded both to the demands and the necessary limitations of his particular type of historiography.

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Phalaris, tyrant (ca. 570–549 BC) of the Sicilian city of Acragas, was said to have a unique brass statue of a bull, which served also as a method of delivering a slow and painful death to his enemies. He quickly became the pre-eminent example of a cruel and ruthless ruler. The Roman statesman Cicero even used the noun *Φαλαρισμός* to describe what he thought likely to be Julius Caesar's reign of terror, if he defeated Pompey (*Att.* 7.12.2). References to Phalaris' bull may be found in numerous ancient texts from Pindar (*Pyth.* 1.185 (95)) to Lucian (*Phalaris* 1). Nevertheless, the actual fortunes of this device (if, that is, it existed) remain unclear. In antiquity it was widely accepted that the bull was taken by the Carthaginians in 406 BC when they sacked Acragas, and later returned to the Acragantines by Scipio Africanus Minor, conqueror of Carthage, in 146 BC. However, some indirect information, based on the work of the Sicilian historian Timaeus of Tauromenion, seems to cast some doubt on this narrative and must certainly be investigated.

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Timaeus' position is known to us solely from three intermediate sources. Of these, the author of the scholia to Pindar's first *Pythian Ode* is the only one to accept his arguments. Both the historians Polybius of Megalopolis and Diodorus Siculus criticise Timaeus and reject his explanation. However, each of the three sources attributes to him at least a slightly different standpoint. This article focuses not only on the fate of the bull, but also on the relationship between Diodorus and Diodorus' sources, Timaeus and Polybius, a focus which may afford us a rare glimpse into the process of the writing of the *Bibliothékê*. Diodorus' criticism of Timaeus in the discussion of the bull of Phalaris (13.90.4–7) has indeed sometimes been taken into consideration when Diodorus' own credibility and methods are discussed. The passage was already thus analysed in 1945 in a paper by F. W. Walbank.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, recent efforts to re-evaluate the *Bibliothékê Historikê* and its author<sup>2</sup> justify a re-examination of this important piece of evidence. The problems of Phalaris' bull itself have also been discussed during the last few decades, especially by scholars interested in Timaeus.<sup>3</sup> While in both these areas notable progress has been made, they have remained essentially separate fields of enquiry. Therefore a new synthetic approach seems justified.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is threefold. First, to analyse critically the explanations given in modern scholarship for the contradictory testimonies. Second, to reconstruct the essential facts concerning the bull's historicity and its fate, as the basis for any further examination, and to relate them to the accounts attributed to Timaeus. Third, to present on the resultant basis a re-examination of Diodorus' methods, of his position within the ancient historiographical debate on this subject, and of his general value as a universal historian.

Let us turn now to the ancient sources. The scholion to Pindar's first *Pythian* (*FGrHist* 566 F 28c =  $\Sigma$  Pind. *Pyth.* 1.185 (95))<sup>4</sup> reads:

τὸν δὲ τοῦ Φαλάριδος ταῦρον οἱ Ἀκραγαντῖνοι κατεπόντωσαν, ὡς φησι  
Τίμαιος· τὸν γὰρ ἐν τῇ πόλει δεικνύμενον μὴ εἶναι τοῦ Φαλάριδος,

<sup>1</sup> Walbank (1945).

<sup>2</sup> Pride of place goes to K. Sacks' (1990) invaluable monograph on Diodorus. See also the articles by C. Rubincam (1998a; 1998b). For favourable discussion of Diodorus see also Green (2006) 1–47; Santangelo (2007); Bissa (2010); Sheridan (2010); Sulimani (2011). A more circumspect approach is presented in Hau (2009). Yet further perspectives were opened up by several of the contributions to the Lampeter workshop on 'History and Narrative in Hellenistic Historiography' (16–17 September, 2011), the papers of which will appear on *Histos*.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Brown (1958); Pearson (1987).

<sup>4</sup> Drachmann (1910) 29.

καθάπερ ἡ πολλὴ κατέχει δόξα, ἀλλ' εἰκόνα Γέλα τοῦ ποταμοῦ.  
κατασκευάσαι δὲ αὐτόν φασι Περίλαον, καὶ πρῶτον ἐν αὐτῷ κατακαῆναι·

The bull of Phalaris the Acragantines sank in the sea, as Timaeus says; for the one that was displayed in the city was not that of Phalaris, as the majority opinion holds, but an image of the river Gelas. And they say that Perilaos fashioned it [the bull], and was the first to be burned in it.

The relevant lines of Pindar read:

οὐ φθίνει Κροίσου φιλόφρων ἀρετά·  
τὸν δὲ ταύρω χαλκῆν καυτῆρα νηλέα νόον      95  
ἐχθρὰ Φάλαριν κατέχει παντᾶ φάτις.

The kindly virtue of Croesus does not perish, but a hateful reputation on all sides surrounds Phalaris, burner in his pitiless mind with a bronze bull.

According to the scholiast's comment, Timaeus accepted the historicity of Phalaris' bull but held that it was disposed of on his overthrow and consequently rejected its identification with a bull displayed in the city in Timaeus' own time; the accusative and infinitives from τὸν γὰρ τοῦ ποταμοῦ represent what Timaeus allegedly said on this score. The point of the reference to an 'image of the river Gelas' is that Gelas was the eponymous river-god, who, like many river-gods, was often represented in bull form.<sup>5</sup> To the item about Perilaos I shall return.<sup>6</sup>

A fragment of Polybius' 12th book (*FGrHist* 566 F 28b = Pol. 12.25.1–5) reads:

ὅτι περὶ τοῦ ταύρου τοῦ χαλκοῦ τοῦ παρὰ Φαλάριδος κατασκευασθέντος ἐν Ἀκράγαντι, εἰς ὃν ἐνεβίβαζεν ἀνθρώπους ... (3) τούτου δὲ τοῦ ταύρου κατὰ τὴν ἐπικράτειαν Καρχηδονίων μετενεχθέντος ἐξ Ἀκράγαντος εἰς Καρχηδόνα, καὶ τῆς θυρίδος διαμενούσης περὶ τὰς συναμίας, δι' ἧς συνέβαινε καθίεσθαι τοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν τιμωρίαν, καὶ ἑτέρας αἰτίας, δι' ἣν ἐν Καρχηδόνι κατασκευάσθη τοιοῦτος ταῦρος, οὐδαμῶς δυναμένης εὐρεθῆναι τὸ παράπαν, (4) ὅμως Τίμαιος ἐπέβαλε καὶ τὴν κοινὴν φήμην

<sup>5</sup> Basic information: Burkert (1985) 175, 418 n. 8; [http://www.forumancientcoins.com/moonmoth/river\\_coins.html](http://www.forumancientcoins.com/moonmoth/river_coins.html).

<sup>6</sup> Below, p. 79.

ἀνασκευάζειν καὶ τὰς ἀποφάσεις τῶν ποιητῶν καὶ συγγραφέων ψευδοποιεῖν, φάσκων μὴτ' εἶναι τὸν ἐν Καρχηδόνι ταῦρον ἐξ Ἀκράγαντος μῆτε γεγονέναι τοιοῦτον ἐν τῇ προειρημένῃ πόλει. (5) καὶ πολλοὺς δὴ τινὰς εἰς τοῦτο τὸ μέρος διατέθειται λόγους ...

That about the bronze bull made by Phalaris in Acragas, into which he put human beings ... (3) this bull having been transferred from Acragas to Carthage during the domination of the Carthaginians and the door remaining around the shoulders through which those destined for punishment were let down, and any other reason not at all being able to be found why such a bull was made in Carthage, (4) nevertheless, Timaeus applied himself both to unmaking the common report and to proving false the claims of the poets and historians, claiming that neither was the bull in Carthage from Acragas nor had such a bull been made in the aforesaid city. (5) And he has set out many arguments indeed on this side.

Here 'the common report' seems to correspond to 'the majority opinion' of the scholiast's version, though in the latter case the claim in favour of Phalaris' bull's historicity is bolstered by the identification (obviously, the misidentification) of that bull with the one representing the river-god Gelas. Both these appeals to general opinion seem to correspond to, and probably somehow derive from, Pindar's allusion to the 'hateful reputation [that] surrounds Phalaris on all sides'. There is marked elegance in Polybius' wording in the verbal contrast between *κατασκευασθέντος/κατεσκευάσθη* and *ἀνασκευάζειν*, which the translation tries to render by the contrast between 'make' and 'unmake' (*ἀνασκευάζειν* actually being a logical or legal term, meaning to 'demolish').<sup>7</sup> The first element of this contrast supports the claim that the bull 'was made'; the second attempts to 'unmake' the claim that the bull 'was made'. The neatness of the contrast is increased by the fact that *κατασκευάζειν* can itself be a logical term, in the sense of 'construct a positive argument', in which sense it is characteristically contrasted with *ἀνασκευάζειν*. It is impossible to know whether this verbal contrast is Polybius' own, or whether it goes back to Timaeus (in the context of the claim 'the alleged bull of Phalaris was not made'). In any case, Timaeus' campaign against 'the common report' or 'the majority opinion' and the claims of the poets and historians seems to echo Thucydides' famous strictures, in regard to events before the Peloponnesian War, against the ignorance or inaccuracy of 'the majority of the Athenians' (1.20.1) and of 'the poets and the log-

<sup>7</sup> LSJ s.v. I.5; I.6.

ographers' (1.21.1). If so, the echo obviously strengthens Timaeus' historical pretensions.

Finally, there is Diodorus' version from his 13th book, where he describes the fall of Acragas (*FGrHist* 566 F 28a = Diod. 13.90.5–6):

τοῦτον δὲ τὸν ταῦρον ὁ Τίμαιος ἐν ταῖς Ἱστορίαις διαβεβαιωσάμενος μὴ γέγονεναί τὸ σύνολον, ὑπ' αὐτῆς τῆς τύχης ἠλέγχθη. Σκιπίων γὰρ ὕστερον ταύτης τῆς ἀλώσεως σχεδὸν ἑξήκοντα καὶ διακοσίους ἔτεσιν ἐκπορθήσας Καρχηδόνα, τοῖς Ἀκραγαντίνοις μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν διαμεινάντων παρὰ τοῖς Καρχηδονίοις ἀποκατέστησε τὸν ταῦρον, ὃς καὶ τῶνδε τῶν ἱστοριῶν γραφομένων ἦν ἐν Ἀκράγαντι. (6) περὶ δὲ τούτου φιλοτιμότερον εἰπεῖν προήχθη, διότι Τίμαιος ὁ τῶν πρό γε αὐτοῦ συγγραφέων πικρότατα κατηγορήσας ... αὐτὸς εὐρίσκεται σχεδιάζων ἐν οἷς μάλιστα ἑαυτὸν ἀποπέφαγκεν ἀκριβολογούμενον.

Timaeus having absolutely claimed in his *Histories* that this bull never existed at all was confuted by Fortune herself. For Scipio approximately 260 years after this capture sacked Carthage and along with the other things that remained in the possession of the Carthaginians restored to the Acragantines the bull which was in Acragas when these histories were being written. (6) I was led to speak rather competitively about this, because Timaeus, the man who accused the historians before him most sharply, is himself found acting off-handedly in the matters in which he has advertised himself as arguing most precisely.

Although all three authors cite Timaeus as their source of information, they seem to attribute to him contradictory statements and in any case to yield an utterly confusing picture of events. How could the bull that, in Polybius' and Diodorus' version of Timaeus, never existed be sunk in the sea, as in the scholiast's version of Timaeus? How could the bull be sunk by the Acragantines (the scholiast) but be taken to Carthage (Polybius and Diodorus) and later be returned to Acragas by Scipio Africanus Minor (Diodorus)?<sup>8</sup> Was the Carthaginian bull really the bull of Phalaris? These prob-

<sup>8</sup> For this version in full see Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.73: 'some things were restored to the Gelans, some to the Acragantines, among which was that notable bull, which that most cruel of all tyrants, Phalaris, is said to have had, into which he was accustomed to put men alive for punishment, and to put fire under. And when Scipio was restoring that bull to the Acragantines, he is reported to have said that it was just for them to consider whether it was more advantageous to the Acragantines to be subject to their own masters, or to be under the dominion of the Roman people, when they had the same monument both of the cruelty of their domestic masters, and of our gentleness.' Polybius must surely have

lems already caught the attention of historians in the late 19th century, and since then various possible explanations have been offered.

The older scholars questioned the authenticity of the bull sent by Scipio to Acragas after the sack of Carthage. It was suggested that the bull which was ‘returned’ to Acragas, and maybe even the very idea of such a bull, was of purely Carthaginian provenance. The bull described by Polybius, with the door on the back, should, according to Lenschau, be identified as a purely Carthaginian creation—the instrument for sacrifices of newborn children to the god Moloch. Lenschau also proposed that Polybius misunderstood Timaeus, who (according to Lenschau) wrote that there was no bull of Phalaris in Acragas at the time of the Carthaginian domination, that is, when the Carthaginians were said to have removed it, but who did not deny that there had ever been a bull.<sup>9</sup>

Lenschau’s analysis provided a starting point for the article by Walbank, which examined the relationship between the accounts of Polybius and Diodorus. Walbank argued that in his criticism of Timaeus Diodorus is simply following Polybius, with only one original touch—the appeal to ‘the bull which was in Acragas when these histories were being written’, an appeal which Walbank criticises as ‘naïve and unconvincing’. To that criticism I shall return.<sup>10</sup> My concern now is with the question of the relationship between the two accounts. It is true that there are commonalities between Diodorus and Polybius: the claim that the bull in Carthage was originally the bull of Phalaris; the criticism of Timaeus; and (presumably) the claim that this bull was returned to Acragas by Scipio the conqueror of Carthage. But the argument that Diodorus is *simply* following Polybius is founded mainly on the analysis of the next section of Diodorus’ text (13.90.7).<sup>11</sup> That Diodorus’ defence of historians who make mistakes out of ignorance and his condemnation of those who purposely distort the historical truth has similarities to the motifs present in Polybius’ *Histories* at 12.7 is not in question. But Diodorus himself had a strong conviction about the moral value of history, and there is no reason why he should not incorporate this Polybian element into his own views. Hence we should not assume that every time he presents a similar idea, he is merely copying Polybius. The lexical similarities mentioned by Walbank can hardly be conclusive. Only one expression is

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recorded this follow-up to the identification of the Carthaginian bull with the bull of Phalaris, which is not to say that he was Diodorus’ only source for it (see below, p. 79).

<sup>9</sup> Freeman (1892) 64–5, 323; Lenschau (1909).

<sup>10</sup> Below, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Walbank (1945) 40–2.

used by both authors in the same form (*κατὰ προαίρεσιν*).<sup>12</sup> Other similarities appear superficial. Walbank points to a pair of cognate words, *ἀγνόημα-ἄγνοια*, but the term *ἀγνόημα* employed by Diodorus is absent from the *Histories*. The nouns *συγγνώμη* and *κατηγορία* which are used by both authors in different forms appear throughout the *Bibliothékê* 38 times each, being therefore too common to constitute a definite signal of Polybius as the source. It should also be noted that our scepticism over Diodorus' allegedly blind following of a single source accords with Palm's conclusions about the internally coherent language of Diodorus' work.<sup>13</sup> That Diodorus often used more than one source at a time is rightly argued by some scholars.<sup>14</sup> And in any case, Walbank's lexical analysis does not relate precisely to the passages about Phalaris' bull.

The claim that Diodorus is simply following Polybius on Phalaris' bull is hard to reconcile with Diodorus' own statement of his purpose—'I was led to speak rather competitively about this' (etc.), unless one attributes to Diodorus a very high degree of disingenuousness. The difficulties of Walbank's analysis further increase if we consider the circumstances of the creation of the Diodorean passage. In Book 13, which covers the years 415–413 BC, Diodorus uses Timaeus quite often,<sup>15</sup> and his main source could obviously not have been Polybius, who does not cover this period. In order to treat Diodorus' testimony concerning the bull as deriving from Polybius' we have to assume that when he found Timaeus' treatment of the bull he either replaced it with Polybius' version (whether from memory or direct consultation), not bothering to control it by comparison with the completely different version of his main source which lay before his very eyes, or he misunderstood Timaeus' version in exactly the same way as did Polybius. Both of these possibilities assume a very high level of incompetence on his part and both therefore seem too far-fetched.

In his *Commentary on Polybius* Walbank slightly modified his position on some specific issues. Most notably, he accepted Jacoby's view that Polybius' detailed description of the bull at Carthage must be based on Polybius' own autopsy—a view that in itself is perfectly reasonable, given Polybius' presence at Scipio's side at the fall of Carthage.<sup>16</sup> However, his overall position

<sup>12</sup> This expression appears four times in the *Bibliothékê* and 16 times in the *Histories*. The simple term *προαίρεσις* appears over 60 times in each work.

<sup>13</sup> Palm (1955) 194–5.

<sup>14</sup> Santangelo (2007) 116 and n. 4 (with references).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *FGrHist* 566 FF 25, 26a, 27, 103, 104, 106, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Pol. 39.3–4.

on these questions and his assessment of Diodorus' method remained substantially unaffected.<sup>17</sup>

The perplexing problems of Phalaris' bull were also important to Truesdell Brown, as author of a monograph on Timaeus. Brown accepts the testimonies which support the existence of two bulls—the one brought by Scipio from Carthage, and the one symbolising the river god Gelas (which stood in Acragas in the time of Timaeus, so certainly cannot be identified with the other one). Brown, like his predecessors, rejects Polybius' identification of the Carthaginian bull as that of Phalaris.<sup>18</sup>

Lionel Pearson, also author of a monograph on Timaeus, proposed yet another explanation. He speculated that Timaeus could have said that, *if* there ever was a bull used to burn people alive, the Acragantines *surely would have* sunk it after overthrowing the tyrant. He also treats Polybius' detailed description of the bull at Carthage as an important piece of information. In his opinion, it was Timaeus, the historian from Tauromenion, who gave the description of this artefact which was later copied by Polybius.<sup>19</sup> It is true that on Polybius' evidence Timaeus did register the existence of the Carthaginian bull, but it does not follow that Polybius' description of it derives, or derives solely, from Timaeus, because, as we have already noted, there is the real possibility that Polybius himself actually saw the Carthaginian bull when in the company of Scipio.

The problems of Phalaris' bull were discussed *in extenso* by Guido Schepens in an article in 1978.<sup>20</sup> Schepens analysed the sources (paying the utmost attention to the transmission of the fragments of Polybius' Book 12) and the modern discussion over their various versions, underlining the shortcomings of previous scholarly interpretations and presenting his own interpretation. In his view, Timaeus indeed denied that there ever was a bull at Acragas, but he meant this in an extremely narrow sense, understanding the Greek *πόλις* (Pol. 12.25.4) as a precise geographical term. Schepens supported this hypothesis by analysis of Diod. 19.108.1, which in his opinion is to be attributed to Timaeus. He repeated these theses in more recent studies, in which he suggested that Diodorus' version should be treated as a 'misleading testimonium'.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Walbank (1967) 381–3.

<sup>18</sup> Brown (1958) 54–7.

<sup>19</sup> Pearson (1987) 118–20.

<sup>20</sup> Schepens (1978).

<sup>21</sup> Schepens (1994) 260–6, (1997b). This view is also presented in the commentary to this fragment in Brill's New Jacoby—see Champion (2010).



Now Diodorus 19.108.1 concerns the alleged presence of the bull of Phalaris in Ecnomus:<sup>22</sup>

κατεῖχον δὲ Καρχηδόνιοι μὲν τὸν Ἔκνομον λόφον, ὃν φασὶ φρούριον γεγενῆσθαι Φαλάριδος. ἐν τούτῳ δὲ λέγεται κατεσκευακέναι τὸν τύραννον ταῦρον χαλκοῦν τὸν διαβεβοημένον πρὸς τὰς τῶν βεβασανισμένων τιμωρίας, ὑποκαιομένου τοῦ κατασκευάσματος· διὸ καὶ τὸν τόπον Ἔκνομον ἀπὸ τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἀτυχοῦντας ἀσεβείας προσηγορεύσθαι.

The Carthaginians held the hill Ecnomus, which they say had been a stronghold of Phalaris. It is said that on it the tyrant had constructed the celebrated bronze bull, the construction being heated by a fire beneath for the punishment of the tortured; and so the place has been called Ecnomus as a result of the impiety practised upon the unfortunates. [The etymological point is that ‘Ecnomos’ can be understood as ‘outside the law’.]

If Timaeus, this passage shows either that Timaeus vouched for the historicity of Phalaris’ bull straightforwardly, in which case Diodorus’ ‘they say’ and ‘it is said’ are non-specific generalisations for ‘Timaeus says’, or that he retailed Phalaris’ bull as a λεγόμενον, a λεγόμενον from which, however, he did not actively dissent. Schepens’ thesis, however, is unconvincing: the attribution is made on the basis of known, or presumed, characteristics of Timaeus’ writings. This method, applied to a historian all of whose writings are lost, cannot be conclusive. Schepens mentions the alleged characteristics present in Diod. 19.106–10: chronological exactness, hatred of tyranny, Agathocles’ cruelty, *deisidaimonia* and improbably high casualty figures. All of these criteria are very subjective and none of them needs to be connected precisely with Timaeus.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, any attempt to consider the historian from Tauromenion as the source for this period is in direct contradiction with Diodorus’ own statement (21.17.3) that he cannot accept the last five books of Timaeus’ *Historiai* because of the author’s anti-Agathoclean bias. Therefore, the attribution of 19.108.1 to Timaeus without far more substantial evidence is doubtful at best.

<sup>22</sup> Schepens himself here follows Meister (1967) 142–3.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vattuone (1991) 140 n. 61: ‘La Tendenz di un autore è criterio malsicuro: ed è così sia per Filisto, che per Timeo’.

Our scepticism on this point may be reinforced by consideration of another Diodoran notice (a fragment) on Phalaris' bull (9.19.1 = Tzetzes, *Hist.* 1.646):

This Phalaris burned to death Perilaos, the famous Attic worker in bronze, in the brazen bull. For this man had fashioned in bronze the contrivance of the bull, making small sounding pipes in the nostrils and fitting a door in the bull's side, and this bull he brings as a present to Phalaris.

This item is also attested in embryo in the scholion on Pindar's first *Pythian*: 'and they say that Perilaos fashioned it and was the first to be burned in it'. The natural inference is that the item introduced by 'they say' comes from a source other than the previously cited 'Timaeus', and that therefore Diodorus was not drawing only on Timaeus for his information about Phalaris' bull. Furthermore, 9.19.1, in combination with the scholion, itself suggests that Timaeus did not tell the story of Perilaos and his immolation, which seems to support the case that he denied the bull's historicity absolutely.

The other claim made by Schepens is also unconvincing. The Greek *πόλις* is properly connected with the whole community, whereas the proper term for the city itself is *ἄστυ*.<sup>24</sup> Since *πόλις* means the whole territory that belongs to a political entity, the denial of the bull's existence in the *πόλις* of the Acragantines also excludes the possibility of its presence in Ecnomus.

Thus Schepens' theory, although clever and interesting, is, as we can see, very doubtful. It seems that the problem of Phalaris' bull still requires satisfactory explanation.

Although all of these scholars try to explain the apparent inconsistencies in the sources in various, distinct ways, they do share key assumptions. Those assumptions are: (a) that the scholiast's version is the most precise one, and (therefore) (b) that Timaeus was essentially right and the later critique was due to the misunderstanding or incompetence of critics such as Polybius and Diodorus rather than to Timaeus' own error. The latter position sometimes even asserts a double error: Polybius misunderstood Timaeus and Polybius himself in turn was misunderstood by Diodorus.<sup>25</sup> In all this, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the scholiast's account and

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *LSJ*, s.v. *ἄστυ*. The difference is clear in Hom. *Il.* 17.144. The word *ἄστυ* is used in the same manner by e.g. Xenophon (e.g. *Hell.* 1.1.21; 7.2.6; *Ages.* 1.33.) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (e.g. *Ant. Rom.* 2.28.3).

<sup>25</sup> Walbank (1945); Champion (2010); Baron (2013) 83; a third possibility is opened up by Baron (2009), who argues that Polybius deliberately distorted Timaeus' accounts, but each case must be taken on its merits and the balance of probability carefully estimated.

its origins and transmission, and these are the questions to which we now turn.

The scholia to Pindar were preserved thanks to Didymus Chalcenterus, who in the second half of the 1st century BC put together various earlier commentaries.<sup>26</sup> But Didymus was not a careful and diligent scholar; this is clear from the sheer number of books attributed to him—at least 3,500—as well as from his nickname Βιβλιολάθας, ‘the one who forgets the books’.<sup>27</sup> Didymus incorporated in his compilations the works of Alexandrian scholars, in the case of Pindar notably Aristarchus of Samothrace (ca. 215–144 BC) and his successors.<sup>28</sup> His method and his reliability are still a subject of discussion, mainly on the basis of his commentary on Demosthenes’ speeches, found in the early 20th century.<sup>29</sup> Although in recent years its reputation has improved, it still leaves much to be desired. Phillip Harding, who is in general rather well-disposed towards Didymus, underlines the role of students in finding citations for their teacher’s works.<sup>30</sup> In reference to Timaeus, one clear error in the scholia is demonstrable.<sup>31</sup> In our case, and crucially, it is clear that neither Didymus nor any of his predecessors or his own students brought the commentaries they found into any relationship with any newer historical works, because there is no reference to Polybius’ criticism of Timaeus. Therefore, we should assume that Didymus represents the state of the question *before* the critical analysis by Polybius and *before* the bull at Carthage was sent to Acragas (whether restored, if actually the bull of Phalaris, or sent for the first time, if not the bull of Phalaris). There is of course no doubt that the bull which was displayed in Acragas at the time of the original commentaries could not be the one of Phalaris, for the latter was either sunk, if the scholiast’s version of Timaeus is correct, or already transported

<sup>26</sup> Dickey (2007) 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Athen.* 4.139c; Dickey (2007) 7. Seneca (*Ep.* 88.37) is more generous when it comes to Didymus’ prolific output as an author (4000 books). Harding (2006) 1–3 gives a brief summary of what we know about Didymus.

<sup>28</sup> Montanari (2006); Dickey (2007) 39.

<sup>29</sup> Editions of this commentary: Diels and Schubart (1904), Pearson and Stephens (1983). English translation with commentary: Harding (2006). For critical assessment of Didymus’ method (with examples), see West (1970); Harris (1989).

<sup>30</sup> Harding (2006) discusses Didymus’ scholarship (31–9) and throughout the commentary addresses some of the problems, mistakes and inconsistencies pointed out by critics. His own stance is much more favourable to the author (e.g. 194), and although some of his explanations seem rather far-fetched (e.g. 252–3), he has to recognise Didymus’ errors and shortcomings (e.g. 194, 252), which he often attributes to haste.

<sup>31</sup> *FGrHist* 566 F 19a–b =  $\Sigma$  Pind. *Ol.* 5.19a–b. Two accounts differ in the date of the resettlement of Camarina.

to Carthage, if Polybius' and Diodorus' version is correct. Both the character of the scholion source and the circumstances of its creation justify a far less favourable estimate than it has enjoyed so far. Consequently, it should not lightly be preferred to the accounts of Polybius and Diodorus, two historians whom we know for sure to have had first-hand knowledge of Timaeus' work.

We should begin our analysis of the basic facts connected with Phalaris' bull, as T. S. Brown began his analysis over fifty years ago, by enumerating bulls, although we should limit ourselves to only three, not five. The first one is of course Phalaris' bull itself; the second is the symbol of the river-god Gelas, which stood at Acragas in the time of Timaeus; the third is the bull from Carthage, described by Polybius, which stood at Acragas in the time of Diodorus. The bull of Phalaris seems well enough attested—especially, of course, by Pindar—for us not to doubt its very existence. The symbol of the river-god Gelas and the bull transported to Acragas by Scipio are both attested by eye-witnesses (in the first case, by Timaeus; in the second, by Polybius and Diodorus). Since, as was mentioned above, there is no controversy over the existence and role of the bull symbolising the river-god Gelas, we have only two bulls left. Despite the passage of time, the question we are facing today is no different from the one discussed by Polybius—are these the same bulls?

Although ancient writers generally accepted the genuineness of the monument transported by Scipio Minor from Carthage,<sup>32</sup> their modern counterparts, as we have seen, rejected it. They then faced the difficult task of explaining the inconsistencies between the accounts of the scholiast (which they perceive as a direct citation from Timaeus) and Polybius. Even disregarding Diodorus' account—which agrees with Polybius but not with the scholiast—did not make this task any easier. In order to explain the similarities between the bull from Carthage and Phalaris' bull it was usually proposed that the former was in fact an instrument to perform infamous sacrifices of children in Carthage. This is, however, a purely hypothetical explanation, without any support in our sources. Indeed, Polybius pointedly rules out any explanation other than Phalarine origin, so he considered the possibility. Moreover, the hypothesis once again contradicts the account of Diodorus (a fact which—as usual—does not bother most scholars), who describes the bronze sculpture used during the ceremony of child sacrifice as the image of Kronos, with his arms extended forwards.<sup>33</sup> It seems that an-

<sup>32</sup> Apart from Polybius and Diodorus, noteworthy also are Cicero (*Verr.* 2.4.73) and Pliny the Elder (*NH* 34.19).

<sup>33</sup> Diod. 20.14.6; on the association between Kronos and child sacrifice see that passage and Bremmer (2007) 57–8. The case that the Carthaginian bull was that of Phalaris

other explanation, preferably not involving another invented bull, is in order. For it seems impossible to harmonise all three accounts and save Timaeus' credibility at the same time.

Therefore, we should re-examine the possibility that it was Polybius and Diodorus who were right and not the historian from Tauromenion. Polybius' disquisition seems perfectly trustworthy and apparently based on eyewitness testimony, and there is no objective reason to doubt his stated conclusion that the bull was genuine. It seems unnecessarily and implausibly cynical to hypothesise either that Polybius misrepresented the facts in order to defend Scipio's credit as 'identifier' of the bull, or that the Acragantines simply found it politic to accept the bull sent by Scipio as genuine.<sup>34</sup> For the Carthaginian bull had a door in it—in itself a striking circumstance—and the bull seen by Diodorus in Acragas in his lifetime must also have had a door in it, otherwise it could not be accepted as genuine by Diodorus or the Acragantines. This scenario immediately simplifies the situation: Timaeus' erroneous statement was rightly corrected by two later historians who had read him directly and whose general viewpoint was universally shared in the ancient world—with the sole exception of Timaeus.

Nevertheless, the question of what exactly Timaeus wrote remains important. We have excluded Schepens' thesis that Timaeus discussed the bull's precise location, but did so in such an unclear manner that neither Polybius nor Diodorus managed to grasp his meaning. He must have denied outright the bull's existence, as, indeed, is clearly attested by Polybius and Diodorus, and he must have been wrong to do so.

The conclusion that Timaeus wrongly denied the bull's existence may stand in its own right, but clearly it may be helped if a simple explanation for his error can be found. Indeed, one can. Although Timaeus was Sicilian, attributing to him extensive first-hand knowledge of the island is risky. He wrote most of his work during his fifty-years' stay in Athens, where he lived after being banished by Agathocles around 317 BC. Although he may have returned to his homeland towards the end of his life, it is by no means certain that he did so.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, in spite of his ties with the island, he must have been drawing the bulk of his information from his predecessors, most notably perhaps Philistos of Syracuse (ca. 430–356 BC). Philistos surely described the fall of Acragas in 406 BC, but he easily could have left out the

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would of course be absolutely proven if, contrary to ancient testimony, the Carthaginians did not actually practise child sacrifice at all, and it seems that the practice is not yet verified archaeologically; for similar scepticism concerning Etruscan human sacrifice see Di Fazio (2013).

<sup>34</sup> Pearson (1987) 119–20.

<sup>35</sup> Brown (1958) 1–3; Pearson (1987) 37–8.

capture of the bull. Timaeus, who had visited Acragas before his banishment<sup>36</sup> and had seen the statue of the river god Gelas, apparently shown to him as the bull of Phalaris, probably approached this issue with a great deal of scepticism and, although he had heard about the bull at Carthage, he concluded that there was no physical evidence of the existence of the bull of Phalaris.

The conclusion that Timaeus wrongly denied the bull's existence needs also to explain the scholiast's account about the bull being sunk by the Acragantines after the fall of Phalaris. Perhaps the author of the scholion was reluctant to include a comment that contradicted the poet's statement, and in order to save Pindar's credibility he 'emended' Timaeus in such a way as to allow the bull's original existence. Alternatively, Pearson may be right to suggest that Timaeus might have said that, if there ever was a bull used to burn people alive, the Acragantines surely would have sunk it after overthrowing the tyrant. As for Timaeus' 'archaeological' credentials in this, one of only three cases known to us where he appealed to physical evidence, he was right that the bull shown in Acragas in his own time as the bull of Phalaris was not genuine and in fact was that of the river-god Gelas, but wrong to dismiss—sight unseen!—the genuineness of the bull at Carthage, which one of his sources must have represented as the original bull of Phalaris. Hence Polybius' general strictures against Timaeus as an 'arm-chair historian' stand in this case also.

Now we shall return to the question of Diodorus' historical method and of his position in the historiographical tradition concerning the bull of Phalaris. As we have seen, most of the scholars with whom we have been concerned did not consider Diodorus a worthy historian, a belief that allowed them to disregard any statement of his that contradicted their reconstructions. As we have also seen, Schepens even suggested that Diod. 13.90.5–6 should not be considered a fragment of Timaeus at all. This whole approach stems from the dominant modern scholarly tradition, which perceived Diodorus as a mere unintelligent copyist and treated his work as a set of fragments rather than as an independent, coherent work. For many years the main approach in studies of the *Bibliothèque* was establishing the origin of various fragments. Historians interested in, for example, Timaeus willingly extended their source base at the expense of Diodorus. Despite extensive efforts, this approach proved dubious, for attribution of many fragments remains uncertain, if possible at all.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Diod. 13.82.6.

<sup>37</sup> Problems concerning *FGrHist* were no stranger to its author, Felix Jacoby. His notes and a commentary on the most important questions were published in Schepens (1997a); cf. id. (2006). For dilemmas in delimitation between fragments and testimonies see Brunt

Simultaneously, our understanding of Diodorus' work started to change. First, over fifty years ago, J. Palm published a study in which he showed the linguistic coherence of the *Bibliothékê*—a conclusion that alone undermines the traditional view of Diodorus as the 'scissors and paste historian'.<sup>38</sup> However, it was not until the 1990s that the perception of the historian from Agyrion started to shift substantially.<sup>39</sup> From then on studies in this field made significant progress. However, although interest in Diodorus continues to rise, and some scholars very firmly advocate his rehabilitation as a historian,<sup>40</sup> the old image of 'a mere copyist' remains the dominant standpoint.<sup>41</sup>

How does the case of the bull of Phalaris help us in reassessing Diodorus' competence as a historian? Precisely, because it allows us to examine his attitude towards his sources and his ability to judge them critically. It is true that this potential was already recognised by Walbank in 1945, as we have seen.<sup>42</sup> Walbank examined the methods and arguments used by Polybius and Diodorus in their polemic with Timaeus. He emphasised that while Polybius argued the authenticity of the bull from Carthage, the historian from Agyrion is concerned only with its very existence. He notes, however, that Diodorus used different arguments, but attributes this to his supposed carelessness and his reluctance to control details with either Polybius or Timaeus' accounts.<sup>43</sup> In the end, Walbank is inclined to recognise some originality in Diodorus' argument (even if he describes it as 'naïve and unconvincing'). Nevertheless, in the final sentence he states that 'the result hardly justifies any regret that in the main Diodorus restricted himself to excerpting his sources'.<sup>44</sup>

Thus there remains the question of the quality of Diodorus' argument against Timaeus. Obviously his criticism is not as detailed as Polybius'. The author of the *Bibliothékê* is satisfied with informing his readers that the bull—presumably original—was returned to Acragas, thus proving Timaeus wrong. He does not overtly discuss its authenticity. This approach was

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(1980), where a wide range of cases is presented. For problems concerning establishing the extent of a fragment, see Baron (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Palm (1955) 194–5.

<sup>39</sup> Sacks' monograph (1990) may be considered a symbolic starting point.

<sup>40</sup> Green (2006) *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> In the most recent monograph R. Miles barely mentions Diodorus at all when discussing sources, concentrating on Timaeus, whom, according to him, Diodorus and other admirers 'extensively and openly followed' (Miles (2010) 14–15).

<sup>42</sup> See above, pp. 75–6.

<sup>43</sup> Walbank (1945) 40–1; see the fuller discussion above, pp. 75–7.

<sup>44</sup> Walbank (1945) 41–2.

judged by Walbank as a sign of his carelessness and his inability to understand the nature of the problem. But this judgement does not take into account some other factors. Firstly, Diodorus was familiar with Polybius' criticism of Timaeus and presumably saw no need to repeat his arguments, considering the question of the bull's authenticity resolved.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, the censure of earlier historians, especially Timaeus, seems to be the sole aim of Book 12 of Polybius, whereas Diodorus' attempt to write universal history confronted him with a very different task.<sup>46</sup> Considering the magnitude of his work it was virtually impossible to go over every detail. Diodorus chose the argument which he thought to be the most interesting for his readers, the one which they might examine for themselves if visiting Acragas, and the one more suited to his genre, validating at the same time his own credentials as a more conscientious and reliable Sicilian historian than the sharply polemical Timaeus of Tauromenion.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Likewise his contemporary, Cicero (*Verr.* 2.4.73), quoted above, n. 8.

<sup>46</sup> On Polybius' attitude towards Timaeus, see e.g. Walbank (1962) 1–12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ταυρομένιον*: can Timaeus or his critics have made nothing of the name of his native city in this context?



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