

REVIEW–DISCUSSION
POLYBIUS REDUX:
FROM PRAGMATIC MACHIAVELLIAN TO
MULTIDIMENSIONAL ENIGMA

Jonas Scherr, Martin Gronau, and Stefano Saracino, edd., *Polybios von Megalopolis: Staatsdenken zwischen griechischer Poliswelt und römischer Res Publica*. Staatsverständnisse 139. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2022. Pp. 319. Hardback, €64.00. ISBN 978-3-8487-5101-3.

These collected essays tackle some critical problems in Polybian scholarship. The volume opens with a lengthy, two-part Introduction (11–74). Part One (‘Das Staatsdenken des Polybios im Spannungsfeld von historischer Empirie und politischer Theorie’, 11–22) is co-written by the editors; Martin Gronau has written Part Two (‘Verfassungskreislauf und Mischverfassung: eine Einführung in die staatstheoretischen Modelle des Polybios’, 23–74). Here major scholarly cruxes—history as cyclical repetition or linear unfolding, grounds for evaluation (ancient or modern?), relationship of Book 6 and historical narrative, Polybios’ contribution to Greek political theory, (in)coherence of the tripartite theoretical explanation of state development (*anacyclosis*, mixed constitution, and biological analogy), intended purposes and audiences of Book 6, competing Greek and Roman influences in Polybios’ thought—are all clearly laid out, with reference to essential, foundational studies, as well as recent bibliography.

Gronau asks the right questions: ‘Warum postuliert [Polybios] eine solch spezifische Transformationsabfolge der Verfassungen, wenn sie an der historisch-politischen Realität nicht validiert werden kann? Warum kann sich eine Demokratie in seinem Modell nicht in eine Oligarchie verwandeln, oder eine Tyrannenherrschaft nicht direkt in eine vom Volk errichtete Demokratie—wie in der historischen Realität so oft geschehen?’ (48–9). Gronau and colleagues are forgiving of Polybios’ inconsistencies and imprecisions in Book 6 for several reasons: Book 6 has been transmitted in fragmentary form (33); Polybios was primarily a statesman writing Book 6 as pragmatic political didacticism; he intentionally presents a schema in Book 6 for amateur political philosophers (34: ‘Die staatstheoretischen Passagen der *Historien* sind ausdrücklich für philosophische Amateure formuliert’); he was forging new

theoretical ground (15: ‘... einen politischen und kulturellen Grenzgänger’).¹ To these reflections one might add shortcomings of Procrustean demands for intellectual and ideological consistency over a lifetime and an oeuvre, discounting factors of different times of composition, reversals of personal circumstances, authors’ evolving thought, and shifting ideological persuasions (one may think of Cicero’s correspondence in 49 BCE for hyperbolic illustration).²

But the fact remains that, ultimately, Polybius’ political theory in general, and the tripartite theoretical model in Book 6 in particular, do not easily correspond to sustained themes in the historical narrative, such as the element of the unexpected, so well delineated in Felix Maier’s *Überall mit dem Unerwarteten rechnen*.³ On a generous reading, one might argue that inconsistencies and slippages of political theory allow for seeming incongruities in the historical narrative proper, which are somehow enabled by Book 6’s theoretical interstices, as it were (cf. 67: differing biological, anthropological, and social-psychological ‘Theoreme’ set up a sort of groundwork, ‘über die sich *politische* Eigenlogiken von der *Historie* zu emanzipieren scheinen’ [emphasis original]). However, in the end it may be more economical to side with Walbank and Momigliano (*pace* Maier (2012), and in this volume), in supposing that political theorising simply was not Polybius’ strong suit (cf. 32–3, with notes). In terms of presentation, Gronau’s single-authored section of the Introduction liberally provides (for the visual learner) useful schematic figures for dynamics of the *anacyclosis* and ‘mixed constitution’.⁴ Bibliography is comprehensive, but there are notable omissions. While my book chapter on Greek perceptions of middle republican Rome appears (somewhat surprisingly in this context),⁵ there is no reference to the chapter in my *Cultural Politics* devoted to Book 6.⁶ I also missed mention of D. E. Hahm’s excellent essay, ‘Polybius’ Applied Political Theory’.⁷

In Chapter 2 (‘Polybios als empirischer Forscher vor dem Hintergrund

¹ For Polybius’ ‘pragmatic history’ (dated but indispensable), see Petzold (1969) 3–24; Walbank (1972) 66–96; Meissner (1986) 313–51.

² Morstein-Marx (2021) 379, ‘even if we *were* able to pry into Cicero’s innermost soul we would be unlikely to find therein a coherent, consistent rationale that would explain his actions in such grave and ever-changing circumstances’. Since Polybius’ personal circumstances are not nearly as well documented as Cicero’s, can we be certain that, at particular moments during the composition of his history, they were any less harrowing?

³ Maier (2012).

⁴ For pervasive Greek philosophical influences here, primarily Plato and Aristotle, see Hau in this volume (116–17, with references).

⁵ Champion (2018a).

⁶ Champion (2004) 67–99.

⁷ Hahm (1995).

seiner Vita', 75–113), Boris Dreyer grounds Polybius' historical work in his life, career, and experiences. This is thematically an excellent follow-up to the Introduction (well placed here), since as a man of affairs and historical figure in his own right, Polybius demands that the statesman and politician never evaporate entirely in studies preoccupied with the didactic historian, (anti)-stylist, or political theorist (it is not an easy task to keep all these dimensions in play). Dreyer's chapter discusses important aspects of the historian and his writing: Polybius' formative period, his ideas on chance, his prose style, lost minor works, the historian's conceptions of decay and decline, and Polybius as deportee and friend of Romans, among other key themes. Dreyer (108) rightly observes that, to his credit, Polybius remained true to his historiographical principles, throughout the many trials and tribulations of his tumultuous life and career, 'Der Neubeginn [cf. Pol. 3.4] wirkte sich aber nicht auf die historische Methode aus: Hier bleibt der Autor sich treu'. This is a solid essay, though its engagement with Anglophone scholarship on Polybius is patchy. For example, there is no reference to David Walker Moore's new book on *empeiria* in Polybius' historical thinking.⁸ This is unfortunate, as Moore's work is concisely powerful, and it directly addresses the central role of experience in Polybius' understanding of history, resonating with Dreyer's main topic: Polybius as empirical researcher.

Lisa Hau considers political theory, religion, and morality in Polybius (large topics, indeed), in the third chapter (115–33). Section titles are 'Politische Theorie', 'Religion', 'Kriegsführung', and 'Moralischer Didaktizismus'. Throughout, Hau frames her topics within the compass of ancient Greek intellectual traditions. Of course, Polybius wrote for both Greek and Roman elites,⁹ and M. Dubuisson even dedicated a massive study to Latinisms that came into Polybius' Greek over the course of the many years he spent in Italy as a political hostage.¹⁰ But Hau's framing of these topics is effective, and she is convincing in utilising them to remind us that, in the end, Polybius operated within a Greek intellectual universe.

One can, however, raise a few objections and queries. For example, when Hau (121–3) pairs Polybius' description of a Roman sack (Pol. 10.15) with Thucydides' account of Thracian atrocities at Mykalessos (Thuc. 7.29), she cleverly suggests that Polybius' Romans have become rational *barbaroi* (or perhaps even some sort of *tertium genus*), but I take her main point to be that both Thucydides and Polybius are tapping into a common stock of Greek historiographical practice in portraying brutal violence. There is nothing to object to here thus far, but to the extent that such a pairing invites the reader

⁸ Moore (2020). The book appears in the Introduction's bibliography

⁹ Assembled references: Champion (2004) 4 n. 5.

¹⁰ Dubuisson (1985). On Polybius' language and style, see (more soberly), de Foucault (1972).

to think of Polybius' direct debts to Thucydides (in fairness, I must note that Hau does not maintain this), the comparison is infelicitous. Polybius mentions Thucydides once in the extant text (8.11(13).3), and criticism of Timaeus' rendering of Hermocrates of Gela's speeches at 12.25k.1–26.9, leads one to expect that Polybius has Thucydides (4.59–64; cf. 6.33–4, 76–80) in mind, but it is important to note that he does not explicitly say so. My point is simply that Polybius' real interest and engagement seem to have lain with historians of what we should call the Hellenistic period; just how well he knew Thucydides' history remains an open question. Juxtaposition of these two passages, therefore, has the potential of being misleading.

In the section on religion (117–19), translating Polybius' famous statement at 6.56.7–11, Hau has opted for 'Aberglauben' to stand in for Polybius' *δεισιδαιμονία*. I am not sure that *Aberglauben* is the right word choice. In English, Polybius' *δεισιδαιμονία* has frequently been translated as 'superstition' (even in the new *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*), which is not quite right, either. Something like 'religious awe' is closer to the mark, and this is the translation I have insisted on in the forthcoming English-language Landmark edition. On Polybian religion, we might now expect some mention of what may well be a paradigmatic shift in the study of Roman religion among power elites, away from 'belief denialism', a current debate in which Polybius' comments at 6.56 stand front and centre, at the very inception of 'elite instrumentalist' readings.¹¹ In the section on Roman warfare, much more could be said about Polybius' schematic representation, and even historical distortions, of the Roman military organisation in Book 6.¹² In the section on moral didacticism, it is odd not to find reference to Arthur Eckstein's *Moral Vision*.¹³ But perhaps much of my criticism here amounts to little more than quibbling. Hau's combination of her chosen themes to reinforce Polybius' essentially Hellenic orientation is a valuable contribution. The idea (and demonstration) that 'Scipio's tears' come from Greek literary tradition is striking (124–5). As Hau notes, crying for Roman aristocrats would normally be a violation of Roman 'manliness' (125, 'Es ist schwer, sich das Weinen als Teil der Geschichten um Romulus, den Republikgründer Brutus oder Horatius Cocles vorzustellen').

In Chapter 4 (135–58), Felix Maier reprises his study of the 'unexpected' in Polybian historiography,¹⁴ with an especial emphasis on Book 6. The basic problem, as Maier lays it out in the introductory section, is 'squaring the circle'

¹¹ I have tried to extinguish lingering embers of 'elite instrumentalist' readings of Roman elites' religious behaviours in Champion (2017). Mackey (2022) has now demolished 'belief denialism' and may well be the *coup de grâce* for residual elite instrumentalism.

¹² See section 3 of my chapter titled, 'The Republic and Its Empire', in the forthcoming *Oxford History of the Roman World* (Oxford), vol. II, ch. 5.

¹³ Eckstein (1995).

¹⁴ Maier (2012).

(to play with the chapter's title, 'Die Makulatur des Kreises'), between Polybius' abstractions in political theory in the sixth book and his recounting of historical events in the narrative books. The narrative voice modulates between first-person, editorial explicator and omniscient, third-person reporter of events.¹⁵ As John Marincola observed, 'The Polybian narrator combines a largely unobtrusive narrative of the deeds with a highly intrusive explicator of that narrative'.¹⁶ Moreover, this modulation is prominent in the historical narrative proper, but not in Book 6. Finally, there are embedded, unarticulated ideological messages throughout the work (e.g., anti-populist, anti-demagogic political orientation; Romans as 'rational' barbarians), aligning with the idea of 'indirect historiography', as Ivo Bruns formulated it.¹⁷ On the broadest of interpretative levels, it is unclear whether for Polybius his main theme—the rise of Rome to Mediterranean-wide hegemony—was destined or a matter of chance.¹⁸

With Maier's chapter we again wade into murky interpretative waters, introduced by Martin Gronau in the Introduction. Maier has come up with a bipartite analytical model that helps us think about seeming inconsistency and incoherence in Polybius' work, a model based on his categories, *Katalogie* and *Paralogie*. Maier introduced this heuristic scheme in his 2012 book, and he employs it here to good effect with concentration on Book 6. The aim is to understand Polybius' views on history, but not by focusing solely on the historian's methodological statements.¹⁹ Instead, deeper understanding results from considering Polybius' recounting of events that follow according to expectation, *kata logon*, and those that stand in opposition, *para logon*. The first order of events has great didactic value, serving as a sort of blueprint for practical statesmen, who can apply knowledge of past events to the future.²⁰ The second reveals limits of reason, and it imparts another kind of lesson: historical study and life itself are filled with the contingent and unexpected; history can provide a reasoned map of sorts, but there are no guarantees. In short, the student of history (and reader of Polybius), should lay careful plans for the future, but not count on things working out as planned (155, '... die Politik keine genauen Vorhersagen, sondern im besten Falle nur approximative Tendenzprognosen auf Basis der historischen Empirie erlaubt').²¹

¹⁵ Cf. Rood (2012); Davidson (1991).

¹⁶ Marincola (1997) 10.

¹⁷ Bruns (1898).

¹⁸ Cf. Maier (2012) 14.

¹⁹ Cf. Sacks (1981).

²⁰ See now Moore (2020).

²¹ One could say that in his ideas on contingency, chance, and the unexpected, Polybius anticipated Nicholas Nassim Taleb's *Black Swan* (2007) by some two millennia.

Maier is primarily concerned with the interface of Book 6 and the historical narrative. The takeaway, as I see it, is a refreshing refusal to insist on an airtight correspondence between political theory and unfolding historical narrative. In other words, Maier paradoxically allows us to integrate Book 6 into the work as a whole *by not imposing* a ‘mythology of coherence’ (one of Quentin Skinner’s cardinal methodological fallacies), or, at least, by not attempting to do so in too rigid terms. Like *Katalogie* and *Paralogie*, Book 6 and historical narrative move along different planes; their different levels of analysis uncover truths that are not self-evidently isomorphic, but they are not mutually exclusive, either. There are truths, not Truth, in history, and our job is to be comfortable with their co-existence on different registers *in simultaneity*.²² As Maier notes, ‘Es kann sehr gut sein, dass Polybios nicht die Zeit fand oder nicht die Notwendigkeit sah, das Geschichtsverständnis im sechsten Buch mit dem der restlichen Narration abzugleichen und zu vereinen’ (151).

Like Dreyer’s contribution, Frank Daubner’s chapter (‘Raumordnung und Territorialherrschaft bei Polybios’, 159–80), grounds the collected essays historically. Daubner discusses myth and power in relation to spatial conceptions, centre and periphery in state formation, monarchy (upon which Polybius does not expend much conceptual energy, though K.-W. Welwei was able to publish a monograph on the topic²³), and the Roman dispensation among the Greeks (‘Bestie ohne Mythos’). There is insightful, detailed discussion here of Philopoemen as architect of the Achaean Confederation, based on individual case studies. Daubner sums up inherent tensions in the Achaean *koinon* (167–8):

Aus mehreren Gründen entsprach die Schaffung neuer politischen Einheiten dem politischen Ziel der Vereinigung und Verschmelzung der ganzen Peloponnes zu einem Staatskörper, denn zum einen wird dadurch klar, dass der Achaiische Bund keine bloße Symmachie ist, sondern eine demokratische Gemeinschaft von Gleichberechtigten. Zum anderen wurden dadurch regionale Bindungen und Grosslandschaften zerschlagen, die ein Gegengewicht zur Bundeszentrale hätten bilden können, und gleichzeitig die Spannungen zwischen Grosspöleis und den ihnen attribuierten Landstädten verhindert.

In this passage and elsewhere, Daubner writes of a democratic Achaean Confederation (e.g., ‘den demokratischen Charakter der achaiischen Verfassung’, ‘wahren Demokratie’, ‘unabhängigen, freien, demokratischen Polis’, ‘Redefreiheit, Teilhabe und Demokratie’). But the meaning of *dēmokratia* in

²² For Polybius’ encomium on ‘truth’, see Pol. 1.1.5–6, and assembled references at Champion (2004) 19 n. 20, with Vercruysse (1990); Farrington (2015).

²³ Welwei 1963.

Polybius' day is not clear-cut (it is just as ill-defined in the present day), and the historian certainly had little sympathy for the radical, direct democracy of classical Athens.²⁴ It would have been helpful to give readers guidance on this point. I have mentioned superficial engagement with Anglophone scholarship on Polybius earlier in this review, and I do not wish to belabour the point. But in this chapter, I am astonished not to find reference to Emily Mackil's award-winning study, *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon* (2013).

In his brief section on Rome, Daubner suggests that Polybius was not seriously engaged with abstract, juridical principles of the *res publica*; rather, the historian had much more pragmatic goals in mind, even in Book 6 (174). The author goes so far as to dismiss the *anacyklosis* as something of a joke ('Die *anakyklosis*-Theorie des Polybios ist m. E. ebenfalls dem Ironiker Polybios zuzuschreiben und darf nicht als Verfassungstheorie missverstanden werden', 173). This interpretation is unlikely to find many adherents, but at least it has the virtue of accounting for Polybius' insufficient understanding of (or interest in) key Roman conceptions such as *imperium* and *provincia*, not to be understood primarily in territorial terms (at least not until the late republican period). Roman republican commanders in Polybius' time operated in relatively undefined physical spaces, and *imperium* was almost exclusively confined to *provinciae* (again, not originally in the sense of territory, but rather of stipulated assignment). Only by extension over time could one construe *imperium*, and the *provincia* in which it was operative, geographically. But we would not know any of this were we to rely entirely on Polybius.²⁵ For Daubner, Polybius eschewed such details, as his brief was to outline a strategy of Greek survival in the wake of Rome's monstrous aggression. His focus, however, is trained upon Polybius' outlook as Achaean politician, and in this sense the chapter complements Hau's contribution, which situates Polybius firmly in a Hellenic universe.

The year 155 BCE presents what is perhaps the most highly charged episode in the history of Greek and Roman politico-cultural interactions during the republican period. And there is even some slight evidence that Polybius may have been present to witness it.²⁶ In this year, three renowned philosophers—Diogenes the Stoic, Critolaus the Peripatetic, and Carneades the Academic sceptic—appeared in Rome as diplomats on Athens' behalf. The 'philosophical' embassy's objective was to obtain remission of a crushing fine. Earlier, the Roman Senate had designated Sicyon as third-party arbitrator,

²⁴ Champion (2018b); cf. the collected essays in Mann and Scholz (2012); Grieb (2013). For democracy's tortuous history as a political conception (from among an enormous bibliography), see Dunn (2005); Cartledge (2016); and Ellen Meiksins Wood's brilliant (and scathing) essay, Wood (1994).

²⁵ Cf. Drogula (2015) 209–30.

²⁶ Champion (2016) 66 n. 8.

whose task it was to impose a penalty on the Athenians for their attack on neighbouring Oropus. The philosophers were able to persuade the senators to reduce the fine from 500 to 100 talents. But the fame of the embassy stemmed from the brilliant oratorical displays of Carneades, who apparently argued on consecutive days for and against the justice of the Roman *imperium*. In the sixth chapter (‘Über Barbaren herrschen: Polybios, die Gesandtschaft von 156/155 v. Chr. und die “Imperialismustheorie des Panaetios”’, 181–228), Jonas Scherr works to reconstruct Panaetius’ views on Roman imperialism by examining relevant ideas in Polybius and in the difficult transmission of the three philosophers-cum-diplomats’ positions.

This is an ambitious undertaking, fraught with methodological difficulties. Firstly, Scherr takes the existence of a ‘Scipionic Circle’ (including Polybius and Panaetius) as a given, but the idea of such a group has been questioned.²⁷ More importantly, most everything we know about the philosophical embassy, Carneades’ philosophical position, and his oratorical performances in Rome in 155 derives from much later sources, and here Cicero looms large.²⁸ For the mid-second century, Cicero may well be a deceptively unreliable guide for historical reconstruction. Indeed, Robert Morstein-Marx (2021) *passim* has recently argued that even for events of Caesar’s meteoric rise, which Cicero lived through and commented on, the orator’s letters invite historical distortion and misinterpretation.

For the second century BCE, Cicero’s interlocutors, Laelius and the younger Scipio, do not unproblematically reflect intellectual and philosophical attainments of historical personages they represent, who most certainly were not as sophisticated in these areas as Cicero represents them to be. We should expect that at the mid-second century, Roman senators’ mastery of and engagement with philosophical fine points were much more rudimentary than Cicero’s, who was not even typical of senators in his own day in this regard. After all, in Polybius’ time, with the Romans we are dealing with a people who executed high-profile war captives as part of their entertainments in triumphal celebrations, who were already putting on gladiatorial combats (from 264 BCE), whose gruesome sacking of cities was noted by Polybius himself for its chilling brutality (Pol. 10.15.4–5), who occasionally buried allegedly unchaste Vestal Virgins alive in the Forum Boarium, and who practised human sacrifice in times of imminent military peril (last recorded instance in 114 BCE). From time to time, it is salutary and bracing for us to lift our heads from philological textual analysis in order to remind ourselves of the rough-and-ready historical

²⁷ Zetzel (1972); cf. Ferrary (1988) 589–615. Pairing of Polybius and Panaetius in Scipio’s company: Cic. *Resp.* 1.34; Vell. Pat. 1.13.3.

²⁸ Carneades, *epochē*, and *to pithanon*: Obdrzalek (2006) (essential); attempt to put Carneades’ aporetic *Dissoi Logoi* into the historical context of the diplomatic embassy: Champion (2016).

contexts in which our literary texts arose, and to appreciate how important the remove of a century or so can be between historical events and literary texts that purport to recount them.

With that caveat in mind, I am impressed by Scherr's careful readings and his teasing out (from nearly intractable source material) the essential philosophical positions of the three ambassadors, and even more by his situating Polybius' pronouncements on the central importance of rational planning in statecraft as reflective of intricate contemporaneous debates at issue on the nature and justice of the Roman *imperium*. Concerning Polybius, the towering authority of F. W. Walbank led to a near *communis opinio* that the notion of the historian's engagement with Stoicism rests on shaky foundations, but Scherr's painstaking analysis gives us pause. Of greater import, in my opinion, the chapter provides a rich background for thinking about Panaetius' reasoned judgement on the Roman imperial dispensation, and the notion of the *bellum iustum*.²⁹

It must be said that intellectual and philosophical connections Scherr makes among these various thinkers are well reasoned and plausible (some even most likely), but in the end most of them cannot rise above the level of conjecture. As the author himself notes in conclusion: 'Panaitios, Poseidonios, und Cicero sollten vor dem Hintergrund der hier erzielten Erkenntnisse schlussendlich vor allem als (mögliche) Fortentwickler und Multiplikatoren betrachtet werden ...' (221). Their key word is *mögliche*. And, as far as the Roman reception of Greek philosophical ideas in 155 goes, I would reiterate the danger of taking *late* republican sources at face value for the Middle Republic. Senators' intellectual sophistication and philosophical refinement in Polybius' day simply cannot be measured by Roman power elites in the last generation of the Republic (recall the tradition on Mummius' boorishness). A sobering desideratum for future scholars will be to conduct a rigorous and painstaking exercise in 'neo-*Quellenforschung*'; to winnow out (to the degree that this is possible) from 'cover texts' for the second century BCE all later (and likely anachronistic) testimony on the Middle Republic and see what sort of picture emerges from what is left. This brings us back to Cicero, who may at times seem to share present-day moral sensibilities (cf. *Off.* 1.1, 34–6; *Resp.* 3.23.34–5, on *clementia*). To drive home my point, it is startling that even he apparently saw no moral issue with Caesar's genocide in Gaul, perhaps amounting to one million casualties (including many women and children), and another one million captured and enslaved.³⁰

Philipp Scheibelreiter examines Polybius' use of the 'Lelantine war' as part

²⁹ Just wars: Kostial (1995), to be used with caution; Rampazzo (2012); Santangelo (2008), esp. 63 n. 1 (bibliography); Rüpke (2019) 119–25. In a present-day mode Walzer (2015); cf. Rawls (1971) 377–82.

³⁰ Discussion and sources: Morstein-Marx (2021) 252–7.

of the historian's theme of decline from the ancients ('Polybios und der lellantische Krieg: ein exemplum für das antike *ius in bello*', 229–45).³¹ He surveys scraps of ancient evidence for the war between Chalcis and Eretria (perhaps originally the port of Lefkandi) ca. 700 BCE for possession of the rich Lelantine plain in Euboea (Homer, Scholiast to Hesiod, Archilochus, Theognis, Herodotus, Thucydides, Ephorus apud Diodorus, Strabo, Plutarch). Scheibelreiter considers the nature of the war itself (one or two?), and what sort of international agreement, or even treaty, may have circumscribed it. The war was significant because, like the Trojan war, it drew in much of the Greek world (Thuc. 1.15), and it may have been the first to restrict the type of weapons to be used (based on a passage in Strabo—claiming that terms were inscribed on a pillar at Amarynthium—and a fragment of Archilochus).³²

Polybius' contribution to historical reconstruction of the Lelantine war may be found early on in Book 13 (13.3.2–8). There the historian, in condemning the enormities of Philip V by way of comparison, writes of a bygone day:

The ancients ... so completely avoided plotting against their friends to expand their power that they even preferred not to defeat their enemies by fraud, believing that no success was brilliant or secure which was not obtained by demoralizing one's opponents in open battle. Therefore, they agreed among themselves not to use hidden weapons against each other, or those that could be discharged from a great distance; and they believed that only a close hand-to-hand battle could really settle matters. This is why they announced their wars and battles to each other in advance, giving the time and place at which they would come out to array themselves to fight. But nowadays people say that only a bad general would conduct his operations openly. A slight trace of the old way remains among the Romans, who do proclaim their wars, make sparing use of ambushes, and fight their battles at close range, hand-to-hand. So much for the excessive spread of a taste for treachery among modern leaders, both in politics and in war.³³

Scheibelreiter notes (230–1) that Polybius' use of the imperfect tense *συνετίθεντο* at 13.3.4, could indicate that he presents us with a gnomic reflection without any particular war in mind, but a statement from Strabo (10.1.11–15, explicitly concerning the Lelantine war) shares with Polybius the detail on banning long-distance, projectile weaponry ('keine Ferngeschosse'). Thus, Polybius may well be alluding to this conflict of ca. 700 BCE (with Ephorus as

³¹ On this theme in Polybius, see Walbank (2002).

³² Early Greek 'civilised' warfare: Connor (1988); but also Krentz (2002).

³³ The translations here and on p. CIII are by Kardan and Champion from the forthcoming *Landmark Polybius*.

a likely common source). More important is Polybius' employment of decline, as in this passage (perhaps referring to the Lelantine war), in the overall narrative trajectory of his history. In this regard, Scheibelreiter rightly stresses the reference to Romans (242):

Die Darstellung der Römer als in diesem Sinne "Nachfahren" der ritterlichen Eretrier und Chalkidier ist auch angesichts der Kampfweise der Legionäre nicht vollkommen geglückt, fügt sich aber in die Reihe von Passagen in Polybios' Geschichtswerk, welche die—gemessen am Ideal des *bellum iustum*—hohen Standards römischer Kriegführung betonen wollen. Polybios ist aber auch vorsichtig, wenn er davon spricht, dass sich bei den Römern nur mehr die "Spur" (*ἵχνος*) der alten Ideale fände.

Of course, this is all part of a large narrative pattern running throughout the extant history, in which both Rome and Polybius' native Achaean Confederation run along parallel tracks of devolution from ancestral political and moral virtues as the historian approaches his own times.³⁴

Those who consider themselves to be Polybian scholars use his history for purposes of historical reconstruction, or to focus on his value in understanding ancient Greek historiographical principles, or in close philological analyses of his prose style, or to illustrate narratological devices, such as a Polybian 'plupast'. Polybius' *Nachleben*, stretching from his lifetime to our own, is not on the horizon much of the time, as most of us probably lack the expansive vision, insatiable curiosity, enormous intellectual energy, and voracious, wide-ranging reading practices of an Anthony Grafton, Arnaldo Momigliano, John Pocock, or Quentin Skinner, which are needed to appreciate fully Polybius' impact (widespread, if not always based on thorough, first-hand knowledge of his text). For an example of the historian's rich legacy, we can consider Polybius' proper place in the intellectual background of the fledgling American republic. It is considerable, but rarely acknowledged. On this point, Arnaldo Momigliano once went so far as to say (with some hyperbole) that Polybius should be considered as an honorary founder of the American Constitution.³⁵ In his contribution ('Die Mikrogeschichte einer Rezeption: Polybios in Florenz und die Nachwirkungen im politischen Denken der Frühen Neuzeit', 247–74), Stefano Saracino takes us back quite a bit earlier than that, exploring Polybius' fortunes in Machiavelli's Florence. The chapter will serve as a Polybian supplement for fans of Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment*. It provides a sort of miniature *vade mecum* into northern Italian history in the sixteenth century, as Saracino deftly weaves his story of Polybius into the fabric of the papacy,

³⁴ Champion (2004) 144–69.

³⁵ Cf. Nippel (1980).

disgruntled Florentine republicans, and the court of the Medici.

In the fifteenth century, Polybius appeared on the horizon of European men of letters through Leonardo Bruni's and Niccolò Perroti's efforts. The ground was set for the sixteenth-century rediscovery of Books 1–6 in Florentine intellectual circles. Saracino traces that development in four instalments: Machiavelli's reception of Polybius in the *Discorsi*; Polybius' influence in the crisis of the Medici regime, 1519–22; Polybius in the 'Heiligen Republik', 1527–30; and Polybian echoes in the writings of the Florentine republican exiles Donato Gianotti (1492–1573) and Bartolomeo Cavalcanti (1503–62). Polybius' political theory was clearly 'in the air' well beyond Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, leaving its traces in writings of Bernardo Rucellai, Pierfilippo d'Alessandro Pandolfini, Niccolò Guicciardini, and a sixteenth-century anonymous, undated, handwritten text. But Polybius' influence, though significant, paled in comparison with the works of Plato and (especially) Aristotle. 'Es waren solche Prozesse, die den Aufstieg von Buch VI zu einem Schlüsseltext des neuzeitlichen politischen Denkens und des Staatsdenkens ermöglichten. Als Ergebnis festzuhalten ist aber auch die subsidiäre Bedeutung von Polybios im florentinischen Republikanismus, seine Nachrangigkeit als 'kleiner Bruder' von Platon und Aristoteles' (269; cf. 248). And while Polybius' impact is unmistakable, we cannot pin down in exact terms how extensively familiar most of these thinkers were with his text; unlike the case of Livy, whose use of Polybius can be tracked fairly closely.³⁶ As Saracino (265) notes, of the authors discussed in this chapter, only Bernardo Rucellai and Donato Gianotti actually mention Polybius by name. It is noteworthy in this connection, however, that in Giovanni Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* (1589), we find the simile of the decaying state as subject to the ravages of 'rust and worms', indicating close reading of Polybius 6.10.3.

An Epilogue broadens our gaze over the history of Polybius' reception, from antiquity to the present day (275–318). This overview will be an invaluable handbook for the Polybian scholar, with bibliographical keys for those who want to dig more deeply into any particular episode of the transmission and interpretation of the *Histories*. There are titbits here and there that may surprise even the veteran Polybian scholar (the strong influence of Polybius in the elder Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*; Polybius mentioned by name twenty-six times in Plutarch's oeuvre, and thirty-three times in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*; Ubbo Emmius' extensive use of Polybius in his *Vetus Graecia illustrata* (1626), or the fact that Polybius was even on Friedrich Nietzsche's radar). In the modern period, Polybius' political ideas are lauded by John Adams, they apprise Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*, find echoes in the

³⁶ Heavy lifting done already in Heinrich Nissen's pioneering *Kritische Untersuchungen* (1863); cf. Tränkle (1977). See Scherr's assembled references in this volume at 279 n. 17 (modern) and 280 n. 20 (Livy's mentions of Polybius).

Federalist Papers, and garner the praise of Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt (cf. 304, ‘Damit markiert das Werk des Polybios für Arendt zum einen den eigentlichen Beginn der Weltgeschichte. Zum anderen ist Polybios für sie aber auch ein Symbol für die theoretische Fruchtbarkeit von Fremdkulturerfahrungen und der dadurch ermöglichten Öffnung des politischen und geschichtlichen Horizonts’). But Polybios’ influence can easily be exaggerated; overall, it has been relatively superficial, and in terms of political theorising, Polybios has always (and justifiably) taken a back seat to Plato and Aristotle (he finds no mention, for example, in Arendt’s monumental book, *The Human Condition*). And Polybios certainly has had his detractors, from Dionysius of Halicarnassus to Karl Jaspers. A startling illustration of paying lip service to Polybios, without serious engagement with his text (and revealing an embarrassing ignorance of historical context), is to be found in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*.³⁷ ‘For Polybios, the Roman Empire represented the pinnacle of political development because it brought together the three “good” forms of power—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, embodied in the persons of the *Emperor* [my emphasis], the Senate, and the popular *comitia*’.

Two substantive criticisms of this collection of essays are those of an historian. Both serve as counters, at least for ancient historians, of the impression left by the Epilogue of Polybios’ superficiality and irrelevance in subsequent political thought (at least in comparison with Aristotle). In two lively contemporary scholarly debates about the nature of the Roman Republic and its extra-Italian hegemony, Polybios is of central importance. And since these debates engage with Polybios’ ideas on state formation and dynamics of empire, it seems fair to expect some mention of them in this volume (even if, by and large, they are the province of historians). After all, the expressed purpose of this series (*Stattsverständnisse/ Understanding the State*), is to pose questions not only ‘to (political) philosophers, but also, and above all, to students of humanities and social sciences’ (Rüdiger Voigt’s editorial preface, p. 6).

The burning question of ‘democratic Rome’ is glaringly absent here. In his account of Rome’s *politeia* in Book 6 (6.14.9–12), Polybios writes:

... the People also bestow offices on the worthy—the state’s noblest prize for virtue—and have the power of ratifying laws. Most important of all, they deliberate on peace and war, and ratify or reject alliances, truces, and treaties. Once again, by all this one might naturally be led to say that the People had the greatest part in the state, and that the constitution was a democracy.

With this Polybian prompt, Fergus Millar argued for a powerful, and neglected, popular component in Roman republican politics. He maintained

³⁷ Hardt and Negri (2000) 314.

that: (1) Roman elites' obsession with political oratory would have been meaningless unless popular persuasion was important for political power; hence, the People had *potentia* in *comitia*; (2) requirements for acquiring and maintaining citizenship at Rome were relatively lenient and inclusive; (3) there were no property qualifications for citizens voting in popular assemblies; moreover, secret ballot legislation was introduced in the 130s BCE; and (4) the People had to approve in assembly the most important decisions of state, such as declaring war or concluding terms of peace. These are among Millar's principal arguments that Rome was in some sense a democracy.

Polybius' statement on Rome appearing to be a democracy (6.14.9–12) suits his rhetorical purposes, set in a discussion of the mixed constitution. The historian is remarking on components of the mixed *politeia* singly (from other perspectives, the constitution appears to be a monarchy or an aristocracy). More importantly, elsewhere in Book 6 (6.51.5–8; cf. 6.11.1–2; 23.14.1–2), Polybius indicates that Rome's *res publica* was aristocratic. Building on Polybius' ambiguity, current debate rages on the nature of the Roman republican polity and the degree to which political culture at Rome had a significant popular element in its *contiones* and *comitia*. Scholars are divided as to whether we should follow Ronald Syme and Robert Michels' 'Iron Law of Oligarchy', or rather credit Roman popular assemblies with a measure of actual 'People Power'.³⁸ Millar launched the controversy with a series of articles in the mid to late 1980s, and debate on the question remains robust to this day; the issue is far from being resolved. The important point here is that Polybius spearheads the discussion on 'democratic Rome'. Indeed, in homage to Polybius, Millar dedicated his seminal 1984 article to the historian (*Polybio nostro*).³⁹ It does not seem unwarranted to lament the fact that this lively scholarly debate leaves no trace in these essays.

Polybius, of course, was primarily concerned with explaining Rome's rise to universal domination over the entire *oikoumenē*. The historian, therefore, is really an *Urvater* of another lively scholarly debate in Roman history; this one growing out of International Relations theory (IR). Recently, classical scholars have employed competing IR theories in order to understand Roman imperial development. The two basic approaches are known as Neorealism and Neo-constructivism.⁴⁰ Neorealists (and in more muted fashion their counterparts,

³⁸ Contrast Hölkeskamp (2017) (oligarchic emphasis) and Morstein-Marx (2021) ('democratic' emphasis).

³⁹ Millar (1984), with Millar (1986), (1989), (1998). Bibliography on 'democratic Rome' is now enormous. Particularly noteworthy are: collected essays in Jehne (1995); Pina Polo (1996); Morstein-Marx (2004).

⁴⁰ Realism/Neorealism and Constructivism/Neoconstructivism are variously, and inconsistently, employed in scholarly discourses. Neorealism and Neoconstructivism are adopted here.

Neoliberals) emphasise power, coercion, and self-interest in international affairs. Following Kenneth Waltz and his Neorealist colleagues, Arthur M. Eckstein sees the default condition of interstate relations as one of lawlessness and disorder. Eckstein's Roman Republic grows out of the cold, brutal, neo-Hobbesian dystopia of Waltz's classic *Theory of International Politics* (1979). On this view, all states endlessly seek power and security in struggles for survival. Ancient states, according to Eckstein, became highly militarised, or else they perished. All were engaged in constant struggles on the battlefield. Bellicosity was not exceptional; 'compellence diplomacy' and bloody warfare were commonplace. Republican Rome endured and prevailed in its harsh interstate anarchy because of its enormous manpower reserves, its political organisation of peninsular Italy, and systemic disequilibrium in the international arena resulting from weaknesses of the Ptolemaic kingdom, and the power vacuum that this created. Rome did not succeed because it was more militaristic than other states, or because its armies were invincible.⁴¹

Paul J. Burton has issued a 'Neoconstructivist' counter thrust.⁴² If Eckstein's ancient Mediterranean takes Waltz's international anarchy and systemic analysis of interstate environments for its blueprint, Burton's map is Alexander Wendt's Neoconstructivist foundational text, *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999). This approach has advantages insofar as it avoids overtly abstracted aggregated units, follows closely the language of political discourse and diplomacy, and analyses imperial development as a matter of communication between ruler, rival, and subject. Neoconstructivists posit an ancient interstate realm in which language of diplomatic communications mattered, with considerable shaping effects on interstate behaviour. The Neoconstructivist universe has ample room for mediation and reconciliation, which most Neorealists would probably regard as pollyannish. On this view, one should take seriously key Roman conceptions such as *fides*, *amicitia*, *maiestas*, *officium*, *fas*, *beneficia*, *societas*, *socius et amicus*, and *aequitas*. Refreshingly seeking to avoid a stark, zero-sum choice, Burton advocates a 'layered approach', in which Neorealist and Neoconstructivist perspectives can be complementary, together forging nuanced reconstructions of the Roman republican success story. But the point of all of this is that Polybios plays a crucial role as primary source evidence for new readings of Roman *imperium* from an IR standpoint, and it does not seem unreasonable to expect some mention here of this rich, interdisciplinary vein in the study of Roman imperialism, which is really a re-evaluation of Polybios' main theme: the rise of Rome to interstate predominance.

There is much to celebrate in this collection of essays, and there is no need

⁴¹ Eckstein (2006) and (2008).

⁴² Burton (2011). For an earlier, Neoconstructivist application to classical Greece, see Low (2007).

to end on a churlish note (I will add, though, that a Master Bibliography and *index locorum* as back matter would make the book more user-friendly). In my view, this volume's great merit is that it furthers appreciation of the multi-dimensionality of Polybius' history. The doyen of Polybian studies, F. W. Walbank, left us with a crusty Machiavellian pragmatist, for whom power and success on the international stage were of paramount importance. Polybius' domain is politics and warfare; his almost exclusive concern is with power elites (Herodotus provides a striking contrast in this regard); in Polybius' world, one can scarcely surmise the existence of women (figures like Teuta and Chiomara are exceptions that prove the rule), children, slaves, or Robert Knapp's 'invisible Romans'. Walbank's general characterisation of Polybius is a fair one (after communing for many years with Walbank's *Commentary*, one of the great monuments of twentieth-century classical scholarship, I have learned that to oppose him on most matters Polybian usually turns out to be a foolhardy move). The traditional Polybius' virtue is in his painstaking, accurate reporting of historical events. Along with Thucydides' penetrating analysis of imperial Athens' rise and decline, Polybius' examination of the development of Roman *imperium* has been hailed as an ancient exemplar of a kind of objective, scientific history that might have pleased Leopold von Ranke.⁴³

We now see that Polybius is so much more: pragmatic historian, yes; but he is also a political philosopher, historiographical preceptor, moralist, narratological gold mine, carping pedant and critic (Timaeus, Phylarchus, and others beware), geographer, military tactician, interdisciplinary scholar, historical personage, and even *magister vitae*. It is almost as if the historian is some sort of *matryoshka* doll: as one probes one Polybius, another appears. Moreover, Polybius dissolves the division between history and its representation insofar as the reading of history and the making of history are for him both forms of *empeiria*, as Daniel Walker Moore has recently shown. And, of course, Polybius will forever remain enigmatic, simply because we have lost so much of his colossal work; but what remains of it still dwarfs the histories of Herodotus or Thucydides.

These essays foster a most refreshing and surprising reappraisal of Polybius as being fluid and open-ended; his truths are contingent and provisional; the historian's knowledge is processual, not in the final analysis teleological. The idea of 'indeterminacy' (which for a long time has served me well in my Polybian studies in the politico-cultural sphere), is extended into new directions in these essays. Polybius would most likely have agreed with John Rawls' notion of *reflective equilibrium* and his statement on the limits of rationality: 'As things are ... our knowledge of what will happen if we follow this or that plan is usually incomplete. Often, we do not know what is the rational

⁴³ See Lehmann (1967). The strongest representation of Polybius as objective, scientific, positivistic historian that I have been able to find is Nemirovskii (1977).

plan for us; the most that we can have is a reasonable belief as to where our good lies, and sometimes we can only conjecture'.⁴⁴

More than twenty-five years ago, in a review of Arthur Eckstein's *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius*, I wrote, 'Polybius does not enjoy hot periods; he is never trendy among classical scholars'.⁴⁵ I was wrong. With Eckstein's book serving as a lightning rod, Polybian scholarship has enjoyed an unprecedented blossoming in the first quarter of the twenty-first century.⁴⁶ F. W. Walbank published the second instalment of his collected papers, titled *Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World*, in 2002, and in 2004 I brought out my *Cultural Politics in Polybius's Histories*. In 2010, Brian McGing published an excellent overview of Polybius for a general readership in *Oxford Approaches to Classical Literature*. In the next year, Donald Baronowski followed with his excellent study, *Polybius and Roman Imperialism*, and Boris Dreyer published his *Polybios: Leben und Werk im Banne Roms*. Over the next two years, two sets of essays were published, *Imperialism, Cultural Politics, and Polybius* (2012) and *Polybios und seine Historien* (2013) in addition to Nikos Mitsios' *The Shaping of Narrative in Polybius* (2013). Early in the new millennium, a fresh Italian translation was issued over several years by the Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, with notes and commentary by John Thornton. There have been two international conferences on Polybius, in Liverpool and Thessalonica, whose proceedings were published as *Polybius and his World: Essays in Memory of F. W. Walbank* (2013), and *Polybius and His Legacy* (2018), respectively. In the last five years we have seen three monographs: Giuseppe Zecchini's *Polibio. La solitudine dello storico* (2018); John Thornton's *Polibio: il politico e lo storico* (2020) and David Walker Moore's *Polybius: Experience and the Lessons of History* (2020). At present, two Companions are in the works (Brill and Cambridge), and Polybius' history, in two volumes, will soon appear in the venerable Landmark series of ancient Greek historians (recently joined by Kurt Raaflaub's indispensable *Caesar*). For intermediate to advanced students of Greek who are brave enough to tackle Polybius' difficult and inelegant prose, there is David D. Phillips' commentary on Book I (2016). And this is an eclectically chosen, hardly exhaustive, list. It seems as if the Polybian party is to continue into the foreseeable future. The volume under review is a welcome addition to the festivities.

Syracuse University

CRAIGE B. CHAMPION
cbchamp@syr.edu

⁴⁴ Rawls (1971) 417.

⁴⁵ *BMCR* 1995.07.06.

⁴⁶ Publication details of the books that follow will be found in the Bibliography.

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