

**LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND AUTHORITY  
IN POLYBIUS' *HISTORIES***

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance attributed to Polybius in recent years as a supposed precursor of global sociology, and the overlap between his universal historical discourse and the multiple *local* pieces of knowledge consulted by him. Two passages of his *Histories* are explored in detail: Plb. 9.22-26, on Hannibal; and 12.5-16, on Locri Epizephyrii. In both texts there are some explicit references to local knowledge and perspectives, as well as an explicit authorial assessment of their historical value. An important argument here is that Polybius consciously self-fashioned as a cosmopolitan historian, stressing his own authorial competence to build a wider and deeper understanding of historical deeds.

**Keywords:** Polybius; Historiography; Local Knowledge; Authority.

## INTRODUCTION

Polybius (c. 200-118 BC) was born in Megalopolis into a leading Arcadian aristocratic family. He served as federal *hipparchos* of the Achaean League (c. 170/169 BC), with a truly promising political career, but in the aftermath of the Third Macedonian War (171-168 BC), the conjunction of Achaean political internal rivalries and Roman imperial suspicions caused his exile and prolonged detention at Rome without charges or trial. There he spent some seventeen years during which, having established a personal connection with L. Aemilius Paullus and his natural son Scipio Aemilianus, Polybius began writing a history to explain how and why the Romans had achieved supremacy, “something logical, which is paradoxical” (παράδοξον θεώρημα) (Plb. 1.1.2).<sup>1</sup> This task required both an historian with specific skills and a new kind of historiography (Plb. 1.3.3-4; 1.4.1; 3.32, 8.2), which was able to grasp the meaning of the new times characterised by the unity of the inhabited world. Emphasising the need for narrative interweaving (*sumploke*), amidst a widening Mediterranean world driven by the astonishingly fast Roman expansion, Polybius claimed to be innovative within the parameters of a tradition.<sup>2</sup> The amplification of his subject was both historical and historiographical, because, as Rome surpasses all previous empires, so universal history on its conquests is far superior to any earlier historical writing. Indeed, Polybius firmly distinguished his own universal history from monographs (*epi merous* or *kata meros*) of other historians.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter, a new historian should be able to provide his readers not only with a proper account of historical events, but also a proper *synopsis* of them. This last term refers to “la vision capable d’embrasser d’un seul coup la forme interne d’un ensemble organique de faits”,<sup>4</sup> which were renewed into a real “corporal totality” (*somatoeidê*) with an order already inscribed in them and just revealed by Roman imperialism. So, universal history was not thought of as a historiographical construction, but as reality apprehensible created by the new political situation.<sup>5</sup>

While much scholarship has been devoted over the past decades to the understanding of the universal character of the *Histories*, and Polybius

<sup>1</sup> Maier, 2018, 56. For the Greek text I have followed the Teubner edition of Th. Büttner-Wobst (1893-1905), while the English translation is that of Paton (1922-1927) slightly modified.

<sup>2</sup> Walbank 1975. Ephorus as a precursor (Plb. 5.33.2 = *FGHist* 70 T7; , D. S. 4.1.2-3).

<sup>3</sup> Marincola 2004, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Zangara 2007, 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Zangara 2007, 18-19.

has even been considered an early precursor of global sociology,<sup>6</sup> the overlapping of global and local knowledge in his work has not been properly explored. This topic seems a particularly promising one.<sup>7</sup>

In effect, globality and locality are mutually interdependent, with all triggers and adaptations across the global/local twofold reality, and a universal vision always supposes a kind of dialogue with local reality. This very idea has indeed had consequences to the understanding of ancient Greek historiography during the last decades.

In writing this new universal history (or, as some might say, global history), the Greek historian obviously did not work exclusively on the basis of his personal experience or his autopsy of all places.<sup>8</sup> In his historiographical practice, he had to resort to oral inquiry and bibliographical search. In doing so he found a myriad of competing and opposing local views on a number of contentious issues. But Polybius also exploited these opposing local visions to shape his own image as a historian to his readers. The aim of this article is to explore this dimension, paying particular attention to the historiographic position taken by Polybius in the face of this local knowledge and, furthermore, to discuss the supposedly cosmopolitan nature of the interpretation offered in exchange. The focus is not on changes between universal and local historiography, but on the overlapping of local knowledge and universal discourse in the *Histories*. As Ambaglio has suggested, great historiography often originates itself from an imperfect suture of diverse local histories consulted as sources.<sup>9</sup> I should like to understand how the historian's cosmopolitan vision, as a look from the outside, was presented to his readers as a validating element of authority to write history and overcome limited and biased local views.

Scholarship on local knowledge and Greek historiography has become increasingly popular within recent years. Local histories and the identity of communities in the ancient Greek world, particularly during late Classical and Hellenistic times, have become highly discussed topics.<sup>10</sup> Local historiography was the most common form of history-writing between the fourth and second centuries BC in the central and eastern Mediterranean.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Moore 1966, 476; Inglis & Robertson 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Schepens 2001, 10 n. 18; Ambaglio 1998.

<sup>8</sup> An impossible *desideratum*: Plb. 12.4c.4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. "che è talora la somma aritmetica mal suturata di tante storie locali" (Ambaglio 1998, 94).

<sup>10</sup> Schepens 2001; Ambaglio 1998, 2001; Thomas 2019; Tolber 2017; Beck 2020, 165-175.

<sup>11</sup> 530-odd works on local history, according to Rosalind Thomas (2019, 10, 417-445) in her recent book.

As Guido Schepens has strongly suggested, local history was the product of a period in which Greek citizens wanted to look back at a better past: “the need for people to define themselves with reference to their local roots may have been felt more intensely as the οἰκουμένη... was growing too vast too quickly for many” (Schepens 2001, 14). Polybius also admitted there was an abiding Hellenistic interest in origins and city foundations when he was writing his *Histories* (9.1.4; cf. 10.21.2-4), and he was even plausibly “writing in the long shadow of these much more popular types of history” (Thomas 2019, 13).

Indeed, these local histories were clearly a normal part of Greek culture, a very common way to encounter the past, because they added local visibility to a storied universe, but they also overlapped with the histories of the Greek world that took a wider approach: local histories were quarries to be read and plundered for different purposes. In this sense, references to local information in Polybius should be understood mainly as the reliance on locally written sources, but also to what he holds to be the social or the local dimension of knowledge.

This last statement is particularly important for this paper, because it draws attention to the problem of the relationship between globality and locality, in particular, to the overlapping of local knowledge and world-wide history, such as the *Histories*. Both Delfino Ambaglio and Guido Schepens have called attention to the mutual permeability between the general (*Hellenika*, *koinai praxeis*) and local histories in ancient Greek historiography. As Ambaglio (2001) has shown, this last historiographical practice, or “practices”, had a technical term to name it: *epichoraii historiai*. And this type of local histories is supposed to have been to a large extent a primary source for “general” historiography (a real “quarry”), as was stated by Domenico Musti (1982, XLII), and it cannot “meccanicamente riportare a una fonte orale e locale ogni notizia introdotta da un ‘dicono’”. In this sense, Felix Jacoby (1949, 68) had thought of local history as “independent, but connected with, great historiography”, and as a response of many cities to the rising importance of Herodotus and his general *History*. The historical genre in the Greek world thus developed in a dynamic and fluid way, with a constant broadening of options available to historians within a tradition.<sup>12</sup> The fact that Ephorus of Cyme was both the author of local history (Ἐπιχώριος λόγος) of his native city in Lesbos island, and of universal history, prevents us from adopting too narrow generic conceptions.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacoby 1909. Fluidity: Marincola 1999.

A significant nuance is needed regarding the position of ancient authors who usually used the term “local” to mean a kind of specific discourse, and historical information deriving from this kind of sources. Indeed, ancient Greeks had two terms to designate local perspectives and, sometimes, to name local historiographies: *epichorios* and *enchorios*.<sup>13</sup> As it is pointed out by Simon Goldhill, *epichorios* (“local”): “goes to the heart of the construction of identity as an act of affiliation – an act of affiliation which, by virtue of the opposition of the local to some other system (global, panhellenic, the empire), indicates a self-awareness of different structures of power in a complex society”.<sup>14</sup> Pausanias is a most conspicuous ancient example of this cultural attitude in Greek literature with 64 attestations of the term *epichorios* in his *Periegesis*. Goldhill has also considered a series of problems about the discourse of the “local” in ancient Greek literature. The first one is meaningful here, particularly about “who speaks”, and entails two dimensions: 1) the position of the narrator, with his focus and his definition of “locality” from inside or outside; 2) the representation of the author in terms of a certain social position.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard, in Polybius’ *Histories* we found traces both of a look from within and from without towards the locality. Indeed, several passages of his work might be considered as examples of local historiography. The Achaean history of Book 2 (Plb. 2.37.7-70) written by Polybius, a historical digression known as the *Achaikà*, or the digression on Arcadia and its customs in Book 4 (Plb. 4.20-21), might be interpreted as a change in focalisation, from universal to local historiography. According to Daniel Tober (2017, 2, n.3), local histories are “narratives, written in Greek, that are focalized by the real or imagined territory of a single community, take that locality and its occupants as protagonists, and concern themselves in some way with the past, whether diachronically or episodically”. Both in Arcadian and Achaean digressions Polybius does just that and consequently he writes to some extent like a local historian. But I am interested here only in his view from outside, in his outlook as a universal historian trying to grapple with perspectives and integrate them into his own historical account.<sup>16</sup>

Compared to the pervasiveness of dialogue with local views in Pausanias Polybius might be truly disappointing, since he used *ἐπιχώριος* just six times (Plb. 4.20.8-9; 34.2.10, 3.9, 14.2, with *ἐπιχωριάζω*: 6.46.3). A

<sup>13</sup> Ambaglio 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Goldhill 2010, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Goldhill 2010, 46-47.

<sup>16</sup>As will be argued more fully later, this is a highly distorting historiographic process.

more frequent word in the *Histories* is *enchorios* (“native”), usually rendered in the plural (Plb. 2.16.12; 3.6.2; 4.78.4; 6.11.11; 9.25.3; 10.28.3). “Natives” are specifically mentioned as sources of information, such as names of rivers, origins of a statue, nature of a political constitution, views about the character of an important leader, and geographical knowledge, such as the location of underground channels in Central Asia. Written sources seem to have been consulted in compiling the *Histories*: this is obviously the case with the last example about the geography of the Iranian plateau. But other local references should have been taken from direct local informants through personal inquiry. This is certainly possible at least in the case of important historical characters, like the Numidian king Masinissa, or the leading people in Locri.

In any case, local knowledge is called into attention through the *Histories* to highlight its informative value, but also to discuss and signify its information from a translocal or cosmopolitan historiographical perspective. Unlike pervasive notions of universality or globality, locality is never explicitly defined in the *Histories*. Polybius’ greatest concern seems to have been only to oppose the value of his universal historiography to that of monographs. However, the local character of the collected information is expressed in different ways. One of them is through a polemical discussion of different local historians (Philius, Fabius Pictor, Zeno, and Antisthenes), who were frequently criticized for their local bias. Another way is introducing information with typical markers to local traditions –written or oral ones– such as “it is said”, “it is told”, or referring to practices performed “still today” (ἔτι καὶ νῦν), or “every year” (κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν). Amazing stories about old statues (e.g. Artemis from Iassos) or temples (e.g. Zeus Lycaeus in Arcadia: Plb. 2.16.13-15; 16.12.1-11), are also included in the work, but usually just to question his wonderful and fantastic character. On several occasions, local information is simply used without further questioning, such as regarding Tarentine burial habits, which explained the appearance of the city in Polybius’ time (Plb. 8.28.6-8).

As the aim of this article is to explore the nature of the overlapping of local knowledge and universal discourse in Polybius’ *Histories*, a few words should be said about the Greek historian’s explicit opposition to local histories. The *Proem* to Book 9 seems in this sense to suggest a rigid conception of the historical genre, emphasising a decision to write just political and military history, unlike most other contemporary historians who rather prefer to mix different kinds of historiography to reach a wider public (Plb. 9.1.3-4). An important argument here is that Polybius consciously self-fashioned

as a cosmopolitan historian. A necessary overlap between local and global focalisations in his work needs to be stressed, especially as it has recently been suggested that Polybius strongly opposed himself to local histories as a conscious mode of authorial self-fashioning.<sup>17</sup> Does opposition mean refusal to deal with local views? How should we read his complex attitude to local knowledge? Understanding who was writing and from what perspective is the main concern. The larger and more cosmopolitan world after Alexander and Roman conquests meant a real change in the historiographical tradition. It will here be discussed how different pieces of local knowledge were reframed, embedded, and overlapped with cosmopolitan Greek historiography developing in a new Mediterranean political world. To do that, the article offers a close reading of two passages of the *Histories*: the controversy of 9.22-26 about the character of Hannibal and 12.5-16 on the foundation of Locri Epizephyrii in Southern Italy. The aim is to recognize the value attributed to local knowledge in those passages and to relate them with Polybius' strategy of self-fashioning as a cultural mediator, who, from adopting a supposedly translocal or cosmopolitan perspective, seeks to make sense of locally produced information.

## HANNIBAL BETWEEN CRUELTY AND GREED

The Second Punic War was possibly the most traumatic event in the history of the Middle Roman Republic. Hannibal's invasion of Italian soil was long, costly, both in demographic and material terms, and in the end it had profound consequences for later Mediterranean history. It is not surprising at all, then, that the image of Hannibal, the great Carthaginian general, has been consistently adversely constructed in later Latin literature. The idea that he had been very cruel and savage in his behaviour during his stay in Italy is the most recurrent theme. In this vein, the claim that he had built a bridge of human corpses over the river Vergellus after the battle of Cannae has had a wide echo among later writers.<sup>18</sup> When Polybius decided to in-

<sup>17</sup> Thomas 2019, 43-45, 13, 35, 39, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Val. Max. 9.2 ext. 2; Sil. 8.668-9; Flor. 1.22.18; App., *Hann.* 28 (cf. *Pun.* 63). And the speech of C. Terentius Varro in Livy (23.5.12), accusing the Carthaginians of brutality and fierceness (*hunc natura et moribus innitem ferumque*), and indicating that their general had built a bridge with corpses (*pontibus ac molibus ex humanorum corporum strue faciendis*) and even that he had accustomed them to eating human flesh (*vesci corporibus humanis docendo*). Cf. Levene 2010, 160-161, who convincingly argues that the attribution by Livy of this speech to Varro has a polemical



clude an extensive digression on the character of Hannibal he was mainly reacting against these kinds of stories based on the local Roman tradition (Plb. 9.22-26).

There Polybius elaborates an argument not dependent on nature to explain the behaviour of leaders in general, and particularly regarding Hannibal in Italy. The Greek historian was especially interested in the importance of “the suggestions of friends (διὰ τὰς τῶν φίλων παραθέσεις)” and also thought of “the complexity of affairs (διὰ τὰς τῶν πραγμάτων ποικιλίας)” to understand the reasons for the actions. In this regard, it is not possible to know whether Polybius was following arguments already developed by previous authors. It has been suggested that a central character in the digression, an advisor to the Carthaginian general during his Italian campaign, whose name was Hannibal “the Monomachus”, would have been a fictitious character created by the Spartan historian Sosylus as a fictional duplicate of Hannibal Barca to whom he could ascribe all the negative actions formerly attributed to the Carthaginian leader.<sup>19</sup> As Levene (2010, 161 n. 179) has suggested, “an ingenious but sadly implausible claim”. We are on safe ground here if we consider that Polybius was offering his own position in Book 9, seeking to give historical meaning to a myriad of previous criticisms against a character who plays an important role in the *Histories*.

It seems especially significant that Polybius decided to resort to a typically Hellenistic argument, such as the influence of friends (*philoî*) in shaping interstate politics, a topic that he himself exploits in various places in his work.<sup>20</sup> Polybius challenged two local views that circulated at that time about Hannibal’s character: “But at any rate among the Carthaginians he was notorious for his love of money and among the Romans for his cruelty” (Plb. 9.26.11). Both local perspectives were about to be questioned in favour of a supposedly less localized explanation proposed by the historian.<sup>21</sup> We have already pointed out in passing the numerous stories in Latin

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slant against this perspective, since the Roman consul does not only have a rather negative image in his work, but the choice of the moment and the words of the speech on the consul’s side are both absolutely out of place.

<sup>19</sup> Brizzi 1984, 7-29.

<sup>20</sup> See esp. Plb. 7.14 (on the influence of Aratus and Demetrius of Pharos on Philip V of Macedon). In the Hellenistic kingdoms, as has been particularly studied in the case of the Seleucid empire, the *philoî* (“the friends”) of the king represented the social, cultural, and military backbone of the empires. They formed “a supra-local aristocracy” (Bang 2012, 71); members of the court, who, as a rule, shared a cosmopolitan Greek outlook and cultural origin. On this topic in the Seleucid empire: Habicht 2009; Haubold 2016, 93-98; Strootman 2020: 124-144.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the opinion attributed to the Romans is aligned with Livy’s position, to whom Han-

historiography about Hannibal's bloody savagery, especially the alleged construction of a bridge with corpses to cross a torrential Italian stream. And Polybius shows to be well informed about this local perspective (ὡς ὤμου γενομένου, "his cruelty").

There is a perfect match there with Livy's later statement about Hannibal's Punic cruelty and perfidy (*inhumana crudelitas, perfidia plus quam Punica*: Livy 21.4.9).<sup>22</sup> The claim to have learned from the Carthaginians themselves about their local perspective, however, is more interesting:

"I have been told about this history by Carthaginians themselves — for the natives do not only know best (ἐγχώριοι... κάλλιστα γινώσκουσιν), as the saying is, the direction of the wind, but the character of their compatriots — and I heard it accurately also from Masinissa, who maintained the accusation against the love of money displayed by Carthaginians in general and especially by Hannibal and by this Mago who was known as the Samnite". (Plb. 9.25.2-4).

Polybian Carthaginian informants remained unidentified in the text, whereas Masinissa, a relevant historical character, a Numidian king who had served under the Barcids in Hispania, could have been interviewed by Polybius when Scipio, then a military tribune under the Roman consul L. Licinius Lucullus in Hispania Citerior, crossed to Africa in 151 BC (Plb. 24.16.12; 34.16.1-2).<sup>23</sup> A written source cannot be completely dismissed in this case. In another place, Polybius said that, regarding Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, he had "inquired about the circumstances from men present on the occasion (τῶν παρὰ τευχότων τοῖς καιροῖς) and have personally inspected the country and made the passage of the Alps to learn for myself and see"

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nibal was full of *inhumana crudelitas, perfidia plus quam Punica* (Livy 21.4.9); D. S. 26.14.1-2; App., *Hann.* 28, 31, 59, 60; Cic. *Off.* 1.38; *Amic.* 28; Walbank 1967, 151. The idea of a single Roman point of view seems to accommodate Thomas' observations on cumulative historiography in the Greek poleis, that is, several authors writing collectively on the same topics and sharing the same perspective to some extent: Thomas 2019, 152-157.

<sup>22</sup> Even Polybius (3.86.11) refers to Hannibal's custom of putting to the knife all men of military age who were captured in the Italian cities taken by storm; however, the Greek historian does not attribute this to a "Punic" attitude, but to Hannibal's personal hatred of the Romans (αὐτῷ μῖσος ἔμφυτον πρὸς Ῥωμαίους).

<sup>23</sup> The Carthaginian view of the First and Second Punic Wars was spread by some Greek historians, first by Philinus of Acragas (*FGrHist* 174), and then by Silenus of Caleacte (*FGrHist* 175) and Sosylus of Sparta (*FGrHist* 176), but also by Hannibal himself, who had composed a record of his actions in Italy, both in Punic and Greek language, which Polybius (3.33.18; 56.4) claimed to have personally seen in the temple of Hera Lacinia. See von Ungern-Sternberg (2011, 146-147). Perhaps if the main sources available to know about Hannibal's campaign were exclusively of Greek origin, Polybius' claim that he had obtained information directly from locals could corroborate his authority as a competent historian.

(Plb. 3.48.12). We cannot accurately identify these sources, but they should not necessarily be viewed as oral testimonies. If we imagine that Polybius may have been interested in this question when he began working on his history, already installed in Rome after the Third Macedonian War, the chances of finding a witness for an event that occurred more than fifty years earlier were a bit thin.<sup>24</sup> More likely, Polybius took this information from the writings of participants in the campaign (maybe memories or histories).

His authority as an historian would be further strengthened, in any case, by having personally travelled to visit the historical places and by having learned the history from reliable written sources. But I am not interested in the provenance of the information collected; anyway, there are no explicit references to specific sources, except for the careful delineation of the specific local origin for each of the opinions. Polybius judged there that the Romans had a biased opinion of Hannibal, while the Carthaginians, for their part, had a different one. For the former he was cruel, for the latter he was greedy - but was this so?

If we consider Goldhill's remarks, Polybius clearly adopted a decent attitude towards Roman and Carthaginian "native" perspectives. In an ethnographical vein, he acted like Odysseus, his own heroic model of inquiry as an historian, who "saw the cities of many men and knew their mind (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω)" (Hom., *Od.* 1.3). Despite recognizing explicitly that native people "know better (κάλλιστα γινώσκουσιν)", he judged from outside and considered both local explanations as inherently incomplete and misleading. He was an observer from outside, who defined and challenged local knowledge. And then he also claimed a degree of authority based on his own social position, which gave him the opportunity to access information that other historians could not have. Local information usually is completely downplayed in the *Histories*, as regrettable childish stories, but not in this case. Assuredly historiographical polemic served the historian's purpose of presenting himself as improving substantially the past, promising to write with greater accuracy than his many predecessors (through the inquiry of the natives and the examination of the terrain).<sup>25</sup> And to do that, as John Marincola (2004, 87) has put it in the most emphatical way: "One either had access to a circle of power or one did not". In the ancient world "assertions that one was close to the source of

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Walbank 1957, 382.

<sup>25</sup> See Marincola 2004, 115-116, who has also explored the reasons alleged by ancient historians for writing non-contemporary history, as Polybius did in this particular case.

power and thus had privileged access” were an important way of validation (Marincola 2004, 87).

Despite claims that the Mediterranean world had become a more connected space since the territorial conquests of Alexander the Great and the Romans, there is no doubt that Polybius’ intellectual endeavour was only made possible by the political umbrella of the Roman imperial domain, not only due to security but fundamentally because of personal relationships with Roman policymakers that made it easier for him to access key oral testimonies.<sup>26</sup>

Depending on his personal relationship with different individuals, both Romans and Carthaginians, the Greek historian sought to exhibit his own competence to build a wider and deeper understanding of historical deeds. This privileged access to information allowed the historian to present his correction of local partial views as absolute. On the evidence of his Book 6 no one could deny his mastery of Roman history, customs, and institutions, but in the case of the Carthaginians, the historian needed to reinforce his authority through referring to his conversation with Masinissa. He not only travelled to northern Italy, to the Alpine area, to learn about the geographical setting of Hannibal’s campaigns, but he also went to Africa to collect the testimony of an important Numidian king. Thus, its association with the paradigmatic attitude of Odysseus becomes total since he too “saw the cities of many men and knew their mind”.

Polybius then adopts a certain cosmopolitan attitude, or a translocal one, that of writers who “do not float above locality; rather, they shuttle between different locales, mediating between the local and the global”.<sup>27</sup> Evidence from the outside world becomes decisive in delineating, interpreting, and criticising local views, and so the historian resorted to many historical examples to better understand Hannibal’s practice: Agathocles, Cleomenes III, Athenian and Spartan leaders, and Philip V, all of them extracted from Greek history and used to make the case for the influence of “friends” on political decision making (Plb. 9.23-24). And through this ethnocentric procedure (with Greek examples and reasoning), Roman and Carthaginian local perspectives were reframed into “global” thinking, although they

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Plb. 3.59.3-8 (Alexander the Great’s and Roman conquests and travelling); but it is necessary to take into account Polybius’ criticism of the ancient explorer Pytheas of Massalia (Plb. 34.5.7; Str. 2.4.3 [C104]), whom he accused, among other things, of not having been able to travel so far because he was just a private and poor man (ιδιώτη ἀνθρώπων καὶ πένητι). See Wallbank 2003, 35-36.

<sup>27</sup> Whitmarsh 2010, 13.

were in fact related exclusively to Greek history. This procedure attempts to make the facts intelligible outside their respective cultural boundaries: “the artisan task of seeing broad principles in parochial facts”, as Clifford Geertz (1983, 167) has written. Through historical analogy and juxtaposition with Greek historical knowledge, Polybius was able to deal with Carthaginian, Roman, and Greek material, offering a single point of view, apparently “global”, or cosmopolitan, and useful for his readers.

But cosmopolitanism faded through this operation because neither could it truly exist without a culturally situated perspective nor could it disregard the political reality of Roman expansion in which Polybius’ historical judgment takes place.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the influence of “friends” in royal political decision making, which is the alleged cause of Hannibal’s cruelty or greed according to the historian, is a fully Hellenistic concern. Indeed, Polybius’ own inquiry into the nature of power in the Hellenistic monarchies, as well as the influence of “friends” such as Aratus or Demetrius on the behaviour of King Philip V is emphatic enough in this regard (Plb. 5.12.5-8; cf. 10.26.7-10).<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the idea of reflecting on Hannibal’s character and political decision-making through the use of the influence of friends and of circumstances highlights the intellectual and cultural bias underlying cultural juxtaposition. Furthermore, it has to be added that Polybius’ journey to Africa to meet Masinissa should not be considered a completely free intellectual endeavour, but as a mediated action through the personal ties with their Roman mutual friend Scipio Aemilianus.<sup>30</sup> The shuttling between different locales thus seems to have been framed by the Roman imperial power, as well as the privileged access to the social relationships that were necessary to collect the key testimonies, as can also be seen in the passage discussed in the following section.

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<sup>28</sup> On the ethnocentrism of cosmopolitanism: Latour 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Troiani 1979, 10-18.

<sup>30</sup> Polybius was also able to collect other kinds of geographic and ethnographic information in Africa, like that on the use of elephant tusks for construction purposes, according to Gulusa (*auctore Gulusa regulo*, Plb. 34.16.1 = Plin., *Nat.* 8.47; 5.9). Two other fragments relate this information directly to his friendship with Scipio (Plb. 34.16.2; 15.7 = Plin., *Nat.* 8.47; 5.9).

## BETWEEN POLEMIC AND LOCAL HISTORY: THE FOUNDATION OF LOCRI EPIZEPHYRII

Polybius generally was scornful of almost perennial Greek interest for foundations and mythical kinship tales, even though he recognised that these kinds of histories were regularly read by Hellenistic Greeks with enjoyment. In Book 10, the Achaean historian even laughed at those historians who had written exclusively on this limited subject even when there was nothing new to say about the topic (Plb. 10.21.2-4). But these local histories are good evidence for the wide interest in the formal presentation of past civic history during late classical and Hellenistic times. Indeed, as it was suggested by Schepens, historians like Thucydides or Polybius were not the rule but the exceptions among the practitioners of the historical genre (Schepens 2007, 49-50). However, in Plb. 12.5-16, in the context of an extensive polemic against the Sicilian historian Timaeus of Tauromenium, Polybius included a discussion about the *ktisis* ("foundation") of Locri Epizephyrii in southern Italy to defend Aristotle's earlier account on the matter, as well as the local tradition accepted in the city in the present, which had been under criticism by Timaeus in his work (Plb. 12.5.4).<sup>31</sup>

These historical accounts of Aristotle and his criticism by the Sicilian historian were only transmitted as historical fragments through Polybius' distorting lens.<sup>32</sup> So, we do not actually have their original texts, but quotations of them. The so-called 'cover-text analysis' method has shown in this sense that Polybius was a potentially highly distortive mirror of his predecessors, among them Timaeus and Aristotle; anyway, although I am aware of this danger, I am specifically interested in the attitudes, distorting or not, of Polybius himself and how they contributed to shaping his own image as a cosmopolitan historian.<sup>33</sup> So we are focusing here on Polybius' own bias.

<sup>31</sup> An inquiry belonging maybe to his *Constitutions* (Plu., *Mor.* 1093 C). The Locrian constitution: Clem. AL., *Strom.* 1.26.66. Of 158 constitutions, only the Athenian constitution and few fragments of the other 147 have survived.

<sup>32</sup> These considerations are particularly important in the case of Timaeus fragments, because of 164 fragments, 26 of them come from Book 12 of Polybius, and "nearly all that survives of Book 12... consists of Polybius' exposition of Timaeus' failings as an historian" (Baron 2013, 58).

<sup>33</sup> The term "cover-text" was introduced by Schepens (1997, 166 n. 66) to describe the texts which we draw out the fragments of lost historiography and the functions performed by the preserving author. On this distorting effect and its consequences to understand the Hellenistic historiography, see *v.g.* the collected studies by Schepens & Bollansée 2005; Vattuone 1991, 21 (a Polybian "diaframma"); and Baron 2013, 72-88.

Apparently, in the fourth century BC Aristotle had stated that Locri had been established by slaves who had come from Greek Locri after living there with free women in the absence of their own masters, who were fighting at that moment in the Messenian War.<sup>34</sup> To this statement, Timaeus opposed several arguments,<sup>35</sup> but what is interesting here is that Polybius recognised an identity between the Aristotelian and the local versions of the *ktisis* and that he understood it as a proof of veracity:

“For I know that the Locrians themselves agree (ὁμολογοῦσιν) that the tradition handed down to them by their fathers concerning the settlement is that given by Aristotle and not that of Timaeus. And of this they adduce the following proofs (Plb. 12.5.5)”.

An awareness of the Locrian perspective was claimed, particularly due to Polybius’ own personal connections. Some years before, he claims, he had obtained for Locrians a temporary exemption from military service to the Roman Republic during the Dalmatian campaigns (Plb. 12.5.1-3).<sup>36</sup> Polybius “knows” because he had seen. And the truthfulness of the Aristotelian account is directly related to a “tradition handed down by parents (ἡ φήμη παρὰ πατέρων)” to Locrians (whose direct testimony is alleged), as well as with a mention of “ancestors” customs (τὰ διὰ προγόνων), which might suggest that Polybius, in fact, would not have consulted a piece of local historiography for gathering this information. Indeed, Tober (2017, 5) has recently argued that local historians avoided indeed using terms as “ancestors” or “parents” in their writings. Anyway, we cannot rule out that Polybius may have picked up information from Aristotle’s text, which is unfortunately lost for us. A sense of continuity is anyway perceived throughout all the argumentation of the historian. Thus, he wrote that “even today (ἔτι νῦν)” the members of the so-called “One Hundred Houses” have a privileged status (Plb. 12.5.8). Similarly, markers associated with local traditions abound in the text: “this story has been transmitted (τις ἱστορία παραδέδοτο)” (Plb. 12.5.9), “about these things they said (περὶ ὧν ἔλεγον διότι)” (Plb. 12.6.2), or “thus it is told, in fact, among the Locrians (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν λέγεται παρὰ Λοκροῖς)” (Plb. 12.6.6).

As in the case with the foundations and mythical kinship tales of most Hellenistic cities, these stories pursued the objective of connecting the

<sup>34</sup> On Aristotle and the ancient history of poleis: Huxley 1973.

<sup>35</sup> Walbank 1967, 331.

<sup>36</sup> Maybe also in Hispania (154 BC): Walbank 2005, 7 n. 33.

polis and reinvigorating its importance in the wider Greek world: “Polis history is being used for diplomacy, for oiling the wheels of negotiation and friendly links, and for pushing the importance of one or other city in the wider Greek world in a new cultural diplomacy” (Thomas 2019, 70). Even though Polybius expressed a “sneering condemnation” of the willingness of travelling historians to say anything to flatter the poleis they had visited (Schepens 2006, 99), I think that there is a certain analogy between the behaviour of those travelling historians and Polybius’ own attitude towards the local traditions of the Epizephyrian Locrians. In fact, Polybius had carried out diplomatic activity in that city, perhaps during the Dalmatian War. He had often visited Locri and had served them, and consequently, the polis had bestowed different kinds of civic honours upon him (Plb. 12.5.1-3). Polybius was then a benefactor who maintained close ties of reciprocity with the polis. In this sense, the historiographical polemic arising from the divergence between the interpretations of Aristotle and Timaeus regarding the legal status of the first Locrian settlers could have concerned for any reason the Locrian elite.<sup>37</sup>

As a learned outsider, and a well-connected city benefactor, Polybius may have sought to help alleviate such concerns. We cannot know exactly why the Aristotelian version of the story was better regarded, but neither the Locrian attitude is at all a surprising one,<sup>38</sup> nor would Polybius’ attitude be astounding in this regard. He was morally committed to this community: “and in return (*i. e.* the Locrians) conferred on me all kinds of honours and favours; so that I ought rather to speak well of the Locrians than the reverse” (Plb. 12.5.3). So, the fostering of reciprocal relations between the city and the honorand, this time as a benefactor historian, may have not been over, and through this action, Polybius was acting again as a civic benefactor. After all, as Thomas has shown: “Cities were keen to honour outsiders who presented their city’s history favourably” (Thomas 2019, 63).

The above statement is purely hypothetical, though it is sound when we consider that the parallel with local tradition is the main validation of Aristotle’s earlier version (and so the “local” one too). Even so, Polybius makes use of two main historiographical procedures in his criticism of Timaeus. First, the *anakrisis* (“personal inquiry”), with ocular inspection and

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<sup>37</sup> From the end of the 6th century BC the story may have served to link with Tarentum, against the ambitions of the Achaean alliance of Sybaris, Metapontum, and Crotona. See Sourvinou-Inwood 1974.

<sup>38</sup> Both Aristotle and Callisthenes were honoured on stone by Delphi for compiling a list of Pythian victors (Thomas 2019, 58-59).



interview (Plb. 12.5.1-6.6). Second, the *eikos logos* (“likely explanation”), which supposes the choice of the most reasonable information between many options (Plb. 12.6a-11.5).<sup>39</sup> But there is a third implicit procedure: the *parathesis*, or “juxtaposition” of information from different written documents (Plb. 12.25e.1).<sup>40</sup> It was a less reliable tool in political historiography than personal experience and visiting places, but to Polybius, it is also the main device when there was a great temporal or spatial gap between the historian and the historical facts. In Book 1 Polybius affirms:

“Indeed, only by the interweaving and juxtaposition (συμπλοκῆς καὶ παραθέσεως) of the elements, through the observation of their resemblance and differences (ἔτι δ’ ὁμοιότητος καὶ διαφορᾶς), someone might derive both benefit and pleasure from history”. (Plb. 1.4.11).

Only the universal historian and his readers can get this knowledge from juxtaposition.<sup>41</sup> In 12.6b.5-10, juxtaposition with analogous facts is proposed as the “more likely (μάλιστα ... εἰκός)” explanation, when the historian introduces as a counterpoint the anomalous foundation of Taras (Taranto) after the Messenian War, which was a similar as well as a different historical experience. In any case, this juxtaposition made the Locrian foundation an unexceptional historical event: if Taras’ foundation was anomalous, the Locrian was too. It is indeed a weak argument, but consistent with the former Polybian methodological approach. When dealing with much older events, they can only be juxtaposed using information from books (maybe in this case Ephorus). Thus, thinking of an urban foundation in a translocal framework allows the historian to redefine its meaning as a historical event.<sup>42</sup> And regarding Timaeus’ assertion of having visited Greek Locri and having examined its epigraphical inscriptions and interviewed its citizens, Polybius limited himself to invalidate all Timaeus’ arguments just writing the following: “it is not clear to which Locrians of Greece Timaeus visited... in Greece, there are two Locrian lineages, which one did Timaeus visit?” (Plb. 12.10.1-3). There, even when he recognized Timaeus’ celebrity as chronographer and epigraphist (Plb. 12.10.4),<sup>43</sup> he immediately

<sup>39</sup> Walbank 1962, 6-7; 2005, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Turco 2011, 232-233.

<sup>41</sup> Sacks 1981, 113-114.

<sup>42</sup> The interest of Timaeus in parallel lists of magistrates (Plb. 12.11.1-2 = *FGrHist* 566 T 10) was aiming to a Panhellenic chronology according to Feeney (2007, 18). Cf. Baron 2013, 24-28.

<sup>43</sup> Vattuone 2005, 115; 1991, 49. Both Timaeus and Aristotle had followed this methodological principle (κατὰ τὸν εἰκότα λόγον) (Plb. 12.7.4). Cf. Plb. 12.9.2, where it is admitted that Timaeus

challenged this acknowledgment, appealing to local testimony as a guarantee: “There were no pacts with Greek Locrians and it was never said among them that they existed (οὐτ’ ἐλέγοντο παρ’ αὐτοῖς)” (Plb. 12.6.1, cf. 12.9.3). Thus, the existence of the Ozolyan and Epicnemidian Locrians, something evident for any Greek reader, acted as external evidence to invalidate everything that was alleged by Timaeus.

However, we should not forget that the polemical Book 12 was aimed to demolish a predecessor with much authority and sympathy among Roman readers.<sup>44</sup> According to the historical evidence from the fragments, Timaeus did rely on oral sources, and as Dionysius of Halicarnassus explicitly states, concerning the description and explanation of the Penates lying in the innermost sanctuary at Lavinium, “he (*i. e.* Timaeus) says he learned this from the locals (πυθέσθαι δὲ αὐτὸς ταῦτα παρὰ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων)”.<sup>45</sup> Christopher Baron (2013, 47) says: “We cannot say whether he visited central Italy or interviewed these Latin sources elsewhere”, but just as in the case of the Polybian “witnesses” of Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps, we cannot discern whether the Sicilian historian was referring there to locally written sources or to oral testimonies.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the distrust of Polybius, it still seems clear that Timaeus had stressed in his work his effort to obtain reliable information. Nevertheless, it seems particularly important that Polybius’ criticism is not oriented towards this point, but to Timaeus’ personal competence to interpret the information he obtained.

Timaeus’ interpretation of a Roman ritual, the ‘October Horse’,<sup>47</sup> was considered by Polybius as proof of the *apeiria* and *opsimathia* of that author. The latter term is meaningful (Plb. 12.4b-4c.1):

“Again, in his history of Pyrrhus, he says that the Romans still keep up the memory of the fall of Troy by shooting to death with javelins a war-horse on a certain fixed day, because the capture of Troy was accomplished by means of the ‘Wooden Horse’. This is quite childish (παιδαριωδέστατον). On this principle, all non-Hellenic nations must be put down as descendants of the Trojans; for nearly all of them, or at any rate the majority, when about to

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denied having used only a probability criterium (οὐκέτι κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν εἰκότα λόγον).

<sup>44</sup> Baron 2013, 30, 44-45, 59; Vattuone 2014, 19-27.

<sup>45</sup> D.H. 1.67.4.

<sup>46</sup> With the additional problem that the Roman written historiographical tradition dates back only to ca. 200 BC: von Ungern-Sternberg 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Festus preserves a description of the rite. There was a sacrificial slaughter of a warhorse on the Campus Martius, at that time an open area beyond the northern wall of Rome, on the Ides of October: Fest. *s.v.* *October eques*; *Panibus*; cf. Plu., *Mor.* 287A.

commence a war or a serious battle with an enemy, first kill and sacrifice a horse. In making this sort of ill-founded reasoning (τῆς ἀλογίας), Timaeus seems to me to show not only inexperience (οὐ μόνον ἀπειρίαν), but, what is worse, late-gotten learning (ἔτι δὲ μᾶλλον ὀψιμαθίαν). For, because the Romans sacrifice a horse, he immediately concludes that they do it because Troy was taken by means of a horse”.

The term *opsimathia* is particularly striking here. Modern translators do not seem to agree on the exact meaning of this almost *hapax legomenon* in ancient Greek literature. Frank Walbank translates it as “pedantic irrelevance”<sup>48</sup>; Paul Pédech and Manuel Balasch Recort rather prefer “imperinence”, meanwhile, Manuela Mari renders it as “pedantry”. However, these translations lack precision. In the *Characters* of Theophrastus (27.2), *opsimathia* means “late-gotten learning” due to a low social status. It is a specific term that refers to a limitation in education during youth. So, the *opsimathes* is someone who seeks to learn awkwardly during his maturity. Two passages in Plutarch reinforce this interpretation (Plu., *Mor.* 334C; 65B), the first of them is also a criticism of Timaeus, while the second one refers to the Macedonian king Philip II and his poor performance in playing the harp.<sup>49</sup>

Timaeus doubtless seems naïve, even childish, but Polybius criticises him mostly because of his lack of learning, which has made him unable to understand and explain properly a local ritual, even when he may have had knowledge of this practice from local people.

This criticism seems to contrast with Polybius’ low profile for bookish culture, when he disapproves of Timaeus’ reliance on books concocting local stories, rather than eyewitness testimony –his *bibliakê hexis* (“bookish habit”)–, but it is only an apparent attitude, for, as a member of the late Hellenistic civic elite, the Achaean historian of course appreciated the distinctive value that a good education had for the social distinction of every Greek aristocrat. In relation to this question, Polybius used other meaningful terms. *Laodogmatikós* (“of vulgar opinion”) appears only Book 34 (Plb. 34.5.14, 1.6, 12.2 = Str. 2.4.2; 7.5.9; 10.3.5),<sup>50</sup> and though Polybius did not use it specifically against Timaeus, it reveals anyway Polybius’ high regard for high culture, typical of the informal education of elites, along with an emphasis on personal experience as necessary preconditions to look at

<sup>48</sup> Walbank (1967, 328), alluding to Theophr., *Char.*, 27. Cf. Ath. 1.4c.

<sup>49</sup> Plutarch might have derived it from Caecilius of Calacte or Longinus: Van der Stockt 2005, 289-293.

<sup>50</sup> τὸ παρὰ τὴν κοινὴν ἔννοιαν (against the “common belief”, or “popular opinion”): Plb. 10.27.8; 15.36.4.

historical phenomena and interpret them properly. In this sense, Polybius thought Timaeus lacked philosophy – he is *aphilosophos* – and had no education – he is an *anagogos syngrapheus*: Plb. 12.25.6)–. Then, although Timaeus had boasted of his bibliographical research, which has motivated Polybius’ criticism against his bookish attitude (*bibliakê hexis*), he had not been able to juxtapose his gathered information due to a lack of culture.

And this was made worse by his *aorasia* (“incapacity to see”) (Plb. 12.25g.1-4), not due to not travelling to see the places, but because of his inability to understand what he had seen (Plb. 12.4c.3). Conversely, thanks to his diplomatic mediation between Rome and the Epizephyrian Locrians, Polybius claimed to have been able to get direct contact with Locrian local testimony and to confirm Aristotle’s version, using at the same time historical information gathered from books to juxtapose and understand better.

## CONCLUSION

Polybius praised the widening of the world resulting from Alexander and Rome’s Eastern and Western conquests, which had made it easier to achieve knowledge through travelling (Plb. 3.59.3-8; 4.40.2). Of course, it is an exaggerated statement; not every individual in the second century BC had the possibility to circulate freely as Polybius. As it has been suggested, ancient cosmopolitanism existed only within imperial structures,<sup>51</sup> and Polybius’ historiographical task, his journeys and personal inquiries throughout the Mediterranean space were closely tied to Roman imperial power, which granted him the opportunity to circulate and to meet local actors, crossing boundaries, and presenting himself as the best-equipped historian to juxtapose locally distributed information.

Even considering this fact, local knowledge remains important as Polybius himself highlighted it several times from an elitist perspective. Thus, rather than discussing Polybius’ sources, it seems more useful to try to understand who was writing and from what perspective. Polybius’ self-fashioned himself as a cosmopolitan writer able to make sense of local experiences through a translocal juxtaposition and a differentiated ability to circulate through space and meeting different local actors. Like Odysseus, he “travelled the whole earth and the sea,” as Pausanias read in Megalopolis

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<sup>51</sup> Lavan, Payne & Weisweiler 2016, 7-12. On Pytheas see Bianchetti 2005, 267-269.

three centuries later, and he “was an ally of the Romans (σύμμαχος γένοιτο Ῥωμαίων)” (Paus. 8.30.8). His soundness in placing the material within an intelligible cosmopolitan framework is undermined first because it operates on a purely Hellenocentric interpretative perspective. But in second place because knowledge and power went hand in hand in his *Histories*. A quotation from *Odyssey* 1.3 inserted at the end of Book 12 of his work, when Polybius presented himself as a model historian is central. Travel, inquiry, and knowledge, as well as experience and suffering, are central aspects of this epic,<sup>52</sup> and Polybius chose to present himself as the most competent historian to give unity and meaning to a spatially and culturally fragmented world.<sup>53</sup>

Anyway, there is a gulf between more universal views of the world and the local experience. Polybian cosmopolitan vision neither floated above boundaries nor erased them. His judgment was ethnocentric and his cosmopolitanism did only exist within the Roman imperial framework.<sup>54</sup> Although Rome exercised its dominion over a wide territory close to the usually thought as “civilized” Mediterranean world, Polybius lacked the specific conceptual baggage to grasp the new political reality, and, if he had had it, maybe it would have remained anyway unintelligible to most of his contemporary Greek readers. He thought of Rome as a polis with a territorial domain similar to that of the Hellenistic kingdoms.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, traditional local history remained important, even within a universal framework, because the *Histories* did not entail a completely post-polis reflection.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Olson 1995, 1-23.

<sup>53</sup> Introduction to *Iliad* 1.4 and 8.183, with an emphasis on Odysseus as a model of experience and suffering, related to the construction of Polybius’ *persona* as a historian: Marincola 2007, 20, 23-25.

<sup>54</sup> Universal history limited to Roman conquests: Sacks 1981, 100.

<sup>55</sup> Ando 1999, 7, 13-14; Moreno Leoni 2017, 227-248.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Inglis & Robertson 2004, 174-185, esp. 176.

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