

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

Polybian studies, c. 1975–2000

During the years following the end of the Second World War there was a remarkable surge of interest in Polybius, which it is hard to dissociate entirely from the contemporary clash of powers and the rise of the United States to preeminence, which were to dominate the next fifty years. For Polybius' central theme was of course the century-long struggle between Rome and Carthage and the rise of Rome to domination in her own world of cities and kingdoms, the *oecumene*. Be that as it may, the publication of a succession of books¹ and articles² on Polybius during the sixties – a trend already foreshadowed in the forties and fifties in Ziegler's important *Real-Encyclopädie* article, von Fritz's long study of Polybius' discussion of the mixed constitution and the first volume of my own *Commentary*³ – has led more than one scholar to speak of a 'Polybian renaissance'.⁴

Some of this work has reflected historians' current interest in such topics as rhetoric and narrative technique, but on the whole older problems have remained uppermost in discussion: on the one hand Polybius' views on his own craft, his methods of composition and the content and purpose of his work and, on the other, his explanation of how and why Rome had been so successful, together with his own attitude towards Rome and her domination since 168 BC. In this introductory chapter I propose to describe and discuss what seem to me to have been the main trends in recent Polybian scholarship, covering roughly the last quarter of a century (though occasionally I shall go back earlier), and to indicate how the papers in this volume relate to these. During this time

¹ See Welwei (1963); Pédech (1964); Roveri (1964); Moore (1965); Eisen (1966); Lehmann (1967); Petzold (1969).

² For a selection of important articles and reviews of books on Polybius see Stiewe–Holzberg (1982); and for a detailed survey of work on Polybius between 1950 and 1970 see Musti (1972).

³ K. Ziegler, *RE* xxi.2, s.v. 'Polybios', cols. 1440–1578; von Fritz (1954) and Walbank, *Comm.* I–III; see also Devroye–Kemp (1956).

⁴ The phrase goes back to Schmitthenner (1968) 31; cf. Holzberg in Stiewe–Holzberg (1982) 11 and Nicolet (1983b) 15.

I

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

there have been several new books and around 200 articles, contributions to colloquia, collected papers and the like on Polybius. Of these I shall touch only on those which seem to me to be the most significant.⁵

I GENERAL SURVEY

I will begin with some of the basic work on Polybius' text. Here, perhaps the most important development has been the continuation of the excellent Budé edition, with French translation, which has now reached Book XVI under a series of editors.⁶ There is still no Oxford text of Polybius and the proposed (and much needed) revision of Paton's Loeb edition seems to have run into the sand. Unfortunately the current pressure in universities for immediate publications makes scholars less inclined to take on work likely to occupy several years. There has been a German translation of Polybius by H. Drexler⁷ and in English a Penguin selection translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert.⁸ Only a few recent articles have concerned themselves with textual problems. A. Díaz Tejera has suggested new readings in Books II–III⁹ and S. L. Radt has critical notes on a score of passages.¹⁰ There have, however, been two important books on Polybius' language and style, one by J. A. Foucault, the other by M. Dubuisson, who investigates Polybius' knowledge of Latin and how far this is reflected in his writing.¹¹ For all readers of Polybius it is a great boon that, after a long silence, Mauersberger's *Polybios-Lexikon* is once more making progress and has now reached *πρῶτος*; a revision of Volume 1.1 (α–γ) has appeared and this is eventually to apply to the whole of Volume 1. The new volumes contain many improvements and this important project is warmly to be welcomed.¹²

One problematic aspect of Polybius' text arises out of the odd way it is made up: from Book VI onwards it consists in the main of extracts assembled in the *excerpta antiqua* and the Constantinian selections, supplemented by passages from Athenaeus and the *Suda*. In Volumes II and III of my *Commentary*¹³ I have attempted to explain and, where necessary,

⁵ For a full bibliography see *Année philologique* for the relevant years.

⁶ Book I (P. Pédech, 1969), Book II (P. Pédech, 1970), Book III (J. de Foucault, 1971), Book IV (J. de Foucault, 1972), Book V (P. Pédech, 1977), Book VI (R. Weil and C. Nicolet, 1977), Books VII–IX (R. Weil, 1982), Books X–XI (E. Foulon and R. Weil, 1990), Book XII (P. Pédech, 1991), Books XIII–XVI (E. Foulon, R. Weil and P. Cauderlier).

⁷ Drexler (1961–3). ⁸ Scott-Kilvert (1979). ⁹ Díaz Tejera (1985). ¹⁰ Radt (1990).

¹¹ Foucault (1972); Dubuisson (1985).

¹² For Vol. II.1 see Glockmann and Helms (1998); and for the revision of Vol. 1.1 see Collatz, Helms and Schäfer (2000).

¹³ Walbank, *Comm.* II, 1–28, III, 1–62.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

emend the order in which these passages now stand in Büttner-Wobst's standard text; but that order cannot always be established with certainty. In 1985, for example, I published a proposal to reassign two Polybian passages from the *Suda*: xvi.29 to immediately before ix.40.3, and xvi.38 to immediately before x.25.¹⁴ (For a proposed modification of the order of the fragments in Book XXII see the addition to the last note in chapter 4, below.) I have discussed Athenaeus' contribution to our current text of Polybius elsewhere.¹⁵

A stimulating essay by Fergus Millar argues that our present text of Polybius, which adds up to less than a third of the original, presents too Roman a flavour.¹⁶ This view can be contested. After all, Polybius' primary, declared purpose was to write, not a simple continuation of Greek history, but an account of the take-over of the 'inhabited world', the *oecumene*, by Rome; and although, especially in the later books, we no longer have access to considerable tracts of the original narrative concerned with Greece and the Near East, it seems unlikely that a full text would have shown a very different emphasis. For one thing, the order in which events throughout the *oecumene* are presented in each Olympiad year, always beginning with *res Italiae*, seems designed to establish a Roman pattern and this continues throughout the *Histories*. The possibility that the way the extracts have survived may have introduced bias was originally suggested by Momigliano in a Vandoeuvres colloquium¹⁷ and was subsequently taken up by W. E. Thompson, who argued, somewhat unconvincingly, that the *excerpta antiqua*, taken only from Books VI–XVIII, represent a working-over of Polybius' text for a military handbook.¹⁸ In its most general form the argument is perhaps still *sub judice* but an important article by P. A. Brunt warns readers of Polybius against possible distortion arising from the selective nature of the Constantinian excerpts.¹⁹ The relevance of fragments both for Polybius' own text and for authors whom he quotes and criticises was the subject of a conference held at Leuven in 2001.

The proceedings of conferences on particular historical or historiographical topics have contributed substantially to Polybian studies in recent years. I have already mentioned the Vandoeuvres conference of 1973. Equally important for Polybian studies were the proceedings of a colloquium held at Leuven in 1988 on the purposes of history,²⁰ at which

¹⁴ Walbank (1985b). ¹⁵ Walbank (2000). ¹⁶ Millar (1987).

¹⁷ Momigliano (1974b) 35–6. ¹⁸ W. E. Thompson (1985). ¹⁹ Brunt (1980).

²⁰ Verdin, Schepens and De Keyser (1990). See the separate references, all 1990, to Verduyck, Schepens, Dubuisson, D'Huys and Wiedemann, and chapter 15 of this volume.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

six of the seventeen papers directly concerned Polybius and almost all the others touched on his work. Among other topics dealt with here were Polybius' methodology, his use of *topoi*, his attitude towards Rome and various rhetorical aspects of his writing. A collection of papers on *Greek Historiography*,²¹ edited by S. Hornblower, who contributes an important introduction, deals with Polybius at many points and especially in a paper by Peter Derow, who discusses 'historical explanation' as it affects Polybius and his predecessors.²² Several volumes in a series entitled 'Hellenistic Culture and Society', published by the University of California Press, are important for the study both of Polybius and of the society in which he grew up. I shall mention some of these in the course of this survey. Meanwhile, one should note the inclusion in the series of three volumes devoted to colloquia. Two of these, both published in 1993, contain the proceedings of conferences held at Berkeley²³ and at Austin, Texas²⁴ in 1988. An important topic, discussed in both volumes, is Hellenistic kingship, for which the evidence of Polybius is indispensable. A third colloquium, held at Cambridge in 1993,²⁵ contained two papers (by H. Mattingly²⁶ and A. M. Eckstein²⁷) that are relevant to Polybius.

Reference may also be made here to one or two volumes containing the collected papers of scholars whose work has been largely concerned with Polybius. In 1998 Doron Mendels published a collection of his essays, about a dozen of which drew directly on Polybius, especially as a source for social and economic issues in third- and second-century Greece;²⁸ and in 1985 I published a selection of papers, most of them with a Polybian background.²⁹ There have also been several important books specifically devoted to Polybius, by K. Meister, H. Tränkle, K. Sacks, D. Golan and A. M. Eckstein;³⁰ my own Sather Lectures on Polybius were published in 1972.³¹ Two studies of Greek historiography, by C. V. Fornara and K. Meister, contain important sections on Polybius.³² Fornara is interested in him as an example of Greek historiography as contrasted

²¹ Hornblower (1994).²² Derow (1994). I have criticised Derow's treatment of Polyb. iii.6.7 on ἀρχή, αἰτίαι and πρόφασις in my review in *Histos*, December 1996; it is the αἰτίαι, the events leading up to a decision to go to war, that constitute 'processes involving several elements' and not the decisions (κρίσεις) themselves, as Derow suggests.²³ Bulloch, et al. (1993). This book contains a good deal on Polybius, especially in papers by K. Bringmann and L. Koenen on Hellenistic kingship.²⁴ Green (1993). ²⁵ Cartledge, et al. (1997). ²⁶ Mattingly (1997).²⁷ Eckstein (1997). ²⁸ Mendels (1998). ²⁹ Walbank (1985a).³⁰ Meister (1975); Tränkle (1978); Sacks (1981); Golan (1995); Eckstein (1995).³¹ Walbank (1972a). ³² Fornara (1983); Meister (1990) 153–66.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

with other literary genres and Meister's general handbook has a special section on Polybius.

Finally, the volume of work devoted to Polybius has been considerably augmented as a result of the growing interest in the Hellenistic world and in the rise of Rome in recent decades. This has led to several important publications, many of which, though not directly concerned with Polybius, necessarily draw on and discuss his work. For the Hellenistic world generally I will mention only the indispensable political survey by Ed. Will, Claire Préaux's outstanding study of the Hellenistic world (though it has little on Polybius), the histories by Peter Green, Graham Shipley and myself, and Volume VII.1 of the new edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Volume VIII deals with Roman events from 220 to 133 BC, which includes most of the period covered by Polybius' *Histories*; Volume VII.2 covers the First Punic War.³³ Also relevant here are Volume III of the *History of Macedonia* by N. G. L. Hammond and myself, which covers most of the period treated by Polybius,³⁴ and R. M. Errington's *History of Macedonia*.³⁵ On Roman expansion and Polybius' treatment of this see also the recent works of W. V. Harris, E. S. Gruen, W. Huss (a notable history of Carthage), and J. Seibert (on Hannibal).³⁶

Chapters 3–10 of the present volume concern incidents and institutions figuring in Polybius' account of the Greek and Hellenistic world. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with aspects of Hellenistic Egypt, chapter 5 compares two well-recorded processions, one in Ptolemaic Alexandria under Ptolemy II and the other in Daphne near Antioch in the Seleucid kingdom under Antiochus IV, as examples of image-creation in the two main Hellenistic kingdoms. Chapter 6 discusses Polybius' picture of Hellenistic Macedonia, chapter 7 the rôle of sea-power in the Antigonid monarchy and chapter 8 demonstrates the logic behind Polybius' apparently improbable claim (v.102.1) that the Macedonian royal house (under the Antigonids) had always aimed at universal power. In chapter 9 I trace the importance of the Achaean League and its shrine at the Homarion, aided by the Homeric echoes of the name Achaea, down to AD 67 and defend Polybius' account of the early development of the League; and in chapter 10 I offer a solution to the old problem concerning the constitution of the Achaean assemblies.

³³ Will (1979), (1982); Préaux (1978); Green (1990) especially 269–85; Shipley (2000); Walbank (1981); *CAH*, 2nd edn, VII.1 (1984), VII.2 and VIII (1989).

³⁴ Hammond and Walbank (1988). ³⁵ Errington (1986).

³⁶ Harris (1979); Gruen (1984); Huss (1985); Seibert (1993).

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

II POLYBIUS' VIEWS ON THE CONTENT AND PURPOSE OF HISTORY:
METHODOLOGY AND ASPECTS OF COMPOSITION

Polybius stands out among ancient historians in his anxiety to define the sort of history he wrote. In ix.1.1–5 he distinguishes three kinds of history: the 'genealogical kind', which is attractive to the casual reader (τὸν φιλήκοον), 'accounts of colonies, city foundations and kinship ties', which appeal to the reader with antiquarian interests, literally 'the man with curiosity and subtle learning' (τὸν πολυπράγμονα καὶ περιπτὸν) and, finally, 'affairs (πράξεις) of peoples (ἔθνη), cities and rulers'. His own work, he tells us, falls into the third category and he describes it as of interest to the politician (ὁ πολιτικός). Probably because it dealt with πράξεις,³⁷ he calls it 'pragmatic history' (πραγματικὴ ἱστορία), an expression not found earlier and probably his own formulation. It is a phrase which has provoked much controversy; indeed, scarcely anyone discussing Polybius as a historian can have failed to come up with his own translation of this.³⁸

Two main issues arise in relation to Polybius' use of the expression 'pragmatic history': what it implied in terms of content and whether Polybius regarded it as restricted to a particular historical period. Petzold has argued for a didactic element in 'pragmatic history'³⁹ and this view has been taken up and developed in a long and important article by his pupil B. Meissner,⁴⁰ who claims that any definition of 'pragmatic history' must take into account all aspects of Polybius' work. This paper contains some excellent observations, for example that Polybius' extensive criticism of other historians is intended in part to furnish negative examples of what is to be avoided, and it offers a good characterisation of Polybius as a historian. But its definition of 'pragmatic history' seems to me to rest on the fallacy that this phrase must embrace in its meaning everything that Polybius chooses to include in his *Histories*.⁴¹

A more recent study of the phrase, that of H. Beister,⁴² is particularly concerned with the question whether 'pragmatic history' is supposed to apply only to the period covered in Polybius' *Histories*. On this there have been several views. Meister,⁴³ pointing to the passage referred to above (ix.1.1–5), argues that, although in practice Polybius is dealing only

³⁷ Cf. xxxix.8.6: Polybius will write τὰς κοινὰς τῆς οἰκουμένης πράξεις, the common events of the inhabited world.

³⁸ See Walbank (1972a), 66–96. For a bibliography of recent suggested meanings of the phrase see Beister (1995) 329 n.1.

³⁹ Petzold (1969). ⁴⁰ Meissner (1986). ⁴¹ Cf. Walbank (1972a) 56 n. 148.

⁴² See n. 38. ⁴³ Meister (1990) 160.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Polybian studies, c. 1975–2000*

7

with contemporary and near-contemporary events, ‘pragmatic history’ covers the whole of the period following the ‘age of colonisation’, which indeed means the colonisation of the eighth to the sixth centuries and excludes the expansion into Asia after Alexander. This view in effect defines ‘pragmatic history’ more as the description of a historical period than as a kind of historiography. Beister, however, argues convincingly that ‘pragmatic history’ need not essentially contain any chronological component: it is simply, as Polybius says, ‘the events of peoples, cities and rulers’. It is also history useful to the πολιτικός who, Beister thinks, can be either a politician or a student of politics.

It is true that Polybius nowhere specifically restricts ‘pragmatic history’ to any particular period; but in his own work, obviously, it is with the period he is covering, namely from where Timaeus’ *Histories* ended to 146 BC, that it is concerned. The phrase ‘peoples, cities and rulers’ is one often to be found in inscriptions and elsewhere as a piece of official Hellenistic jargon.⁴⁴ This seems to stamp ‘pragmatic history’ as primarily political and military, although in Polybius’ sixth book and elsewhere it clearly does not preclude the discussion of other matters; for, as Meissner shows, the *Histories* contain much that is not purely military or political, for example the drawing of moral lessons.⁴⁵ But these elements are not to be regarded as included in the definition of ‘pragmatic history’. Polybius also touches on events which took place earlier than his own chosen period, where his narrative or comments on his narrative render that necessary;⁴⁶ such events are neither included under ‘pragmatic history’ nor are they excluded by any chronological aspect attached to the phrase. How in fact Polybius saw the remote past is a subject on its own and one discussed both in chapter 12 below and in an interesting article by G. A. Lehmann.⁴⁷

If ‘pragmatic history’ refers basically to history with a political and military content, another phrase used by Polybius, ‘apodeictic history’ (ἀποδεικτική ἱστορία), seems rather to describe a method of composition.⁴⁸ This expression has also been the subject of much controversy. In a well-argued exposition, K. Sacks has shown that the word ἀποδεικτική (or the phrase ‘with *apodeixis*’, μετ’ ἀποδείξεως) simply relates to a fuller narrative in contrast to a summary (κεφαλαιώδης)

⁴⁴ Cf. Walbank (1972a) 56 n. 145. ⁴⁵ See Eckstein (1995).

⁴⁶ E.g. i.12.7–9 (general statement), ii.18–20 (early Celtic invasions), 38–40 (early Achaean history), iii.22–7 (Punic–Roman treaties).

⁴⁷ Lehmann (1989/90). In chapter 11, I discuss Timaeus’ views on the past.

⁴⁸ Polyb. ii.37.3, iv.40.1 (with διήγησις); cf. x.21.8 (ὁ μετ’ ἀποδείξεως ἀπολογισμός), contrasting the *Histories* with Polybius’ biography of Philopoemen.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

account.⁴⁹ It does not describe a special kind of historical treatment; nor does it in itself mean ‘history which investigates causes’ – though in practice it is difficult to see how an extended historical narrative could exclude such an investigation.

Polybius also claims that his history is ‘universal’, not in Ephorus’ sense of covering the whole of the past,⁵⁰ but in embracing the whole *oecumene* at a time when its history has itself become a single whole. This claim, as I have explained elsewhere,⁵¹ implies a certain sleight of hand, inasmuch as it involves Polybius in projecting the concept of the unity of a historical composition (in contrast to a ‘continuous history’ like that of Xenophon) onto the events it describes. Polybius’ notion of ‘universal history’ has come to the fore in recent years. In particular, J. M. Alonso-Nuñez has taken up this theme,⁵² stressing the geographical limitations implied in Polybius’ concept of the *oecumene* and attaching importance to the idea of the ‘four world-empires’, leading up to that of Rome, which, he argues, played an important part in Polybius’ thought.⁵³ In contrast, Doron Mendels has contended⁵⁴ that the *topos* of the ‘four – or four-plus-one – world-empires’ (i.e. Assyria, Media, Persia, Macedonia plus Rome) had not yet crystallised at the time Polybius was writing. More recently Katherine Clarke has discussed the same question, emphasising the spatial aspect of Polybius’ unified *oecumene* in contrast to Derow and Millar, both of whom point rather to Roman *imperium* and the universal enforcement of Roman orders as an expression of power.⁵⁵ Clarke sees the unified *oecumene* as *σωματτοειδής*, ‘like a corporeal whole’; the biological metaphor used here is one which, she claims, is significant for Polybius’ interpretation of the development of historical institutions, including states and empires.⁵⁶

Another aspect of Polybius’ view of historiography which has attracted recent attention is the antithesis which he draws between utility and pleasure and the rôle he proposes for these two concepts in the composition of his *Histories*. I have discussed this in chapter 15 below and it is also the subject of an article by V. D’Huys,⁵⁷ who in an analysis of Polybius’

⁴⁹ Sacks (1981) 171–5. ⁵⁰ Cf. Polyb. v.53.2 for Ephorus’ universal history.

⁵¹ See Walbank (1972a), 67; this sleight of hand is facilitated by Polybius’ emphasis on the rôle of Fortune, *Tyche*, in bringing about this unity. On ‘continuous history’ see Cicero, *Ad fam.* v.12.2, 12.6.

⁵² Alonso-Nuñez (1990) especially 186 n. 32 for a bibliography of earlier discussion of this topic in some of the works mentioned above in n. 1.

⁵³ Alonso-Nuñez (1983). ⁵⁴ Mendels (1981). ⁵⁵ Derow (1979) 4–6; Millar (1987) 1.

⁵⁶ Clarke (1999a) 124; see also (1999b) 278–9, with useful bibliography.

⁵⁷ D’Huys (1990) with bibliography at 267 n. 1.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

account of the battle of Zama (xv.9–14) shows how particular *topoi*, which are to be found in accounts of battles in earlier historians as well as in Homer and the tragedians, also occur in Polybius, but only to a limited extent and at points where they help to clarify the narrative. Polybius, in short, does not sacrifice truth in order to create an effect. Others who have touched on this problem are S. Mohm, K. Sacks, J. Boncquet and H. Labuske.⁵⁸ Polybius' contrasting of utility and pleasure is only one of the themes in his work that look back to some of his predecessors and it raises the question whether his place in a historical tradition should be regarded as an important element in any assessment of his work.

The study of tradition in historical writing is discussed at length in an important recent book by J. Marincola.⁵⁹ In this study Marincola assesses the literary and moral traditions inherited by a succession of Greek historians, including Polybius, which help to shape their writing. He isolates the various rhetorical and compositional devices they employ, in order, for instance, to establish their *bona fides* and their competence as historians, and he identifies the precepts, examples and modes of operation, which they hand down from one to another for adoption (with or without modification) in order to support their claims. This approach is new in so far as it treats historical texts, not least that of Polybius, more as a form of self-definition than as an unprejudiced factual narrative. It sees historical texts as a means of negotiation between the historian and his readers. It involves studying Polybius in his social context, especially in his relationship to a reading public and a tradition of historical writing; and it leads to a consideration of his purpose in writing *in that particular context* rather than simply accepting his historical statements as if they were all objectively determined. When, for example, Polybius remarks that the Rhodian historians Zeno and Antisthenes were moved by the desire for glory and renown, he is formulating an aspect of motivation carrying implications for other writers, including himself, which must be taken into account in assessing anything he and others write. From this perspective historiography can be seen as a form of self-projection.

I have summarised this argument at some length as it seems a good illustration of a new approach to be found increasingly in writers on historiography. One should perhaps note, however, that it is basically less novel than it might appear to be. The good critic has always known that behind a historian's account lie assumptions and aims directly related to his predecessors, to his contemporary situation and (if he is a public

⁵⁸ Mohm (1977) 250–61; Sacks (1981) 122–70; Boncquet (1982–3); Labuske (1984).

⁵⁹ Marincola (1997); I have reviewed this work in *Histos* (1997), 1–9.

Cambridge University Press

0521812089 - Polybius, Rome and the Hellenistic World: Essays and Reflections

Frank W. Walbank

Excerpt

[More information](#)

figure like Polybius) to his own political career, his present stance and his future ambitions; also that literary presentation can affect the emphasis of his narrative.

I will close this section with a look at several further methodological questions which have attracted the attention of Polybian scholars. The first of these is a query: did Polybius set out to construct a consistent account of how historical research should be conducted and history written? The question arises particularly in relation to two chapters in the twelfth book (xii.25e and 27). In the first of these, which introduces an elaborate comparison between practitioners of medicine and historians, Polybius identifies three fields in which the ‘pragmatic historian’ may work. First, in a library, studying and comparing memoirs and other documents; secondly, by investigating geographical features of all kinds, which of course involves travel; and, thirdly, by acquiring political experience. Discussing these, he asserts that it is folly to think that one can write satisfactory history by applying oneself (as Timaeus did) to only the first of these. In xii.27, however, he introduces a quite different distinction, based on whether the historian uses his eyes or his ears. Here the ears are the organs employed both in reading (presumably aloud) and in interrogating eye-witnesses of historical events; reading – Timaeus’ method – is easy, but interrogating witnesses is very difficult, though in fact it constitutes ‘the most important part of history’. A few lines earlier, however, Polybius has told us that information conveyed through the eyes is superior to what we learn through the ears. The different approach adopted in these two chapters and the apparent contradiction in xii.27 (where the eyes are superior to the ears but the interrogation of eye-witnesses through the ears is the most important thing of all) present problems on the assumption that they are part of a developed and coherent guide to writing history. The likelihood, as Schepens has observed,⁶⁰ is that Polybius’ remarks in the two passages are independent of each other and have simply grown out of his primary purpose at this point, that of demolishing all Timaeus’ pretensions. They are not, therefore, to be reconciled as elements in a comprehensive and internally consistent exposition of how history should be written.

A second issue which is basic for our view of Polybius as a historian is that of truthfulness and how far he was committed to this in principle and in practice. Polybius, of course, repeatedly asserts the importance of truth, which, he insists, is essential if history is to be of any use – though in his criticism of other writers he distinguishes between deliberate and

⁶⁰ Schepens (1974) and (1990) 50 n. 39; see also Sacks (1981) 26 n. 10.