

Polybius' Emotional Persuasion

In his *Histories* on Rome's rise to power in the Mediterranean, Polybius represents characters who observe events and express a wide range of emotions, including indignation (δυσἀρέστησις), anger (ὀργή), and pity (ἔλεος), in response to events. I show how the emotional responses of these internal observers also work to condition the responses of external readers and ultimately affect the impression those readers take away about the meaning of the events Polybius describes. Some of these internal observers are present at the scene of historical action, but many internal observers, though mentioned in the text, are not present at the actual events. For Polybius, these observers represent public opinion as they view and judge the historical action. I suggest that these observers, separate from the historical action, also include Polybius' external audience, his readers. Polybius' readers also observe the historical events from a distance and can react and make judgments about the historical characters and action. I argue that Polybius assimilates his observers with his readers in order to condition his readers to respond with the correct emotions. That is, Polybius describes the responses of observers in the text to the actions in the historical narrative to teach his readers which emotions are appropriate to feel in certain situations. In this way, Polybius uses the observers within the text to guide his readers' own reactions.

This presentation falls within current trends in Polybian studies of emphasizing his moral focus (Eckstein-1995), using a narratological lens (Miltsios-2014), and analyzing Polybius' complex stance towards and portrayal of the Romans after the Achaean War of 146 BC (Champion-2004). In particular, James Davidson carefully brings out the layers of viewers in and of the events of the *Histories*, specifically in the context of war (Davidson-1991). He draws attention to the differing perspectives between the generals, their troops, other third parties such

as a king from an uninvolved country, and the audience. I extend Davidson's emphasis on perspectives to examine how Polybius treats the emotions of observers and applies such emotion to his own readership.

Polybius coopts his readership through several narrative techniques, of which I shall highlight three. First, bystanders within the narrative observe and grow indignant at the maltreatment of others, such as in Polybius' theory of how human community develops (Polybius 6.5.10-6.6.12). The bystanders' observation stimulates positive change and exemplifies what Polybius describes as the formation of morality (τὸ καλὸν καὶ δίκαιον) in humans. The bystanders' moral emotions thus should be emulated. Second, unidentified observers "outside of" the historical scene (οἱ ἔκτός) react with emotion to the situation, such as at the capture and decapitation of Achaeus, a rival for the Seleucid throne (Polybius 8.36). Polybius remarks that those outside reacted with hatred against the perpetrators of the deed and with pity for the victim Achaeus. Through their emotions these unidentified observers present moral objections to the historical action, which Polybius hints to the audience as correct emotional responses for similar events in the future. Third, Polybius generalizes who feels emotional and moral responses with the use of "τις". "Someone would rightly grow indignant at" (εἰκότως ἂν δόξειε δυσαρρεστεῖν) the Romans for crossing to Sicily to help the Mamertines before the First Punic War (Polybius 3.26.6). This "τις" represents what any "normal" person would rightly feel, including Polybius' readers. Using these (and more) narrative techniques, Polybius exemplifies the correct emotional response to situations and guides his readers to developing this sense of correct emotion.

Such framing of emotional reactions has significant repercussions for Polybius' discussion of the Greeks' defeat in the Achaean War against the Romans at the end of the extant

Histories (38.1-4, 9-18). In this moment, Polybius must navigate the cultural politics of deference to Rome while not betraying his own patriotism to Achaea and the Greeks, as Champion has persuasively shown (Champion-2004). Polybius treads a careful line, arguing that the Greeks deserved their fate, but that they deserve pity also for their genuine suffering, a pity from external observers (παρὰ τῶν ἐκτός) which can help them recover and “help change the conquerors’ minds” (τοὺς κρατοῦντας αὐτοὺς μεταμελομένους) (Polybius 38.3.2). Applied to the Greeks after the Achaean War, Polybius wanted “those outside” to pity the Greeks in their disaster, thus mitigating the Greeks’ suffering and any further punishment from the Romans. Observers, i.e., his readers, should pity the Greeks: they deserved more pity both because their past actions were shameful and their suffering genuine, and they needed that pity for their future as well.

Bibliography

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