

# Timaeus, Aristotle, and Polybius' degrees of truth\*

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**Abstract:** Polybius uses the criticism of historians to prove his statements and his historical interpretation. It is, above all, his apodeictic method that requires it: by placing under investigation others' mistakes, at the same time he has the opportunity to highlight what a historian must not do and enucleate the canons of the right historiographical method. This article will focus on Polybius' historiography in relation to truth and the criticism of the historian Timaeus. It will also show that Polybius' notion of truth appears to be multifaceted and it becomes a whole and unbroken essence only when a proper historian deals with it after taking all the required steps corresponding to the phases of historical science.

**Keywords:** Aristotle; autopsy; Lokroi Epizephyrioi; Polybius; Timaeus; truth

## I

Polybius explains his methodology not through methodological chapters or in the preamble of his work, but through the criticism of his predecessors,<sup>1</sup> especially Timaeus, to whom he apparently devoted an entire book, the twelfth, to criticize him. This article will focus on a selection of passages from the aforementioned book where Polybius finds fault with Timaeus and highlights his errors. Through a close look at the language used by Polybius, the article aims at offering an explanation of Polybius' notion of truth.

But why is Polybius so preoccupied with Timaeus? Various explanations have been offered for why Polybius' main target was Timaeus. Walbank maintains that Polybius harboured a profound antipathy towards Timaeus, both because he saw him as a fearsome competitor and because he felt a strong resentment following the importance that Timaeus had devoted to Magna Graecia.<sup>2</sup> Paul Pédech reflects on 12.26d, where Polybius explains how Timaeus gained his fame through detailed accounts on colonisations, foundations, and kinships, and states that Polybius mocks Timaeus' pretensions to ἀληθινολογία, his constant desire to proclaim the truth and to denounce the false, and his passion to persuade by demonstration (μετ'ἀποδείξεως).<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Sacks believes that Polybius, while writing book

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, 1.14.1-8 (criticism of Fabius and Philinus); 2.56-63 (criticism of Phylarchus); 3.32.8-10 (criticism of histories κατὰ μέρος); 3.47.6-3.48.12 (criticism of the so-called Hannibal's historians); 7.7.1-8 (against historians who wrote about the death of Hieronymus); 15.34.1-2 and 15.36.1-11 (against works κατὰ μέρος on Agathocles); 16.14.1-8 and 16.17.9-18.3 (criticism of Zeno and Antisthenes).

<sup>2</sup> Walbank 1962: 5-12.

<sup>3</sup> Pédech 1964: 50.

12, had the clear intention of describing the historian's task and that the criticism of Timaeus was not as important as the description of his own methodology.<sup>4</sup>

While underlining that Polybius has a didactic intention so that, whenever he spots mistakes, he intends to give a lesson in historical method, Vercruysse claims that there is a hidden reason, which is present between the lines but which Polybius himself does not mention: whoever discovers the mistakes of others shows that he knows his job well, but Polybius does not openly declare it because that is exactly what he himself reproaches Timaeus for acquiring, that is, a reputation at the expense of the authors whom he censured.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Vercruysse adds, Polybius, with the intention of giving the impression that he is indeed worthy of faith, does not offer assurance that he tells the truth, but he does it in a less direct way:<sup>6</sup> thinking that he is in a sort of "agonal situation",<sup>7</sup> Polybius tries to *convince* his readers<sup>8</sup> as if they were the jury in a court, also adopting the rhetorical figures that lawyers use in their speeches, such as metaphors, similes, antitheses. Marincola explains why Polybius adopts a hostile tone when dealing with Timaeus: the latter had lied deliberately; moreover, since Timaeus himself had been "a prodigious and wide-ranging polemicist", he deserved the same treatment.<sup>9</sup>

It seems then clear that Polybius uses the criticism of historians to *prove* his statements and his historical interpretation. It is, above all, his apodeictic method that requires it:<sup>10</sup> by placing under investigation others' mistakes, he has the opportunity at the same time to highlight what a historian must not do and enucleate the canons of the *right* historiographical method.

## II

An excellent example of Polybius' use of rhetorical figures to convince his readers is constituted by a passage from the criticism of Timaeus (12.25h.1-3):

[1] Ὅτι Τίμαιος φησιν ἐν τῇ τριακοστῇ καὶ τετάρτῃ βύβλῳ ἑνὴν πεντήκοντα συνεχῶς ἔτη διατρίψας Ἀθήνησι ξενιτεύων καὶ πάσης ὁμολογουμένως ἄπειρος [ἐγένετο] πολεμικῆς χρείας, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῆς τῶν τόπων θέας'. [2] λοιπὸν ὅταν εἷς τι τῶν μερῶν τούτων ἐμπέσῃ κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν, πολλὰ μὲν ἀγνοεῖ καὶ ψεύδεται· κἂν ποτε δὲ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπιψαύσῃ, παραπλήσιός ἐστι τοῖς ζωγράφοις τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν (ἀνασσο)αγμένων θυλάκων ποιούμενοις τὰς ὑπογράφας [3] καὶ γὰρ ἐπ' ἐκείνων ἢ μὲν ἐκτὸς ἐνίοτε γραμμὴ σῶζεται, τὸ δὲ τῆς ἐμφάσεως καὶ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῶν ἀληθινῶν ζῶων ἄπεστιν, ὅπερ ἴδιον

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<sup>4</sup> Sacks 1981: 66-78.

<sup>5</sup> Vercruysse 1990: 29.

<sup>6</sup> Vercruysse 1990: 31.

<sup>7</sup> Vercruysse 1990: 31: "dans une situation agonale".

<sup>8</sup> See Pédech 1964: 355 ("L'historien doit faire partager sa conviction au lecteur de la même manière qu'elle s'est formée en lui") and Vercruysse 1990: 31 ("A notre avis l'intention générale est de convaincre les lecteurs").

<sup>9</sup> Marincola 1997: 231-232.

<sup>10</sup> On this particular style and method, see Pédech 1964: 43-53; Petzold 1969: 3-20; and Musti 2010: 203-210.

ὑπάρχει τῆς ζωγραφικῆς τέχνης. τὸ δ'αὐτὸ συμβαίνει καὶ περὶ Τίμαιον καὶ καθόλου τοὺς ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς βυβλιακῆς ἕξεως ὀρμωμένους.

[1] Timaeus says in his Book 34 “having lived abroad and spent fifty years at Athens without interruption” he was “admittedly inexperienced both in every kind of military operation and besides in the observation of the places”.

[2] It remains that whenever, in the course of his history, he falls into one of these parts, he is ignorant of many things and he tells many lies; and if he ever does touch on the truth, he is similar to those painters who draw sketches taking stuffed dummies<sup>11</sup> as models. [3] indeed, in those cases sometimes the outward outline might even be preserved, but what belongs to the expressiveness and energy of the real living creatures is missing, that very one which is characteristic of the art of painting. The same thing happens to Timaeus and, in general, to those historians who base themselves on the same bookish habit.

Historians who use only written sources for their historiographical research work are treated as third-class painters. The persuasive technique of Polybius is expressed with a captivating simile, since he knows well that the figures of speech remain etched in the mind of the public.

The concept Polybius seems to underline is that if historians fail to follow not only truth but also the correct research procedure when writing history, they will inevitably be led to ignorance and falsehood (πολλὰ μὲν ἀγνοεῖ καὶ ψεύδεται), as he has already underlined in the case of authors of historical works κατὰ μέρος<sup>12</sup> who, not having enough subject matter, are driven to tell falsehoods<sup>13</sup> or “to render small things great and to sprinkle them with many accounts not worthy of memory”.<sup>14</sup> This reference might appear even more suggestive if one reflects upon two terms used by Polybius later in the passage, ἐνεργείας connected to ζῶν.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Polybius had already used such terms in his proemial passage regarding histories κατὰ μέρος: according to Polybius, authors of histories κατὰ μέρος, just like people looking at the dismembered limbs of a body, will never have an adequate view of the energy

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<sup>11</sup> This is how Montanari translates it in GE. A more literal translation would be “loaded up bags”.

<sup>12</sup> At 1.4.7-10, Polybius draws a clear-cut demarcation line between two different ways of writing history: histories dealing with only one topic, one war or one character, which he defines as histories κατὰ μέρος, ‘by single topic’, and his own ‘universal’ history, a kind of history that none of his contemporaries has ever written. The best approach to writing history is universal history since Polybius suggests that if one writes κατὰ μέρος, he will have only a partial knowledge of the events. On this passage, see Monti 2022: 315-320, and 331-332. The term used by Polybius to describe his own history is τὰ καθόλου, which is commonly translated as ‘universal’, but which carries a series of different meanings ranging from “history offering an overall view of the events” to “complete and intact history”, from “history in which no part is missing” to “history shareable by all”. On the meaning of the term and the likelihood that this is a Polybian neologism, see Monti 2024b (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> 3.47.6: καὶ γὰρ ψευδολογεῖν καὶ μαχόμενα γράφειν αὐτοῖς ἀναγκάζονται.

<sup>14</sup> 7.7.6: ἀναγκάζεσθαι τὰ μικρὰ μεγάλα ποιεῖν καὶ περὶ τῶν μηδὲ μνήμης ἀξίων πολλοὺς τινὰς διατίθεσθαι λόγους.

<sup>15</sup> Walbank 1967: 396 clarifies that ζῶν might also refer to human being and that its use might “denote any figure in a work of art, not only an animal and not necessarily even a living creature” which suggests that Polybius is using it with the general meaning of “the living subject of a painting”.

of historical events (= body).<sup>16</sup> Finally, a further connection of this passage with the proemial one might be considered the idea of drawing/painting: just as it is not best conduct to be a painter who does not look at living creatures but at stuffed dummies (that, of course, also lack ἐνεργεία), so, as Polybius declares at the beginning of his work, it is not the right procedure to try to get an idea of the entire inhabited world looking at cities drawn on maps separately.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in both passages a sort of negative idea emerges of the action of looking at something which is not real and living but at an artificially sketched work, just like cities on a map (1.4.6) or stuffed dummies (12.25h.2-3).

The importance of this passage is also underlined by the usage of the word ζωγράφος. Polybius uses it only thrice in his work as we have it now, thus it might have some sort of significance when used (given its rare employment): the word occurs twice in an earlier passage (12.25e) and once in 12.25h, where the adjective ζωγραφικός, used only here in Polybius,<sup>18</sup> also appears. In 12.25e.7, Polybius had already compared the bookish historian to painters, though in a slightly different situation:

τό γε μὴν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ταύτης (τῆς) δυνάμεως ὀρμηθέντα πεπεισθαι γράφειν τὰς ἐπιγινόμενας πράξεις καλῶς, ὃ πέπεισται Τίμαιος, τελῶς εὐθηθεὶς καὶ παραπλήσιον ὡς ἂν εἴ τις τὰ τῶν ἀρχαίων ζωγράφων ἔργα θεασάμενος ἰκανὸς οἴοιτο ζωγράφος εἶναι καὶ προστάτης τῆς τέχνης.

However, being convinced that those who take their cue from this ability in research are able to describe well subsequent events, as Timaeus believed, is completely silly and similar to the following case, as if someone, having contemplated the works of painters of the past, believed himself to be a skilled painter and a master of the art.

In this case, the bad painters in question look exclusively at their predecessors to train themselves and have the presumption of knowing the art of painting, just as Timaeus looking only at his predecessors' work presumes to know how to write history. So, the similes at stake are different although the protagonists are the same (Timaeus and painters). Nevertheless, the triggering factor is the same, namely the fact that Timaeus' knowledge and research are based exclusively on the reading of books.

But there seems to be even more, since this passage, just like 12.25h, might once again evoke the proemial passage. In Polybius, the juxtaposition of the verb θεάομαι and the adjective ἰκανός occurs in 12.25e.7, and the only parallel appears in the proemial passage 1.4.7, where the expression occurs with the verb θεάομαι modified by the adverb ἰκανῶς (διερριμμένα τὰ μέρη θεώμενοι νομίζοιεν ἰκανῶς αὐτόπται). In both passages, Polybius criticises the way in which the protagonists of the action look at things. It is not the act of looking in itself to be wrong, but how such people look at the objects of their examination. Moreover, in both passages, such people have the firm belief that they are adequate for their job, but this is a false belief provoked by observing something in the wrong way.

<sup>16</sup> 1.4.7-8: ὡς ἂν εἴ τις ἐμψύχου καὶ καλοῦ σώματος γεγονότος διερριμμένα τὰ μέρη θεώμενοι νομίζοιεν ἰκανῶς αὐτόπται γίνεσθαι τῆς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ τοῦ ζῶου καὶ καλλονῆς. On this passage, see Monti 2022: 315-321.

<sup>17</sup> 1.4.6: ὅπερ ἐκ μὲν τῶν κατὰ μέρος γραφόντων τὰς ἱστορίας οὐχ οἶόν τε συνιδεῖν, εἰ μὴ καὶ τὰς ἐπιφανεστάτας πόλεις τις κατὰ μίαν ἐκάστην ἐπελθὼν ἢ καὶ νῆ Δία γεγραμμένας χωρὶς ἀλλήλων θεασάμενος εὐθέως ὑπολαμβάνει κατανενοηκέναι καὶ τὸ τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης σχῆμα καὶ τὴν σύμπασαν αὐτῆς θέσιν καὶ τάξιν.

<sup>18</sup> Before Polybius the adjective is used once by Xenophon, *Symp.* 4.21.5, and once by Plato, *Tht.* 145a.

A corollary to this statement, given Polybius' obsession with the historian's ability and expertise,<sup>19</sup> might be that one has to be an expert on the subject in order to be able to see in the *right* way and not to get the wrong impression. Otherwise, what is seen might be deceitful, as it is wrong. The idea of deceit has been already expressed by Polybius in his critique of Phylarchus (2.56.12) and might be connected to Plato.<sup>20</sup> This element reappears in Polybius' attack against Timaeus. Moreover, in the part where Plato reflects on poets' deception of their spectators, he uses a metaphor which involves painters and their being inadequate to represent the truth of reality: he underlines that poets are similar to painters who render their works inferior to truth (φαῦλα ποιεῖν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν) and cause people to have false beliefs and to be unable to distinguish the greater from the lesser.<sup>21</sup> This inability to represent reality and truth is then peculiar to writers of histories κατὰ μέρος whom Polybius *charges* with making some events bigger and not offering an adequate representation of some other events.

Thus, one might gather that Plato's simile is a key element, a sort of hub connecting the two passages of book 12 (25e and 25h) to the proemial passage (1.4.6-7) and the critique against Phylarchus (2.56), and from this one might also draw the following considerations. If authors of histories κατὰ μέρος are inferior to Polybius and to authors of universal history because just like painters they give a distorted and falsified image of reality (like the poets accused by Plato and compared to painters), Timaeus, at least according to Polybius, is at an even lower level, because he tries to shape his historical work looking at what others have represented. Indeed, Timaeus is not similar to the painter who only gives a falsified image of the reality because the painter does not succeed in rendering a truthful image, despite the fact that he seeks to reproduce reality. On the contrary, Timaeus is more similar to those painters who look at paintings of their colleagues, which means that they have distorted images of already distorted images. Indeed, Timaeus is similar to the painter who tried to copy not the living beings, but the dummy which is already a not-so-perfect copy of the living being. Lastly, one can infer that Timaeus' knowledge is even more falsified by the fact that he was probably looking at works κατὰ μέρος of his colleagues.

Moreover, according to Plato, imitative works (in this case he refers to poetry and to its criticism)<sup>22</sup> may cause severe damage (λώβη)<sup>23</sup> to some of the listeners because most of them do not have the antidote (φάρμακον) to *mimesis*, in the sense that they do not really know what *mimesis* is, and they confuse it with reality.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, only the person who is the 'most expert' (ἐμπειρότατον)<sup>25</sup> will be able to deal with this kind of source, whereas the one who

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, 16.14.1-8; 16.17.9-11; 16.18.1-3; 38.4.1-8.

<sup>20</sup> On deception and lie connected with poetry in Plato, see Plebe 1960: 761-788. See also Zucchelli 1985: 305-306, who links the concept to Gorgias, and Marincola 2010: 457 with footnote 35, who stresses the importance of deception in Polybius' remarks and the fact that "It is the whole tradition of poetry as 'deceit', beginning with Gorgias (or indeed even Hesiod) and culminating in Plato, that seems to animate Polybius here".

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 605a-c. On the interpretation of this passage, see Belfiore 1983: 40 and 44-46, where she shows that in Plato's mind poetry presents just *eidola aretes*, and Gastaldi 2013: 60-64.

<sup>22</sup> For Plato, tragic poetry is a deformation of reality, that is of truth, and the poetic *mimemata* are three degrees away from truth: *Rep.* 596 c-598 b; on this, see Palumbo 2013: 64. According to Salkever 1986: 278, the poetic imitation is not adequate also because generally what is imitated is not actually real.

<sup>23</sup> I borrow the terminology used by Gastaldi 2013: 49.

<sup>24</sup> See Gastaldi 2013: 49-55.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 601d.

just imitates things “does not have either knowledge or correct opinions about the beauty or flaws of the objects they imitate”.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Polybius' intention is to demonstrate (by means of a selective reworking of Platonic aesthetics) that it is not enough to draw on the works of the past: no matter how much they may be worthy of trust, they will never be able to give readers back the *true* truth of the facts, because each work is characterized by style, tendencies, the cultural substratum of the author, all elements which act like a filter. Truth, therefore, is returned to readers not as it is, but filtered and, consequently, it loses its strength and its liveliness (τὸ δὲ τῆς ἐμφάσεως καὶ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῶν ἀληθινῶν ζώων).<sup>27</sup>

### III

Of course, even though a historian would go a step further and avail of autopsy – another important part of the historiographical research –, nevertheless, he should possess the right expertise in order to see things as they are (12.4c.1-4d.4):

[4c.1] ὁ δὲ Τίμαιος περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος τῆς ἀλογίας οὐ μόνον ἀπειρίαν, ἔτι δὲ μᾶλλον ὀψιμαθίαν δοκεῖ μοι πολλὴν ἐπιφαίνειν, ὅς γε, διότι θύουσιν ἵππον, εὐθέως ὑπέλαβε τοῦτο ποιεῖν αὐτοὺς διὰ τὸ τὴν Τροίαν ἀφ' ἵππου δοκεῖν ἐάλωκέναί. [2] Πλὴν ὅτι γε κακῶς ἰστορήκε καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Λιβύην καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Σαρδόνα, καὶ μάλιστα τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν, ἐκ τούτων ἐστὶ συμφανές, [3] καὶ καθόλου διότι τὸ περὶ τὰς ἀνακρίσεις μέρος ἐπισέσσυρται παρ' αὐτῷ τελέως ὅπερ ἐστὶ κυριώτατον τῆς ἱστορίας. [4] ἐπειδὴ γὰρ αἱ μὲν πράξεις ἅμα πολλαχῆ συντελοῦνται, παρεῖναι δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν πλείοσι τόποις κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρὸν ἀδύνατον, ὁμοίως γε μὴν οὐδ' αὐτόπτην γενέσθαι πάντων τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην τόπων καὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἰδιωμάτων τὸν ἕνα δυνατόν, [5] καταλείπεται πυνθάνεσθαι μὲν ὡς παρὰ πλείστων, πιστεύειν δὲ τοῖς ἀξίοις πίστεως, κριτὴν δ' εἶναι τῶν προσπιπτόντων μὴ κακόν.

[4d.1] Ἐν ᾧ γένηται μεγίστην ἐπίφασιν ἔλκων Τίμαιος πλεῖστον ἀπολείπεσθαί μοι δοκεῖ τῆς ἀληθείας. [2] τοσοῦτο γὰρ ἀπέχει τοῦ δι' ἐτέρων ἀκριβῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐξετάζειν ὡς οὐδὲ τούτων ὧν αὐτόπτης γέγονε καὶ ἐφ' οὓς αὐτὸς ἤκει τόπους, οὐδὲ περὶ τούτων οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς ἡμῖν ἐξηγεῖται. [3] τοῦτο δ' ἔσται δῆλον, ἐὰν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Σικελίαν δεῖξωμεν αὐτὸν ἀγνοοῦντα περὶ ὧν ἀποφαίνεται. [4] σχεδὸν γὰρ οὐ πολλῶν ἔτι προσδεήσει λόγων ὑπὲρ γε τῆς ψευδολογίας, ἐὰν ἐν οἷς ἔφω καὶ ἐτράφη τόποις, καὶ τούτων ἐν τοῖς ἐπιφανεστάτοις [ἐν τούτοις] ἀγνοῶν εὐρεθῆ καὶ παραπαίων τῆς ἀληθείας.

[4c.1] Regarding this matter, Timaeus seems to me to show not only inexperience derived from lack of thinking, but even more a great deal of slowness in learning, since, when they [the Romans] sacrifice a horse, he immediately supposed that they do this because they think that Troy has been captured by a horse. [2] Besides, he has badly carried out research on matters about Libya, and Sardinia, and especially Italy; [3] it is evident from these, and in general, because the part relative to enquiries has been completely swept

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 602a. See Gastaldi 2013: 60-61.

<sup>27</sup> 12.25h.3.

away by him, which is the most important part of historical research. [4] For since events occur at the same time in many places, and it is impossible that the very same person is present in many places at the same moment, and likewise that a single man is eyewitness of all the places in the inhabited world and the peculiarities in these places, [5] what remains is to inquire from as many people as possible, to trust those who are worthy of trust, and to be not a bad judge of the circumstances.

[4d.1] And in this aspect, Timaeus, while engaging in a great deal of showing off, seems to me to go excessively far away from the truth: [2] indeed, he is so far from scrupulously investigating the truth through others that not even of those events of which he has been an eyewitness and those places to which he goes, not even regarding such things does he tell us anything correct. [3] This will be clear, if in the topics regarding Sicily, we prove that he is ignorant about his claims: [4] indeed, probably there will be no longer need of many further words about his falsehood, if, in regard to the places where he was born and grew up and the most famous of these, he is found ignorant and away from the truth.

Polybius points out that the target of his criticism is actually a *bad* historian. Indeed, he writes *κακῶς ἱστορήκε*, which might be understood on two levels. The first, more superficial, level is that of literal translation, with which Polybius wants to signal that Timaeus has conducted bad historical research: in this case, the verb *ἱστορέω* is used in its characteristic meaning of ‘to inquire’. The second and more careful reading of this passage could lead to another, metaphorical, not explicit level: Polybius wants his readers to understand that Timaeus is a historian who does not know how to do his job well, he does not deserve this name. In this case the verb *ἱστορέω* indicates the historiographical work, the search for historical truth, and the adverb *κακῶς* highlights that Timaeus did not respect this criterion.

Using an image taken from football, one can say that Polybius goes studs up on Timaeus. Not only is Timaeus ignorant and incapable of thinking, but he also understands things with a certain delay. By means of the refined and rare word *ὀψιμαθία*,<sup>28</sup> probably inspired by Timaeus himself,<sup>29</sup> Polybius describes his colleague and brings into question his learning abilities.<sup>30</sup> Timaeus, as Polybius will declare later on,<sup>31</sup> is lazy, and it is probably his laziness which drives him to slowness, if one follows Polybius’ line of reasoning. One might also infer that, in Polybius’ mind, Timaeus cannot solve the problem of his ignorance not only because he lacks the capability of reflecting on events, but also because he lacks learning speed and

<sup>28</sup> Only 15 occurrences in the TLG, of which 3 before Polybius: Hippocrates, *Praeceptiones* 13; Aristoxenus F 39 (Wehrli); Theophrastus, *Char.* 27.1. The verb *ὀψιμαθέω* does not occur in Polybius (in the TLG there are 23 occurrences) as well as the adverb *ὀψιμαθῶς* (only one occurrence, Galenus, *De differentia pulsuum libri iv*, 8.601 Kühn). Walbank 1967: 328, drawing on Theophrastus description of the *ὀψιμαθής* (*Char.* 27) as someone who “displays excessive zeal in inappropriate activities”, interprets the abstract noun *ὀψιμαθία* as “pedantic irrelevance”.

<sup>29</sup> The adjective *ὀψιμαθής* (which has a wider usage with 98 occurrences in the TLG, but only 8 before Polybius) occurs only once in Polybius (12.8.4), who actually seems to report Timaeus’ words in this case. Moreover, Timaeus (*FGrHist* 566 F 156) accused Aristotle of being *ὀψιμαθής*. On Timaeus’ fragment, see Baron 2013: 116-120.

<sup>30</sup> Mauersberger 2006, s.v. translates it as “pomposity with later acquired knowledge” (*Wichtigtuerei mit spät erworbenem Wissen*).

<sup>31</sup> 12.27a.4. On this passage, see Monti 2022: 326-329.

performs actions which are now inappropriate to his (i.e. Timaeus') years.<sup>32</sup> Timaeus' brain, as the usage of ὀψιμαθία might suggest, also seems to be similar to the brain of old people, if one gives credit to Theophrastus who reports that men who turn sixty might be affected by ὀψιμαθία.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the concept of ὀψιμαθία, "learning the truth too late",<sup>34</sup> seems to retain a tragic flavour as well, since it has been shown that human ὀψιμαθία is indeed a pattern present in tragedy.<sup>35</sup> Once again, Polybius reworks meanings, connects concepts, and assigns new meanings to them. So, though ὀψιμαθία is typical of the tragic character and not of the writer (so not really like dementia), nevertheless one can speculate that Polybius – as he also adumbrates when he compares Timaeus to a certain kind of painter in the passages which have been analysed at the beginning of this section –<sup>36</sup> is accusing Timaeus of being a sort of tragic writer, the tragic writer of historiography, thus with all the defects of a historian writing κατὰ μέρος.<sup>37</sup>

To these remarks, one should add that this passage seems to be the summary of Polybius' previous accusations against historians writing κατὰ μέρος. In 2.63.5, Polybius charges Phylarchus with ἀλογία, lack of thinking, together with irrationality and/or improbability, and, especially, together with ἀσκεψία, the incapacity of reflecting on the events.<sup>38</sup> The reference to the part related to enquiries, τὸ περι τὰς ἀνακρίσεις μέρος (12.4c.3), which has been neglected by Timaeus, recalls the concept of the historian as good judge of what has been heard, underlined later at 12.4c.5 (κριτὴν δ' εἶναι τῶν προσπιπτόντων μὴ κακόν), and seems to allude to passages which are related to the Polybian criticism of historians writing κατὰ μέρος works: in 2.56.4, while criticising Phylarchus, Polybius stresses the necessity for the historian to judge the events rightly (ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστιν ἡμῖν διευκρινεῖν), and in 7.7.6 he laments the ἀκρισία, the lack of judgement, of the historians who wrote about the death of Hieronymus. The ἄγνοια of historians writing κατὰ μέρος, evoked by the terms ἀγνοοῦντα (12.4d.3) and ἀγνοῶν (12.4d.4), referred to Timaeus of course, has been discussed by Polybius in 2.58.13 and 2.62.2, the passages relative to Phylarchus, and in 3.38.7, where he gets angry with the so-called historians of Hannibal. Moreover, the term ψευδολογία (12.4d.4) recalls the verb ψευδολογέω used to attack, once again, the historians of Hannibal (3.47.6).<sup>39</sup> But, the strongest reference to the criticism of historians writing κατὰ μέρος is the expression Τίμαιος πλεῖστον ἀπολείπεσθαί μοι δοκεῖ τῆς ἀληθείας, which is used only twice by Polybius, in this passage and in the proemial passage 1.4.8, where Polybius is indeed criticising histories κατὰ μέρος (λίαν πολὺ τι τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπελείποντο).<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Polybius employs

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Diggle 2004: 477-478.

<sup>33</sup> Theophrastus, *Char.* 27.1-2: ὁ δὲ ὀψιμαθῆς τοιοῦτός τις, οἷος ῥήσεις μανθάνειν ἐξήκοντα ἔτη γεγονὼς καὶ ταύτας λέγων παρὰ πότον ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι.

<sup>34</sup> For this translation see Davies 2007: 17, who reflects on the comic usage of this concept in Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

<sup>35</sup> See Rutherford 1982: 147-150, and footnote 21 (for some bibliography on the topic).

<sup>36</sup> 12.25e.7 and 12.25h.2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Polybius always connects the idea of writing in a tragic style with historians writing κατὰ μέρος. See, for example, 2.56-63; 3.47.6-8; 3.48.8-9; 7.7.1-8; 15.34.1-2.

<sup>38</sup> On this Polybian neologism, see Monti 2022: 331-332.

<sup>39</sup> The verb ψευδολογέω occurs only once in Polybius, and the noun ψευδολογία thrice, in 4.42.7, where Polybius is criticizing the sailors, in 12.4d.4, and in 33.21.1, where he underlines his action of confuting a false account.

<sup>40</sup> The expression τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπελείποντο hardly occurs in Greek texts: apart from later authors, it appears once in Herodotus (2.106: he is writing about two statues of an unknown man in Ionia: some of the



the same expression as the one used by Herodotus in 2.106 (πολλὸν τῆς ἀληθείης ἀπολελειμμένοι), which is the only one occurrence preceding the two in Polybius, but with the superlative degree of πολλόν. Finally, Polybius comes back to the theme of the correct view of events only if one is an expert and possesses ἐμπειρία, when he underlines that, on the contrary, Timaeus is affected by ἀπειρία (12.4c.1). Thus, the reader might easily infer that Polybius is underlining that Timaeus will never be able to see the truth.

Another noteworthy concept is expressed when Polybius emphasizes that Timaeus has neglected the phase of personal investigations (12.4c.3). We learn, therefore, that the research and the work of the historian consist of various phases, of which the most important seems to be the one related to personal enquiries.

So, what are the other phases?

Polybius accurately describes, using once again the rhetorical expedient of the simile, the three branches of historical science in 12.25d-25e,<sup>41</sup> where he states that history and medicine are similar, because they are both divided into three branches. In medicine, for example, one can distinguish:

1. A theoretical branch (ἐνὸς μὲν μέρους αὐτῆς ὑπάρχοντος λογικοῦ), which had its beginnings in Alexandria.
2. A dietetic branch (τοῦ δ' ἐξῆς διαιτητικοῦ), which deals with the management of food.
3. A surgical and pharmacological branch (τοῦ δὲ τρίτου χειρουργικοῦ καὶ φαρμακευτικοῦ), which acts through surgical interventions and drug administration.

Doctors who belong to the first category are often preferred: they do their training from books, but if they are led back to reality and are entrusted with sick people, their experience is equal to those who have never studied medicine. Despite this, the persuasive capacity of the discourse of such theoretical doctors often prevails over proof of facts, τῆς τοῦ λόγου πιθανότητος καταγωνιζομένης πολλάκις τὴν ἐπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων δοκιμασίαν (12.25d.6).<sup>42</sup> Once again, Polybius is leaving the reader a hint, since the mention of the 'persuasive capacity' (πιθανότης) might recall the πιθανότητες all marshalled on the side of falsehood mentioned in 13.5.4 (πασῶν τῶν πιθανοτήτων μετὰ τοῦ ψεύδους ταττομένων).<sup>43</sup>

Polybius, then, continues (12.25e.1):

τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον καὶ τῆς πραγματικῆς ἱστορίας ὑπαρχούσης τριμεροῦς, τῶν δὲ μερῶν αὐτῆς ἐνὸς μὲν ὄντος τοῦ περὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι πολυπραγμοσύνην καὶ τὴν παράθεσιν τῆς ἐκ τούτων ὕλης, ἑτέρου δὲ τοῦ περὶ τὴν θέαν τῶν πόλεων καὶ τῶν τόπων περὶ τε ποταμῶν καὶ λιμένων καὶ

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people looking at them infer that it is the image of Memnon, but “they are very far from the truth”), and twice in Polybius (1.4.8; 12.4d.1). Due to its rarity, one could infer that it might have significant importance.

<sup>41</sup> On this passage, see Zangara 2007: 122-129.

<sup>42</sup> Walbank 1967: 388 observes: “the threefold division of medicine is traditional, but P’s division differs from that in Celsus, *Proem.* 9 (*in tres partes medicina diducta est, ut una esset quae uictu, altera quae medicamentis, tertia quae manu mederetur. Primam διαιτητικὴν secundam φαρμακευτικὴν tertiam χειρουργίαν Graeci nominarunt*). Polybius compresses *pharmaceutice* and *cheirurgia* into one and adds the λογικοί, who are to provide the parallel with Timaeus (cf. 25 e 4); but the division is not necessarily his own, and he may well be drawing on some handbook of medicine from the third or second century”.

<sup>43</sup> On this passage, see Monti 2024a (forthcoming).

καθόλου τῶν κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν ἰδιωμάτων καὶ διαστημάτων, τρίτου δὲ τοῦ περὶ τὰς πράξεις τὰς πολιτικάς.

In the same way, political history also possesses three parts, of which the first has to do with being familiar with the records, and with the comparison of the material derived from them, the second has to do with direct observation of cities and places, rivers and harbours, and in general the peculiarities and the distances both through land and sea, the third has to do with political activities.

Thus, historical research is formed by three parts, but many historians, and Timaeus is certainly among them, can be compared to the theoretical physicians: indeed, drawing only on history books, they completed only one of the phases of historical research (12.25e.4).<sup>44</sup> But, in order to reach the complete truth and to fully understand the dynamics of history, one must instead resort to all three phases, which might be regarded as degrees or steps, because, as Polybius underlines, not all phases have the same importance, since some are more important than others (12.27.1-3):

[1] δυεῖν γὰρ ὄντων κατὰ φύσιν ὡς ἂν εἴ τινων ὀργάνων ἡμῖν, οἷς πάντα πυνθανόμεθα καὶ πολυπραγμονοῦμεν [ἀκοῆς καὶ ὀράσεως], ἀληθινωτέρας δ' οὖσης οὐ μικρῶ τῆς ὀράσεως κατὰ τὸν Ἡράκλειτον - ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ τῶν ὤτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες - [2] τούτων Τίμαιος τὴν ἡδίω μὲν, ἤττω δὲ τῶν ὁδῶν ὤρμησε πρὸς τὸ πολυπραγμονεῖν. [3] τῶν μὲν γὰρ διὰ τῆς ὀράσεως εἰς τέλος ἀπέστη, τῶν δὲ διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἀντεποιήσατο.

[1] For by nature we possess two instruments, as it were, sight and hearing, with which we inquire about and investigate everything, and although sight is closer to the reality not by a little as Heraclitus says - for eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears -, [2] nevertheless Timaeus started studying by the pleasanter of these two paths, though inferior. [3] Indeed, in the end he shrank from what is deduced from sight, and pursued what can be heard.

The resort to the term ἀληθινωτέρας clearly suggests that Polybius has in mind the fact that there are degrees of truth, but above all it underlines that sight is not the most truthful instrument of all, but it is 'just' a more reliable instrument in comparison with hearing, and in any case the historian must be an expert if he is to truthfully interpret what he sees and give a true account of the events.<sup>45</sup> Of course, the motif of autopsy is an important one in relation to historiography, since the need to see with one's own eyes is a guarantee of the historical reality,<sup>46</sup> and it underlines the powerful imposition of the persona of the historian, which brings with it the fact that autopsy is in a way subordinated to the historian's subjectivity, as Nenci has suggested.<sup>47</sup> With respect to his predecessors, Polybius' innovation is precisely this, the fact of having understood the subjective character of autopsy:<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. 12.25g and 12.25h.

<sup>45</sup> As is clear from the passages mentioned *supra* in footnote 19.

<sup>46</sup> See Nenci 1955: 15-16: "l'esigenza, cioè, di vedere con i propri occhi come garanzia della realtà storica di quanto viene conosciuto".

<sup>47</sup> Nenci 1955: 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> Thucydides had partially recognised this when he underlined that people at the same events did not give the same accounts because of their memory or favourability towards one or the other side (1.22.1-4). However, Thucydides is reflecting on his sources, so his remarks are related to just one aspect of historical research, the difficulty of dealing with different kinds of accounts from different people. On the other hand,

therefore, just as doctors need not only direct observation of the patient and of the symptoms, but also their experience, so only an expert historian will be able to best interpret the actions, the facts, the reality of which he will be a direct witness and, consequently, able to faithfully and objectively report them.

Hence, what seems to emerge is that the scrupulous historian must proceed through all the phases of the historical research, step by step, and he should not neglect any of them. Only in this way will he be able to get to the *true* truth. Furthermore, truth does not seem to have a fixed image, but appears as a flexible entity which might even be characterized by degrees, and, thus, measurable in a certain sense, as is the case of Plato's allegory of the cave, when the images pertaining to the sphere of perception are defined as ἀληθέστερα, "truer".<sup>49</sup>

#### IV

A notable example of the idea that the historian has to perform all the procedures to reach the *true* truth, which might lead to the concept of degrees of truth, can be also found in another passage from book 12 where, as part of his harsh polemic against the historian Timaeus, Polybius makes his position on the different accounts about the foundation of Lokroi Epizephyrioi very clear (12.5.3-6), even though Polybius had claimed that this topic is not quite a topic within the realm of history proper (9.1.4; 9.2.1-2; 10.21.3-4).<sup>50</sup> The passage concerns the story of Lokroi Epizephyrioi in which Timaeus argued with Aristotle regarding the origins of this colony in Magna Graecia. Aristotle, probably in one of the 158 *Constitutions*,<sup>51</sup> claimed that the colony was founded by slaves from Lokroi (in Greece) who had joined the women of the nobility while their husbands fought in the Messenian war. Timaeus, on the other hand, in the ninth book of his *Histories* (FGrHist 566 F 11) refuted Aristotle's thesis by asserting that:

- the Locrians of Greece were not allowed to own slaves at that time (FGrHist 566 F 12 *apud* Pol. 12.6);
- Lokroi Epizephyrioi, like the motherland, was on friendly terms with Sparta and hostile to Athens: if the founders of Lokroi in Magna Grecia had been slaves, it would have been unlikely to maintain the same alliances as their masters (FGrHist 566 F 12 *apud* Pol. 12.6a);
- it is unacceptable that the Locrian noblewomen lived with their slaves and that their husbands did not have the opportunity to return home, since the Spartans themselves sent home those young Lacedaemonians who were not bound by the military oath (FGrHist 566 F 12 *apud* Pol. 12.6b);
- Timaeus' thesis was also confirmed by documentary evidence, as he personally saw a treaty between the Greek Lokroi and Lokroi Epizephyrioi which began with the terms ὡς

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Polybius' reflection is about the full concept of autopsy: if the historian is not endowed with expertise, his autopsy will be faulty even if he is a historian. Hence, Thucydides refers to the historian's effort and the difficulty of interpreting his sources, whereas Polybius is reflecting on the possible fallacy of autopsy.

<sup>49</sup> Repellini 2013: 173 underlines that in the allegory of the cave Plato shows the presence of degrees of truth. On the relation between Plato's cave and Polybius, see Monti 2022: 319-320.

<sup>50</sup> See Thornton 2020: 310 footnote 24.

<sup>51</sup> Walbank 1962: 6; Champion 2010, *BNJ* 566 F 11a, *Commentary*.

γονεῦσι πρὸς τέκνα (“as is fitting for fathers towards their children”),<sup>52</sup> clearly indicating a relationship of equality and not, on the contrary, between masters and slaves (*FGrHist* 566 F 12 *apud* Pol. 12.9).

Polybius, on the other hand, criticises Timaeus' claims: “First of all, one would be in confusion as to which of the Locrians he turned up and carried out these investigations” (12.10.1). Polybius, therefore, casts doubt on the ability of Timaeus to conduct historiographical research: he does not specify which Locris (since there were two different regions called Locris in Greece, Opuntian Locris located to the north-east of Phocis, and Ozolian Locris located to the south-west of Phocis),<sup>53</sup> nor does he explain who the magistrates who showed the written text were,<sup>54</sup> an unusual attitude for a historian who is very precise in chronologies and written documentation.<sup>55</sup>

It is in the light of these reflections that Polybius does not at all believe that Timaeus is trustworthy and this is the reason why, at the beginning of the discussion on the foundation of Lokroi, he states (12.5.3-6):

[3] διόπερ ὀφείλω μᾶλλον εὐλογεῖν Λοκροὺς ἢ τούναντίον. [4] ἀλλ' ὅμως οὐκ ὤκνησα καὶ λέγειν καὶ γράφειν ὅτι τὴν ὑπ' Ἀριστοτέλους παραδιδόμενην ἱστορίαν περὶ τῆς ἀποικίας ἀληθινωτέραν εἶναι συμβαίνει τῆς ὑπὸ Τιμαίου λεγομένης. [5] σύνοιδα γὰρ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὁμολογοῦσιν ὅτι παραδόσιμος αὐτοῖς ἐστὶν αὕτη περὶ τῆς ἀποικίας ἢ φήμη παρὰ πατέρων, ἦν Ἀριστοτέλης εἴρηκεν, οὐ Τίμαιος. [6] καὶ τούτων γε τοιαύτας ἔφερον ἀποδείξεις.

[3] And so I ought much more to speak well of the Locrians than the opposite. [4] Nevertheless, I did not hesitate both to declare and to write that the history of the foundation of the city transmitted by Aristotle happens to be truer than the one told by Timaeus. [5] Indeed, I know very well (and the people there agree)<sup>56</sup> that the traditional account on the colony handed down to them by their fathers is the one which Aristotle, not Timaeus, has told. [6] And of this, they were adducing such proofs.

Thus, despite the fact that Aristotle's story was somewhat unfavourable to the inhabitants of Lokroi, Polybius was not afraid of reporting the account which looked rather truthful to him.

To justify his complete and utter impartiality in favouring Aristotle rather than Timaeus, a few lines before Polybius underlines that he had been in the city many times; he also acted as a benefactor in their regards, by pleading their case with the Romans, since the Locrians were not in a position to send auxiliary troops to Iberia and Dalmatia. In return for being freed from “misery, risk and a considerable expenditure” (καὶ κακοπαθείας καὶ κινδύνου καὶ δαπάνης ἰκανῆς τινοῦ ἀπολυθέντες), they granted him every kind of honour and privilege.

<sup>52</sup> This document is thought to be a later forgery: see, for example, Brown 1958: 48; Walbank 1967: 345; and Musti 1977: 145-146, who dates the treaty to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

<sup>53</sup> On this topic, see Luraghi 1991: 143-159.

<sup>54</sup> 12.10.5-6.

<sup>55</sup> 12.10.4: καίτοι διότι τοῦτ' ἴδιόν ἐστι Τιμαίου καὶ ταύτη παρημίλληται τοὺς ἄλλους συγγραφέας καὶ καθόλου τῆδέ πη τῆς ἀποδοχῆς \*\*\* - λέγω δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις καὶ ταῖς ἀναγραφαῖς ἐπίφασιν τῆς ἀκριβείας καὶ τὴν περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ἐπιμέλειαν - δοκῶ, πάντες γινώσκομεν.

<sup>56</sup> They should be the Locrians of the metropolis, “the metropolitan Locrians in Greece”: see the Loeb edition of the *Histories*, translated by Paton, revised by Walbank and Habicht: 357.

In his line of reasoning, this is not a biased opinion against Timaeus, who had indeed a more positive account of the story, and his historical research. In Polybius' reasoning, the choice of a version less favourable to the Locrians – thus not intended to praise a people whose patron he had even been – demonstrates that he is writing for the sake of truth, even more so as “praise was usually regarded as incompatible with truth”.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the critique against Timaeus, who, once again, is branded as a liar, and to the Polybian stance in favour of Aristotle, in this passage there is a significant statement which gives rise to a reflection: Polybius says that the Aristotelian narrative is ἀληθινωτέρων compared to the one of Timaeus. Indeed, noteworthy is the use of the comparative. The first question one should ask is why Polybius is addressing the issue of the two versions in such a way, why he uses the comparative ἀληθινωτέρων, what the adjective's degree means and why he is not using its zero grade, the simple ἀληθινός. What does Polybius want us to understand in this passage? Does he want to show us that there are various degrees, *gradus veritatis*? Or, according to what we have seen, are there different degrees that the historian has to go through in order to reach the *true* truth, since the adjective could be better translated as ‘closer to reality than’ or ‘quite/rather close to reality’?

Mario Pani, arguing that ancient historians had the consciousness of history as a literary genre in its own right, states that the historian's task was to look for external truth and report it.<sup>58</sup> The truth, therefore, is one, and it transcends the protagonists or those who write history; there are, however, “plural truths” (to borrow the effective terminology used by Mario Pani) which could be defined as immanent to the historian, subjective truths that constitute the limit of the writer of history because they are influenced by personal factors, such as partisanship, ill will, the limits of information or the inability to attend all events.

## V

At this point, it is important to notice how Polybius presents the topic and how self-referential this presentation is. In fact, he does not simply state that Aristotle's version is truer than Timaeus', but he introduces the idea of hesitation with the verb ὀκνέω preceded by the negative:<sup>59</sup> he, the historian, plucked up the courage to say and write his thoughts as a scrupulous historian would do.<sup>60</sup> However, the story related by others is not *his* truth: therefore, from Polybius' words, one might infer that it is not on purpose, but rather a coincidence (συμβαίνει)<sup>61</sup> that the account handed down or even taught (παραδιδόμενην

<sup>57</sup> Woodman 1988: 43. More generally, on hostility, bias, truth and impartiality, see Woodman 1988: 40-47; 73-74; 82-83.

<sup>58</sup> Pani 2004: 348: “ricercare e trovare la verità esterna e rispecchiarla”.

<sup>59</sup> Schweighäuser 1822, s.v., translates as “non dubitandum, non verendum”, and Mauersberger 2006, s.v., renders the verb as “fear” (*fürchten*), but also as “hesitate” (*zögern, Bedenken tragen*).

<sup>60</sup> He uses this verb two other times in the negative form and in association with his role: in 16.20.5, writing about the incompetence of Zeno from Rhodes in matter of geography, he states that he did not hesitate to write to him personally and to point out his big mistakes; in 18.55.9, he declares about Polycrates and other characters that he will not hesitate, at the right time, to show plainly their indecent actions. To my knowledge, there is no such use in previous historians.

<sup>61</sup> The term seems to attenuate the value of the assertion.

ιστορίαν)<sup>62</sup> by Aristotle is truer than that told (λεγομένης) by Timaeus. In this passage, Aristotle appears as the teacher who hands down a tradition, whereas Timaeus is just a storyteller (although there might still be some truth in his version) or – even worse – a fabulist.<sup>63</sup> On the contrary, Polybius is performing all of these actions: he transmits a tradition and testifies to it by speaking and writing (καὶ λέγειν καὶ γράφειν). Even more so, since he knows what he is doing, he is conscious about his role, whereas Aristotle, or even better, Aristotle's tradition just 'happens to be the truer one'.

Indeed, the second part of this passage is introduced by σύνοιδα: not only does he know this, he knows it extremely well. The verb does not simply mean 'to know', but it is its intensifier. In addition, it also belongs to the legal sphere,<sup>64</sup> since it is often translated as "to know that something is true", "to know something about a person as a potential witness" or "to bear witness".<sup>65</sup> This shade is not surprising, as the verb is formed with one of the roots of ὀράω, and one is supposed to see something to be a witness. More to the point, another nuance of its meaning is remarkable, since it bears the sense of "to be fully conscious" and "share the knowledge with someone".<sup>66</sup> Thus, here Polybius might be introducing himself as an historian acting with full consciousness. He has just mentioned the technical term ἱστορία,<sup>67</sup> connecting it to Aristotle, a few lines before, a word which, again, shares its root with ὀράω and, consequently, with the σύνοιδα discussed here:<sup>68</sup> so, to do his job well, the historian must be the witness of the events, he must see the actions he is describing. In fact, he – Polybius – had done so, since – as he declares – he had been many times in the city of the Locrians.

Furthermore, he perhaps appears to have checked all the different traditions of the story, when he describes the Locrians as ὁμολογοῦσιν: Herodotus, for example, uses this verb, when he is giving the account of different traditions and wants to underline that people agree on that particular account.<sup>69</sup> However, this word also belongs to the semantic field of legal terminology, as it could mean "to admit" or, even better, "to confess": if one follows Polybius' argument that the truer version of Aristotle was also the one less favourable to the Locrians, it is not unforeseen that they 'confess, admit' a story which puts them in a bad light. Nonetheless, unexpectedly, Polybius might perhaps assign the role of storyteller to Aristotle now (εἴρηκεν), but I think that this might be explained by the fact that the direct object of

<sup>62</sup> The expression could also be interpreted as 'the traditional story', 'the history of the foundation according to the tradition'. Cf., for example, μηδένα νομίζειν ἄλλον θεὸν ἢ τοὺς παραδεδομένους, "the traditional gods" (Dinarchus 1.94). See LSJ, s.v.

<sup>63</sup> The verb λέγειν does not seem to have a different meaning than just 'tell', without any implication on writing history. See Schweighäuser 1822, s.v., and Mauersberger 2006, s.v.

<sup>64</sup> Polybius often used legal terminology to describe his historical method, as ἀνακρίνω / ἀνάκρισις, βασανίζω / βάσανος, ἐλέγχω / ἔλεγχος, ἐξετάζω. See Mauersberger 2000, 1.1, s.vv.; Id. 2003, 1.2, s.vv.; Verduyck 1990: 36 and footnote 120. See also Farrington 2015: 40, who argues that Polybius acts both as a dikast and as an orator. Thornton 2020: 47-51 reflects on the concept of Polybius' history "as a court".

<sup>65</sup> See LSJ, s.v.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Chantraine 1974, III.779.

<sup>67</sup> In Polybius, the word reflects a certain awareness of genres, it is related to the genre of history, and it is used to describe the historian's work. See Schweighäuser 1822, and Mauersberger 2006, s.vv. Moreover, from 34.4 it is clear that Polybius was mindful of the specific genre, since he states that history should aim at truth (τῆς μὲν οὖν ἱστορίας ἀλήθειαν εἶναι τέλος), whereas poetry should not be assessed according to historical truth. See also 10.21.5-8, in which he separates the genre of the encomium from history.

<sup>68</sup> Chantraine 1974, III.779. On the meaning of ἱστορία, see also Keuck 1934.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, 1.23; 1.171; 2.4; 4.154.

the verb is the relative pronoun referred to φήμη, which in this case is not the rumour, but the story known by oral tradition,<sup>70</sup> thus ‘told’ and not ‘written’. Anyhow, such confusion and mixing of the terms cast doubt among his readers.

This two-faced passage, a display of both historical and oratorical technique, ends with another polysemous expression, ἔφερον ἀποδείξεις. In the standard translations,<sup>71</sup> this phrase is interpreted as Polybius saying that the Locrians used to provide the proofs about which he is going to talk in the subsequent lines.<sup>72</sup> Of course, this is a coherent translation and the Locrians appear to be the logical subject of the sentence, but another translation is nevertheless possible: the imperfect ἔφερον can also be a first-person singular (“and I was providing such proofs of these accounts”). The tense of the verb might cause issues with this interpretation,<sup>73</sup> since one might ask when in the past Polybius was talking and proving this. However, the difficulty can be solved if one reflects upon what he has written a few lines before, in 12.5.4, introducing this topic: he did not hesitate both to speak and to write in favour of Aristotle’s version, so, perhaps, he had proved even before why he preferred the philosopher’s account. Anyway, I would suspect that here Polybius is intentionally ambiguous.

In addition, the use of the word ἀπόδειξις is thought provoking, as it assumes diverse meanings: it belongs to the legal sphere, as we have seen, with the meaning of ‘proof’, but it is also translated as ‘demonstration’ and ‘display’. Thus, Polybius is playing the role of the orator in attacking Timaeus and he needs to demonstrate that he is right, to provide proofs and to plead his case against him. At the same time, he is a historian, and this behaviour is part of his ‘apodeictic’, demonstrative style:<sup>74</sup> Polybius often insists on the necessity for an historian to provide proofs of his accounts<sup>75</sup> and he invokes his sources as witnesses, but he has to demonstrate that they are credible.<sup>76</sup> Also, the mention of ἀπόδειξις together with ἱστορία cannot but evoke Herodotus’ preamble to his *Histories*: Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησέος ἱστορίας ἀπόδειξις ἦδε, “This is the display of the historical research of Herodotus from Halicarnassus”. In the same methodological way, Polybius is displaying the results of his own historical research about the foundation of Lokroi Epizephyrioi having dug into the different traditions of the city’s history.

It is surprising though that the nexus φέρω/ἀπόδειξις is scarcely present in previous historians. It is absent in Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon.<sup>77</sup> After Polybius, Diodorus

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Schweighäuser 1822, and Mauersberger 2004, s.vv.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the translations of Paton, Pédech and Sonnino.

<sup>72</sup> καὶ τούτων γε τοιαύτας ἔφερον ἀποδείξεις: “And they used to provide such proofs of these accounts”.

<sup>73</sup> In Polybius the imperfect is almost often durative, especially in relationship with the *verba dicendi*. See de Foucault 1972: 129-132.

<sup>74</sup> See *supra*, footnote 10.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, 4.40.1-3; 7.13.2; 31.30.2.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Vercruysse 1990: 21.

<sup>77</sup> As for the abstract term ἀπόδειξις, Herodotus has six occurrences (1.p; 1.207; 2.101; 2.148; 7.50; 8.101), with the meaning ranging from ‘display’ and ‘achievement’ to ‘demonstration’, ‘proof’, and ‘evidence’; it is attested twice in Thucydides (1.97.2; 2.13.9), bearing the meaning of ‘explanation’ and ‘demonstration’; finally, the term is present twice in Xenophon (in *Cyr.* 8.6.15 in the sense of ‘review, check’, and in *Mem.* 4.6.13 with the significance of ‘proof’). Even when the abstract word is used with the meaning of proof, there is no direct action of the historian in bringing such evidence.

Siculus uses it, probably because he was looking at Polybius' way of writing history.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, those two words together were employed nine times by Aristotle, compared to only two occurrences in Polybius: the philosopher generally used this expression when he was demonstrating an argument, and, fascinatingly, in the *Rhetoric*, where there is a concentration of this usage in only one passage (three out of nine), Aristotle is describing the epideictic style and speeches.<sup>79</sup> Besides, both Polybian passages, this one and 12.25k, are in a context where the historian is arguing against Timaeus. What is more, this terminology is also used in two of the remaining fragments of Timaeus, although, in this case, it is hard to separate Timaeus' voice from Diodorus' who transmits the fragment, especially because he was 'imitating' Polybius' style.<sup>80</sup> In *FGrHist* 566 F 85, Timaeus was writing about the Argonauts and the route they followed after stealing the fleece, and, in the middle of the fragment, one reads "and they bring proofs of this" (ἀποδείξεις δὲ τούτων φέρουσι): it is not specified to whom the third person refers, presumably 'the writers'<sup>81</sup>, although Diodorus mentions Timaeus alone. The second fragment, *FGrHist* 566 F 38, deserves equal attention, as Diodorus is commenting on Timaeus' way of writing history (a statement based on Timaeus' words?):

Τίμαιος δὲ τὴν ἄγνοιαν τούτου τοῦ συγγραφέως ἐλέγξας, ἀκριβῶς ἀποφαίνεται τούτους αὐτόχθονας εἶναι: πολλὰς δ' αὐτοῦ φέροντος ἀποδείξεις τῆς τούτων ἀρχαιότητος, οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον ἡγούμεθα περὶ τούτων διεξιέναι.

Timaeus brought convincing proofs of this historian's [Philistus] ignorance, accurately showing that they were indigenous; and since he adduces many proofs of their antiquity, there is no need to go through them.

Timaeus was harshly quarrelling with Philistus over the colonization of a city (περὶ δὲ τῶν κατοικησάντων ἐν αὐτῇ πρώτων Σικανῶν, writes Diodorus), the very same matter on which Polybius disagrees with him.

Thus, whether these two fragments preserve Timaeus' own words or he had his work described by these words, they still might be of some importance if seen as a part of the entire framework. Indeed, since there is no trace of the two words together in previous historians, but there is enough presence in Aristotle especially, and, probably, in Timaeus/Diodorus, one might speculate that Polybius was playing with words. First of all, he appears to put together two concepts, the 'inquiry' of Herodotus and his own 'demonstrative technique': once more, his action seems active, deliberate and conscious. He is again working on two different levels, as the verb is two-pronged, being interpreted as a first-person singular or a third-person plural: reversing what Timaeus declared, he is dropping the subtle hint that he, Polybius, was bringing the counter-proofs of what Timaeus wrote; taking it as third person, since Aristotle used this expression too, Polybius' suggestion would be that he was mimicking the philosopher's style, his account being the truer one.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Rood 2004: 158. On Polybius' influence upon Diodorus, see, also, Bianchetti 2005: 127-153, and Achilli 2012: 1-20. Diodorus uses this expression ten times: 1.25.4; 1.28.4; 1.29.1; 1.29.6; 1.96.3; 2.31.6; 3.74.6; 4.56.4; 5.6.1; 19.56.1. This usage might have been part of Diodorus' style inspired by Polybius, but it is difficult to understand where Diodorus was writing in his own words and where he was reporting the words of another historian.

<sup>79</sup> *APo.* 74b (Bekker); 77a; 79a; *Metaph.* 1005a; 1087b; *Ph.* 252a; *Rh.* 1417b (three times).

<sup>80</sup> Diodorus is "the historian whose narrative manner is closest to Polybius": see Rood 2004: 158, and footnotes 13 and 28.

<sup>81</sup> This is the translation given by Champion in *BNJ*.



But, if truth is one and an unbroken essence, as one would imagine, one does not infer this from the passage above, since it transmits uncertainty instead. The definition of its entity seems to escape: in fact, Polybius appears to go in a certain direction when he clearly separates Aristotle's act of writing from Timaeus' act of telling stories, but soon afterwards he weakens this strong opposition between writing and telling, and he assigns the action of telling stories also to Aristotle who in this case represents the 'truer truth'.

Polybius' hesitation might be explained in this case by his firm belief that it is almost impossible to write non-contemporary history due to the lack of autopsy and inquiry, the most important parts of the historian's work<sup>82</sup>; consequently, if he chooses this path, he will need "to write hearsay from hearsay" (ὡς ἀκοήν ἐξ ἀκοῆς γράφειν).<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Polybius makes a statement especially on writing about foundations of colonies and cities (which is the main theme of the fragment we are discussing here): in this particular case, the historian has two possibilities, to tell the story of another pretending that it is his own story (which is the most dishonourable action of all) or to find a previous account with which he agrees, and that was treated and transmitted sufficiently well.<sup>84</sup> Although the historian must avoid this, sometimes he will need to deal with previous events to explain contemporary events:<sup>85</sup> in this case, "the prohibition on non-contemporary history could be ignored when the author believed he had superior information".<sup>86</sup> This might be the case with the passage above: Polybius judges Aristotle's account as one of a higher standard, but he is still tied up with his conviction that it is difficult, if not even unmanageable, to write non-contemporary history. Hence, he could have had to weaken his statement on the truer account, since Aristotle did not employ the proper instruments of history. But, if the imperfect ἔφερον is taken as a first person, then one finds oneself facing Polybius' intervention in the account of another writer: since he thought that Aristotle's story was better, he tries to 'help' him and intervenes in the historiographical process. This could be the explanation of the gradual weakening of the opposition which appears not so strong anymore.

Polybius seems to lead his reader to the following phase of this account: of course, Aristotle's version is truer, but it is not the truest one, since he related a story, but he did not research deeply into it. Therefore, it needs to be completed with another phase of historical research, which is inquiry: Polybius intervenes and provides evidence for Aristotle's account. Furthermore, Aristotle is not a politician, which is the quality that shapes the perfect historian, according to Polybius (12.25e). The historian should be a good judge of the events and of the different versions (12.4c.4-5), but to do so he needs to be involved in politics (12.25i): the account of political or military episodes is useless if the historian did not experience politics or war (12.25g). Indeed, the inexperienced in such matters is not able to ask witnesses the right questions, and he does not understand what is happening even in the case that he is present (12.28a-9-10).

<sup>82</sup> 12.25g.1-28a.10.

<sup>83</sup> 4.2.1-3. See Walbank 1957: 450, and Marincola 1997: 98.

<sup>84</sup> 9.2.1-3.

<sup>85</sup> 1.12.8-9; 3.7.4-7.

<sup>86</sup> Marincola 1997: 99.

Hence, Aristotle is not a historian *tout court* in Polybius' opinion, and so he cannot manage a history *stricto sensu*, though he is closer to it than Timaeus.<sup>87</sup> It might be stated that here the "highly intrusive explicator"<sup>88</sup> and the "intrusiveness of the Polybian narrator"<sup>89</sup> find one of their greatest expressions. I also believe that the main point here is perhaps that, there being diverse truths and various degrees of truth – at least according to Polybius –, the most crucial features become the person who deals with truth, how he gets to it, and how he manages it.

Furthermore, Polybius, still within the dispute over the origins of Lokroi, reports the hypothetical reflection of those who will read what he wrote about Timaeus, about his work, and about the tasks of the historian (12.7.4):

ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἀμφοτέροι κατὰ τὸν εἰκότα λόγον πεποιήνται τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν, καὶ διότι πλείους εἰσὶ πιθανότητες ἐν τῇ κατ'Ἀριστοτέλην ἱστορίᾳ, δοκῶ, πᾶς ἄν τις ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὁμολογήσειεν· ἀληθὲς μὲντοι γε καὶ καθάπαξ διαστεῖλαι περὶ τινος οὐδὲν ἔστιν ἐν τούτοις.

Everyone, I believe, would agree on the basis of what has been said that both [Timaeus and Aristotle] have conceived their reasoning according to plausibility, and that there is more persuasiveness in Aristotle's account; however, it is not possible to define precisely the truth of anything in these matters once for all.

Based on this statement, scholars have hypothesised that this was Polybius' line of reasoning, namely that neither Aristotle nor Timaeus told the truth, but they were based on plausible elements: on the basis of these seeds of truth, Aristotle's story appeared to Polybius more credible, but not more truthful than Timaeus' one. Walbank, indeed, claims that the arguments of both Aristotle and Timaeus are based on likelihood.<sup>90</sup> According to Pédech, in Polybius' mind the verisimilitude is nothing but the complement and the substitute element of the truth, since also likelihood belongs to the category of Logic and is the result of rational data. Therefore, Pédech adds, since the events develop rationally, through a logical link between causes and consequences, the historian has a duty to verify the coherence of a piece of information, to evaluate whether the different parts have a logical connection and whether the results of an action do not contradict the premises: for Polybius, in fact, "le raisonnement est un outil effective de critique".<sup>91</sup> Polybius, Pédech continues, goes further: he maintains that if a historian finds that a piece of information contradicts the logical link or modifies the natural order, he can rectify it and restore truth based on likelihood.<sup>92</sup>

However, I believe that the statement at 12.7 is clear: Polybius is not reporting his own ideas, but only what the readers might think; equally doubtless is what he states in 12.5, that Aristotle is closer to the truth/reality than Timaeus. Therefore, one could affirm that Polybius' statements regarding the historical method go in one direction only, that is towards the duty that the writer of history has to always adhere to the truth. Pédech's

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<sup>87</sup> Of course, the imperfect could be a third-person plural, as we have seen, but it is nevertheless true that Aristotle appears to be unable to 'defend' himself, and he still needs someone else to bring proofs of his account's truth on his behalf.

<sup>88</sup> Marincola 1997: 10.

<sup>89</sup> Rood 2004: 150.

<sup>90</sup> Walbank 1962: 7.

<sup>91</sup> Pédech 1964: 391.

<sup>92</sup> Pédech 1964: 389-391.

hypothesis, on the other hand, might be valid if one transfers it to the level of Polybius' implementation of the canons established by him, since Polybius has perhaps not always stuck to the truth, but, as Pédech says, "il peut la rectifier et rétablir la vérité selon la vraisemblance".<sup>93</sup>

## VI

Consequently, in Polybius' philosophy of history, is truth unique or are there different *gradus veritatis*? The image that Polybius has of the truth, I believe, is that of an unbroken essence but which at the same time is formed by various parts that he makes correspond to the phases of historical science. Truth is not something that is given immediately and completely, but the historian reaches it throughout a long and hard path, punctuated by various difficulties: going back to the etymology of ἀλήθεια,<sup>94</sup> it seems that even for Polybius it is an entity that one succeeds to *unveil* slowly, step by step. Therefore, the Platonic doctrine is transposed to historical truth: just as the slave enclosed in the cave is slowly educated to the absolute truth, so the historian comes to "possess" the historical truth after different passages.<sup>95</sup> There are, therefore, *gradus veritatis* that are made explicit in the phases described by Polybius, which however still lead to the one and only unique truth. In this sense, the story of Aristotle is closer to the truth than that of Timaeus: the philosopher had adhered much more to the historiographical procedure, even though he had not completed all the steps of historiographical research, whereas the historian Timaeus, in the opinion of Polybius, touched only the first step, that is that of the "bookish acquisitions".

Hence, the partial and plural truths (which seem also to be influenced by different sorts of things, from bias or blame to the author's background), though they are essential to reach the *true* truth and are part of the preliminary historiographical research and path, can only participate in the historiographical procedure and science if they are thought to be part of it, but they cannot exist by themselves. They appear only as a component of an obligatory route to reach the transcendent truth, since Polybius repeatedly returns to support the historian's need to narrate events without praising friends too much and blaming enemies,<sup>96</sup> but with total objectivity, without deliberately falsifying.

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<sup>93</sup> Pédech 1964: 391.

<sup>94</sup> The lexicographer Hesychius explained ἀληθεία as "not false and what is not forgotten (concealed)" (ἀψευδῆ καὶ τὰ <μη> ἐπιλανθανόμενα). In the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, a similar explanation of Ἀληθές, was given by the *Etymologicum Gudianum*, with the addition of a clear statement on its etymology, from 'forgetfulness' or from the verb 'conceal' (Ἀληθές: παρὰ τὸ λήθη τὸ μὴ λήθη τοῦ δικαίου ὑποπίπτον[τος], and Ἀληθές: παρὰ τὸ λήθω τὸ μὴ λήθη τοῦ δικαίου ὑποπίπτον). Finally, in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century AD, the *Etymologicum Magnum* underlined that Ἀληθές was the opposite of lie, and re-stated the link with non-forgetfulness and/or non-concealment and justice (τὸ μὴ λήθη ὑποπίπτον τοῦ δικαίου: τὸ ἐναντίον τῷ ψεύδει). See, also, Luther 1935: 26; Jens 1951: 240-246; Luther 1954: 35; Mette-Snell 1955, vol. 1, s.v.; Pokorny 1959: 651 and 853; Frisk 1960, s.v.; Heitsch 1962: 24-33 (cf. id. 1963: 36-52); Bultmann 1964: 238-239; Krischer 1965: 167; Chantraine 1968, s.v. λανθάνω; Starr 1968: 350; Levet 1976: 14-15.

<sup>95</sup> On the relationship between Polybius and the allegory of the cave, see *supra* footnote 49.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, 1.14.5-8; 10.21.5-8; 12.28a.1. Cf. Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 7.

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