

The Pedagogical Practices of Polyaeus

Polyaeus' *Strategemata* has in recent decades enjoyed an upswing in scholarly attention: the collection of essays edited by Brodersen (2010), a translation by Krentz and Wheeler (1994), and monographs by Schettino (1998) and Martín García (1980) have all contributed greatly to the modern understanding of the text. However, due to a long history of neglect, brought on at least in part by the supposed impracticality of the work as a military manual, there are still many unexplored avenues of research into Polyaeus' collection of stratagems.

One such area that scholars have only just begun to delve into is locating Polyaeus in his social and political context. Scholars have only recently begun to look at Polyaeus as a part of the Second Sophistic movement instead of a mere "armchair quarterback" attempting to give military advice pulled exclusively from books. In particular, Pretzler (in Brodersen ed., 85-107) convincingly shows how Polyaeus has edited his material for literary and cultural effect, and Morton (in Brodersen ed., 108-132) discusses Polyaeus in terms of the construction of Greek identity under Roman rule. When compared to the practical organization of Frontinus's *Strategemata* by situation, Polyaeus' ethnographic and prosopographic arrangement of exempla is not conducive to a battlefield setting. However, Polyaeus' *Strategemata* is far from useless as a teaching tool.

In this paper, I argue that Polyaeus' organization, content, and style, while admittedly unusual for a military manual, place him neatly within the educational framework of the period. His choice of material, ranging in time from the mythological to the end of the Roman Republic, is common in the Second Sophistic, and as a book of topics would have been well suited to a school of rhetoric. In addition, Polyaeus' definition of stratagem is much broader than one would expect from a military manual, encompassing military, political, and even legal tricks

executed by Greeks, Romans, barbarians, and even collections of women. The arrangement of the exempla, first by ethnicity and then by strategist, makes looking up specific stratagems difficult, but finding unusual themes and sayings easy. Finally, Polyaeus' concise, yet highly informative writing style is similar to several of the progymnasmata, which were widely used as teaching tools in rhetoric schools.

All of this points to a text deeply immersed in the pedagogical culture of the period. While the *Strategemata* would not have been especially useful as a reference guide on the battlefield, I suggest that Polyaeus instead wrote it to be entertaining, informative, memorable, and useful in many contexts. For, in addition to containing a collection of topics for rhetorical exercises, it has a much broader scope than other military manuals. While many of the exempla could not possibly have been applied to the Parthian war for which Polyaeus ostensibly composed his work, it would have been easy for the intellectual to pick up the *Strategemata* and use it as a guidebook to creative problem solving rather than as a list of strategies to copy.

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