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Rumor, Rage, and Reversal: Tragic Patterns in Polybius' Account of Agathocles at Alexandria[1]

Paul Johstono

Polybius repeatedly, in his statements on his approach to historiography, insisted that good history (and by implication, his history) should hold didactic value for future leaders, and polemicized the work of tragic historians as bad history.[2] Tragic history led the reader to "experience incidents rather than understand them."[3] It incorporated fiction alongside fact, and packaged the embellished whole in an imagery-heavy, twisting narrative calculated to excite and enthrall the audience.[4] Nevertheless, in his fairly lengthy coverage of affairs in Alexandria from the death of Ptolemy IV Philopator to the death of regent-turned-usurper Agathocles (15.24-36), Polybius first employed techniques of tragic historiography in his narrative, then stridently disavowed both tragic history and the didactic value of the Agathocles narrative. So why accord considerable space to an empty story, and tell it in such a manner? Polybius even remarked on his treatment of the narrative, saying that, in the case of a reprobate like Agathocles, it would be "hardly appropriate" οὐδαμῶς ἁρμόζει (15.35.7) to use the narrative for entertaining or educating his readers or otherwise "embellishing the account" τὸν μετ' αὐξήσεως λόγον (15.36.1), and thus appropriate only to stay within the bounds of the bare narrative, τὰ πράγματα καὶ κυρίου (15.34.1).[5] Could Polybius have been unaware that he had embellished his own account with tragic elements?

I suggest that Polybius objected to other historians' coverage of the career and overthrow of Agathocles, but not because he actually found it insignificant. The earlier historians styled their accounts as popular entertainment or attempted to derive conventional Hellenistic applications from the story, presumably as meditations on Tychē or leadership studies of

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[1] I presented an early version of this paper at the Association of Ancient Historians annual meeting held at McGill University in 2014, and received several helpful comments that I attempted to incorporate into this version. I am thankful for the comments of the anonymous reviewers. Remaining faults are my own.

[2] Polybius *Histories* 1.1, 2.56-63, 3.47.6-48.12, 15.34-6. For Polybian historiography and its relation to tragic history, on which a great deal his been written, see in particular Walbank 1955 and 1960=1985:224-241 and *HCP* I.259-63, Meister 1975: 109-26, Strasburger 1977, Sacks 1981: 144-70, Fornara 1983: 122-34, Schepens 1990, Marincola 1997: 229-33, Van der Stockt 2005, Schepens 2005, McGing 2010: 71-5, Chaniotis 2013, Dreyer 2013a, Eckstein 2013, and Marincola 2013.

[3] Walbank 1955: 4.

[4] Marincola (2013: 74) asserts that Plb. 2.56-63 demonstrates that falsehood is more important to tragic history than particular historiographic techniques, but tragic history must have done both.

[5] In the passage he condemned as well a superfluous narrative, τὸν ἐπιμετροῦντα λόγον (15.34.1, 35.1), the instructive account, τὸν ἐπεκδιδάσκοντα λόγον (15.35.7), or enthralling his readers, εἰς ἐπίστασιν ἄγειν (15.35.7). On the legitimate uses of history, in Polybius' view, see Walbank 1990 and Eckstein 2013: 335-36. On embellished and sensational narrative in Hellenistic historiography, see in particular Walbank 1972: 39-40, Fornara 1983: 122-26. Polybius' cognitive dissonance between his narration and his editorial comments has received comparatively little attention; see recently Baron 2012: 68.

Agathocles.[6] The length, intensity, and irregularity of his own treatment affirm he did find the events significant, only not in a conventional way. What struck Polybius was the tale's illustrative value. What he saw as the main faults in Alexandria—luxury, the urban *plēthos*, and autocratic court politics—could ruin even the most prosperous states, and perhaps especially the Roman Republic.[7] Thus Polybius employed historiographic techniques he otherwise—and even in the same passage—condemned in order to convey with impressionistic, emotional force the dangers that lurked in apparent success. A close reading of the passage reveals how rumor and suspense, rage and emotion, reversals and violence highlight the perils endured when courtiers, sycophants, and the riotous *plēthos* hold sway over a state.

The Revolt of 203 B.C. and Polybius' Polemic against Tragic History

The basic story is as follows: Ptolemy IV Philopator met his end in the year 205/4 B.C., expiring of a surfeit of, if we follow Polybius, dissipation and bad counsel, leaving behind his kingdom, his wife Arsinoë, and their infant son, the future Ptolemy V.[8] His partners in revelry and the dispensers of his bad counsel, Sosibius and Agathocles, kept the king's death secret and conspired in assassinating the queen (15.25.1-7). With the young successor tragically orphaned, the two counselors sought to suppress any rumor of foul play and position themselves as his regents. Rumors of her murder nevertheless abounded. Agathocles soon removed Sosibius from the picture as well. He manipulated his way into sole power, and dispatched many of the top figures at court on missions abroad or in the countryside (15.25.20). He replaced them at Alexandria with favorites of his ilk, like Satyrus, the priest of Alexander in 203/2 B.C., a famous musician.[9]

In time Agathocles' insolence and incompetence aroused broad resentment and resistance toward his rule. Groups of citizens met together to rail against Agathocles (15.25.23-5). Soldiers sailed down to the city and encamped among the garrison, squatting outside the palace (15.26.1).[10] Further away, one of the most powerful men in Egypt, Tlepolemus, began putting

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[6] These fit both with Polybius' particular criticisms in the passage (15.34.2) and what is known of conventional Hellenistic historiography, e.g. the evaluative summary invented by Ephorus; Fornara 1983: 108-09, Marincola 2001: 105-12.

[7] In this regard see especially Champion 2004, with Derow 1979, Eckstein 2005: 129-40, 232-34, Walbank 2002: 193-211 and McGing 2010: 147-201. His scorn for the Hellenistic monarchies is well known, see e.g., Dreyer 2013b.

[8] On the transition in power and the career of Agathocles, see Walbank 1936=1985: 38-56, Bolansée 2005: 250-253, Miltsios 2009: 495-97. On the date, see Walbank 1936=1985: 47-52 and Samuel 1962: 108-14. Philopator died as early as the end of 205 or as late as about midsummer 204, "four or five days" before Agathocles and Sosibius went public (Plb. 15.25.23, cf. Just. 30.2.6).

[9] For Satyrus son of Eumenes the flute player (*FD* III 3.128, possibly *IG* XI.4 1078 and *IG* XII.6 1.176), for Satyrus son of Eumenes as priest of Alexander see *BGU* VI 1266, and Clarysse 1998: 8.

[10] Walbank *Historical Commentaries on Polybius*, II 489 argued that the encampment was part of the city garrison. There surely were troops garrisoned in the city and their barracks were near the palace grounds (15.29.2), but the best textual evidence (Agathocles on the Guard units at Plb. 15.25.3, 17-18, Cleomenes on the

together an organized campaign to overthrow Agathocles. Tensions rose in Alexandria as the military camp grew, and more so after Tlepolemus occupied locations near Memphis, blocking the flow of supplies to the city (15.26.9-10). Polybius describes a reactionary movement breaking out when the soldiers in the camp received credible intelligence that Agathocles was planning to kill the young king (15.29.1-14). He was overthrown in a burst of popular and military violence at the end of 203 B.C.[11] Most of his family and supporters were arrested, taken to the city stadium, and brutally slain along with him (15.33). The revolution was not against but for Ptolemaic rule, and in that sense was a reactionary or restorationist movement intent on securing young Ptolemy's throne against a perceived usurper.[12] Polybius obscured some of the motives, agency, and mechanisms of the movement through his emphasis on the senseless violence of the mob.[13]

Polybius concluded his detailed narrative of the career and death of Agathocles with an editorial on writing good history and a polemic against tragic history. The whole excursus expounds the historian's responsibility to discern what does or does not merit mention.[14] In the case of Agathocles, his fall resulted from his "singular cowardice and lethargy," τὴν ἰδίαν ἀνανδρίαν καὶ ῥαθυμίαν (Plb. 15.34.6), and called neither for reflection on the whims of fickle Tychē nor for thorough investigation of causality. Polybius thus critiques, without offering names, the accounts that had preceded his own.[15] After all, what policy recommendation could Polybius have made to some other leader who, like Agathocles, made himself the object of universal hatred by his unchecked, consuming wretchedness?[16] Polybius insists that only the essential narrative was fitting in such a case, but condemns others who, in writing about such a despicable man and his fall, had indulged "excessive description of shocking misfortunes," πλεονασμὸς ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐκπληκτικῶν συμπτωμάτων (15.36.3). Backtracking a bit, he concedes only that the telling is worthwhile once and at first, if only to prove that things thought unnatural or impossible could indeed transpire in human affairs.[17] To Polybius, an account

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garrison at Plb. 5.36.4) indicates that by far the greatest part were mercenaries and troops of the Palace Guard, not Macedonian infantry.

[11] On the violent movement of Alexandrians and soldiers against Agathocles, see Fraser 1972: 80-82, 130-31, 313-16, Barry 1993: 415-31, Mittag 2003: 161-72. On the date see 15.29.8 and Abel 1983: 283-286.

[12] The complexity involved in categorizing the movement has been discussed thoroughly in Barry 1993: 422-28.

[13] Polybius' bias against the Alexandrian crowd is consistent with his attitudes toward both Alexandria and urban mobs, but his perspective may also relate to the perspective of his possible sources. Walbank (*HCP* II 493) suggested Ptolemy of Megalopolis (dispatched as ambassador under Agathocles at 15.25.14) as a possible source; Pédech (1964: 354) suggested Agatharcides of Cnidus as an alternative, given Polybius' harsh criticism of Ptolemy (18.55.8-9), but he may be too late; for the range of possible sources, including Heracleides Lembus, Eratosthenes, Callixenus, and others, see Zecchini 1990.

[14] See Walbank *HCP* II 493-96 for analysis and sharp criticism of the logic of the passage.

[15] On the interaction of Greek historians with their predecessors as both critics and continuators, see Canfora 2011. On the usual roles of Tychē in Polybian and Hellenistic material, see Walbank 2007, Brouwer 2011, Chaniotis 2013: 56-61, and Deininger 2013.

[16] See further Eckstein (1995: 37) on Polybius' portrait of Agathocles.

[17] 15.36.2: πάσας τὰς ἐκπληκτικὰς περιπετείας μίαν ἔχειν φαντασίαν τὴν πρώτην ἀξίαν ἐπιστάσεως, "all astounding reversals are worthy of consideration once, when first presented" and 15.36.5: ἀλλ᾿ εἰσάπαξ μὲν καὶ

fixated on calamity, ὁ τῆς συμφορᾶς πλεονασμός, is "more suited to tragedy than to history," οἰκειότερόν ἐστι τραγῳδίας ἤπερ ἱστορίας (15.36.7). In particular, he identifies two key elements to a tragic account. It would be embellished with "tall-tales and window dressings," τερατείας καὶ διασκευάς (15.34.1), and marked by "astounding [and] unexpected reversals," ἐκπληκτικὰς... παραλόγους περιπετείας (15.36.2-3). The embellishments he elsewhere calls ψεῦδος, invention (2.56.12). Polybius identifies two types of invention: the implausible invention, τερατεία, born of exaggeration; and the plausible, πιθανός, which arises from imagination or conjecture rather than evidence. The combination of invention, vivid (and sordid) detail, and twists and turns engaged and enthralled the hearer, but neither educated nor entertained.

His sharp rejection of tragic history, falling immediately after his vivid narration of Agathocles' fall, has the ring of him who protests too much. While Polybius' narrative may have eschewed lengthy descriptions of the horrific sufferings of Agathocles' faction at the end of things, the narrative as a whole is hardly constrained by the bare facts. It is in fact one of the few passages in the surviving portions of his history marked by sensational imagery, vivid detail, and embellishment, all hallmarks of tragic history.[18] Criticize its legitimacy and utility as he did, Polybius nevertheless wrote a tragic history of the rise and fall of Agathocles. Four elements to Polybius' narrative highlight his incorporation of the same tragic elements he condemned: (1) a dramatic scheme setting rumor against fact and building tension and suspense, (2) driven by reversals and plot twists, (3) enhanced with salacious descriptions, many of them devoted specifically to the plight of women, (4) ultimately obscuring or confusing, rather than strictly following, the elements of the bare narrative.

Dramatic Scheme

Polybius' treatment of the episode employs perception, rumor, and emotion to drive developments in a tale characterized by corruption, conspiracy, and violence. The narrative moves, not on understanding, decision, or command, but competing antagonisms, manipulation, and emotional outburst. Polybius artfully uses these elements to build a high-stakes, suspenseful narrative.[19] Miltsios emphasized that Polybius' words were "carefully chosen" to "encapsulate the perils of expectation."[20] Because Sosibius and Agathocles hid the death of Ptolemy and covered up the murder of Arsinoe, rumor alone carries the truth abroad in 15.25.8. The people question (ἐπεζητεῖτο) the official story, but are stirred up as the rumor

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πρῶτον σπουδάζομεν ἃ μὲν ἰδεῖν, ἃ δ' ἀκοῦσαι, χάριν τοῦ γνῶναι τὸ μὴ δοκοῦν δυνατὸν εἶναι διότι δυνατόν ἐστιν: "but once and for the first time we are eager to see, to hear, that what was supposed impossible is now possible."

[18] One might compare it with the burning of the camps near Utica (Plb. 14.5.10-14) or the sack of Abydos (Plb. 16.32.4-6, 34.9-12). Polybius was willing to contemplate the role of Tychē in the sack of Abydos (16.32.5), for which see Chaniotis 2013: 60-61.

[19] On the significance of suspense and emotion in dramatic scheme, see Ferrari 1999, Chaniotis 2013.

[20] Miltsios 2009: 496.

(προφάσεως), which had leaked out before, now came to appear "truthy" (ἀληθινῆς).[21] The public does not learn the truth. Rather, it is impressed upon them (ἐπεσφραγίσθη) as the outrageous rumor begins to appear more plausible. Polybius mentions disruption (σύγχυσιν), distraction (παράστασιν), affliction (δυσθυμίαν), mourning (οἰμωγῆς), and hostility (μίσους) among the public reactions (15.25.9-10).

In a departure from the tenor of the narrative, Agathocles and Sosibius then acted decisively to quiet the Alexandrians and ensure the loyalty of the army. The rapid and effective actions of 15.25.11-18 have the appearance of competent (if autocratic) leadership, helped extend Agathocles' time in power by a year or more, and make the depraved antagonist more formidable.[22] His last rational act, in Polybius' narrative, was to replace the veterans of the Alexandrian garrison and palace guard units with new mercenaries loyal to him (25.18). The garrison and guard units were just a fraction of the Ptolemaic army, most of which the Ptolemies had settled throughout Egypt as cleruchs.[23] He sent Scopas, a prominent, infamous Aetolian to levy mercenaries, and he returned with 6,500 men, most of them Aetolians.[24] A uniform force of foreign mercenaries "whose only hope of safety and profit lay with" Agathocles, who were his "confederates and colleagues," raises the stakes and suspense going forward.[25] Agathocles then returned to his debauched ways, ignorant or dismissive of the latent anger and suspicion among the populace. Polybius describes the public reaction as an intense and widespread distress and an impassioned hatred, a violent popular revolution held in check only for lack of a figurehead.[26] More importantly, it raises a counter to the careless ruler and his loyal mercenary backers, for the people await a leader, not to remove Agathocles, but "through whom they might unleash their wreath against Agathocles and Agathoclea" δι' οὗ τὴν ὀργὴν εἰς τὸν Ἀγαθοκλέα καὶ τὴν Ἀγαθόκλειαν ἀπερείσονται (25.25).

Having raised the stakes and suspense on both sides, Polybius immediately introduced the champion for a revolution: Tlepolemus, the *strategos* at Pelusium. The narrative builds the conflict between Tlepolemus and Agathocles chiefly through rumors, secrets, and manipulation, since the antagonists were based on opposite sides of the Delta. In Alexandria, rumors began to spread that Tlepolemus would put himself forward as champion of the

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[21] For the crowd's reaction, see 15.25.8: μεγάλην γενέσθαι τὴν σύγχυσιν τῶν ὄχλων, "the immense bewilderment of the mob."

[22] The death of Philopator belongs to August 204 at the latest, but Agathocles' death may have occurred as late as early summer 202. Somewhere between the two dates Sosibius also passed.

[23] At 5.36.4, Polybius has Cleomenes of Sparta reckon that the most significant part of the Alexandrian garrison were Peloponnesian and Cretan mercenaries, who numbered 4,000. The palace guard goes unmentioned, but Cleomenes references other soldiers from Syria (probably Judeans especially) and Caria. The Alexandrian garrison may have been 10-12,000 strong. By comparison Polybius numbered the Ptolemaic field army at Raphia as 75,000 (5.79.2).

[24] 15.25.16. Scopas' hiring of mercenaries is related in Livy 31.14.4-7, alongside stories of the military campaigns in summer 199, but Livy must have used *deinde* to add Scopas' recruitment to Philip's victory over the Aetolians at Phaeca as things that dramatically reduced Aetolian fighting ability.

[25] Plb. 15.25.18: ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ τὰς ἐλπίδας ἔχοντας καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ τῆς ἐπανορθώσεως, ἑτοίμους ἕξειν συναγωνιστὰς καὶ συνεργοὺς πρὸς τὸ παραγγελλόμενον.

[26] 15.25.23: πολλῆς καὶ παντοδαπῆς γινομένης δυσαρεστήσεως, 25.24: ἀνεθυμιᾶτο … τὸ … μῖσος.

people. Hope and anticipation bloomed, according to Polybius (25.25, 25.29). In Pelusium, Tlepolemus heard (πυνθανόμενος, 25.29) rumors of popular support in Alexandria, and began preparing his own movement. He used drinking bouts to gauge men's loyalty to him while they were in their cups, testing their willingness to permit rowdy slurs (πικροτάτην λοιδορίαν) against the regent and his family, at first enigmatically (αἰνιγματώδεις), eventually outspoken (ἐκφανεῖς, 25.31). While Tlepolemus was still planning, Polybius says Agathocles heard rumors of the opposition movement. He raised public charges against Tlepolemus, filling them with half-truths and invention, performing his own tragic history to manipulate the people against his opponent.[27] Polybius used διασκευάζω not only for Agathocles' inventions (25.35) but also for how tragic historians structured their tragic accounts (15.34.1). His own treatment employs dramatic irony, for Agathocles' intentions are repeatedly confounded or reversed.[28] Agathocles' charges against Tlepolemus appear twice, in performances that could be considered dramatic in their embellishments of the truth and their use of emotional appeal.

In the first public charge, Agathocles suggested Tlepolemus planned to betray Pelusium to king Antiochus III and have himself crowned king (25.34-5). According to Polybius, the public charges failed to convince, and the people were delighted to see the antagonism between the two leaders enflamed (ἐκκαιομένην, 25.36). Some intervening period then followed, during which time some affair involving Nicon, who was over naval affairs, set off a "popular movement" (κίνημα, 25.37). When the narrative resumes, at 15.26.1, Polybius has the viewer witness Agathocles' exaggerated pleas before a gathering of hostile Macedonian soldiers, whose presence and mood offer some indication of the temper of the popular movement. In the second public charge, Polybius' dramatic staging hosts Agathocles' own drama. He began by feigning (ὑπεκρίνετο) he could not speak through a flood of tears, διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐπιφερομένων δακρύων, and made a grand show of subduing his emotion, wiping his eyes repeatedly with his cloak to compose himself (26.2), an act Chaniotis recognized as possessing "an intrinsic connection with acting and theatrical behaviour."[29] Polybius' account of the spectacle depicts Agathocles' quoted speech and his use of his cloak, the child king, and Agathoclea as props in his bid for sympathy and support. But his efforts only ever exacerbated the animus directed toward his power, to the point Polybius imagines that Agathocles "could not conceive how he was delivered from the assembly," μηδ' αὐτὸν εἰδέναι πῶς τὸ παράπαν ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀπελύθη (26.8).

Agathocles and his company are at the center of two more performances, which function to highlight their calculations as dramatists and the oppositional tensions of the crisis. In the first, he had the aged mother-in-law of Tlepolemus taken forcefully from her refuge in the temple of Demeter, dragged across the city, and thrown into prison (27.2). Polybius describes

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[27] 15.25.35: πολλὰς … πιθανότητας, τὰς μὲν ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων … διαστρέφων, τὰς δ' ἐκ καταβολῆς πλάττων καὶ διασκευάζων. "Many…most plausible charges, some through manipulating the record, others from fabricating and working up from his imagination."

[28] On dramatic irony, esp. in Polybius, see Miltsios 2009: 487-93, D'Agostini 2014: 40-41. See 15.25.36: ταῦτα δ' ἐποίει βουλόμενος τὰ πλήθη παροξύνειν κατὰ τοῦ Τληπολέμου: συνέβαινε δὲ τοὐναντίον, "he presented the charges intending to turn the populace against Tlepolemus; the result was the opposite."

[29] Chaniotis 2013: 67.

the act as a public performance of his antagonism to Tlepolemus.[30] His actions "exasperated" (27.1) and "irritated" (27.3) the people, and their secret resentment became increasingly public.[31] The tide had turned against Agathocles, and he was overthrown before Tlepolemus could reach the city. Polybius depictes Agathocles drinking and carousing all afternoon and all night in his "usual manner" (εἰθισμένην ἀγωγὴν) while a popular uprising consumed the city (29.7). The next morning, Agathocles, understandably hungover, took refuge with the boy king, Agathoclea, and some other relatives and two or three of the bodyguards in a gallery leading to the theater in the palace complex. Polybius takes care to emphasize that the gallery contained three gates, and that the gates were latticework, and could be seen through, δικτυωτὰς διαφανεῖς (30.8). This detail sets the stage for a suspenseful scene: the party of Agathocles and the loyalist revolutionaries, led by Macedonian soldiers, could see one another, but only closed incrementally, as the Macedonians removed the first gate, then the second. This permitted Agathocles to make a plea for mercy, which Polybius provides as indirect speech (31.4-5) through the mediation of the bodyguard Aristomenes, who was nearly stabbed when he came to treat with the Macedonians (31.10-11). After the Macedonians broke down the second gate, Agathocles and Agathoclea used the third gate as a prop, offering hands and breasts, respectively, through the lattice gate, trying every approach, leaving no word unspoken, πᾶσαν προϊέμενοι φωνὴν, begging for their lives (31.13).

Anticipation and Reversals

The qualities Agathocles exhibited contrast with qualities Polybius valued—rational thinking, shrewd perceptiveness, virtuous character, respect for the laws—all of which served to buttress a career or a state against the vicissitudes of Fortune.[32] Dramatic reversals, or περιπετεία, figure prominently in the *Histories*, and in Walbank's analysis of Polybius were "objectively in the fabric of events."[33] Polybius emphasized in his concluding editorial that the reverses that afflicted Agathocles were not worthy of elaboration because he brought them upon himself and, but for the deplorable corruption of his environment, would never have attained so high a position or held it so long. Reversals of expectation nonetheless repeatedly and prominently play a pivotal role in driving the action forward and contribute to the dramatization of the narrative.[34] For example, in the aforementioned assembly with the

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[30] 15.27.2: φανερὰν ποιεῖν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Τληπόλεμον διαφοράν, "to manifest his hostility to Tlepolemus."

[31] 15.27.3: ἐφ' οἷς τὸ πλῆθος ἀγανακτοῦν οὐκέτι κατ' ἰδίαν οὐδὲ δι' ἀπορρήτων ἐποιεῖτο τοὺς λόγους, ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν τὰς νύκτας εἰς πάντα τόπον ἐπέγραφον, οἱ δὲ τὰς ἡμέρας συστρεφόμενοι κατὰ μέρη φανερῶς ἐξέφερον ἤδη τὸ μῖσος εἰς τοὺς προεστῶτας. "In their anger they no longer confined themselves to secret murmurs: but some of them in the night covered the walls in every part of the city with pasquinades; while others in the day time collected in groups and openly expressed their loathing for the government."

[32] 1.1.2, 1.35.1-5, 2.35.8, 31.25.2-8, 38.21.2.

[33] Walbank 1945: 8. Reversals and the unexpected inspired the *Histories* and characterized the First Punic War (1.13.3), but should appropriately serve to introduce consideration of cause, and should not be embellished; see Walbank 1945: 8-11, Sacks 1981: 132-44, Marincola 2001: 69-73, Beck 2013: 135-37, Chaniotis 2013: 60-63.

[34] Miltsios 2009: 496-97.

Macedonians, Agathocles had hoped to goad, παροξύνειν, the soldiers against Tlepolemus, but the result was just the opposite (25.36).

In the twilight of Agathocles' career, he, concerned at Tlepolemus' mobilization to Memphis, arrested a member of the royal guard, Moiragenes, suspected of spying for Tlepolemus (15.27.6-28.8). The arrest of Moiragenes ended up instigating the popular uprising when Moiragenes escaped. Polybius describes the sudden and easy escape as παράλογον (28.1) and a περιπετεία (28.7), historiographical traits he condemned in the subsequent remonstrance against tragic history (36.3). Polybius builds an intense scene with interrogation and impending torture, but at the last moment, the lead interrogator receives a message and stalks out of the room in silence, slapping his thigh in consternation (λέγων μὲν οὐδέν, τύπτων δὲ συνεχῶς τὸν μηρόν, 15.27.11). His subordinates, dumbfounded (ἀχανεῖς), eventually all wander away (15.28.3-4). Moiragenes finds himself completely alone, and although stark naked, manages to sneak out of the palace complex unobserved—the whole palace had become a ghost town—and reach the tents of the Macedonians. The men in the first tent were sitting down for breakfast when the hysterical, naked Moiragenes rushed inside, pleading for help. Within four hours, by about noon, the loyalist revolution was on.

The encamped soldiers, so crucial to the preceding story, figure as a kind of reversal themselves. Agathocles had dispatched many men in the garrison of Alexandria to forts and military settlements in the countryside (15.25.16-18). Polybius cast this decision as the most reasoned element of Agathocles' bid for power, in which he replaced most of the soldiers in Alexandria with new mercenaries loyal to him. Thousands of soldiers were dispatched upstream, then, as the crisis began, literally reversed course. Agathocles' display before the assembly of Macedonian soldiers took place within the context of a spontaneous and great influx, πολὺς, of soldiers from the country, on which Polybius elaborates at 15.26.10. They came, in particular, from the army camps up-country, ἐκ τῶν ἄνω στρατοπέδων, and their friends and relatives recruited them into the revolution. Agathocles' intent, to empty the city of the veteran soldiers, was completely reversed, and they wound up, with numerous companions, on the very threshold of the palace.

In a final example, Agathocles had inflamed the populace by arresting the mother-in-law of Tlepolemus, even though she had taken refuge in the temple of Demeter (15.27.1-2). Later, when the revolution began, his own mother Oenoanthe, who had lorded it over so many aristocratic women, took refuge in the Thesmophoreion of Demeter. Some of the suppliants there cursed her, but the wives and daughters of several aristocrats attempted to comfort her. Instead, she cursed them, swearing she would "make them eat their own children," γεύσειν ὑμᾶς τῶν ἰδίων τέκνων (15.29.12). Polybius closes the incident with the noblewomen returning her curses as Oenanthe's guards drove them from the temple, "clasping their hands to the gods and calling down curses that she might be made to suffer the very miseries she had threatened to exact on her neighbors."[35] Hours later she was seized from the sacred precinct, dragged across the city, taken to the stadium, and suffered a terrible death, where, amid an orgy of

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[35] 15.29.14: τοῖς θεοῖς ἀνίσχουσαι τὰς χεῖρας καὶ καταρώμεναι λαβεῖν αὐτὴν ἐκείνην πεῖραν τούτων, ἃ κατὰ τῶν πέλας ἐπανετείνετο πράξειν.

violence, Polybius left the reader to ponder whether the curses she proclaimed against others were indeed visited upon her.

Setting the Horrors before their Eyes

The third way the narrative exhibits qualities of tragic history is the presence of sordid, sensational, and specific imagery, rare in Polybian narratives.[36] Polybius elsewhere condemned sensational imagery, lambasting Phylarchus for πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν τιθέναι τὰ δεινά, "setting the horrors" of narrative "before the eyes" of his readers through vivid description of emotional scenes (2.56.11-12).[37] One of the faults of writing in that way, Polybius recognized, was that it encouraged or even required ψεῦδος, invention, because it aimed to entertain rather than educate. Polybius engaged in both plausible and marvelous inventions in the narrative, presenting in vivid, lurid detail the affairs of Agathocles and the popular movement against his rule.

The clearest example of this is the attention he gives to women, their roles in the mob, and to violence against their bodies. Agathocles raised the ire of the Alexandrians by involving married women, maidens, and brides in his drunken debaucheries.[38] When he ordered Danaë, Tlepolemus' mother-in-law, seized from her temple refuge, she was dragged across town without her veil.[39] In each Polybius presents Agathocles as a violator of the conventions of Hellenistic culture, impious toward the gods and disrespectful of the sanctity and privacy of women's bodies, subjecting them to public humiliation.[40] But women play a far larger role than to highlight Agathocles' abuses. Women participated in the popular uprising alongside the men, and perhaps "the anger of the women" (τῆς ἐκ τῶν γυναικῶν ὀργῆς, 15.29.1) is a reference to Agathocles' offenses. When the revolution began, Agathocles and company took refuge with the king in a vaulted passage between the palace and the theater, separated from the Macedonians by three lattice gates, two of which the Macedonians removed. While Agathocles showed his hands and pleaded to be granted safe passage into a poor, anonymous exile, Polybius portrays his sister Agathoclea pleading directly with the soldiers, exposing her breasts, with which she claimed to have nursed the infant king, and pressing them through the

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[36] In the surviving works of Polybius one can make comparisons to the lengthy treatment of the Mercenary War (1.65-88, esp. 1.70.5-6), Scipio's attack on the camps near Utica (14.4-5), and Philip V's attack on Abydus (16.30-34). They all relate general conditions but lack the detailed fates of numerous specified individuals.

[37] On emotion in Hellenistic historiography and its relation to dramatic structures and detailed scenes, or *enargeia*, see Zangara 2007: 55-89, Marincola 2003, and Chaniotis 2013.

[38] 15.25.22: οὔτ' ἀκμαζούσης γυναικὸς οὔτε νύμφης οὔτε παρθένου. On the emphasis of women in this narrative, see Pomeroy 1990: 49-51 and Eckstein 1995: 153.

[39] 15.27.2. Pomeroy 1990: 51 suggests that the veil was passing out of fashion in Egypt by the end of the century, but for a woman of the previous generation the removal of her veil was surely for reason of public humiliation.

[40] Eckstein 1995: 150-60, Carney 2000: 10-13.

lattice-work, διὰ τῆς θύρας προτείναντες... τοὺς μασθούς (15.31.13).[41] Polybius' only other mention of female breasts in his entire surviving work is his condemnation of Phylarchus for using the imagery of bared breasts in depicting the calamity of the sack of Mantinea (2.56.7). Phylarchus, in Polybius' view, included visceral imagery of distraught women, of tears and lamentation, styled to elicit emotional rather than logical responses.[42] Polybius labeled Phylarchus' method of writing history ἀγεννὲς καὶ γυναικῶδες, "lowly and womanly" (2.56.9), and held it up as a chief example of the tragic oeuvre (56.8-13). And yet Polybius' description is, if anything, even more sensational, focused upon one woman rather than a crowd, terrified and pleading for her life with armed men, rather than accompanied by fellow refugees. Furthermore, it features the provocative image of Agathoclea exposing her breasts, not as an act of mourning, but through the lattice gate as part of a plea for mercy.

During the rioters' vengeance upon Agathocles and his family, Polybius emphasizes violence by and against women. Agathocles' mother was dragged from a temple to the stadium, the wife of Philammon dragged from her house. Polybius relates that Agathoclea and her sisters, when brought into the stadium, were naked (15.33.7). Oenanthe was led across town naked and on horseback, heightening her public humiliation (33.8). The wife of Philammon was stripped naked before she was killed in the street (33.12). The aristocratic women who killed the wife of Philammon killed him as well, and strangled their infant son. In this narrative, Polybius refers to naked women for the only times in the surviving *Histories*. As if written for subscription cable, the ten-chapter Agathocles narrative contains about one fifth of all the references to nudity in Polybian material. About one quarter of all Polybian references to tears, crying, and wailing appear here as well.

In a similar vein, the aforementioned torture scene with Moiragenes is the only true torture scene in Polybius' history: he mentions numerous incidences of torture, but this was the only scene with a person stripped ἐξεδύθη, whips readied, διατεταμένοι τὰς μάστιγας, and torture implements laid out before him, τὰ πρὸς τὰς βασάνους ὄργανα διεσκεύαζον (15.27.9, 28.2). The torture scene in particular highlights one exceptional aspect of Polybius' approach in this narrative: he most often treated his material, and especially popular politics, through collectivity and generalization; the Agathocles affair he narrated through individuals and description. Individual details heighten the reader's awareness of the dangers posed both by Agathocles' regime and the otherwise faceless mob, providing opportunities for empathy, horror, and catharsis that would not be afforded without the attention to individuals.[43]

Otherwise many of the words in this narrative appear rarely, or not at all, in the rest of his work. He employs these words to describe the violence and disorder of the mob or the depravity of Agathocles' offences. Superlative adjectives figure frequently: εἰκαιοτάτους καὶ θρασυτάτους "most frivolous and most arrogant" (15.25.21), ἐπαχθεστάτης "most offensive"

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[41] Compare with offering hands and bodies in classical tragedy, e.g., Aesch. *Agam.* 1110-11, Soph. *Trach.* 1184.

[42] 2.56.7: σπουδάζων δ᾽ εἰς ἔλεον ἐκκαλεῖσθαι τοὺς ἀναγινώσκοντας καὶ συμπαθεῖς ποιεῖν τοῖς λεγομένοις, "aspiring to move the hearer to sorrow and to bring them to a sympathetic state through his writing."

[43] The emotions of Greek drama have been well rehearsed since Aristotle's *Poetics,* but for empathy and horror in Hellenistic historiography see Walbank 1990=2002: 231-42, Marincola 2003, and Chaniotis 2013: 53-84.

(25.22), πικροτάτην "most poisonous" (25.31), δυσχερέστατα "most horrific" (29.12), even πιθανότητας "most plausible" (25.35). Polybius unleashes an array of visceral verbs to describe the actions and temperament of the Alexandrian mob. Concerning them he said "it is terrible indeed when the savage passions of the Egyptian people are aroused."[44] They roar, κατερρήγνυτο, at the order to arrest Agathocles' faction and bring them to the stadium (32.9), and the whole revolution is characterized by the clamor, μεγάλης κραυγῆς (32.3), and fury of the mob, ὁρμὴν τῶν ὄχλων (33.2). Throughout the narrative Polybius employs words and phrases rare to his writing. At Agathocles' assembly with the Macedonian body two Polybian *hapax legomena* capture the unrest of the soldiers, who are διαψιθυρίζοντες, murmuring, and μυχθίζοντες, snorting (26.8). In the torture scene, the servant whispers, ψιθυρίσας, to Nikostratos (27.10). In the stadium, the mob acquired a taste for slaughter, γεύσασθαι φόνου,[45] and when the party of Agathocles was led in, "they bit, they stabbed, they tore out eyes; whenever one fell they tore them to pieces, until they utterly massacred them all."[46] Of the visceral verbs in this passage, δάκνω appears twice in Polybius, κεντέω twice in the Agathocles narrative and four times overall, ἐκκόπτω only in this passage for human violence, while καταλωβάω represents a true *hapax legomenon.*

Polybius twice refers to the popular movement as growing and spreading like a wildfire, and uses fire again in describing how hatred and wrath were flared and fanned up into orgiastic violence.[47] He refers repeatedly to the hatred, fury, and anger, μῖσος, ὁρμήν, and ὀργὴν of the crowds and mobs. While the violent energy of the people and the mob figures frequently in his work, the underlying emotion, μῖσος, figures less frequently, six times in the Agathocles narrative, one quarter out of the entire corpus.[48] Furthermore, the characterization of the crowd's size and energy as a fire appears in just two other instances: first, in a theoretical passage from Book 6 describing the resentment that builds against a tyrannical autocracy (it is in that sense a theoretical complement to the Agathocles narrative—more on this later), and the second in the flare-up of anti-Roman feeling across Greece in the Third Macedonian War.[49] Twice he refers to the mob's desire to vent its anger, ἀπερείσασθαι τὴν ὁρμήν (15.32.6, and at 15.25.25), and its staying power, ἀμετάθετον, without some vent (15.32.7). The mob, when activated, is pure chaos: Polybius' revolutionary Alexandria is filled with tumult, torches, and darting about, θορύβου καὶ φώτων καὶ διαδρομῆς (30.2), and a clamor of shouts and cries, βοὴ καὶ κραυγὴ σύμμικτος (30.9). The mob--hosts of men, women,

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[44] 15.33.10: δεινὴ γάρ τις ἡ περὶ τοὺς θυμοὺς ὠμότης γίνεται τῶν κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀνθρώπων.

[45] 15.33.5. The verb γεύω appears only four times in *The Histories*, twice in the Agathocles narrative. It appears first at 15.29 when Oenanthe threatened to force aristocratic women to eat their own children. It appears only twice with φόνος, the other being at 30.11.5 with reference to a massacre in the Aetolian civil war of 174 B.C.

[46] 15.33.9: οἱ μὲν ἔδακνον, οἱ δ᾽ ἐκέντουν, οἱ δὲ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐξέκοπτον: ἀεὶ δὲ τοῦ πεσόντος τὰ μέλη διέσπων, ἕως ὅτου κατελώβησαν πάντας αὐτούς.

[47] At 15.29.3 the sedition spread through the city like fire, οἷον εἰ πῦρ ἐξέλαμψεν, and at 15.30.1 their hatred blazes with double strength, διπλάσιον ἐξεκαύθη τὸ μῖσος.

[48] The other eighteen instances are split between editorial comments (e.g., 9.10.10, 18.15.13) and historical narrative (e.g., 30.29.1-7, 38.11.9).

[49] 6.7.8: μίσους ἐκκαιομένου καὶ δυσμενικῆς ὀργῆς, and 27.9.1: ἐξέλαμψε καθαπερεὶ πῦρ ἡ τῶν πολλῶν πρὸς τὸν Περσέα διάθεσις.

and children--packed the streets, alleys, staircases, rooftops, and public buildings (30.3-9), so that "there was not a foot of open ground," ὥστε μὴ μόνον τοὺς ἐπιπέδους τόπους (30.9). In this narrative, but seldom elsewhere in his writing, Polybius strove to convey in detail the make-up, locations, and activities of the mob. In whole, the passage is singular for its detail.

Obscuring the Political-Military Narrative

Because tragic history focused excessively upon graphic details it tended to obscure critical developments. According to Polybius (2.56.11-12), in some cases it required historians to invent parts of the narrative just to make the story comprehensible. Walbank wrote that "the account of Agathocles' end, though sensational, is in fact true," but that conclusion may have come a little hasty.[50] Polybius' dramatic telling overlooks actual action and in vivid imagery obscures the bare political-military narrative. It is possible to examine this narrative for both inventions and obscured essentials. The narrative contains numerous instances of dialog, both public and private, but not the full texts of speeches, a remarkable contrast to his usual practice. The text as a whole contains rich descriptions, but limited explanatory exposition. For example, Barry has shown that Polybius' fixation with a wild mob has largely obscured the role of civic institutions, τὰ πολιτικὰ (15.29.4) in organizing the uprising and the mob's use of legitimate spaces, especially the stadium, to connect their actions to loyalist motives.[51] Four additional political-military plot points, normally the stock of Polybian material, further highlight the faults in the surviving narrative: the campaign of Tlepolemus, conditions in Egypt proper, the location and contribution of Scopas' mercenaries, and the Macedonian movement.

Polybius was sufficiently preoccupied with Agathocles' death he never clarified the activity of Tlepolemus. While some of the missing portions of the passage may have provided some detail, most of what Polybius relates about Tlepolemus he chose to record through Agathocles' failed politicking.[52] At 15.26.11 he gives the detail that soldiers were bent on action because they recognized that delay could harm them, since Tlepolemus controlled the supply of provisions to Alexandria. Does this mean that Tlepolemus had reached Memphis? At 29.6 Polybius mentions a letter from Tlepolemus to the soldiers and spies sent to inform on Tlepolemus' movements, each of which imply he was nearing the city, yet Tlepolemus and his

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[50] Walbank 1990: 261-62. Barry 1993 represents some of the misunderstandings that may arise from the Polybian narrative through his bias.

[51] Barry 1993: 426-27.

[52] There is at least one sizeable gap in the text, but probably three or more, erasing a passage that began with the Nicon affair in 15.25.37 before the text picks up with Agathocles and Agathoclea putting on a political performance before the assembled Macedonians (*HCP* II 22-23). Philon's warning to the crowd at 15.33.3 that "they would have cause to repent again, as they had done some days before" may refer to some violent incident lost to history, and Nicon himself was slain by the crowd the same day (15.33.9). Some narrative devoted to Sosibius is missing from 15.25, and the description of Deinon given as 15.26a is excerpted from a larger, missing description that came before 15.25.20.

forces receive no further mention in the text, and if they played any role in the conclusion of the uprising, it goes unmentioned.

Tlepolemus and his forces were not the only soldiers heading to Alexandria during the crisis, and Polybius never revealed the circumstances of this other movement. Amid the early stages of the popular movement, he mentions that "numbers of men kept on sailing down from the up-country military posts, and their relatives and friends were begging them to help them in the crisis, and not watch while they were abused at whim by such worthless people."[53] The structure of the passage intimates the men were arriving in the city for another purpose, and then being recruited to the movement. And yet their movement came at their initiative, rather than Agathocles' command. How had they been impacted by Agathocles' administration? It is possible that the lost Nikon incident had impacted soldiers in the countryside, or they were endangered by the march of Tlepolemus. But this latter makes little sense, as it would cast Tlepolemus as villain rather than savior. A third option, which may be most likely, is to connect the evacuation of up-country posts with the intensifying Egyptian uprising in the countryside. By 203/2 the revolt was a serious affair: cities in the Delta, like Lykopolis, were rebel strongholds, Thebes and much of the Thebaid were in rebel hands, the southern rebels had crowned a pretender pharaoh in Thebes, and even the more Hellenized Fayum had been impacted by insurgent violence.[54] It is possible, then, that the men arriving in Alexandria brought their own frustration and alarm to bear on the crisis in the city.

In another example, Polybius relates that Agathocles replaced most of the soldiers of the Alexandrian garrison with mercenaries. Polybius casts the decision as one entirely based on Agathocles' sinister machinations, but adds that Agathocles sent the veterans into the forts and settlements in the countryside.[55] Given the progress of the Egyptian revolt Agathocles' move could also be rehabilitated as a strategy to put more soldiers in seditious areas: the Agathocles "Surge." Either way it could be reckoned among his shrewder decisions. The mercenary replacements, whose express purpose was to deter a reactionary movement, are invisible when the reactionary movement began. The Macedonians play the leading role in the unrest; the palace guard stepped aside, and only "two or three" of the aristocratic *somatophylakes* stayed with Agathocles and the boy king (15.29.3). Had Scopas and his men been given an assignment outside the city, or had they seen the writing on the wall and turned coat?[56]

The violence of the uprising and Polybius' focus on emotion obscure what in many respects looks like a very traditional Macedonian concern for and connection to the king. The

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[53] 15.26.10 ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταξὺ πολὺς ἦν ὁ καταπλέων ἐκ τῶν ἄνω στρατοπέδων, καὶ παρεκάλουν οἱ μὲν συγγενεῖς, οἱ δὲ φίλους, βοηθεῖν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις, καὶ μὴ περιιδεῖν σφᾶς ἀνέδην ὑφ᾽ οὕτως ἀναξίων ὑβριζομένους.

[54] Plb. 5.107.1-3, 14.12.4-6. In the latter of these Polybius claimed that, like Agathocles' leadership, the Egyptian revolt contained little worth mentioning. On the revolt, see McGing 1997, Veïsse 2004, and Johstono 2016.

[55] 15.25.17: ἐπὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν χώραν φρούρια καὶ τὰς κατοικίας ἀποστεῖλαι.

[56] The melting away of Moiragenes' torturers following a secret message (15.27.10-28.4) may hint at a broad desertion of Agathocles.

Macedonians are the most important military group in the uprising, yet their role has been obscured not only by Polybius' focus but also in modern historiography. Nearly all commenters have identified the Macedonians in Polybius description as equivalent to the palace guard.[57] Yet neither the *somatophylakes* nor the palace guard, in Ptolemaic context, was ever identified as ethnically Macedonian, and their attested personnel included Macedonians, Greeks, and others.[58] Fischer-Bovet resorts to calling this "Polybius' term for the soldiers of the guard," but there is no basis for that, since Polybius refers multiple times in the same narrative to actual household troops (θεραπείαν 15.25.17), palace guards (περὶ τὴν αὐλὴν φυλακεῖα, 15.25.17) and hypaspists, (ὑπασπιστὰς 15.25.3).[59] The Macedonian phalangites were not a normal part of the Alexandrian garrison, yet, amid the ongoing crisis under Agathocles' regency, they assembled in large numbers in the capital. The narrative gaze in an assembly with the Macedonians is upon Agathocles' affected emotions, false testimony, and failed persuasion, passing over the organization and disposition of the assembled Macedonian soldiers (15.26). There is no evidence outside this passage that there was a Ptolemaic version of the Macedonian Assembly, but both the pleas (and ploys) of Agathocles and the politics of the assembled Macedonians imply both parties were aware of and positioned themselves in relation to the traditions of the Assembly.[60] Agathocles' rhetoric at the assembly, which Polybius does once call an ἐκκλησία (15.26.8), dwelt upon the possession and security of the child king, who was "entrusted to your faith, soldiers of Macedon" and guarded by "you and your hands."[61] His failure to gain their support subsequently says more about his poor leadership than the Macedonians' reception of appeals to national traditions of familiarity with and faithfulness to the royal family. When the revolution broke out the Macedonian soldiers, chanting "The king!," took the leading role. The Macedonians secured the palace grounds, the Macedonians took apart the gates to where Agathocles held the king, and the Macedonians negotiated with Aristomenes and accepted Agathocles' surrender. When they had secured the king's person and therefore his safety, by their faith and at their hands, their collective role in the revolution ended. If some of the Macedonians participated at the stadium in the violent, closing acts of the uprising, they did so as individuals or bands of soldiers, rather than as a collective Macedonian nation at arms. However imagined their Macedonian

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[57] Walbank *HCP* II 488, Fraser 1972: 53, Mittag 2003: 169-70, and Fischer-Bovet 2014: 95.

[58] See, e.g., *P. Lond.* 7.1986, where members of the city and palace garrison include a Roman, a Persian, Cyreneans, but no identifiable Macedonian. The infantry *agema* carries strong Macedonian connections, but its Macedonian character and its possible relation to the palace troops is unsettled.

[59] 2014: 95; hesitancy about the identification on p. 151. The hypaspists, unmentioned in papyri, may represent an elite within the *agema*, so also the περὶ τὴν αὐλὴν, given the neighborhood named for them in the Agema region of the Herakleopolite nome (*BGU* 8.1771).

[60] On the Macedonian Assembly elsewhere in the Hellenistic world, see Heckel 2009, Anson 1985, 1991, and 2009, Hatzopoulos 1996: 139-49 and 276-79, and Meeus 2009. On this passage and the possibility of reading a reference to the Macedonian Assembly, see 2003: 166-67. Similarly, Polybius did not elaborate how the various parties of Alexandria agreed (συμπεφωνήκει, 15.29.4) to launch the movement.

[61] 15.26.3-4: παρακατέθετο δ᾽ εἰς τὴν ὑμετέραν, ὦ ἄνδρες Μακεδόνες, πίστιν. [4] ἡ μὲν οὖν [καὶ] ταύτης εὔνοια βραχεῖάν τινα ῥοπὴν ἔχει πρὸς τὴν τούτου σωτηρίαν, ἐν ὑμῖν δὲ κεῖται καὶ ταῖς ὑμετέραις χερσὶ τὰ τούτου νυνὶ πράγματα.

status or national identity must have been,[62] the Polybian narrative leaves a distinct impression that the Ptolemaic kings had tolerated, and perhaps cultivated, Macedonian cultural conceits among their phalangites.

Conclusion

In a recent volume Marincola argued that Polybius rejected tragic historiography because it tended toward "falsehood, exaggeration, and invention."[63] Its appeals to emotion were merely a symptom of an overall approach that, according to Polybius, borrowing from Thucydides (1.22.2-4), privileged momentary entertainment over lasting enrichment (2.56.11-12). But in any history the selection and treatment of particulars not only always takes place, but also says something about the historian. All history, even tragic history, is still political. This is of course true for Polybius as well, whose style did not eschew vivid or emotion-stirring depictions so long as doing so did not conflict with clarity, utility, or truthfulness.[64] And it should certainly not be considered less true simply because Polybius claims in this passage to see no didactic value in Agathocles' career. Rather than taking Polybius at his word it behooves the historian to inquire what inspired the manner of his writing.

It is perhaps no surprise that the aristocratic historian from Arcadia was disgusted with all elements of the narrative: a corrupt court culture, violent mobs exerting agency, a decadent eastern metropolis.[65] There was little there for a Polybius to admire, for in spite of some personal connections to Egypt he found it a weak state corrupted by luxury and perhaps even by some particularly Egyptian, deterministic quality.[66] What may surprise is that Polybius, first, inclined to use such an uncharacteristic method to tell the story and communicate his concerns, and second, claimed not to have used such methods and drew no application from the lengthy endeavor. Polybius permitted "nearly nothing to pass without drawing his own moral from it for the benefit of his audience, almost as if he were afraid that they might overlook an incident's importance," with occasional editorials on the narrative and its lessons.[67] In the case of Agathocles, he provided a detailed, dramatic narrative, and an editorial

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[62] That "Macedonian" became a fictive ethnic in Ptolemaic Egypt by the second century is widely acknowledged; see Fischer-Bovet 2014: 177-91. However, it must have begun sooner. Not only are the 25,000 Macedonian phalangites attested at Raphia (Plb. 5.65.4) far too many to actually have been Macedonians, the case of Straton son of Stration (*BGU* 10.1958, 215 B.C.) provides a clear third century case of a Thracian settler enrolled into the cleruchy as a Macedonian infantryman bearing the ethnic *Makedōn*.

[63] Marincola 2013: 77-78: "all bound together, not coincidentally, with a metaphor from the theatre."

[64] Davidson 1991, Dreyer 2013a: 201-11.

[65] Eckstein (1995:132) commented on the horror Polybius likely felt that mob violence not only broke out, but successfully interfered in the political order.

[66] Walbank 1979=2002: 53-69, Bollensée 2005: 250-53, McGing 2010: 150-54. Polybius' statements at 5.34.4-10, 34.14.3, and especially 39.7.7 "ἀσωτία καὶ ῥαθυμία ... Αἰγυπτιακὴ" are revelatory for his attitudes toward Egypt and its leaders and people, and at 31.10.7 he signaled approval of the Roman strategy that kept Egypt divided and tense.

[67] Marincola 1997: 11; see further discussion in Sacks 1981: 171-8.

on the faulty historiography of Agathocles himself, but no moral of his own. In a narrative where Polybius revealed himself to be a masterful tragic historian, there must have been a point. A key indicator of his intent may lie in two γὰρ asides at 15.30.10: "for the children, in Carthage as at Alexandria, play no smaller part than the men in their revolts," and 15.33.10: "for the impassioned savagery of the Egyptians is a terrible thing."[68] Apparently most preceding accounts of the Agathocles affair devoted their narrative to the qualities of the leader himself; Polybius thought that was the wrong set of lessons.[69]

For Polybius, the tale of the Alexandrian revolution against Agathocles could not be related in a bare narrative precisely because it reflected and validated his grave concerns regarding royal courts, urban populations, and Hellenization. He wrote the *Histories* as an explanation of Roman success, a lecture on leadership, and a cautionary tale that Rome was not immune to the faults that felled the Hellenistic polities. Polybius perceived nothing worthy of editorial comment in Agathocles' career specifically, and said as much. Eckstein recently argued that Polybius' "style of expression was generally as sober as his topic was important" and he reserved his use of ornate, emotional, or sensational writing for cases where "the magnitude of events warranted it."[70] I suggest that he felt the mob revolution merited a lengthy, dramatized narrative. This could best be explained by his sense that it encapsulated so much of what he believed had sunk Hellenic civilization, so much of what he foresaw as the future of hegemonic Rome. Polybius wrote openly in Book 6 of the dangers of court culture and mob rule.[71] While he did not editorialize on that subject in Book 15, the Agathocles narrative aptly showcases how the *plēthos* enflamed becomes an *ochlos*.[72] Champion has suggested that these components in Book 6 present Polybius' concern that Roman general-politicians, with soldiers and the urban mob at their back, someday could present a grave threat to the Republic.[73] The narrative of Agathocles' rise and fall is in that sense a vivid depiction of Polybius' political warning from Book 6, and can be situated within Polybius' moral-political hermeneutic, even if he did not explicitly situate it there himself.[74] It functions primarily as parable, secondarily as historical account. Alexandria was poised between the sycophantic and degenerate courtiers of an Eastern autocracy, the indolence and frivolity

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[68] 15.30.10: οὐ γὰρ ἐλάττω ποιεῖ τὰ παιδάρια τῶν ἀνδρῶν περὶ τὰς τοιαύτας ταραχὰς ἔν τε τῇ Καρχηδονίων πόλει καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν. 15.33.10: δεινὴ γάρ τις ἡ περὶ τοὺς θυμοὺς ὠμότης γίνεται τῶν κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀνθρώπων.

[69] This accords with Marincola's revision of Polybius' critique of tragic historiography, and with other works on Polybius' emphasis on the didactic value of history and the relation of instruction and rhetoric, e.g., Davidson 1991 and Farrington 2015.

[70] Eckstein 2013: 335; see also Wiedemann 1990.

[71] Champion 2004: 186-226. On page 151 he wrote: "enervated polities, corrupted monarchs, and evil courtiers populate the pages of Books 7-15."

[72] Compare Plb. 6.16.3-5 and 6.57.6-9 with the transition from πλῆθος to ὄχλος, which occurs at 15.30.4, save for one appearance of the latter term very early on, at 15.25.8, in connection with the early crisis surrounding the rumor that Arsinoë had been murdered. At 31.25.2-8 there is some indication that Polybius—and an indignant Cato—saw degenerative effects taking hold at Rome by mid-century.

[73] Champion 2004: 192, and 212-20; Eckstein 1995: 129-40; Gruen 2013.

[74] See especially Eckstein 1995, also Walbank 1965=1985: 157-80.

cultivated in the Greek migrants by exposure to luxury and extravagance, and the ochlocracy of the virtue-less mob of savage Greco-Egyptians. There was little good in any aspect of what Polybius saw: Agathocles was corrupt, destructive, and foolish, but the greater part of the people deserved him. Both his ascendance and his fall were merely symptomatic of a poisoned civilization.

<div align="right">
Paul Johstono
The Citadel
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