

Weather and *τύχη* in Polybius' *Histories*

The word *τύχη* plays a significant role in Polybius' *Histories*, and he uses the word frequently. Although, as Hau points out, *τύχη* has a varied meaning throughout the *Histories*, she suggests that the force of *τύχη* provides “certain human beings with intelligence and rational thought, talents which it is then up to them to put to good use” (2011: 190). Hau expands on this idea when she says “it is likely that some instances... show double determination – *tychê* working through or in conjunction with human agents” (2011: 199; Lloyd 1979: 31-32, 51).

This paper argues that one way in which *τύχη* appears in the *Histories* is through weather phenomena, which end up playing a part in the outcomes of battles and the actions of those fighting, since, as Curchin asserts, “unexpected precipitation, fog, wind or extremes of temperature could seriously upset a commander’s plans... on other occasions, a fortuitous change of weather facilitated operations” (2014-2015: 21). In 1.48, a storm arises and *ἐν ᾧ καιρῷ συννοήσαντές τινες τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μισθοφόρων τὴν ἐπιτηδειότητα τῆς περιστάσεως πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἔργων διαφθορὰν.*” In this opportunity some of the Greek mercenaries were considering the suitability of the circumstance for destroying the works” (1.48.3). Although *τύχη* is not specifically mentioned, the weather here acts as a force of nature outside human control, which is one of the definitions that Hau suggests that Polybius uses for *τύχη* (196). This passage also plays into Hau’s suggestion that *τύχη* works together with human agents. Here, the weather provides an occasion upon which the Greek mercenaries act against the Romans during their siege on Lilybaeum, which occurred during the First Punic War.

While Hau seems to suggest that *τύχη* provides some humans with the cognitive abilities needed for strategic warfare, this paper argues that in this specific passage (1.48), *τύχη* also provides outside circumstances which human agents make use of for their benefit. We see human cognition at work here with *συννοήσαντες* in conjunction with the *καιρός* provided by the weather. The word *καιρός* used here is also significant, and while it may suggest that a time appropriate for this action befell the Greek mercenaries by chance, it was their own action and cognition that seized this opportunity for their benefit. Furthermore, in his study of the semantics of *καιρός* in Greek drama, Race suggests that “*καιρός* can also be closely associated with *τύχη* (designating the circumstances within which it is possible or expedient to do something)” (1981: 212). In this section, the weather, as a component of *τύχη*, provides an opportunity for humans to take action that will be of benefit to them. Later in this section, we see *συνεργούσης τοῖς βάλλουσι τῆς τοῦ πνεύματος βίας*, “the force of the wind cooperating with those who are throwing” (1.48.8). Here, we really see the combination of the weather and human action acting towards a common goal. Ultimately, this paper establishes that weather acts as a component of *τύχη* in Polybius’ *Histories* which sways the outcomes of events, and may even provide opportunities for action and influence the decisions of human participants in the historical events.

Bibliography

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