

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: POLYBIUS AND THE PROGRESS OF ROME\*

### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Polybius' work is the frequency with which the historian pauses his historical narrative and embarks upon digressions, including entire books devoted to the topics of geography (Book 34), historiography (Book 12) and, most famously, the discussion of the Roman constitution in Book 6.<sup>1</sup> Such digressions have naturally drawn the attention of modern scholars, but in the past the tendency in Polybian scholarship had been to read such digressions in isolation, and even to deny their relevance outside of their immediate context.<sup>2</sup> While it is true that these digressions cannot be regarded as strict blue-prints upon which Polybius' historical narrative is to be precisely mapped, more recent scholarship has suggested that such passages are not as irrelevant to this narrative as they had for a long time appeared.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a parallel trend in Polybian scholarship is currently calling for a renewed focus into the composition of his historical narrative in order to apply the level of scrutiny to the text of Polybius previously reserved, for example, for his more famous predecessors, Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>4</sup> An appropriate recognition of the relationship between the more famous passages of Polybius' work found in his digressions and the broader narrative of historical events will help to alleviate this deficiency. Careful study of the text of Polybius in this manner will reveal that his historical narrative does not simply represent a bare record of historical facts but is rather composed by the historian in a way that demonstrates

\* This project originated as part of my Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Virginia. I am deeply indebted to my advisor, John Dillery, and to the readers of that dissertation, Tony Woodman, Ted Lendon and Jon Mikalson, for their advice, comments and support in that project. I am also grateful to John Dillery, Tony Woodman, Bruce Gibson and this journal's anonymous reviewer for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. I have benefitted greatly from their insights. All translations are my own.

<sup>1</sup> For Polybius' practice in utilizing such digressions, see F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley, 1972), 46–8. On the novelty of Polybius' assertive authorial voice, see J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), 10–11.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. A. Momigliano, 'Time in ancient historiography', in *Quarto Contributo alla Storia degli Studi Classici e del Mondo Antico* (Rome, 1969), 13–41, at 27 and J.M. Alonso-Núñez, 'The anacyclōsis in Polybius', *Eranos* 84 (1986), 17–22, at 17. Further bibliography in support of this view is cited by D.E. Hahm, 'Polybius' applied political theory', in A. Laks and M. Schofield (edd.), *Justice and Generosity* (Cambridge, 1995), 7–47, at 10 n. 12.

<sup>3</sup> R. Balot, 'Polybius' advice to the Imperial Republic', *Political Theory* 38 (2010), 483–509 and B.C. McGing, *Polybius' Histories* (Oxford, 2010), 169–94, for example, represent notable recent attempts to demonstrate that the patterns of the *anakyklōsis* and Book 6 are relevant elsewhere in Polybius' work.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. F.K. Maier, 'Überall mit dem Unerwarteten rechnen': *Die Kontingenz historischer Prozesse bei Polybios* (*Vestigia* 65) (Munich, 2012), 1–16; B.C. McGing, 'Youthfulness in Polybius: the case of Philip V of Macedon', in B. Gibson and T. Harrison (edd.), *Polybius and his World: Essays in Memory of F.W. Walbank* (Oxford, 2013), 181–200, at 181–2; and N. Miltisios, *The Shaping of Narrative in Polybius* (Berlin, 2013), 1–5.

and reinforces the principles presented in the more abstract digressions, which have attracted more attention.

The theme of this study, which will demonstrate the efficacy of this approach, is the ability of the Romans in the text of Polybius to learn from their experiences as a collective group. As we shall see, the ability of the Romans to learn and adapt based on their past experiences not only will play an important role in understanding Polybius' depiction of the ultimate success of Rome in the Second Punic War but also forms a significant connection with his analysis of the development of the Roman constitution presented in Book 6. As a result, the discussions of Book 6 can be read not as isolated and otherwise irrelevant abstractions but as sign-posts which enable us more properly to understand the driving principles of Polybius' historical narrative. The final sections will consider, first, the relationship between Polybius' characterization of the Romans and the similar views found among Roman authors themselves, in particular Cato the Elder. Although Polybius' views have much in common with Cato's, I argue that there is a notable distinction between the two which will help to define the important role played in the text of Polybius by the ability to learn from experience. Finally, I discuss the role of learning from experience in the broader didactic principles expressed in Polybius' work and the contrast between the Roman method of progress and the vicarious lessons offered by the study of history.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMAN CONSTITUTION

The characterization by Polybius of a particular ability by the Romans to learn from their experiences as a collective group is evident in his famous analysis of the Roman constitution in Book 6.<sup>5</sup> Polybius' admiration for the Roman constitution as it is described in Book 6 rests on its fundamental composition as a mixed constitution, a balanced combination of the otherwise unstable forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.<sup>6</sup> As Polybius acknowledges, the concept of the mixed constitution was not unknown to the Greek world, and he directly compares the

<sup>5</sup> The bibliography on Book 6 is extensive. General treatments can be found in Walbank (n. 1), 130–56; P. Pédech, *La méthode historique de Polybe* (Paris, 1964), 302–30; and McGing (n. 3), 169–202. F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (= *HCP*), 2 vols. (Oxford, 1957 [vol. 1] / 1967 [vol. 2]), 1.635–6 and 2.645, and id. (n. 1), 130 provide more specific bibliography up to 1970. Notable subsequent studies include G.J.D. Aalders, *Political Thought in Hellenistic Times* (Amsterdam, 1975), 105–12; G.W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought* (Berkeley, 1979), 4–115; Hahn (n. 2); F.W. Walbank, 'A Greek looks at Rome: Polybius VI revisited', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 17 (1998), 45–59 (reprinted in F.W. Walbank, *Polybius, Rome, and the Hellenistic World* [Cambridge, 2002], 277–92); R. Seager, 'Polybius' distortions of the Roman "constitution": a simpl(istic) explanation', in B. Gibson and T. Harrison (edd.), *Polybius and his World: Essays in Memory of F.W. Walbank* (Oxford, 2013), 247–54; and A. Erskine, 'How to rule the world: Polybius Book 6 reconsidered', in B. Gibson and T. Harrison (edd.), *Polybius and his World: Essays in Memory of F.W. Walbank* (Oxford, 2013), 231–45.

<sup>6</sup> The theory of the mixed constitution in Polybius has received much scholarly attention. The fullest treatment is that of K. von Fritz, *The Theory of the Mixed Constitution in Antiquity* (New York, 1954). For more, see Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.639–41 and 1.647–8; E. Graeber, *Die Lehre von der Mischverfassung bei Polybios* (Bonn, 1968); W. Nippel, *Mischverfassungstheorie und Verfassungsrealität in Antike und früherer Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1980); and J.M. Alonso-Núñez, 'The mixed constitution in Polybius', *Eranos* 97 (1999), 11–19. Most recently, Seager (n. 5) discussed Polybius' misrepresentation of the Roman *πολιτεία* as a mixed constitution as well as his possible motivations for doing so.

mixed constitution at Rome to the mixed constitution established by Lycurgus in Sparta (6.10). While he regards the final composition of these two examples of the mixed constitution as essentially the same, Polybius distinguishes the Roman from the Spartan constitution only in the process by which it was created (6.10–12).<sup>7</sup> The Spartan constitution, on the one hand, was created by a single lawgiver, Lycurgus, who in Polybius' view designed it through a theoretical process (λόγῳ) based on his own foresight (προϊδόμενος) and untaught by adversity (ἀβλαβῶς).<sup>8</sup> The Romans, by contrast, developed their constitution not based on an original theoretical design (οὐ μὴν διὰ λόγου) like Lycurgus but by making incremental improvements over a period of time through many struggles and experiences (διὰ δὲ πολλῶν ἀγώνων καὶ πραγμάτων).<sup>9</sup>

In this passage we can see two significant traits of the development of the Roman constitution highlighted by Polybius that will be relevant to his characterization of the Roman people more generally.<sup>10</sup> First, the formation of their mixed constitution is enabled not by an initial theoretical design but by their ability to learn over time from their experiences. Second, while Sparta is believed to have received its system of government from a single lawgiver, Polybius describes the Roman constitution as the result of a series of collective developments over time by the Romans as a whole.<sup>11</sup> The exact historical process, which Polybius envisions here, would have been explained in more detail in his now (mostly) lost *archaeologia* of early Roman history, which would originally have followed this passage.<sup>12</sup> But, as we shall see, the traits which, Polybius suggests, help to define the unique development of the mixed constitution of Rome will continue to define the behaviour—and ultimate success—of the Romans in the course of his historical narrative. It will become clear, therefore, that this passage is not simply an isolated or abstract comment by Polybius, relevant only to his analysis of the Roman constitution, nor, as Walbank suggests, is it included simply to create a transition to the *archaeologia* of ancient Rome.<sup>13</sup> Rather, it is directly relevant to, and reflective of, Polybius' characterization of the Romans in his historical narrative in a manner not previously considered by scholars of Polybius.

<sup>7</sup> See von Fritz (n. 6), 152–3; Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.662–3; Pédech (n. 5), 324–6; and K. Petzold, 'Kyklus und telos im Geschichtsdnken des Polybios', *Saeculum* 28 (1977), 253–90, at 278–9 for more on this contrast.

<sup>8</sup> ἐκεῖνος μὲν οὖν λόγῳ τινὶ προϊδόμενος πόθεν ἕκαστα καὶ πῶς πέφυκε συμβαίνειν, ἀβλαβῶς συνεστήσατο τὴν προειρημένην πολιτείαν (6.10.12). For this meaning of the word λόγος, cf. 6.3.8, where Polybius claims that the concept of the mixed constitution is evident in real life (ἔργῳ) and not just in theory (λόγῳ). On the important distinction between this definition of λόγος and Polybius' term for 'rational thought' (λογισμός), which plays an important role in his account of the cycle of constitutions (*anakyklōsis*), see D.W. Moore, 'Polybius' classroom: a historian's approach to practical education' (Diss., University of Virginia, 2013), 61–2.

<sup>9</sup> Ῥωμαῖοι ... οὐ μὴν διὰ λόγου, διὰ δὲ πολλῶν ἀγώνων καὶ πραγμάτων, ἐξ αὐτῆς ἀεὶ τῆς ἐν ταῖς περιπετείαις ἐπιγνώσεως αἰρούμενοι τὸ βέλτιον (6.10.13–14).

<sup>10</sup> For this twofold nature of the contrast drawn by Polybius between Rome and Sparta, cf. Alonso-Núñez (n. 6), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Erskine (n. 5), 240–4 discusses instances elsewhere in Book 6 where Polybius emphasizes the ways in which the Roman constitution produces collective benefits for the Romans instead of for individuals.

<sup>12</sup> Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.663–4 provides an overview of this *archaeologia*. In addition, Walbank (n. 5 [1998]), 53–5 cautions against attempts to reconstruct the lost portions of this passage based on the account preserved in Book 2 of Cicero's *De re publica*.

<sup>13</sup> Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.663.

## ROMAN PROGRESS IN POLYBIUS' HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Polybius' recognition of the Roman ability to adapt and improve in general is clear and well known. His clearest statement on the matter also occurs in Book 6, where he explicitly indicates that the Romans possessed a distinct ability to change their customs and to imitate whatever they perceive to be superior.<sup>14</sup> As scholars have previously recognized,<sup>15</sup> this ability to adapt and to imitate the success of others is applicable not just to his specific analysis of the Roman constitution in Book 6 but more broadly to events in his historical narrative, such as their initial attempts at shipbuilding during the First Punic War described in Book 1 (1.20.9-16).<sup>16</sup> The Roman ability to adapt and improve, therefore, appears to be a critical factor in Polybius' estimation of what made them so successful.

Our focus, however, which takes its cue from the passage of Book 6 discussed above, is not the innovations made by the Romans in general but their ability to learn and adapt specifically in response to their past experiences. This too is evident in Polybius' representation of Rome's progress and ultimate success during the First Punic War. At the outset of his narrative of this war, Polybius emphasizes the inexperience (*ἀπειρών ὄντων*, 1.20.10; cf. 1.20.16) of the Romans in the art of shipbuilding and naval warfare. While he has been faulted by modern historians for exaggerating the inexperience of the Romans in seafaring at this point in their history,<sup>17</sup> Polybius is emphatic about this here in order to suggest that the ultimate success of the Romans resulted from their ability to learn from their failures over the course of the war. As his narrative proceeds, Polybius describes how—despite some initial successes (at Ecnomus, for example, 1.26-8; see also 1.23 and 1.36.10-12)—the fleets which the Romans build are crippled or destroyed on multiple occasions either in combat against the more experienced Carthaginians or by devastating storms (for example, 1.21, 1.37, 1.39.1-6, 1.50-1 and 1.54). These setbacks twice cause the Romans to abandon their naval enterprises completely (1.39.7-12 and 1.55.2). With the third and final fleet, which they construct, however, the Romans are able to secure a lasting defeat of the

<sup>14</sup> ἀγαθοὶ γὰρ, εἰ καὶ τινες ἕτεροι, μεταλαβεῖν ἔθῃ καὶ ζηλώσῃα τὸ βέλτιον καὶ Ῥωμαῖοι (6.25.11). A.M. Eckstein, 'Physis and nomos: Polybius, the Romans, and Cato the Elder', in P. Cartledge, P. Garnsey and E.S. Gruen (edd.), *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography* (Berkeley, 1997), 175-98 convincingly argues that the primary difference between the Romans and other peoples, especially the Greeks, in Polybius' view rests not with their basic nature (φύσις) but with their customs (νόμοι). Significantly, as Eckstein indicates, this means that the success of the Romans could potentially be imitated by readers of Polybius' work (198).

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.75 and C. Pelling, 'The Greek historians of Rome', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Malden, MA, 2007), 1.244-58, at 255.

<sup>16</sup> See 1.20.15 and 1.59.8. Polybius' depiction of the advancements made by the Romans during this war is discussed in more detail by Moore (n. 8), 63-70. In these instances, however, Polybius' emphasis rests not primarily on the Roman ability to adapt independently based on their experience but rather on their willingness to imitate the example of others, such as the use of captured Carthaginian ships as models for their own fleet.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. J.F. Lazenby, *The First Punic War: A Military History* (London, 1996), 62-3 and, more fully, C. Steinby, *The Roman Republican Navy: From the Sixth Century to 167 B.C.* (Helsinki, 2007), 87-104. Nevertheless, the significance of this moment for the Romans in both historical and literary terms is discussed by M. Leigh, 'Early Roman epic and the maritime moment', *CPh* 105 (2010), 265-80.

Carthaginians following the decisive naval encounter at the Aegates Islands in 241 b.c. (1.60-1).<sup>18</sup>

In Polybius' assessment of the outcome of this final battle of the First Punic War, the victory of the Roman fleet resulted from adaptations made by the Romans since their earlier defeat at Drepana (1.61.2). In this instance, Polybius explains, the Romans had altered the construction of their navy; lightened the load carried by their ships into battle; and employed on the ships well-trained crews and their most unwavering soldiers from the army (1.61.3).<sup>19</sup> These improvements appear to be the result of the lessons learned by the Romans from their previous failures, as these are precisely the problems with the Roman fleet cited by Polybius as the cause of their defeat at Drepana (1.51.4-9). This progress in naval warfare attributed to the Romans stands in direct contrast to Polybius' depiction of the Carthaginians at this time, as the historian claims that—in contrast to their prior practice—their ships were now too heavily loaded and their crews were insufficiently trained (1.61.4). Whereas the Romans are represented as learning from their defeats in the course of this war, the Carthaginians appear to have forgotten what had previously made them successful.<sup>20</sup>

In his estimation, therefore, of how at this critical moment the Romans are able finally to overcome the Carthaginian naval prowess, Polybius' narrative suggests a process of learning from experience similar to the manner in which he would subsequently describe the development of the Roman constitution. The contrast with the Carthaginians in this passage, who manage to forget the very lessons that the Romans learn, suggests that Polybius sees this ability to learn from experience as particular to the Romans. The Carthaginians, on the other hand, do make an important advancement during the course of this war in their ability to meet the Romans on land when they defeat the army of M. Atilius Regulus in North Africa (1.34); they do not make these adaptations on their own—as the Romans will—but under the instructions of a foreigner, Xanthippus the Lacedaemonian (1.32-3).<sup>21</sup>

This is not to say, however, that such improvements always come easily to the Romans in Polybius' narrative or that they unflinchingly learn every lesson that they should. As noted above, the Roman efforts at sea suffer numerous setbacks in the course of Book 1 of Polybius—often with disastrous consequences—while it is only after many years of war that the Romans seem to learn anything from these failures. Following the destruction of the Roman fleet by a storm off of Camarina in 255 b.c. (1.37.1-6), Polybius remarks that even in his own day the Romans still refused to correct their mistaken insistence on sailing at whatever season they wish (1.37.10).<sup>22</sup>

Polybius acknowledges that the process at work in the progress of Rome takes time and will involve a certain amount of failure. This is evident both here and in the case of the Roman constitution, which for Polybius was perfected only through many struggles (διὰ δὲ πολλῶν ἀγώνων, 6.10.14). And in at least this one instance in Book 1, Polybius

<sup>18</sup> For evidence in support of this date, see Walbank (n. 5 [*HCP*]), 1.124–5.

<sup>19</sup> The improvements in the construction of this fleet, which Polybius describes earlier (1.59.8), were modelled on the 'ship of the Rhodian' that had made a mockery of the Roman blockade at Drepana (1.46.10-12).

<sup>20</sup> Polybius' representations of collective nationalities and the distinctions he draws between such groups in his text is discussed in detail by C.B. Champion, *Cultural Politics in Polybius's Histories* (Berkeley, 2004). For discussion of Polybius' respective representations of Roman and Carthaginian behaviour in the First Punic War, see Champion (this note), 105–11.

<sup>21</sup> This passage is discussed further below. See also Moore (n. 8), 70–3.

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to the journal's anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this passage.

even acknowledges that they have not yet learned and may not ever learn their lesson. What is important for Polybius, however, is that the Romans—in contrast to the Carthaginians—ultimately did manage to learn important lessons from their experiences in this war, and that these lessons played a significant role in their progress and ultimate success in naval warfare.

A similar contrast between the Romans and their adversaries is evident in Polybius' narrative of the wars between the Romans and the Gauls in Book 2, where Polybius makes even more explicit the adaptive abilities of the Romans as a primary factor in their success. Polybius describes how over the course of this war the Romans learned both the nature of the Gallic soldiers and the weaknesses of their weapons (2.33.1-3). Specifically, Polybius claims that the Romans gathered this information from past battles (συνεωρακότες γὰρ ἐκ τῶν προγεγονότων κινδύνων, 2.33.2), which resulted in a decisive victory. This ability of the Romans to adapt collectively based on their experiences against the Gauls was significant enough, according to Polybius, even to overcome the failures of their commander, Flaminius (2.33.7).

This ability to learn and adapt in response to past events, moreover, stands in direct contrast to Polybius' depiction of the Gauls during this period. Following his description of the Roman victory over the Gauls at Lake Vadimon, Polybius also emphasizes the benefit of the Romans' experiences in the war as preparation for their later conflict against the better trained and more experienced soldiers of Pyrrhus (2.20.8-10). But here he also notes the failure of the Gauls to preserve meaningful lessons from their experiences against the Romans. Although those Gauls who had personally witnessed the horrors of this war kept peace with Rome as long as they survived (2.21.1), the younger generation foolishly, according to Polybius, broke this peace because of their inexperience (ἄπειροι) with hardship and defeat (2.21.1).<sup>23</sup> This portrayal of the Gauls is presented in terms that closely reflect the hypothetical societies described by Polybius in the *anakyklōsis* of Book 6; they suffer instability because of their inability to heed the lessons learned by previous generations.<sup>24</sup> The contrast between the Romans and the Gauls, which Polybius seeks to emphasize here, rests on the ability of the Romans not just to learn from their experiences but to preserve those lessons and apply them later and in different circumstances, whereas the Gauls quickly forget and repeat their mistakes.<sup>25</sup>

#### LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE IN THE SECOND PUNIC WAR

In Book 3 Polybius presents his narrative of the Second Punic (or Hannibalic) War. This book describes the events of the war beginning with the ascension of Hannibal and the instigation of the conflict in Spain and culminating in Hannibal's dramatic defeat of the

<sup>23</sup> Θυμοῦ μὲν ἀλογίστου πλήρεις, ἄπειροι δὲ κἀόρατοι παντὸς κακοῦ καὶ πάσης περιστάσεως.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Polybius describes aristocracy as inevitably degenerating into oligarchy because the next generation is inexperienced with adversity as well as the political concepts of equality and freed speech (ἄπειροι μὲν ὄντες κακῶν, ἄπειροι δὲ καθόλου πολιτικῆς ἰσότητος καὶ παρρησίας, 6.8.4). On practical experience (or the lack of it) as an important catalyst in the *anakyklōsis*, see Hahn (n. 2), 23–4 and 31; and Moore (n. 8), 49–51. For more on this parallel between Polybius' depiction of the Gauls here and the hypothetical societies of the *anakyklōsis*, see Moore (n. 8), 74–5.

<sup>25</sup> For the more general contrast drawn by Polybius between the barbaric qualities of the Gauls and the rational conduct of the Romans in this war, see Champion (n. 20), 114–17.

Romans at Cannae. For Polybius, however, the primary significance of this battle rests not in the victory of Hannibal but in the resolve demonstrated by the Romans in the face of such a catastrophic defeat. To highlight the importance of this moment in his assessment of this war, Polybius again returns to this example at the end of his famous analysis of the Roman constitution in Book 6, where he describes the Roman response to Cannae as the peak of the development of the Roman constitution (6.58).<sup>26</sup>

This pivotal moment in Polybius' representation of the Roman state is not simply the culmination of a long and vague historical trend. Rather, it is the direct result of the lessons learned by the Romans in the course of his narrative in Book 3, in which the Romans overreact both to previous defeats at Trasimene (3.85.7-10 and 3.86.6) and to the brief success of M. Minucius (3.103.1).<sup>27</sup> A critical moment in Polybius' representation of this process occurs when, after the initial success which led directly to his appointment as co-dictator with Q. Fabius Maximus, Minucius falls victim to his own overconfidence and is saved only by the timely intervention of Fabius. Although the historicity of Minucius' promotion is controversial,<sup>28</sup> Polybius frames this episode not only as a lesson to be learned by his own readers but also as a lesson which the Romans themselves learned at the time. From this point on, he claims, the Romans obeyed the commands of Fabius, because they had been taught by their experiences (διδαχθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων, 3.105.10) not to be so haphazard in their choice of leaders.

This passage anticipates the similar statement that Polybius will make in Book 6 to describe the development of the Roman constitution, which was also based on the lessons learned from actual experience (διὰ δὲ πολλῶν ἀγώνων καὶ πραγμάτων) in contrast to the theoretical process (λόγῳ τινί) attributed to Lysurgus. The lesson which the Romans learn here, moreover, occurs in the build-up to the moment in history which Polybius has identified as their finest hour, when the Roman resolve in the face of disaster would enable them to persevere and eventually to overcome Hannibal and the Carthaginians. Because Minucius had gained power in Polybius' view as the direct result of inappropriate reactions by the Romans to news of successes and defeats on the battlefield, Polybius suggests in this passage that the Romans learned to respond with more resolve to such news. As a result, their response to the catastrophic report from Cannae (3.118.6-7) will stand in stark contrast to their previous behaviour and earn the praise of Polybius.

Again, we see that the ability of the Romans to learn from their experiences is not simply a concept that Polybius has applied to an abstract notion about the development of their constitution but plays a critical role in their ability to survive this critical moment in his historical narrative. Polybius' decision to frame the events of Book 3 in this way is perhaps surprising. Just as we saw in his narrative of the First Punic War in Book 1, the Romans suffer multiple defeats against Hannibal—most notably at Trebia (3.71-4) and

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Erskine (n. 5), 235, who also discusses the significance of Polybius' return to Cannae at the conclusion of Book 6 as a means to integrate this book into the historical narrative.

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller discussion of Polybius' representation of this process, see Moore (n. 8), 75–83.

<sup>28</sup> T.R.S. Broughton, *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* (New York, 1951), 1.243 accepts the version of events presented by Polybius, and this seems to be supported by an inscription referring to a dictator named Minucius (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup>.2.607). T.A. Dorey, 'The dictatorship of Minucius', *JRS* 45 (1955), 92–6, at 92, however, argues that this inscription probably referred to an earlier dictatorship and prefers the accounts of Livy and other historians contradicting Polybius' claim that Minucius had been made dictator at the same time as Fabius.

Trasimene (3.84)—in the course of the narrative leading up to their defeat at Cannae. The historian might have used this sequence of events to emphasize the *failure* of the Romans to learn from these defeats in order to avoid the devastation suffered at Cannae. But in this case it is not the ability to avoid defeat that Polybius views as most significant but the manner in which the Romans respond to it. By focussing our attention twice (3.118.6-7 and 6.58) not on the results but on the Roman response to Cannae, Polybius is able to frame even this great defeat as an example of what the Romans have learned from their experiences in Book 3. Again, the fact that this process is painful and takes time is consistent with Polybius' view of it. But, more importantly, Polybius' decision to frame the Fabius/Minucius episode as a positive learning experience for the Romans in the build-up to Cannae demonstrates his determination to portray the events of the Second Punic War not as a failure but as an example of Roman progress achieved through experience.

Polybius' repeated claims that the aftermath of Cannae represents the peak development of the Roman constitution implies that the subsequent history of Rome represented in his view a period of gradual decline. Prior to his discussion of Lycurgus' mixed constitution in Book 6, Polybius predicts explicitly (6.9.12-14; cf. 6.4.11-13) that Rome would not be exempt from the inevitable decline experienced by all states.<sup>29</sup> As we shall see, Polybius' depiction of the Romans as making positive changes based on their practical experiences will continue in his narrative of the Second Punic War after Book 6. Nevertheless, the fragmentary state of the remaining books makes it difficult to determine the extent to which Polybius' prediction of eventual Roman decline was realized in the final section of his work.<sup>30</sup> Even if Polybius did envision a subsequent halt to Roman progress, however, this does not contradict Polybius' depiction of the nature of Roman progress thus far. While Polybius acknowledges that such progress will not continue in perpetuity, his suggestion—both in Book 6 and in his depiction of Roman success thus far—is that the progress that is achieved by the Romans results from their ability to learn directly from experience and failure.

Polybius' depiction of the lessons learned by the Romans leading up to Cannae is even more striking as Polybius imagines these to be learned by the Romans as a collective whole.<sup>31</sup> While individual leaders such as Fabius clearly have an important role, Polybius here decides to focus the reader's attention on the Romans as a group. For the purposes of his own narrative, this is important because, while the Carthaginians will enjoy the stability of a single leader during this war, the Romans would have fresh commanders even by the time of Cannae. The historian is, therefore, able to create

<sup>29</sup> On this theme, see F.W. Walbank, 'The idea of decline in Polybius', in S. Koselleck and P. Widmer (edd.), *Niedergang: Studien zu einem geschichtlichen Thema* (Stuttgart, 1980), 41–58 (reprinted in F.W. Walbank, *Polybius, Rome, and the Hellenistic World* [Oxford, 2002], 193–211).

<sup>30</sup> Walbank is skeptical of any serious attempt by Polybius to pass definitive judgement on Roman rule in the later books of his history: see e.g. F.W. Walbank, 'Polybius between Greece and Rome', in *Polybe (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique 20)* (Geneva, 1974), 1–31, at 22–7 (reprinted in F.W. Walbank, *Selected Papers: Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* [Cambridge, 1985], 280–97). For evidence of degeneration in Roman morality in Polybius' later books, on the other hand, see Champion (n. 20), 144–69.

<sup>31</sup> For Polybius' more general representation of collective Roman character during the Second Punic War and the Hellenic nature of the virtues which they display after Cannae, see Champion (n. 20), 117–22.



a more consistent subject by casting the Romans as a collective unit.<sup>32</sup> While this also reflects Polybius' later description of the development of the Roman constitution where the collective efforts of the Romans are contrasted with the individual agency of Lycurgus at Sparta, we will see that Polybius will not remain so committed to the collective nature of Roman progress as the narrative proceeds.

### LEARNING THE VALUE OF AN EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUAL

By the end of Polybius' account of the Second Punic War, the Romans will determine that it is necessary for them to entrust their fortunes to a single established leader in order finally to overcome the genius of Hannibal.<sup>33</sup> They, of course, find this leader in the great Roman general Scipio Africanus. But, again, Polybius describes the method by which they come to this decision as a collective process, in which the Romans learn the value of such an individual from their own experiences. The instance in which the Romans come to this realization, however, does not occur, in Polybius' view, following the Fabius/Minucius episode previously described. Nor, surprisingly, is this change of strategy depicted as a direct response by the Romans to their long experience against Hannibal. Rather, Polybius situates the Romans' revelation about the value of an individual commander at the siege of Syracuse in 215–214 B.C., during which they encounter the genius of Archimedes (8.3-7).<sup>34</sup>

At the commencement of this siege, Polybius claims, the Romans were confident in the success of their mission because they did not account for the ability of Archimedes (8.3.3), whose machinations would repeatedly thwart their attempts to claim the city.<sup>35</sup> Polybius here adds that the Romans did not foresee (οὐδὲ προῖδόμενοι) that one intellect (μία ψυχή) is on some occasions more effective than many hands together.<sup>36</sup> Polybius' emphasis on this theme, which we will see repeated in other passages, indicates that he is eager for his reader to appreciate this lesson. What stands out about this particular passage is that now, according to Polybius, the Romans learned this lesson too. For at that time, he concludes, the Romans learned the truth of this saying from the events themselves (τότε δι' αὐτῶν ἔγνωσαν τῶν ἔργων τὸ λεγόμενον, 8.3.3). Again, we can see here the repetition of the theme presented earlier both in the historical narrative of Book 3 and in the abstract discussion of the Roman constitution in Book 6, namely that the Romans in Polybius' text possess a particular ability to learn and adapt based on their own experiences. The inability of the Romans to foresee (οὐδὲ προῖδόμενοι, 8.3.3) this outcome at Syracuse further supports

<sup>32</sup> For a significant parallel to this depiction of changes and innovations made by a collective group, compare the speech of the Corinthians describing the Athenians in Thucydides (1.70). Thucydides, however, does not emphasize there the ability of the Athenians to learn from their own experiences.

<sup>33</sup> Polybius' admiration for individual leaders who display courage and even self-sacrifice in the pursuit of honour and glory is demonstrated by A.E. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley, 1995), 28–55.

<sup>34</sup> For more extensive treatment of this episode and the connections with these other points in Polybius' narrative, see Moore (n. 8), 83–9.

<sup>35</sup> Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 2.74-7 discusses the defenses invented by Archimedes to combat the Roman siege engines (8.5-6). The rumour (not mentioned by Polybius) that Archimedes used a combination of mirrors to burn Roman ships from the walls of Syracuse is dismissed by T.W. Africa, 'Archimedes through the looking-glass', *CW* 68 (1975), 305–8.

<sup>36</sup> οὐδὲ προῖδόμενοι διότι μία ψυχή τῆς ἀπάσης ἐστὶ πολυχειρίας ἐν ἐνίοις καιροῖς ἀνυστικωτέρα (8.3.3). Cf. 8.7.7 discussed below.

the contrast with the creation of the Spartan constitution based on the foresight of Lycurgus (προϊδόμενος, 6.10.12).

While Polybius here again depicts this as a collective process, however, the specific lesson learned here by the Romans is that their collective efforts can be thwarted by the work of an exceptional individual. As Walbank notes on this passage, the theme of a talented individual able to overcome a multitude is common both in Polybius and in other ancient authors.<sup>37</sup> Previously, for example, Polybius has made similar statements about the Spartan Xanthippus, whose training of the Carthaginian infantry during the First Punic War was noted above. Following his description of the subsequent Carthaginian victory over the Romans, Polybius reflects on the circumstances of the battle with a quotation from Euripides that ‘one wise plan conquers many hands’.<sup>38</sup> Again, Polybius is contrasting the collective approaches of the Romans with the talented individual commanders that they face.<sup>39</sup> In each of these examples, Polybius makes the (apparently proverbial) statement that the talents of such individuals are often more effective than collectivity. This has implications, which I will discuss below, for the historian’s depiction of the Romans up to this point as learning and adapting as a group. For now I focus on the consequences in Polybius’ narrative of his claim that this is a lesson, which the Romans learn at this moment from their experiences against Archimedes.

Lurking in the background of this emphasis by Polybius on the formidable influence of talented individuals is, of course, Hannibal. As I have discussed, although Polybius does represent the Romans as learning from their experiences against Hannibal, he does not indicate that they learned this particular lesson—the value of one talented and stable commander—from Hannibal himself. The connection between their experiences with Archimedes and their failures against Hannibal, however, is implied by Polybius in the following book. There, Polybius claims, ‘of what befell and happened to both Romans and Carthaginians the cause was one man and one intellect (εἷς ἦν ἀνὴρ ... καὶ μία ψυχὴ), that of Hannibal ... Such a great and wondrous thing (μέγα τι ... χρῆμα καὶ θαυμάσιον) is a man and intellect by nature perfectly suited (δεόντως ἄρμοσθεῖσα) in his original construction for whatever of human affairs he attempts’ (9.22.1-6).<sup>40</sup> In addition to echoing the sentiments of the passages discussed above, this description of Hannibal very closely resembles the language used of Archimedes following the fall of Syracuse, when Polybius states that ‘such a great and wondrous thing (μέγα τι χρῆμα ... καὶ θαυμάσιον) does one man and one intellect (εἷς ἀνὴρ καὶ μία ψυχὴ) perfectly suited (δεόντως ἠρμοσμένη) to certain affairs appear to be’ (8.7.7).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 2.71. For more general examples and analysis of the important role of exceptional individuals as agents of causation in Polybius’ narrative, see Pédech (n. 5), 208–9.

<sup>38</sup> Ἐν σοφὸν βούλευμα τὰς πολλὰς χεῖρας νικᾷ (1.35.4). This line from Euripides’ lost *Antiope* (*TrGF* 220) is frequently quoted by ancient authors and may have been found by Polybius among a collection of quotations according to Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.94.

<sup>39</sup> For the common opposition in Polybius between ‘the one’ and ‘the many’, see F.W. Walbank, ‘Polybius’ perception of the one and the many’, in I. Malkin and Z.W. Rubinsohn (edd.), *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World* (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1995), 201–22, especially 205–7 (reprinted in F.W. Walbank, *Polybius, Rome, and the Hellenistic World* [Cambridge, 2002], 212–30).

<sup>40</sup> τῶν ἑκατέρους, Ῥωμαίοις φημι καὶ Καρχηδονίοις, προσπιπτόντων καὶ συμβαινόντων εἷς ἦν ἀνὴρ αἴτιος καὶ μία ψυχὴ, λέγω δὲ τὴν Ἀννίβου ... οὕτως μέγα τι φύεται χρῆμα καὶ θαυμάσιον ἀνὴρ καὶ ψυχὴ δεόντως ἄρμοσθεῖσα κατὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς σύστασιν πρὸς ὃ τὴν ὀρμήσῃ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἔργων.

<sup>41</sup> οὕτως εἷς ἀνὴρ καὶ μία ψυχὴ δεόντως ἠρμοσμένη πρὸς ἕνια τῶν πραγμάτων μέγα τι χρῆμα φαίνεται γίνεσθαι καὶ θαυμάσιον.

The verbal and thematic similarities between these passages have been noted previously;<sup>42</sup> but Polybius' suggestion that the Romans learned this lesson from their encounter with Archimedes suggests an important narrative connection between these passages as well: because the Romans now recognize the value of exceptional individuals such as Hannibal, they will themselves turn to a leader qualified to match him, which they will soon find when Scipio Africanus is formally introduced into Polybius' narrative at the beginning of Book 10 (10.2-5). Following Africanus' eventual victory over Hannibal at Zama, Polybius explains the results of the battle by quoting another proverb that (in reference to Hannibal) 'though good, he met another, better' (15.16.6).<sup>43</sup> Polybius later makes this suggestion even more explicit when he states: 'for when there was a general in command of the Romans having ability equal to that of Hannibal, victory soon followed' (18.28.6-8).<sup>44</sup> It is clear that, in Polybius' view, the talents and leadership of Africanus were critical to the success of the Romans against Hannibal. But Polybius' narrative in the books leading up to the introduction of Africanus has suggested that his leadership did not come about by chance. Rather, Polybius has indicated that, by the end of the war, the importance of having a talented and consistent leader was something that the Romans themselves had come to realize, as they had learned it from their own experiences.

But even in this shift to focus on an individual leader, Polybius again depicts this development as a collective process in which the Romans as a whole are able to learn and improve. While he might have focussed on the lessons learned, for example, by the specific Roman commander at Syracuse, Marcellus, or even by the particular group of Romans in his army, Polybius instead suggests that all Romans learned this lesson as a result of the events at Syracuse. His decision to frame his narrative in this way is even more striking in this instance as a result of the logical stretch which it requires. Polybius makes no attempt, at least in the surviving text, to convince us that those who witnessed the impact of Archimedes at Syracuse went on either to support the ascent of Africanus themselves or to relate their newfound wisdom to their fellow Romans. Rather, he appears to take it for granted that the Romans operate as a single body, and that a lesson learned by some Romans is learned by all Romans.

Polybius' focus on the collective nature of this process runs counter to the general trend in Greek historiography of increasing emphasis on the historical agency of individuals.<sup>45</sup> It also stands in opposition to Polybius' own repeated claims discussed above that talented individuals are often more effective than the collectivity exhibited by the Romans. Why, then, does he choose to depict the Romans in this way? From a practical point of view, it may simply be more convenient to suggest that a lesson learned by some Romans was learned by all Romans in order to avoid identifying a precise chain of knowledge, especially since Roman military commanders were replaced with much more frequency than, for example, their Carthaginian counterparts. But, as we have seen, this characterization of the Romans is also evident in his representation of the collective development of the Roman constitution, where such practical concerns

<sup>42</sup> See Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 2.150; and Maier (n. 4), 54–5, who discusses these and similar passages as evidence of the important role played by such exceptional individuals in Polybius' work.

<sup>43</sup> ἔσθλός ἐὼν ἄλλου κρείττονος ἀντέτυχεν. This is yet another proverb but of uncertain origin. For possibilities, see Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 2.464–5.

<sup>44</sup> παραπλησίαν δύναμιν ἔχοντος Ἀννίβα, ταχέως καὶ τὸ νικᾶν συνεξηκολούθησε.

<sup>45</sup> This has been demonstrated recently by S.B. Ferrario, *Historical Agency and the 'Great Man' in Classical Greece* (Cambridge, 2014).

are less relevant. This suggests that the ability to learn collectively over time from experience is an important component of Polybius' understanding of Roman development and success.

Such a claim conflicts with the conclusions reached by scholars in the past that the political discussions presented by Polybius in Book 6 represent a mere digression and bear little relation to the remainder of his work. But we can see here that Polybius' understanding of the development of the Roman constitution—and presumably his now-lost account of that development in his *archaeologia*—corresponds closely to his portrayal of these developments made by the Romans in the course of his narrative. This passage in Book 6 serves both to reinforce depictions of the Romans encountered by the reader in previous and subsequent passages and to provide an outline of the important themes in the remainder of his work. Both in the more general passage on the development of the Roman constitution and in specific instances in the course of his historical narrative, two features distinguish Roman progress in Polybius' work. They learn from their experiences, and they do so not individually but as a group.

#### EXPERIENCE, COLLECTIVITY AND CATO THE ELDER

The ability which Polybius assigns to the Roman people to learn and adapt as a group extending all the way back to the origins of their constitution contrasts with the preference among Greek authors for attributing the creation of the constitutions of their various city-states to individual lawgivers. Just as Lycurgus is credited with the creation of the Spartan constitution, other lawgivers, such as Solon at Athens or Minos at Crete, are common figures in Greek conceptions about the origins of their respective states.<sup>46</sup> So too for Rome it might be perfectly plausible to name an original lawgiver; and, in fact, this is precisely the approach taken later by Dionysius of Halicarnassus when he depicts Romulus as the founder of the Roman constitution as part of his attempt to depict Rome in the mould of a Greek city-state (2.7-29).<sup>47</sup> But instead of taking a similar approach, Polybius eschews any notion of an individual lawgiver in the case of Rome and instead describes a collective process so crucial to his understanding of Roman progress that it has influenced not just the more abstract discussions of Book 6 but also his depiction of the Romans in the course of his historical narrative.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> For a general treatment of these and other Greek lawgivers, see J.D. Lewis, *Early Greek Lawgivers* (Bristol, 2007). A. Szegegy-Maszak, 'Legends of the Greek lawgivers', *GRBS* 19 (1978), 199–209 traces the common narrative elements evident in the legendary treatments of these lawgivers. On the theme of the lawgiver in Plato and Aristotle, see K.-J. Hölkamp, *Schiedsrichter, Gesetzgeber und Gestzgebung im archaischen Griechenland* (Stuttgart, 1999), 28–59. V. Farenga, *Citizen and Self in Ancient Greece: Individuals Performing Justice and the Law* (Cambridge, 2006), 262–345 discusses the performative role of the lawgiver as well as the reception and relevance of the lawgiver by later politicians, especially in Athens. For references to the most common lawgivers in ancient literature and further bibliography on the subject, see A.J. Woodman and R.H. Martin (edd.), *The Annals of Tacitus: Book Three* (Cambridge, 1996), on 3.26.2.

<sup>47</sup> See T.J. Cornell, 'The foundation of Rome in the ancient literary tradition', in H. Mck. Blake, T.W. Porter and D.B. Whitehouse (edd.), *Papers in Italian Archaeology I: The Lancaster Seminar* (Oxford, 1978), 131–9, at 136. Cornell also notes (138 n. 14) that Polybius himself recognizes foundation accounts (κρίσεις) as one of the primary genres of historiography (see 9.1, 12.26d.4 and 34.1).

<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Champion (n. 20), 67–99 has demonstrated how Polybius' depictions of the causality of collective cultural characteristics presented in Book 6 inform our understanding of national (and especially Roman) identity throughout his work.

This portrait of a collective and progressive development of the Roman constitution, as it is described by Polybius, is characteristic of later accounts of the origins of Rome with the exception of the account of Dionysius mentioned above.<sup>49</sup> The closest evidence of such a depiction contemporary to Polybius is to be found in a passage from Cicero's *De re publica* (2.2), in which similar views about the development of the Roman constitution are attributed to Cato the Elder.<sup>50</sup> Cato is quoted here by Cicero as claiming that the superiority of the Roman constitution compared to other states was the result of the fact that it was not the product of the genius of any particular individual but of many (*non unius esset ingenio, sed multorum*), and not in the lifetime of one man but over the space of many generations.<sup>51</sup> The distinction from the more common designation of individual lawgivers in Greek states is then made explicit as the Roman process is contrasted with that of Sparta, Crete and Athens. The passage concludes with the suggestion that the process at Rome was preferable because no one has the foresight (*providere*) at one time to understand all things without experience of affairs (*sine rerum usu*) over a long period of time.<sup>52</sup> Here again we find that the development of the Roman constitution has two important characteristics: that it was a collective process and that it resulted from improvements made over a period of time based on practical experience.

As scholars have long recognized, this passage shows a striking similarity to Polybius' claims about the Roman constitution in Book 6 and, as I have argued, to Polybius' more general depiction of the Romans in his historical narrative.<sup>53</sup> But with whom did this idea originate? Cornell (n. 47) suggests that the theory of a gradual and collective evolution of the Roman constitution probably originated with Cato and would have been outlined in his *Origines* (135-6).<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, since the

<sup>49</sup> See Cornell (n. 47).

<sup>50</sup> The similarity between these two passages is well-established: see Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.662–3 for discussion with prior bibliography. The authenticity of this quotation as genuinely Catonian and not an invention of Cicero is generally accepted. T.J. Cornell et al. (ed.), *The Fragments of the Roman Historians* (= FRH) (Oxford, 2013), 2.230–1 includes this passage as F131 under 'Possible Fragments'. Although Cornell expresses doubt in the commentary on this fragment about whether this passage came from Cato's *Origines* (or some other work) or from a published collection of his *dicta*, he concludes that, despite some possible elaboration by Cicero, it is 'undoubtedly Catonian' (3.151). Cf. Cornell (n. 47), 135, who notes that Cicero too makes a reference to Cato's *Origines* at the start of this book. The sentiment found here, moreover, is consistent with views expressed elsewhere by Cato: see Cornell et al. (this note [FRH]), 3.151; cf. n. 58, below. The potential relationship between Polybius and Cato, however, is controversial. Polybius himself indicates that they at least knew of one another (35.6). A.E. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford, 1978), 226 doubts that either had any noteworthy influence on the other. But Eckstein (n. 14), 192–8 has shown that there is strong evidence in support of a significant connection, both intellectual and personal, between Polybius and Cato. See also D. Musti, 'Polybio e la storiografia romana antica', in E. Gabba (ed.), *Polybe (Entretiens sur L'Antiquité Classique 20)* (Geneva, 1974), 105–39, at 125–35.

<sup>51</sup> *nostra autem res publica non unius esset ingenio, sed multorum, nec una hominis uita, sed aliquot constituta saeculis et aetatibus.*

<sup>52</sup> *neque cuncta ingenia conlata in unum tantum posse uno tempore providere, ut omnia complecterentur sine rerum usu ac uetustate.*

<sup>53</sup> One significant difference between the passage in Cicero and Polybius is that in the former the Roman method is explicitly said to be superior to the method of the Greeks. Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.662 correctly notes that Polybius does not make any such claim of superiority (cf. C. Nicolet, 'Polybe et les institutions romaines', in E. Gabba [ed.], *Polybe [Entretiens sur L'Antiquité Classique 20]* [Geneva, 1974], 209–58, at 249).

<sup>54</sup> See also Nicolet (n. 53), 245–50. In his commentary on F148 of Cato, which also expresses ideas similar to those found in Polybius, Cornell (n. 50 [FRH]), 3.157–8 imagines a more complex exchange of ideas in which both men were influential on one another.

relevant portions of Polybius' work were probably composed and available to be read before Cato's death in 149 B.C.,<sup>55</sup> it is also possible either that Polybius was Cato's source of this depiction of the Romans or that Polybius developed his analysis independent of Roman influence. But given his own background and demonstrated familiarity with Greek literature and historiographical traditions,<sup>56</sup> Polybius might easily have identified an individual original lawgiver for Rome in accordance with standard Greek practice. But he did not. It appears likely, therefore, that Polybius' depiction of the Romans, which has impacted not just on his analysis of the Roman constitution but also on the composition of his historical narrative, was influenced in this respect by the Romans themselves, either Cato or some common source.<sup>57</sup>

While the origins of these ideas must remain speculative, comparison with the statements attributed to Cato by Cicero can at least help us to understand more clearly the choices made by Polybius in these passages. While both aspects of Roman development—learning from experience and collectivity—are suggested in Cicero's passage, the emphasis there rests more on the contrast between the individual lawgivers of Greek states and the collective process at Rome. The emphasis in this passage on the collective development of the Roman constitution is especially evident from the contrast drawn with the Athenian constitution, which—similar to that of Rome—is described as an extended process of refinement over time. But, significantly, in the case of Athens each improvement was made by an individual, such as Solon or Cleisthenes.<sup>58</sup> So the idea attributed originally to Cato in this passage emphasizes not just that the Roman constitution was developed over a period of many generations—a trait which it shares with the Athenian constitution—but most importantly that at all stages of improvement it resulted uniquely from a collective effort by the Romans as a group and not from any individual.

This emphasis on Roman collectivity as opposed to individual prestige is consistent with views attributed elsewhere to Cato, who famously is said to have suppressed the names of individual commanders in his *Origines*.<sup>59</sup> As we have seen, Polybius also presents this view of Roman collectivity but only up to a point. On multiple occasions, Polybius has suggested that the group-efforts of the Romans were outmatched by talented individuals. While the proverbial nature of Polybius' comments on this theme demonstrates that such a concept was common in Greek thought, this recognition of individual achievement stands in contrast to the views of Cato. In order to explain the

<sup>55</sup> See Walbank (n. 1), 18–19 and Eckstein (n. 14), 197 n. 71.

<sup>56</sup> For an overview of Polybius' familiarity and engagement with Greek literature, especially historiography, see e.g. Walbank (n. 1), 32–65 and McGing (n. 3), 52–66.

<sup>57</sup> Champion (n. 20), 174–85 argues that Polybius has similarly been influenced by Roman aristocratic views (including those of Cato) on the virtues of their ancient past.

<sup>58</sup> *Atheniensium, quae persaepe commutata esset, tum Theseus, tum Draco, tum Solo, tum Cleisthenes, tum multi alii* (2.2). J.E.G. Zetzel, *Cicero De re publica* (Cambridge, 1995), 158 concludes that the list of lawgivers here was added by Cicero (cf. Cornell [n. 50 (*FRH*)], 3.151). Even if this is the case, the fact that Athenian history records a series of *individual* lawgivers would have been well known to Cato and remains significant to the arguments attributed to him in the rest of this passage.

<sup>59</sup> Although the precise nature of this practice and his motivation for it are obscure, it is mentioned both by Cornelius Nepos (*atque horum bellorum duces non nominavit, sed sine nominibus res notavit, Cato* 3.4) and by the Elder Pliny (*cum imperatorum nomina annalibus detraxerit, HN* 8.11). Cornell (n. 50 (*FRH*)), 1.213–16 discusses the possible implications of these statements and suggests that Cato's purpose was to give greater credit to the Roman army as a whole than to individuals (cf. F114). Cornell also relates this to F1, which appears to define the subject of the *Origines* as the 'deeds of the Roman people' (*populi Romani gesta*).

eventual Roman success over the individual genius of Hannibal, moreover, Polybius indicates that the Romans changed their approach in order to allow for the ascension of Scipio Africanus. Polybius' obvious high regard for Africanus and the focus which the historian places on this general's role in defeating Hannibal suggests that he viewed this shift away from collectivity as a positive step for the Romans.

This may help us to explain why—unlike Cato—Polybius does not explicitly state in his parallel passage from Book 6 that the Roman method of constitutional development was superior to that of Sparta and Lycurgus. At least for one of the two significant aspects of this development—collectivity—he did not necessarily believe that it was. While this was what seemed to Cato to be the primary explanation for Roman superiority, however, Polybius' interests rest more with the second aspect: learning from experience. It is this method of Roman improvement that remains consistent for the Romans; even when they learn the value of individual leaders, they do so from their experiences against Archimedes. It is the ability of the Romans to learn from these experiences that for Polybius represents a primary factor in their ultimate success.

#### PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AND THE PURPOSE OF HISTORY

It may appear counterintuitive for an historian—and especially for one as committed to the didactic value of history as Polybius—to describe Roman progress as the result of a long process of learning from experience.<sup>60</sup> But throughout his work Polybius emphasizes the value of practical experience both for future statesmen and for writers of history. A proper historian, Polybius claims, must have adequate experience in practical affairs in order to understand and record events in a manner that will produce an accurate historical account.<sup>61</sup> When discussing the qualifications for a successful general (9.14.1-2), moreover, Polybius indicates that he believes experience (τριβή) to be the best (κόλλιστον) method of acquiring the knowledge necessary for success in the field. While Polybius' emphasis on the importance of practical experience appears to represent an innovation in Greek historiography,<sup>62</sup> it also potentially stands in conflict with his own insistence on the importance of history in providing the lessons necessary for public life.<sup>63</sup>

Following his narrative of the defeat of Regulus in Africa during the First Punic War, Polybius directly contrasts the study of history with learning from practical experience

<sup>60</sup> For Polybius' view of history as an educational tool, see e.g. 1.1.1-2 and 9.2.5. For discussion of this topic, see K. Ziegler, 'Polybios (1)', *RE* 21.2 (1952), 1440–578, at 1501–3; M. Gelzer, 'Die pragmatische Geschichtsschreibung des Polybios', in G. Bruns (ed.), *Festschrift für Carl Weickert* (Berlin, 1955), 88; Walbank (n. 5 [HCP]), 1.7–8; Pédech (n. 5), 30–1; K. Petzold, *Studien zur Methode des Polybios und zu ihrer historischen Auswertung* (Munich, 1969), 7–8; Walbank (n. 1), 56 n. 148; S. Mohm, *Untersuchungen zu den historiographischen Anschauungen des Polybios* (Diss., Saarbrücken, 1977), 161–2; K. Sacks, *Polybius on the Writing of History* (Berkeley, 1981), 182–3; T.J. Luce, *The Greek Historians* (London, 1997), 127–9; and Moore (n. 8), 8–11.

<sup>61</sup> See especially 12.28.2-5. For Polybius' emphasis on the value of experience for historians, see Marincola (n. 1), 71–5. The implications of this passage for understanding the overlap between the practices of historians and the historical agents depicted in Polybius' work are discussed by F.K. Maier, 'Der Feldherr als Geschichtsschreiber: Polybios' Forderung nach Interdisziplinarität', *RFIC* 140 (2012), 295–330.

<sup>62</sup> For the novelty among historians of Polybius' emphasis on experience and the possible influence of medical and philosophical thought on his views, see Marincola (n. 1), 73–4.

<sup>63</sup> The tension between these two methods of learning in Polybius is the subject of Moore (n. 8).

(1.35). Here Polybius explains the purpose of his account by noting the potential it offers his reader to learn vicariously the fickle nature of Fortune from the experience of Regulus. But in contrast to what he claims in the preface to Book 1, where he states that history is the most vivid (*ἐναργεστάτην*) and in fact only teacher for learning to bear the vicissitudes of fortune,<sup>64</sup> Polybius now acknowledges that there are in fact two ways to gain such instruction: either by learning from one's own misfortunes or by learning from those of others.<sup>65</sup> While his primary objective in this passage is still to promote the study of history (i.e. learning from the misfortunes of others) for its didactic potential, Polybius in fact claims here that this method of instruction is to be preferred only because it is free from personal suffering (*ἀβλαβέστερον*). While Polybius states that personal experience, on the other hand, is less desirable than the study of history because of the direct exposure to misfortune involved, he nevertheless confesses (in contrast to 1.1.2) that it is in fact more effective to learn through personal experience because the lessons produced in this manner are more vivid (*ἐναργέστερον*).

This recognition of both the didactic value of personal experience and the potential suffering involved is consistent with Polybius' depiction of Roman progress in the passages discussed above. The role of personal suffering in progressive improvement is reflected, for example, in Polybius' contrast between the Spartan and the Roman constitutions in Book 6. Just like readers of history, Lycurgus is described as achieving his purpose without suffering personal harm (*ἀβλαβῶς*, 6.10.12). The foresight (*προϊδόμενος*, 6.10.12) employed by Lycurgus is similarly reminiscent of the foresight that Polybius elsewhere claims will result from the study of properly written history.<sup>66</sup> The Roman constitution, on the other hand, required much adversity (*διὰ δὲ πολλῶν ἀγώνων*, 6.10.14) and progressed as a direct result of the knowledge gained in reversals of fortune (*ἐν ταῖς περιπετείαις*). As we have seen, this experience of misfortune continues to be characteristic of the progress attributed to the Romans in Polybius' historical narrative, while the lack of foresight (for example, 8.3.3) prevents them from avoiding these misfortunes outright. The sharp contrast with the method of Lycurgus serves to frame the lessons learned by the Romans as the result not of the vicarious lessons of history but rather of the more painful, but ultimately more vivid, lessons of personal experience.

This central component of Polybius' explanation of the unprecedented extent of Roman success during this period—a matter essential to the overall purpose of this work (1.1.5)—represents, therefore, a synthesis of three seemingly disparate aspects of his project: his historical narrative, the political theory of Book 6 and his fundamental didactic principles. Through this holistic approach to the text of Polybius, we can see that the method attributed to Roman progress is not the only way, in Polybius' view, to achieve success. Nor, in fact, does he necessarily recommend it given the remarkable

<sup>64</sup> *ἐναργεστάτην δὲ καὶ μόνην διδάσκαλον τοῦ δύνασθαι τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς γενναίως ὑποφέρειν*, 1.1.2.

<sup>65</sup> *τοῦ τε διὰ τῶν ἰδίων συμπτωμάτων καὶ τοῦ διὰ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων*, 1.35.7.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. 12.25b, where Polybius states that the understanding of causes provided by proper history enables the reader not only to apply past events to the present but also to foresee the future (*τὸ προϊδέσθαι τὸ μέλλον*, 12.25b.3). Maier (n. 4), 47–9 also recognizes this parallel between Lycurgus and a reader of history.



amount of suffering involved. But while he may hope that his history will offer to his readers a less painful path to success, he cannot deny the significance of personal experience in producing lessons not only memorable but also powerful enough to shape the course of history.

*University of Virginia*

DANIEL WALKER MOORE  
[dwm7a@virginia.edu](mailto:dwm7a@virginia.edu)