

A LIKELY STORY: RHETORIC AND THE DETERMINATION OF TRUTH IN POLYBIUS' *HISTORIES**

Abstract: I argue that Polybius demands that a central duty of the historian should be to employ rhetoric to determine which sources are credible, define the course of past events, and convince the reader that the resulting historical narrative is true. Polybius asserts that the historian must 'teach and persuade', so I examine the use of this collocation in other prose authors and rhetorical treatises. I also examine the ways in which Polybius behaves both as a *dikast*, who must judge the quality of competing narratives, and as an orator who must convince his audience to accept his determinations; and I consider certain rhetorical strategies employed by Polybius to these ends. I conclude that Polybius openly applied rhetoric to historical narrative with the expectation that it would make the narrative both more accurate and more credible.

Keywords: Polybius, historiography, rhetoric, truth, Thucydides, Timaeus, Isocrates, Plato

At the conclusion of his seminal *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, A. J. Woodman asserts that ancient historiographers possessed a fundamentally different conception of history from their modern counterparts.¹ Their histories were composed of a core of facts developed through the rhetorical process of *inventio*, which Woodman defines as 'the invention of material'.² For him, classical historians are rhetorical 'in the sense that they manipulate factual truths for dramatic purposes'.³ He concludes that ancient historians aim to produce works which are 'willingly believed' and in which historical truth does not imply 'the authenticity of facts and events'.⁴

In his review of Woodman's book, Roger Brock suggests that if we keep in mind that the object of rhetoric is persuasion, we can consider a 'more interesting sense in which historiography is rhetorical, namely that the historian wants to persuade his audience of two things, first that the account

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¹ Woodman (1988) 197–215; the bibliography in response is vast. Representative works include Bosworth (2003); Moles (1993); Plant (1999); Pownall (2005); Rhodes (1994).

² Woodman (1988) x.

³ Woodman (1988) 199.

⁴ Woodman (1988) 211.

is true, and second that his interpretation is more convincing than any other (and hence “correct”).⁵ He adds that historiography can be ‘rhetorical *and* scientific’.⁶

Like Brock, I agree that the dichotomy between ‘rhetorical’ and ‘truthful’ is false: ancient historians can employ rhetoric to determine the course of past events. They weigh the evidence, whether from witnesses or written testimony, and arrive at a judgement about what happened. Once the historians have judged the evidence, they attempt to convince the reader to accept their conclusions. In this way, the historiographer behaves first like a *dikast*, who examines the available evidence and testimony and makes a determination about the course of past events, and next like an advocate, who must convince his audience to accept that his narrative is true.

This process is easily observed in the *Histories* of Polybius, who was fully aware of the need for persuasion in historiography. I will argue that he defines persuasion as a central element of historiography. He weighs competing accounts against each other and follows those he finds persuasive. During the course of his narrative, he actively and openly pleads his case, and he shows concern that his account is persuasive. His programmatic statements reveal that he was not an innovator in this practice. On the contrary, his contemporaries and predecessors used similar standards and methods, and he invites his readers and continuators to apply similar tests of rhetorical inquiry to his own work.

Teaching and Persuading

In his famous attack on Phylarchus, Polybius asserts that the historian’s duty is to ‘teach and persuade’ (2.56.11):

τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἱστορίας καὶ τραγωδίας οὐ ταῦτόν, ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον. ἐκεῖ μὲν γὰρ δεῖ διὰ τῶν πιθανωτάτων λόγων ἐκπληῆσαι καὶ ψυχαγωγῆσαι κατὰ τὸ παρὸν τοὺς ἀκούοντας, ἐνθάδε δὲ διὰ τῶν ἀληθινῶν ἔργων καὶ λόγων εἰς τὸν πάντα χρόνον διδάξαι καὶ πείσαι τοὺς φιλομαθοῦντας, ἐπειδὴ περ ἐν ἐκείνοις μὲν ἡγεῖται τὸ πιθανόν, κἂν ᾗ ψεῦδος, διὰ τὴν

⁵ Brock (1991) 101.

⁶ Brock (1991) 101, his emphasis. Cf. Cameron (1990) 33: ‘... in order to be believed, the writer must be able to convince the reader, whether by proofs, assertions, truth-claims or rhetorical devices, that his narrative is actually worthy of belief’. Streuver (1980) has made a similar argument, particularly in response to the theories of Hayden White: ‘it is the duty of the more active historian to argue narratives, not simply narrate arguments’ (74); cf. 76: ‘history as a traditional discipline has either been well argued or poorly argued’.

ἀπάτην τῶν θεωμένων, ἐν δὲ τούτοις τὰληθὲς διὰ τὴν ὠφέλειαν τῶν φιλομαθούντων.⁷

For the goal of history and of tragedy is not the same, but the opposite. In the one it is necessary to bewilder and bewitch the listeners for the moment with the most plausible words, but in the other, one must teach and persuade—for all time and with true words and deeds—those who are eager to learn. This is so because in tragedy the plausible takes precedence, even if it is false, so as to deceive the spectators, while in history the truth takes precedence to benefit students.

There are two points I would like to stress about this passage. First, truth takes precedence in history; this very emphasis allows that there are many other important elements of good historical narrative. Second, if by ‘teaching and persuading’ Polybius refers to rhetorical activity, he has made rhetorical argument a defining element of historiography. To understand what Polybius means, however, it is necessary to examine the phrase ‘*διδάξαι καὶ πείσαι*’.⁸

The verb *διδάσκω* naturally refers to argumentation through proofs. Thucydides uses the verb to describe a variety of oratorical activities, as when the Lacedaemonians send envoys to Athens to treat after the calamity on Pylos (4.17.1–3):

ἔπεμψαν ἡμᾶς Λακεδαιμόνιοι, ὧ Ἀθηναῖοι, περὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ νήσῳ ἀνδρῶν πράξοντας ὅτι ἂν ὑμῖν τε ὠφέλιμον ὄν τὸ αὐτὸ πείθωμεν καὶ ἡμῖν ἐς τὴν ξυμφορὰν ὡς ἐκ τῶν παρόντων κόσμον μάλιστα μέλλη οἴσειν. τοὺς δὲ λόγους μακροτέρους οὐ παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς μηχανοῦμεν, ἀλλ’ ἐπιχώριον ὄν ἡμῖν οὐ μὲν βραχεῖς ἀρκῶσι μὴ πολλοῖς χρῆσθαι, πλέοσι δὲ ἐν ᾧ ἂν

⁷ The text of Polybius is that of Büttner-Wobst. All translations of the Greek are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Yunis (1996) analyses instructive persuasion as a feature of Periclean oratory (e.g., 33: ‘... Thucydides attributes the Athenians’ success under Pericles to a peculiar feature of Periclean rhetoric: he alone was able to instruct the citizens in the course of persuading them’). I will attempt to show that the concept of instructing and persuading is more commonplace than Yunis concludes, as was suggested in certain reviews of his book (e.g. Rowe (1997) 636 and Hesk (1999) 183). Nevertheless, once the notion that this type of oratory is restricted to particular figures is abandoned, Yunis’ descriptions are helpful, e.g. Yunis (1996) 76: ‘... the *dêmos* decide correctly not simply because they have been persuaded to do so, as in our euphemism for “commanded to do so”, but instructed about public policy. This mass instruction that precedes mass decision-making can refer only ... to speeches like those delivered by Pericles before the Assembly in which he “explains” and “instructs”.’

καιρὸς ἢ διδάσκοντάς τι τῶν προύργου λόγοις τὸ δέον πράσσειν. λάβετε δὲ αὐτοὺς μὴ πολεμίως μηδ' ὡς ἀξύνετοι διδασκόμενοι, ὑπόμνησιν δὲ τοῦ καλῶς βουλευσασθαι πρὸς εἰδότας ἡγησάμενοι.⁹

Athenians, the Lacedaemonians sent us regarding the affair of the men on the island so we might persuade you that the same thing will benefit you and bring as much credit as possible to us in our misfortune. And we are spinning out long speeches not contrary to our custom; rather, it is our native habit not to use many words where few suffice, but to use more when it is time for arguing something of consequence and for doing what must be done with words. Take them neither inimically, nor like witless men being lectured, but consider them a reminder—for those who know how—of deliberating well.

The Lacedaemonians' first use of a form of διδάσκω in this passage plainly refers to acts of rhetorical deliberation. They have come to persuade, and they are going to persuade by arguing through proofs. The second use of the word reinforces the first. The Spartans make clear that they are not 'teaching', because the Athenians are not in need of instruction; rather, the Spartans are pleading their case before an audience that knows its rhetoric.

Later in the *Histories*, the Melians employ the same verb. At the beginning of the dialogue, they say they find no fault with arguing at leisure (διδάσκειν, 5.86.1), but their second use of the verb is more illustrative (5.98.1):

δεῖ γὰρ αὖ καὶ ἐνταῦθα, ὥσπερ ὑμεῖς τῶν δικαίων λόγων ἡμᾶς ἐκβιβάσαντες τῷ ὑμετέρῳ συμφόρῳ ὑπακούειν πείθετε, καὶ ἡμᾶς τὸ ἡμῖν χρήσιμον διδάσκοντας, εἰ τυγχάνει καὶ ὑμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ συμβαῖνον, πειρᾶσθαι πείθειν.

For here again, since you have stopped us from discussing the question of justice and are persuading us to submit to your interests, we must try to persuade you by arguing for what is serviceable to us, in case the same thing happens to be advantageous to you as well.

Here, the verb διδάσκω refers to an act of argumentation and is associated with the verb πείθω, the same association as in Polybius' attack on Phylarchus. Instruction is inappropriate to the context: the Melians do not intend to teach the Athenians what they find serviceable; rather, they intend

⁹ The text of Thucydides is that of Jones and Powell.

to convince the Athenians to do what is serviceable for the Melians. To this end, they present proofs.

There are many other instances where Thucydides employs forms of *διδάσκω* to refer to rhetorical activity. The Megarians argue that Cnemus, Brasidas, and the other Peloponnesian leaders should make an attempt on the Peiraeus (*διδασκάντων*, 2.93.1). The Corinthians complain that the council rejected their arguments (*διδάσκομεν*, 1.68.2). Sthenalaidas demands that no one argue (*διδασκέτω*, 1.86.4) that wasting time is appropriate. Themistocles argues (*διδάξας*, 1.90.4) before an Athenian assembly. The conspirators at Corcyra argue (*διδάξοντας*, 3.71.2) that the refugees at Athens should do nothing prejudicial. Chalcidian envoys argue (*ἐδίδασκον*, 4.83.3) that Brasidas should deal with Perdiccas. The truce of 429 stipulates that, if the Athenians protest, they must go to Lacedaemonia and argue their case (*διδάσκετε*, 4.118.9). A Corinthian embassy leaves for home having argued (*διδάξαντες*, 5.27.3) their case. Nicias argues (*διδάξω*, 6.9.3) that the expedition to Sicily will be difficult. Alcibiades argues (*διδάξαντος*, 6.93.1) before the Lacedaemonians for a march on Athens and (*ἐδίδασκε*, 7.18.1) for fortifications at Decelea. Peisander argues (*διδασκόμενος*, 8.54.1) for installing an oligarchy and recalling Alcibiades. The 400 send men to Samos to argue (*διδάξοντας*, 8.75.1) that oligarchy benefits the army, but more moderate arguments prevail (*διδαχθέντες*, 8.75.1). In each of these cases, the contexts are unequivocally deliberative. These are councils and debates, and the forms of *διδάσκω* clearly refer to rhetorical acts. Thucydides' usage, therefore, firmly establishes that a basic meaning of the verb is 'to argue'.

Having established the pedigree of this sense of *διδάσκω*, I would like to restrict the following survey to usages of the verb in this sense that illustrate the unique qualities of instructive rhetoric. With that in mind, I turn to Isocrates. In the light of the possible effect Isocrates had on the development of historiography, his mentions of instructive rhetoric warrant close attention.¹⁰ Commonly, his possible influence is reduced to stylistics, but it need not be so limited.¹¹ It is clear, after all, that Isocrates instructed his

¹⁰ The position that Isocrates was the teacher of Ephorus and Theopompus is controversial. For a discussion and citations of relevant literature, cf. Pownall (2005) 257 and n. 7, who argues that the historians were Isocrates' students. For another defence of that position, cf. Nickel (1991). For an argument against, cf. Flower (1994) esp. 42–62.

¹¹ E.g., Momigliano (1978) 8: 'In the fourth century B.C. Ephorus and Theopompus used the rhetorical techniques they had learnt in Isocrates' school to enliven their expositions.' Similarly, Rebenich (1997) 287: 'The "rhetorical" writing of history strove, after the Isocratic model, for stylistically artistic shaping.' Also 288: 'the so-called "rhetorical" writing of history, which in line with the programme of the school founded by Isocrates integrated historiography into rhetoric and reduced it to the function of a normative stylistic model.' Also Labuske (1984) 479: 'die zwar umfangreiche, aber

students to follow the rules of probability and plausibility when employing historical paradigms in their oratory. From there, it would have taken only a small step to demand probability and plausibility in the paradigm itself.¹²

All of the following examples of Isocrates' uses of *διδάσκω* appear in either symbouleutic or forensic contexts. Instruction—what a teacher furnishes to a student—is appropriate to neither. Argumentation is essential to both. For instance, Athenian embassies argue (*διδασκούςας*, 8.68) before the Great King. Conon and Evagoras argue (*ἐδίδασκον*, 9.55) for waging war on sea rather than on land. In the *Archidamus*, the allies try to convince (*διδάσκειν*, 6.13) the Spartans to give up Messene. In *Against Callimachus*, Isocrates demands that his accuser prove (*διδάσκειν*, 18.40) that he took the money.

More significantly, Isocrates' uses of the verb sometimes illustrate the contrast between positive and negative aspects of rhetorical argumentation. In the first place, he contrasts instructive persuasion with outright deception. In *On the Team of Horses*, he begins by asserting that his accusers spend more time slandering his father than arguing (*διδάσκοντες*, 16.2). He, on the other hand, is going to argue instructively (*διδάσκειν*, 16.4).¹³ Isocrates tends to approve of instructive rhetoric, even in the mouths of his opponents. In the *Panegyricus* for instance, he says that the previous speakers spoke the truth—though ineffectively—when they argued (*διδάσκουσιν*, 4.15) for uniting against Artaxerxes. To have achieved anything, he adds, those speakers should have argued (*ἐδίδαξαν*, 4.19) points that were in disagreement. Additionally, in the *Panathenaicus*, he explains that he wrote the speech in part to commend those listeners who consider instructive and artful speeches more serious and philosophical than display or legal speeches (*διδασκαλικούς*, 12.271). For Isocrates, instructive rhetoric is praiseworthy and does not intend to deceive.

We learn still more about Polybius' assertion by examining uses of the full collocation 'to teach and persuade'. Several authors explicitly combine, as Polybius does, forms of *διδάσκω* with forms of *πείθω*. For instance, though

gedankenarme und rhetorisch aufgeputzte Schriftstellerei eines Ephoros und Theopomp.' Pownall's examination (2005) is somewhat more inclusive, considering rhetorical questions, antitheses, 'word jingles' (262), exaggeration, and 'excessive and sensational language' (265). In contrast to all these scholars, D'Huys (1987) 212–7 attributes Ephorus' reluctance to dwell on the terrible to Isocratean influence. He names the resulting style of historiography 'rhetorical-moralising' and argues that it focused on furnishing *paradeigmata* in contrast to the contemporary movement of 'dramatising' historians.

¹² In rhetoric, too, the historical paradigms had to be plausible: cf. Hamilton (1979) 295–6.

¹³ See also 8.18, 8.67. Additionally, he refers to his own argumentative activity with the same verb in the *Panegyricus* (*διδάσκειν*, 4.33) and twice in the *Antidosis* (*διδάσκειν*, 15.29; *διδάσκοντας*, 15.197).

he does not use the precise phrase, Gorgias associates the terms in his *Apology of Palamedes* (Palam. 11a.33 D.–K.):¹⁴

οἶκτος μὲν οὖν καὶ λιταὶ καὶ φίλων παραίτησις ἐν ὄχλῳ μὲν οὔσης τῆς κρίσεως χρήσιμα· παρὰ δ' ὑμῖν τοῖς πρώτοις οὔσι τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ δοκοῦσιν, οὐ φίλων βοηθείαις οὐδὲ λιταῖς οὐδὲ οἴκτοις δεῖ πείθειν ὑμᾶς, ἀλλὰ τῷ σαφεστάτῳ δικαίῳ, διδάξαντα τὰ ληθές, οὐκ ἀπατήσαντά με δεῖ διαφυγεῖν τὴν αἰτίαν ταύτην.

So then, pity and prayers and the supplication of friends are useful when the judgement belongs to the mob, but it is necessary to persuade you, who are the first men of the Greeks—and are known to be—not by the help of friends and prayers and piteous wailing, but with the clearest justice, arguing the truth; I do not have to deceive to escape this charge.

This document is challenging. It seems to have been a show-piece; reluctance to take it at face value, therefore, is well-advised.¹⁵ Still, despite the playfulness and parody, the contrast Palamedes makes between instructive persuasion and emotional appeal remains valid. Even if a speaker's claims to the higher road are disingenuous, the higher road must exist.¹⁶ We have evidence, therefore, that associates instructive persuasion with truthful argument from the very earliest stages of the development of rhetoric.

The precise collocation, 'to teach and persuade', occurs at the end of Plato's *Apology*.¹⁷ Socrates, like Palamedes, concludes his argument by laying claim to an upright and honest argumentative method (*Apol.* 35b9–c2):¹⁸

οὐδὲ δίκαιόν μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι δεῖσθαι τοῦ δικαστοῦ οὐδὲ δεόμενον ἀποφεύγειν, ἀλλὰ διδάσκειν καὶ πείθειν.

¹⁴ The text of the *Palamedes* is that of Diels–Kranz.

¹⁵ Seeskin (1982) 95 considers it a model of sophistic oratory.

¹⁶ Discussing Plato's *Gorgias*, Seeskin (1982) 98 notes: 'To each type of persuasion, there corresponds a type of rhetoric: one is a species of flattery which aims at gratification, the other aims at improving the soul. ... Flattery succeeds only to the extent it can pass itself off as something better.' Similarly, parody must pass itself off as sincerity.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of teaching and persuading in Plato, cf. Morrow (1953) esp. 243: 'The persuasion employed in his state is unquestionably concerned with instructing, i.e., inculcating true beliefs, as Plato thought them to be.'

¹⁸ The text of the *Apology* is that of Burnet. The similarities between the *Apology* and the *Palamedes* have stimulated much discussion. Seeskin (1982) 100 argues that the appearance of the collocation in the *Apology* is a direct response to the *Palamedes*.

It seems to me just neither to beg the dikast nor, having begged, to be acquitted, but rather to teach and persuade.

Here again, instructive persuasion is opposed to deception, emotional manipulation, and dramatic delivery.¹⁹ Still, the passage raises questions. Given Plato's complicated opinion of rhetoric, he may mean to contrast teaching and persuading with any kind of rhetoric at all.²⁰ Furthermore, we cannot conclude from the *Apology* that Plato considers instructive persuasion to belong to rhetoric alone. For example, the phrase also appears in the *Laches* when Socrates suggests that the four older men express their opinions, and if he has any response to make, he will try to teach and persuade them (181d6). Similarly, in the *Protagoras*, he invites his interlocutor to join him and 'teach and persuade humanity' (*Prot.* 352e5–6). In the *Laws*, free doctors use instructive persuasion to treat their patients, in contrast to the more autocratic slave-doctor (*Leg.* 804d1). Later, the Athenian supposes that those charged with sacrilege and unfamiliar with Athens would first ask to be taught and persuaded about the nature of the gods before being punished (*Leg.* 885d2). Though none of these instances contradicts the use of the phrase in the *Apology*, there is no definitive link in these passages between teaching and persuading and rhetoric. In the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, however, instructive persuasion is explored in more depth.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates considers the role of instruction in rhetoric at length. He and Gorgias agree that anyone who instructs also persuades (διδάσκει, πείθει, 453c9), and Socrates provides an illustration. The arithmetic art and the person skilled in it instruct and persuade students of arithmetic (διδάσκει, πείθει, 453e2, 4). The arithmetic art is therefore a practitioner of persuasion (πειθοῦς δημιουργός, 453e4–5) and its persuasion is instructive (διδασκαλική, 453e7). Similarly, all other arts are producers of persuasion (454a2–3).

¹⁹ Kallet-Marx (1994) 235, not taking into account *Apol.* 35b9–c2, argues that Plato polemicalises against 'the common democratic image of the orator as teacher'.

²⁰ Though cf. Yunis (1996) 155: '[Socrates] insists ... that in contrast to the deceitful discourse of the prosecutors his truthful way of speaking exemplifies true rhetorical excellence.' Also McCoy (2008) 55: 'What distinguishes Socrates from the sophists in the *Apology* is neither rhetoric-free speech nor a precise philosophical method. Instead, Socrates and Plato are both rhetorical in the sense of being willing to draw upon the techniques of orators and sophists in order to persuade their own audience.' Similarly, Brickhouse and Smith (1986) argue that the *Apology* is meant to represent a sincere and conventional forensic defence of Socrates, even if ahistorical.

Later, Socrates asserts that the rhetoric of the law courts is not instructive persuasion;²¹ furthermore, the forensic rhetorician is not instructive (διδασκαλικός, 455a3) but persuasive (πιστικός, 455a4), because he cannot in such a short amount of time instruct (διδάξαι, 455a6) such a large crowd in matters so important. When discussion resumes, Gorgias reaffirms that on all subjects the rhetor in the law court carries conviction with the mob not by instructing them, but by persuading them.²²

In this line of questioning, Socrates never rejects instructive persuasion;²³ rather, he examines how the rhetoric before the mob in the law court contrasts with instructive persuasion. It is this non-instructive rhetoric, later characterised as a form of flattery (κολακείαν, 463a8), that Socrates rejects; furthermore, he juxtaposes this flattery with another type of rhetoric, one which has not yet been found in practice but tries to improve the citizens' souls. Socrates claims that his speeches meet the requirements for this kind of rhetoric,²⁴ which eschews flattery and points to what is just.²⁵

The difference between flattery and instructive rhetoric is also a subject of discussion in the *Phaedrus*. Here, Socrates maintains that whoever develops an art of rhetoric must make a clear division between abstract concepts like 'justice' or 'goodness' and concrete things like 'iron' or 'silver'. Such a division is necessary because people are easily deceived about abstract concepts.²⁶ Then Socrates concludes that there are skills worth learning, and defines one (*Phdr.* 265d3–5):²⁷

εἰς μίαν τε ιδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῇ διεσπαρμένα, ἵνα ἕκαστον ὀριζόμενος δῆλον ποιῇ περὶ οὗ ἂν ἀεὶ διδάσκειν ἐθέλῃ.

²¹ Pl. *Gorg.* 454e9–a2: ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἄρα, ὥς ἔοικεν, πειθοῦς δημιουργός ἐστιν πιστευτικῆς ἀλλ' οὐ διδασκαλικῆς περὶ τὸ δίκαιόν τε καὶ ἄδικον.

²² Pl. *Grg.* 458e6–7: ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν περὶ πάντων ὥστ' ἐν ὅλῳ πιθανὸν εἶναι, οὐ διδάσκοντα ἀλλὰ πείθοντα; ΓΟΡ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν.

²³ Cf. McCoy (2008) 110: 'The *Gorgias* does not reject rhetoric as such but instead connects good rhetoric to the possession of ... philosophical values.' Also Murray (1988) 8: 'sophistical rhetoric is merely one (mis)use of an otherwise legitimate didactic method, the persuading activity.'

²⁴ Pl. *Grg.* 521e–522a. Cf. McCoy (2008) 101: 'Socrates acts with attention to *kairos*, a sense of knowing what sorts of *logoi* are called for at different times in order to persuade his audience. He tries a variety of approaches—questions, images, arguments, and myths—to persuade Callicles that the just soul is better off; he is rhetorical and changes his approach in different circumstances, although his moral stance remains stable.'

²⁵ Pl. *Grg.* 527b–c

²⁶ Pl. *Phdr.* 263a5–263b9

²⁷ The text of the *Phaedrus* is that of Burnet (1967).

Bringing disparately scattered things into one comprehensive class, so that by delimiting each thing, one makes clear what it is one wishes to argue throughout.

The context makes clear that Socrates is contrasting instructive persuasion with the dishonest kinds of persuasion that make the weaker case the stronger and do not amount to an art. He is, after all, in the course of defining what qualities an art of rhetoric must possess. If one can define everything separately, divide the subjects by classes, understand the nature of the soul, and arrange and adorn the discourse, then one will be able to argue artfully and persuade instructively (*πρὸς τὸ διδάξαι ... πρὸς τὸ πείσαι*, 277c5–6). All other issues aside, these passages stress the fact that instructive argument is rhetorical persuasion.

The same association appears in the thought of Aristotle. At the beginning of the *Rhetoric*, he assumes a stance in opposition to existing handbooks. Echoing the *Apology* and the *Palamedes*, he asserts that one ought not to pervert the dikast by arousing anger, jealousy, or pity.²⁸ He goes on to say that rhetoric is useful for two reasons. First, the advocates of truth and justice sometimes fall short, and thus need the help of rhetoric. Second, even though arguments based on knowledge are instructive (*διδασκαλίας*, 1.1.1355a26), some people are incapable of being instructed, and must then be persuaded by rhetoric. He then offers a definition of rhetoric: the ability to theorise the possible means of persuasion in any circumstance.²⁹ Each of the other arts is instructive and persuasive (*διδασκαλική καὶ πειστική*, 1.2.1355b28) regarding its own subject, but rhetoric is the only art that can theorise the persuasion for any subject.³⁰ This statement is perhaps the most emphatic association of instructive persuasion with rhetoric so far. Rhetoric is the ability to instruct and persuade on any subject.

With this understanding of instructive rhetoric in mind, I would like to return to Polybius.³¹ Like Thucydides and Isocrates, Polybius employs the

²⁸ Arist. *Rh.* 1.1.1354a24–25

²⁹ Arist. *Rh.* 1.2.1355b25–26: ἔστω δὴ ἡ ῥητορική δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρήσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν.

³⁰ Arist. *Rh.* 1.2.1355b31–3.

³¹ Besides 2.56, Polybius employs the full collocation only twice: at 5.63.3 to describe Ptolemy's style of argumentation; and again at 39.3.5 to describe Philopoemen's. Naturally, in a fragmentary work, the number of usages—determined as they are by the vicissitudes of transmission—is less relevant than the context of each use. The attack on Phylarchus is an emphatic digression on historiographical method. That Polybius defines his method at all is remarkable and lends as much weight to the passage as its emotion.

verb *διδάσκω* to refer to acts of symbouleutic oratory. Gesco tries to convince (*διδάσκειν*, 1.69.2) his troops to remain loyal. Adeimantus argues (*διδάσκειν*, 4.22.9) before the assembled citizens of Tegea that they should not oppose the approaching Macedonian forces. A Messenian embassy, seeking Philip's help, argues (*διδάσκοντες*, 5.5.3) that he could cross from Cephallenia to Messenia in a single day. Hannibal convinced (*ἐδίδασκε*, 8.43.5) the Tarentines that to remove the Romans from their citadel, they must control the sea. Philip wishes to convince (*διδάσκειν*, 16.34.5) Marcus Aemilius that the Rhodians attacked first. Flamininus argues (*διδάσκων*, 18.45.7–9) at the conference in Corinth that the Romans must free the Greek cities garrisoned by Philip. The Achaeans send Apollonidas of Sicyon to argue (*διδάξοντας*, 22.11.6) before the Roman senate about affairs in the Peloponnese. He and the Spartan embassies argue (*διδασκόντων*, 22.12.1) about Philopoemen's management of the region. The Achaeans send envoys to Rome to argue (*διδάξοντας*, 24.8.7) that they cannot comply with Roman demands without violating their own laws, but on arrival Callicrates did not argue (*διδάσκειν*, 24.8.9) in accordance with his orders. Rhodians send envoys to the Romans to argue (*διδάξοντας*, 25.5.4) that the Lycians behaved deceitfully. Polybius himself argues (*ἐδίδασκον*, 29.24.1) before the Achaean assembly. Leptines boasts that he will go before the Roman senate and argue (*διδάξειν*, 32.3.4) that he murdered Gnaeus with the approval of the gods. The Romans send an envoy to the Achaeans to convince them (*διδάσκειν*, 38.9.4) to ignore those who want them to act against Rome. On their way to the Peloponnese, they meet an embassy sent by the Achaeans to argue (*διδάξοντες*, 38.10.2) their case before the Senate. In every case, the verb clearly refers to acts of rhetorical argument.

Given this lengthy survey, two conclusions follow. First, when Polybius says it is the duty of the historian to teach and persuade, he puts rhetorical argument at the heart of historiography. Second, the type of instructive rhetoric he singles out is frequently opposed in the ancient literature to deceptive and emotional argumentation.³² Neither of these conclusions prevents any particular historiographer from disguising deceitful rhetoric as instructive. Neither conclusion prevents a reader from labelling instructive

The two other passages sufficiently indicate that Polybius employed the collocation with a consistent meaning.

³² As mentioned above, Polybius is not innovative in this respect. Cf. Yunis (1996) 29: 'All three [Plato, Thucydides, and Demosthenes] adopt ideal criteria when they propose their models of political rhetoric. All are well-versed in the uses of language; none countenances the use of charisma or a mystical kind of persuasion to conjure an end to political conflict and create a community sustained by emotion or faith. All three seek a rational, instructive political discourse, a discourse that applies human intelligence and will to make the citizen-community wiser, and therefore better.'

rhetoric as deceitful. What Polybius has done, however, is make clear that in his estimation the presence of rhetoric in historiography is neither unusual nor necessarily mendacious.

The Dikast, the Advocate, Probability, and the Truth

Before moving on to consider the rhetorical arguments Polybius uses himself or observes in the works of others, I would like to consider the roles the historiographer must play. In the first instance, he must examine historical accounts and other evidence and determine which sources to accept and which to reject. In this way, the historian behaves like a dikast. Once the historian has made his determinations, he must then present his judgement to the reader in such a way that lends credibility both to the historian himself and to his account. In this role, the historian behaves like an orator. In either role, a concern for historical truth is appropriate; in both roles, a concern for plausibility and persuasion is fundamental.

Polybius begins his history proper with the 140th Olympiad because accounts of the remote past amount to hearsay and do not allow for safe judgements (*διαλήψεις*) and assertions (*ἀποφάσεις*) regarding the course of events.³³ For the period of his own and the previous generation, he can relate events he saw himself, or he can use the testimony of eyewitnesses.³⁴ Nevertheless, even for contemporary events, the historian is faced with a host of contradictory evidence.³⁵

Polybius understands that eyewitness accounts are potentially untrustworthy. In the first place, people can misunderstand the events unfolding before them (2.28.11):

ἴδιον ἦν καὶ θαυμαστὸν τὸ συμβαῖνον οὐ μόνον τοῖς ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ καιρῷ τότε παροῦσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ποτε μετὰ ταῦτα δυναμένοις ὑπὸ τὴν ὄψιν λαμβάνειν ἐκ τῶν λεγομένων τὸ γεγινός.

³³ Pol. 4.2.3. Marincola (1997) 67 argues that conjecture and tests of probability were necessary in accounts of the distant past when eyewitnesses were unavailable. I will argue that Polybius applies these same tests to contemporary events and to the testimony of those who witnessed them.

³⁴ Pol. 4.2.2: *ἐξ οὗ συμβαίνει τοῖς μὲν αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς παραγεγονέναι, τὰ δὲ παρὰ τῶν ἑωρακότων ἀκηκοέναι.*

³⁵ Raaflaub (2013) 17 makes a similar point regarding the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars: ‘... the memory of these wars was necessarily fractured, differing greatly among those involved: different events were remembered and even main events were remembered differently from one *polis* to the other; the scope of universally accepted elements was minimal, essentially limited to the bare outline of the main facts.’

The result [of the spectacle] was peculiar and beyond the ordinary not only for those present as it happened, but also for those who were able, sometime later, to visualise what happened from reports.

In this instance, the difficulty of comprehending the event is practical (2.29.1):

πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τριῶν στρατοπέδων τῆς μάχης συνισταμένης, δῆλον ὡς ξένην καὶ παρηλλαγμένην εἰκὸς καὶ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν καὶ τὴν χρείαν φαίνεσθαι τοῦ συντεταγμένου.

For in the first place, since three armies joined the battle, it is clear that the sight and movement of the marshalled forces appeared, in all likelihood, strange and unusual.

This passage represents something of an exception to the general practice of ancient historians to take eyewitness accounts as in the main reliable.³⁶ As eyewitnesses may in fact be unreliable, historians who work from eyewitness accounts cannot simply accept the accounts preserved in their sources (2.29.2):

... πῶς οὐκ ἂν ἀπορήσαι τις καὶ νῦν καὶ τότε παρ' αὐτὸν ὄν τὸν καιρὸν πότερον οἱ Κελτοὶ τὴν ἐπισφαλεστάτην εἶχον χώραν;

... how would anyone either now or who was present at the time not be at a loss as to whether the Celts held the most precarious position?

Nevertheless, determining whether the Celts lost the battle due to their position, or tactics, training, personnel, equipment, or even their lack of moral fortitude, is essential for the pragmatic student of history.³⁷ Making

³⁶ Cf. Marincola (1997) 66. Further, Canfora (1983) 15: 'Whether something was true or likely to be true was secondary to the fact that it was a *logos* told by an informant.' Despite any shortcomings, Polybius places a great deal of faith in eyewitnesses and autopsy, cf. (20.12.8): οὐχ ὅμοιον ἐστὶν ἐξ ἀκοῆς περὶ πραγμάτων διαλαμβάνειν καὶ γενόμενον αὐτόπτην, ἀλλὰ καὶ μεγάλα διαφέρει, πολὺ δέ τι συμβάλλεσθαι πέφυκεν ἐκάστοις ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἐνάργειαν πίστις ('Determining events from a report and being an eyewitness are not the same but differ greatly. But credence through self-evidence naturally contributes a great deal in each instance').

³⁷ Polybius is very clear that the historian's judgements must be sound if the reader is to benefit from studying the account, e.g. 3.21.9–10: ἵνα μὴθ' οἷς καθήκει καὶ διαφέρει τὸ σαφῶς εἰδέναι τὴν ἐν τούτοις ἀκρίβειαν, παραπαίωσι τῆς ἀληθείας ἐν τοῖς ἀναγκαιοτάτοις διαβουλίαις, μὴθ' οἱ φιλομαθοῦντες περὶ τούτων ἀστοχῶσι, συμπλανώμενοι ταῖς ἀγνοίαις καὶ φιλοτιμίαις τῶν συγγραφέων, ἀλλ' ἢ τις ὁμολογουμένη θεωρία τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς

that determination, whether through the examination of eyewitnesses or the narratives in which they are preserved, is therefore a necessary task of the historian.³⁸

Historical actors themselves create a need for judgements regarding the course of past events. For instance, Polybius rejects written accounts of Hannibal's character.³⁹ The reasons for his judgement in this case have little to do with the accounts themselves. He argues that, firstly, historical figures are sometimes forced by circumstance to behave in ways that contradict their character, while at other times they must dissimulate and obscure their true intentions or designs;⁴⁰ furthermore, advisors might be responsible for the actions taken, and therefore the actions reveal the character of the advisors rather than of the leaders themselves. Polybius illustrates his point by enlisting some parallel examples, Agathocles of Sicily and Cleomenes of Sparta, both of whom presented one face in public and another in private. Polybius concludes with the following judgement (9.23.4):

καίτοι γ' οὐκ εἰκὸς ἦν περὶ τὰς αὐτὰς φύσεις τὰς ἐναντιωτάτας διαθέσεις
ὑπάρχειν.

It is not likely that such diametrically opposed dispositions exist in the same nature.

In these cases, written histories are of little use in determining historical fact. Instead, the historian must examine the data, apply reason, and pass judgement.

To complicate matters, when more than one written account of the same event exists, contradictions are common (3.32.4):⁴¹

ὑπαρξάντων δικαίων Ῥωμαῖοις καὶ Καρχηδονίοις πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἕως εἰς τοὺς καθ' ἡμᾶς καιρούς. ('So that those, for whom there is a duty or interest in knowing these things clearly and with accuracy, do not fall away from the truth in the most fateful deliberations, and so that those who are eager to learn about these things do not fail, led down the garden path by the ignorance and rivalries of historians, but that there will be some accepted reckoning of the contracts existing between the Romans and Carthaginians from the beginning up to our times.')

³⁸ Cf. Clarke (2003) 81: 'All forms of evidence, when critically handled, could be valuable in putting together the historical narrative.'

³⁹ Pol. 9.22.7–26.11.

⁴⁰ Sometimes, of course, the secret becomes manifest. Fr. 212: ἡ δὲ τύχη παρελκομένη τὴν πρόφασιν καθάπερ ἐπὶ προσκήνιον παρεγύνμνωσε τὰς ἀληθεῖς ἐπινοίας. Fortune, as if dragging the pretence onto stage, exposed the true designs.

⁴¹ Historians frequently consulted multiple versions of the same events. Canfora (1983) 5 and n. 10 argues that when Hecataeus ridicules the *logoi* of the Greeks for being many

οὐδὲ καταλαβεῖν ἐξ αὐτῶν βεβαίως οὐδὲν οἶόν τε τοὺς ἀναγινώσκοντας,
πρῶτον μὲν διὰ τὸ τοὺς πλείστους μὴ ταῦτα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν γράφειν ...

And it is impossible for the readers to securely comprehend anything from these [monographic historians], primarily because most of them do not write the same things about the same events ...

Written accounts of the past disagree, and in these cases the historian has no choice but to make his own determination.⁴²

Polybius' criticism of Philinus' and Fabius Pictor's accounts of the first Punic war provides an example of such a judgement (I.15). Both authors apparently agreed that the Syracusans and the Carthaginians had taken up positions against each other near Messene; further, both agreed that the Romans arrived, entered Messene, sallied forth against the Syracusans, returned, sallied forth against the Carthaginians, and returned again to Messene. Both authors record that, subsequently, Hiero and the Syracusans burned their stockades and tents and returned to Syracuse. Both agree that the Carthaginians dispersed into various nearby towns and that the Romans advanced and laid siege to Syracuse and Echetla. The only point, Polybius asserts, upon which the two authors disagree is which army was victorious. Philinus maintains that the Romans suffered defeats; Fabius records Roman victories.

Polybius is now faced with a dilemma. On the points about which his sources agree, the number of armies involved, the movements, the number and location of the battles, he can follow the sources. To determine which armies advanced in victory, and which retreated in defeat, he must make his own determination. In this case, he decides that the behaviour of the Syracusans and Carthaginians, burning their camps and dispersing, is indicative of defeat, so he sides with Fabius.⁴³ This judgement is not adornment or rearrangement,⁴⁴ but a determination of the central facts. In much the same way, a dikast might have to determine whether a killing was justifiable or simply murder.

(πολλοί), he 'seems primarily to object to a variety of different accounts of the same subjects'. Similarly, Rebenich (1997) 271: 'The first universal historian of antiquity [Ephorus] was in fact a 'bookworm', who took extracts from the sources available, put them together, and transposed them into an agreeable uniform style.'

⁴² For a detailed study of how Polybius evaluates written sources, cf. Vercruysse (1990).

⁴³ Modern historians are less certain that the engagements took place at all: cf. Walbank (1970) ad loc.

⁴⁴ Pace Bosworth (2003) 170: 'By and large the facts are thought to be established, and the historian's task is seen to be rearrangement and re-interpretation.'

Those who write contemporary accounts might record contradictory versions of past events for any number of reasons. Perhaps Philinus (or Fabius) was blinded by patriotism. Other authors face the threat of political reprisal (8.10.3–4):

τῶν συγγραφέων τοὺς μὲν ὅλως παραλελοιπέναι τὰ κατὰ τοὺς Μεσσηνίους, τοὺς δὲ καθόλου διὰ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς μονάρχους εὐνοιαν ἢ τάναντία φόβον οὐχ οἷον ἐν ἀμαρτία γεγονέναι τὴν εἰς τοὺς Μεσσηνίους ἀσέβειαν Φιλίππου καὶ παρανομίαν, ἀλλὰ τούναντίον ἐν ἐπαίνῳ καὶ κατορθώματι τὰ πεπραγμένα διασαφεῖν ἡμῖν.

Of those writers [of the affairs of Philip], some omit the Messenian affair completely, others, purely through good feeling for the kings or, conversely, because they are afraid, have made quite clear to us that the impiety and lawlessness of Philip at Messene was not only not a mistake, but quite the opposite: his actions were praiseworthy and virtuous.

The historians who praise Philip at Messene do not invent Philip's behaviour, substantially change it, or omit key details. Apparently, Philip incited a fight between opposing factions at Messene that led to the death of two magistrates and roughly two hundred citizens.⁴⁵ But to determine whether his actions were justified or outrageous is more complicated. Such judgements do not rest upon the bare facts alone. Polybius stresses this aspect of the historian's job in his attack on Phylarchus (2.56.14–16):

ἐπεὶ τίς ἀνθρώπων οὐ δεινὸν ἡγέται τύπτεσθαι τοὺς ἐλευθέρους; ἀλλ' ὅμως, ἐὰν μὲν ἄρχων ἀδίκων χειρῶν πάθῃ τις τοῦτο, δικαίως κρίνεται πεπονθέναι. ἐὰν δ' ἐπὶ διορθώσει καὶ μαθήσῃ ταῦτό τοῦτο γίνηται, προσέτι καὶ τιμῆς καὶ χάριτος οἱ τύπτοντες τοὺς ἐλευθέρους ἀξιοῦνται. καὶ μὴν τό γε τοὺς πολίτας ἀποκτείνονται μέγιστον ἀσέβημα τίθεται καὶ μεγίστων ἄξιον προστίμων. καίτοι γε προφανῶς ὁ μὲν τὸν κλέπτην ἢ μοιχὸν ἀποκτείνας ἀθῶός ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ τὸν προδότην ἢ τύραννον τιμῶν καὶ προεδρείας τυγχάνει παρὰ πᾶσιν. οὕτως ἐν παντὶ τὸ τέλος κεῖται τῆς διαλήψεως ὑπὲρ τούτων οὐκ ἐν τοῖς τελουμένοις, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς αἰτίαις καὶ προαιρέσεσι τῶν πραττόντων καὶ ταῖς τούτων διαφοραῖς.

For who on earth does not consider it terrible when free men are beaten? All the same, whenever the one who first resorts to violence is beaten, he is judged to have suffered justly. And if it is for correction or

⁴⁵ Cf. Walbank (1970) 7.12.1.

education, those who beat free men are considered all the more worthy of honour and gratitude. And killing citizens is the greatest sacrilege and worthy of the greatest penalty. But whoever kills a thief or adulterer is obviously blameless, and all over the world those who kill traitors and tyrants gain esteem and official recognition. In every circumstance, the passing of judgement rests not upon the act that is done, but in the motives and intentions of the actors and the differences between them.

Any single act can invite various interpretations, so historians must survey (*συνθεωρεῖν*, 3.32.5), interpret (*συγκρίνειν*, 3.32.5), perform examinations (*δοκιμασία*, 3.34.5), and decide which sources to follow and what their import is.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Polybius expects other historians to make judgements of a similar nature to those he himself makes (12.4c.3–5):

τὸ περὶ τὰς ἀνακρίσεις μέρος ἐπισέσσυρται παρ' αὐτῷ τελέως· ὅπερ ἐστὶ κυριώτατον τῆς ἱστορίας. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ αἱ μὲν πράξεις ἅμα πολλαχῇ συντελοῦνται, παρῆναι 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, καταλείπεται πυνθάνεσθαι μὲν ὡς παρὰ πλείστων, πιστεύειν δὲ τοῖς ἀξίοις πίστεως, κριτὴν δ' εἶναι τῶν προσπιπτόντων μὴ κακόν.

He is utterly slovenly in the area of his examinations, which is the most important element of history. For actions happen at the same time in many places, and one person cannot possibly be present at any moment in more than one place, and a single person cannot see first-hand all of the places in the inhabited world or all of the peculiarities in those places. What remains is to inquire among as many people as possible, to believe those who are worthy of credence, and not to be a poor judge of the reports one hears.

Like a *dikast*, the historian must determine—from whatever evidence is available—not only what sources are credible, but also which particular

⁴⁶ And he's not the first Greek to have such an understanding: Tindale (2010) 111: 'If there is no clearly objective truth that reason can uncover, as the Protagorean tradition would insist, then the need to adjudicate difference in perception and perspective becomes paramount.' We can find a similar attitude in the law courts: cf. Todd (1993) 89: 'It [the jurist's vote] was a general verdict on which of the two theses was preferable, rather than a specific verdict on whether the defendant had or had not committed the offence ...'; cf. *ibid.* 90.

interpretation of events the sources support. Furthermore, like a *dikast*, the historian may judge well or poorly, fairly or with bias, with sincerity or mendacity. The act of judgement itself is blameless.

Once a historian has played his *dikastic* role, he must then take up the role of orator and attempt to persuade his reader to accept his account.⁴⁷ Because the act of judgement is inherent in historical narrative, the demand for truth is more than a simple demand for verifiable facts.⁴⁸ The account must also be plausible, and the historian must be credible.

Polybius' discussion of the silting of the Pontus touches upon the necessity of plausibility and credibility. According to him, the Pontus was becoming a shallow freshwater lake. His position contradicts the common opinion of sailors, and he stresses the differing levels of credibility in their determinations and his own (4.39.11):

αἱ μὲν οὖν ἀληθεῖς αἰτίαι τοῦ ῥεῖν ἔξω τὸν Πόντον αἶδ' εἰσὶν, οὐκ ἐξ ἐμπορικῶν ἔχουσαι διηγημάτων τὴν πίστιν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς κατὰ φύσιν θεωρίας, ἧς ἀκριβεστέραν εὑρεῖν οὐ ῥᾶδιον.

The true causes of the flow out of the Pontus are these [i.e., the ones Polybius has determined]. They do not gain credibility from the stories of merchants, but from my observation of nature; it is not easy to find something more precise than that.

At first, it appears that Polybius is rejecting credibility (*πίστις*) in favour of truth, but he soon makes his position clearer (4.40.1):

οὐδὲν ἀφετέον ἀργὸν οὐδ' ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ φάσει κείμενον, ὅπερ οἱ πλείστοι ποιεῖν εἰώθασι τῶν συγγραφέων, ἀποδεικτικῇ δὲ μᾶλλον τῇ διηγήσει χρηστέον, ἵνα μηδὲν ἄπορον ἀπολείπωμεν τῶν ζητουμένων τοῖς φιληκόοις.

⁴⁷ Vercruysse (1990) 31: 'A notre avis l'intention générale est de convaincre les lecteurs.' Cf. Pédech (1964) 355: 'L'historien doit faire partager sa conviction au lecteur de la même manière qu'elle s'est formée en lui.' Further, Labuske (1984) 486: 'Seine Methode, Quellen zu sammeln, kritisch zu sichten, gegeneinander abzuwägen und schließlich nach eigenem Urteil zu verwerten, hat im Prinzip heute noch Gültigkeit, wenn sich auch das Instrumentarium wesentlich verfeinert hat.' Marincola (1997) 135–6 argues that Theopompus acts as an orator for the reader who acts as a jury member.

⁴⁸ Cf. Marincola (1997) 74: 'Polybius does not imagine that an historian has only to question informants to find out what happened: the truth is rather bound up in a complex nexus of inquirer and informer, and is as dependent on the ability of the former as it is on the reliability of the latter.'

Nothing must be left untested nor rest on assertion alone, as most writers are accustomed to do, but rather one must employ a demonstrative⁴⁹ narrative, so that we do not leave any difficulty for those fond of hearing what has been investigated.

More strikingly, Polybius asserts that as the art of historiography progresses and more tools of investigation become available to the historian, credibility becomes even more essential (4.40.2–3):

οὐκ ἂν ἔτι πρέπον εἴη ποιηταῖς καὶ μυθογράφοις χρῆσθαι μάρτυσι περὶ τῶν ἀγνοουμένων, ὅπερ οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν πεποιήκασι περὶ τῶν πλείστων, ἀπίστους ἀμφισβητουμένων παρεχόμενοι βεβαιωτὰς κατὰ τὸν Ἡράκλειτον, πειρατέον δὲ δι' αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας ἱκανὴν παριστάναι πίστιν τοῖς ἀκούουσι.

It is no longer appropriate to use poets and mythographers as witnesses for what we do not understand, as our predecessors did regarding most things, producing untrustworthy sureties of disputes, as Heraclitus says, but one must try to furnish credibility sufficient for the readers through the history itself.

Inconveniently for us, Polybius' assessment of the silting of the Pontus is incorrect, but his point about the historian's task stands (4.42.7):

ἔτι δὲ μᾶλλον εἰρήσθω καὶ τῆς τῶν πλοῖζομένων ψευδολογίας καὶ τερατείας χάριν, ἵνα μὴ παντὶ τῷ λεγομένῳ προσκεχνηέναι παιδικῶς ἀναγκαζώμεθα διὰ τὴν ἀπειρίαν, ἔχοντες δ' ἔχνη τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπὶ ποσὸν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπικρίνειν δυνάμεθα τὸ λεγόμενον ὑπὸ τινων ἀληθῶς ἢ τούναντίον.

But I provided this account even more because of the falsehoods and tall tales of sailors, so that we are not forced by our ignorance to accept every utterance like a slack-jawed child, but by tracking down the truth we can determine to what degree statements by authors are truthful or not.

⁴⁹ The term ἀποδεικτικός is a word of special importance for Polybius. Coincidentally, Aristotle asserts that truly just forensic rhetoric would require only to demonstrate the facts (*Rh.* 3.1.1404a6: ἀποδείκνυμι). On the 'apodeictic' method in Polybius, cf. Marincola (1997) 11; Pédech (1964) 43–53; Petzold (1969) 3–20; Sacks (1981) 171–8.

A credible account is intimately bound to a credible historian. The historian's credibility is related to his ability to effectively judge the quality of his sources. Polybius does not hide his desire to appear credible, and he goes to great lengths to achieve credibility.⁵⁰ In fact, he stresses this desire from the starting point of his narrative (1.5.5):

τῆς γὰρ ἀρχῆς ἀγνοουμένης ἢ καὶ νῆ Δί' ἀμφισβητουμένης οὐδὲ τῶν ἐξῆς οὐδὲν οἶόν τε παραδοχῆς ἀξιωθῆναι καὶ πίστεως· ὅταν δ' ἡ περὶ ταύτης ὁμολογουμένη παρασκευασθῇ δόξα, τότε ἥδη καὶ πᾶς ὁ συνεχῆς λόγος ἀποδοχῆς τυγχάνει παρὰ τοῖς ἀκούουσιν.

For if the beginning is unknown or—by Zeus—in dispute, then it is impossible for anything that follows to be deemed worthy of acceptance and credence. But whenever a commonly agreed notion regarding this [beginning point] is provided, only then does the subsequent account obtain acceptance among the readers.

Furthermore, Polybius frequently makes note of the elements in his histories that help achieve credence (7.13.2, 6):

ἡμεῖς δέ, τοῦ κατὰ τὴν πέμπτην βύβλον ἡμῖν ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ καὶ φάσει μόνον εἰρημένου νῦν δι' αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν πίστιν εἰληφότος, βουλόμεθα προσαναμνησαί τοὺς συνεφιστάνοντας τῇ πραγματείᾳ, πρὸς τὸ μηδεμίαν τῶν ἀποφάσεων ἀναπόδεικτον μηδ' ἀμφισβητουμένην καταλιπεῖν. ... εἰς τοῦτον ὑπερθέμενοι τὸν καιρὸν τὴν πίστιν τῆς προρρηθείσης ἀποφάσεως ...

Since what I said in my fifth book as only a profession and mere assertion has now seized upon credence through the affairs themselves, I want to remind those who are attentively following my narrative [of my previous statements], with a view to leaving not one of my assertions without proofs or in dispute. ... I deferred the proof of my previous assertion to this moment ...

Polybius does not simply place his narrative before the reader and expect the factual truth of it, or his claim to factual truth, to satisfy the reader's scepticism. Instead, he emphasises his argumentative posture; he stresses that

⁵⁰ Cf. Miltsios (2013) 330–1: 'Both the self-distancing and the tendency to intervene in the narrative can be interpreted as rhetorical gestures that enable Thucydides and Polybius, setting out from different starting-points and travelling by different routes, to reach the same goal: to reinforce the reliability of their descriptions and their own credibility.'

he places before the reader a credible case.⁵¹ He works even harder to persuade the reader his account is true when events themselves are difficult to believe (31.30.1–2):

ἐγὼ δὲ πλείω πεποιήμαι λόγον ὑπὲρ τῆς Σκιπίωνος αἰρέσεως ... μάλιστα δὲ βουλόμενος πίστιν παρασκευάζειν τοῖς λέγεσθαι μέλλουσιν ... πρὸς τὸ μήτε διαπορεῖν τοὺς ἀκούοντας διὰ τὸ παράδοξά τινα φανήσεσθαι τῶν συμβαινόντων μετὰ ταῦτα ...

I have made this rather long account of Scipio's principles ... primarily because I wanted to procure credence for what I am about to relate ... so readers will not be in doubt because certain of the events after these appear incredible ...

For the historian, paradoxical events present a particular difficulty, but when events themselves are surprising or hard to believe, the historian relies even more upon credibility.⁵²

After giving the exact numbers and stations of Hannibal's troops in the winter of 219/18, Polybius asserts that he is not like those writers who invent details in order to lend an air of plausibility to their lies.⁵³ Nevertheless, he is aware that an account that presents too much accuracy or detail (*ἀκρίβεια*, 3.33.17) might raise suspicion. In this case, he explains, precision is possible because he found a bronze tablet on which Hannibal inscribed the relevant details. He further explains that he considered this tablet worthy of belief (*ἀξιόπιστος*, 3.33.18).⁵⁴ Unless the historian wins the credence (*πίστις*) of the reader, the relative accuracy of the account is irrelevant.⁵⁵

Of course, the mendacious historian also strives to convince the reader that his account is true by giving it the veneer of plausibility. The attack on

⁵¹ He makes a similar assertion regarding his decision to provide background information regarding the reformation of the Achaean League (2.42.2): ἵνα καὶ τὰ τῆς προαιρέσεως μὴ μόνον διὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἀποφάσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων πίστεως τυγχάνῃ ... ('So that the matters of their policy might obtain credence not only through my assertion, but also through the deeds themselves ...'). Cf. 1.35.4; 4.33.7; 6.54.4; 8.2.1.

⁵² Cf. Pol. 18.35.7.

⁵³ Pol. 3.33.7: τοῖς ἀξιόπιστως ψευδομένοις τῶν συγγραφέων those writers who lie in a credible way

⁵⁴ For more on Pol. 3.33.17, particularly the concept that mendacious narratives presented elaborate detail, cf. Wiseman (1993) 141–6.

⁵⁵ For more instances where Polybius shows a concern for *πίστις*, cf. 1.4.10; 4.33.1; 6.54.6; 10.47.6; 12.20.3, 21.9, 25.1; F48.

Timaeus illustrates this process in detail. Though his history is, in Polybius' opinion, entirely untrustworthy, it enjoyed wide acceptance (12.25c.1):

ἴσως δ' οὖν ἂν τις ἐναπορήσειε πῶς τοιοῦτος ὢν οἶον ἡμεῖς ὑποδείκνυμεν τοιαύτης παρ' ἐνίοις ἀποδοχῆς τέτευχε καὶ πίστεως.

Perhaps then someone might not understand how, though the sort of historian I have shown him to be, [Timaeus] obtains this sort of acceptance and credence from some.

Polybius explains that his success is due not to hiding the rhetorical persuasion in the account, but by underlining it (12.26d.1):

ἡνάγκακε δ' αὐτῷ <προσέχειν> διὰ τὴν ἐπίφασιν τῆς ἀληθινολογίας, τινὰς δὲ καὶ προσκέκληται καὶ μετ' ἀποδείξεως δοκεῖ πείσειν.

He has compelled his reader to take heed through the outward appearance of a true account, and he also summoned certain [witnesses]⁵⁶ and it seems that he will persuade with proofs.

The act of putting the rhetorical argument on display convinces the reader not only to accept Timaeus' account, but to reject all others (12.26d.3):

ὥστε δοκεῖν τοὺς ἄλλους συγγραφέας ἅπαντας συγκεκοιμῆσθαι τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ κατεσχεδιακέναι τῆς οἰκουμένης, αὐτὸν δὲ μόνον ἐξητακέναι τὴν ἀκρίβειαν καὶ διευκρινηκέναι τὰς ἐν ἐκάστοις ἱστορίας, ἐν οἷς πολλὰ μὲν ὕγιως λέγεται, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ψευδῶς.

As a result, all other writers seem infatuated with events⁵⁷ and seem to affirm the whole world rashly, while he alone scrutinised accurately and judged rightly the histories in each case, in which much is spoken soundly and much falsely.

Timaeus claims, though falsely, precisely the method that Polybius endorses, and it is this claim that convinces the reader that his account is true.

⁵⁶ The antecedent of *τινας* is unclear. Grammatically, it might refer to *τοῖς τούτου ζηλωταῖς* in 12.26d.1, but it makes little sense for Timaeus to summon those whom he necessarily precedes. More logically, *τινας* would refer to whatever witnesses or evidence Timaeus employs.

⁵⁷ Similarly, Polybius accuses Fabius and Philinus of behaving as lovers of their subjects at 1.14.2, a trait that undermines their credibility.

Nevertheless, falsehoods do not guarantee that the reader will accept the account (2.58.12):

ὁ συγγραφεὺς αὐτῆς τῆς τερατείας χάριν οὐ μόνον ψεῦδος εἰσήνεγκε τὸ ὅλον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ψεῦδος ἀπίθανον.

The historian [Phylarchus], for the sake of graphic detail itself, introduced not only utter falsehood, but also unpersuasive falsehood.

But as long as the readers have been persuaded only by the lies of the historian and are not predisposed through some sort of bias in favour of that historian, correction is possible (12.23.8):

περὶ μὲν οὖν Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ Θεοφράστου καὶ Καλλισθένους, ἔτι δ' Ἐφόρου καὶ Δημοχάρους, ἱκανὰ ταῦθ' ἡμῖν ἐστι πρὸς τὴν Τιμαίου καταδρομὴν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀφιλοτίμως πεπεισμένους ἀληθεύειν τὸν συγγραφέα τοῦτον.

Therefore, regarding Aristotle, Theophrastus and Callisthenes, and further still Ephorus and Demochares, these [points] of mine are sufficient for my attack against Timaeus, and similarly for those having been impartially persuaded that this writer tells the truth.

The nature of historical inquiry demands that the historian pass judgement on his sources. These judgements pertain not only to the bare course of events, that is, where an army encamped or how long it remained in a certain location, but also to a wide range of largely subjective matters. The historian decides who deserves praise or blame, who behaved justly or unjustly, who behaved rashly or intelligently, who succeeded through virtue and who through dumb luck. These judgements can be political, ethical, or personal. Depending on the historian's ability, character, motivation, or political status, these judgements might represent sincere attempts at determining and interpreting past events, or they may be absolute fabrications. In every case, however, the reader must be convinced to accept the narrative. Consequently, every historian trades in rhetoric. They judge the quality of their sources' rhetoric, and they are judged according to their own. Polybius states so explicitly on more than one occasion. In the first place, one must judge what the historian chooses to include or omit (6.11.7–8). Further, the reader must determine whether inaccuracy is due to ignorance or mendacity (12.7.6, 12.4). Finally, Polybius challenges the reader to approach his own work with critical scrutiny (29.12.7–11).

τά γ' ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις τοῖς περὶ λόγων τέχνης γεγραμμένοις
(Pl. *Phdr.* 266d₅–6)

I would like now to examine particular examples of argumentation Polybius employs in the *Histories* or observes in the works of others. In a survey such as this, it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive analysis of rhetoric in the *Histories*; therefore, I will limit my examination to those aspects of rhetoric present in the *Histories* and discussed at *Phaedrus* 266d–267e, which Socrates calls τὰ κομψὰ τῆς τέχνης (266d₉). These are arguments from probability, witnesses, indirect proofs, refutations, the use of a sententious style, making the small great, the arousal of anger and pity, and slander. In the dialogue, Phaedrus and Socrates assign each of these elements of rhetorical theory and practice to the contemporary handbooks of famous rhetoricians.⁵⁸ Therefore, what we find is that Polybius uses elements of rhetoric that were current and central in the earliest theorists and practitioners of the art.

Arguments from probability were central to rhetoric.⁵⁹ In Antiphon's *Tetralogies*, for instance, the speaker relies almost entirely on probability.⁶⁰ Furthermore, arguments from probability were considered reasonably sound.⁶¹ Such arguments also featured in Greek historiography from at least Herodotus and Thucydides onwards,⁶² and Polybius uses probabilities (εἰκότα) to make his judgements concerning the course of past.

His analysis of the treaties between Rome and Carthage concerning Saguntum provides an example. He begins by criticising earlier accounts (he will later assign them to Chareas and Sosylus) of the Senate debating the question of war when news of the fall of Saguntum reached Rome. These accounts fall short in two important ways (3.20.4):

ὧν οὐτ' εἰκὸς οὐτ' ἀληθές ἐστι τὸ παράπαν οὐδέν.

⁵⁸ The list is generally considered to be a faithful representation of at least some of the content of early rhetorical handbooks and techniques, e.g. by Kennedy (1963) 75–80; Russell (1967) 131; Thomas and Webb (1994) 21; Kennedy (1994) 31; McCoy (2008) 172–3.

⁵⁹ Cf. Plant (1999) 71. For a detailed discussion of *eikos* arguments in the sophists, particularly Antiphon, cf. Tindale (2010) 69–82.

⁶⁰ Gagarin (2007) 12. In the *Tetralogies*, the exclusive reliance on arguments from probability is perhaps a function of their genre, cf. Gagarin (2007) 14.

⁶¹ Cf. Grimaldi (1980) 390: 'Thus an εἰκός, as relatively stabilised, is knowable and offers a solid base for reasonable inference to further knowledge.'

⁶² E.g. Hdt. 2.113ff.; Marincola (1997) 97 describes how Thucydides employs arguments from probability in the archaeology. Plant (1999) 71 adds examples from later in Thucydides' narrative.

Not one bit of these [accounts] is either likely or true.

Polybius does not immediately present concrete evidence to support his position. Instead, he asks⁶³ how it is possible that the Romans, who had promised war if the Carthaginians entered the territory of Saguntum, would deliberate after the city itself was taken. Second, he asks how the sons of the senators, some as young as twelve, could attend the deliberation and—as other historians record—not disclose the proceedings. He concludes that these improbable accounts amount to common gossip and rumour.⁶⁴ In his alternative version of events, the Romans immediately sent an embassy to Carthage to demand the surrender of those responsible for Saguntum or to declare hostilities. Polybius, judging by a standard of probability, discounts these sources completely and presents an entirely new version of events. He does not name a new source, and it appears that he has simply constructed his account from probabilities. His conclusion could surely be erroneous, as could that gloomy picture of the senate in which the sons of the elite, wise beyond their years, sit in reverent silence. Regardless of whether he is correct, he is neither inventing freely nor creating history out of whole cloth. Rather, he employs a test of probability in order to present a narrative that he considers more likely to be true than those he has received.

Polybius makes his method more explicit in his discussion of Philip V's decision to pardon the Spartans for their behavior toward the Achaean league in 220. It is not probable (4.24.1: *εἰκός*), Polybius says, that a boy of seventeen actually decided such grave matters. Nevertheless, it is the duty of historians to attribute to the leaders the decisions made by their advisors. Readers, on the other hand, must consider that it is probable (4.24.2: *εἰκός*) that historians misattribute such decisions. In this case, though Polybius believes the version he presents is improbable, he allows the reader to make the final determination.

Polybius' treatment of the competing Locrian histories of Aristotle and Timaeus focuses almost entirely on the issue of probability. He begins his comparison by affirming, despite his own close ties to Locri, Aristotle's unflattering version of Locrian history (12.5.4). He points out that the history that the Locrians themselves transmit is the same as Aristotle's. He concludes: (12.6a.1):

Ἐκ τούτων ἂν τις συλλογιζόμενος Ἀριστοτέλει πρόσχοι μᾶλλον ἢ Τιμαίῳ.

⁶³ Polybius relies heavily on rhetorical questions: cf. Rood (2004) 157.

⁶⁴ Pol. 3.20.5: *κουρεακῆς καὶ πανδήμου λαλιᾶς*.

Anyone reasoning from these things would turn to Aristotle rather than Timaeus.

From his criticism of Timaeus, we can see the role probability played in that author's historical narrative. For instance, Timaeus argued that it was not probable that the Locrians descended from the freed slaves of Lacedaemonian allies (12.6a.2):

ὥς οὐκ εἰκὸς ἦν τοὺς οἰκέτας τῶν Λακεδαιμονίοις συμμαχησάντων τὴν τῶν κυρίων εὐνοίαν ἀναφέρειν.

[Timaeus argued that] it was not probable that the slaves of Lacedaemonian allies would maintain goodwill towards their masters.

Polybius does not dismiss Timaeus' point for being based on probability. On the contrary, he presents a counterargument from probability (12.6b.1):

τοῦτο δὲ μάλιστα περὶ τοὺς Λοκροὺς εἰκὸς ἐστὶ γεγονέναι.

This [maintaining goodwill towards their masters] is especially probable in the case of the Locrians.

Timaeus' error is not in resorting to probability, but in applying it poorly. The historian must determine the individual points, each individual probability, with the greatest care (12.6b.6):

ἕκαστα δὲ τούτων οὐ μόνον κατὰ τὸ πιθανόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν μεγάλην ἔχει διαφοράν.

Each of these [points] makes the greatest difference not only for persuasiveness, but also for truth.

Once again, we see that Polybius' concept of effective historical narrative is more complex than writing it *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. The historian must effectively scrutinise his sources according to probability and then convince the reader that the resulting account is true.

Consequently, because Aristotle is more effective than Timaeus at persuading the reader his account is true, Polybius concludes he is a more accurate historian than Timaeus. He is even more convinced of his determination because they are writing about affairs that are beyond recovery (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 ἂν τις ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὁμολογήσειεν· ἀληθὲς μέντοι γε καὶ καθάπαξ διαστεῖλαι περὶ τίνος οὐδὲν ἔστιν ἐν τούτοις.

That both [Aristotle and Timaeus] made an attempt at a probable account, but that Aristotle's is more persuasive, I think, anyone would agree from what I have said. Indeed to absolutely define the truth about something in matters such as these is not at all possible.

When defining the truth absolutely is impossible, the historian turns to persuasion, and the historian who persuades most effectively is most worthy of belief.

As a matter of fact, Polybius defines a wide range of situations in which the truth cannot be determined with absolute certainty. For instance, he expresses concern over the inclusion of matters that kings managed between themselves and in secret (29.5). To write in detail and with precision about such affairs seems open to censure. On the other hand, to pass over in silence affairs that had practical effects on the course of history would appear lazy and indolent. So, he determines his account through probabilities (29.5.3):

οὐ μὲν ἀλλὰ κατηνέχθην ἐπὶ τὸ γράφειν κεφαλαιωδῶς τὸ δοκοῦν, καὶ δι' ὧν εἰκότων καὶ σημείων ἐπὶ ταύτης ἐγενόμην τῆς γνώμης ...

But I did not shrink from writing summarily what seemed [right] and the probabilities and signs through which I became of this opinion.

He then explains his reasoning in detail. The Romans had a reasonable suspicion of Eumenes because he and Perseus previously sent soldiers back and forth to each other. Additionally, the Romans transferred their friendship from Eumenes to his brother Attalus. From this evidence, he reasons, it is obvious that the Romans suspected Eumenes of intriguing with Perseus, and it is easy to understand that Eumenes did not want Perseus to win the war and become master of Greece. Apart from their inherited dislike and hostility, they ruled similarly, and so distrusted each other. Polybius concludes that Eumenes decided he was in a good position to mediate between the Romans and Perseus. This explains the contact between Eumenes and Perseus. Polybius then presents a detailed account of the intrigues between them and adds (29.8.10):

τούτων δ' ἔνια μὲν (ἐξ)ερρῦη παρ' αὐτὸν τὸν καιρόν, ἔνια δὲ μετ' ὀλίγον εἰς τοὺς παρακειμένους τῷ Περσεῖ φίλους, παρ' ὧν ἡμῖν ἐξεποίησε πυθέσθαι διότι πάσης κακίας ὡσανεὶ παπταλεῖδόν ἐστιν ἡ φιλαργυρία.

Some of these facts leaked at the time and others shortly afterwards to the intimate friends of Perseus, from whom I learnt enough to convince me that avarice is, as it were, the tuning-peg of every vice.

Remarkably, Polybius does not enlist these sources—contemporary testimony and eyewitnesses—as the evidence for his account. Instead, he employs probability first and evidence second.⁶⁵ Furthermore, he puts his reasoning on display and argues his case before the reader. Finally, he uses this method to determine the course of events themselves; many scholars argue that ancient historians used arguments from likelihood to fill out their narrative,⁶⁶ but Polybius employs it to determine the heart of the matter.

Another of the ‘niceties of the art of rhetoric’ present in the *Histories* is the use of witnesses. The attack on Timaeus provides an illustration. Timaeus recorded that Demochares was guilty of such impurity that he wasn’t fit to blow the sacrificial flame, and he provides a witness (12.13.3):

ὁ δ' ἵνα πιστὸς φανῇ κατὰ τὴν αἰσχρολογίαν καὶ τὴν ὅλην ἀναισχυντίαν, καὶ προσκατέψευσται τάνδρός, κωμικόν τινα μάρτυρα προσεπισπασάμενος ἀνώνυμον.

In order to appear credible in his obscenity and his complete impudence, he told lies about the man, dragging forth some anonymous comedian as a witness.

Because a witness would lend authority to Timaeus’ version of events, Polybius diminishes the value of the witness through his derisive language.

⁶⁵ Gagarin (1994) 49 has argued that probabilities were considered more reliable than witnesses, but adds that ‘probability arguments only have value in the absence of direct evidence; direct evidence, when available, is better’ (53), and ‘[t]he primary use of probability arguments in early rhetorical exercises is thus in factual disputes where direct evidence is inconclusive’ (55). Cf. Gagarin (2007) 14: ‘if Antiphon allowed one of the speakers in these exercises in rational argumentation [i.e. the *Tetralogies*] to introduce a conclusive external proof—say an eyewitness—then the sort of argumentation [i.e. from probability] he wants to explore would be moot.’

⁶⁶ E.g., Russell (1967) 135–6: ‘... most ancient historians feel free to fill out the tradition with speeches, standardised accounts of embassies or battles, likely motivations, and other manifestations of τὸ εἰκός. Both poet and historian operate within rules which were originally rhetorical.’

He then attempts to convince the reader his own witnesses furnish a more trustworthy estimation of Demochares' character (12.14.1):

ἐγώ, βεβαιότεραν τὴν τῆς πατρίδος ἡγούμενος μαρτυρίαν ἢ τὴν Τιμαίου πικρίαν, θαρρῶν ἀποφαίνομαι μηδενὶ τὸν Δημοχάρους βίον ἔνοχον εἶναι τῶν τοιούτων κατηγορημάτων.

Considering the testimony of his [Demochares'] homeland more certain than Timaeus' bitterness, I confidently set forth that the life of Demochares was in no way liable to indictments such as these.

The authority these witnesses lend to the narrative is at least as important as any information they impart to the historian. Polybius asserts his evaluation of Demochares is a more accurate account of the past than Timaeus', and he presents witnesses to convince the reader his assertion is true.

Interestingly, Polybius does not suggest that witness testimony is true simply because it is a first-hand account, and this factor applies even in the case of witnesses he has interviewed personally. This point becomes clear when he attacks the view, which he attributes to 'all other writers', that Scipio Africanus owed his success to chance. To support his assertion that Africanus always acted with calculation and foresight, he introduces Gaius Laelius. He has interviewed Gaius personally, and he found his account probable (διὰ τὸ δοκεῖν εἰκότα λέγειν, 10.3.2). Though his witness testimony is merely probable, Polybius maintains that his account, based on that testimony, is more credible than those that attribute Scipio's success—contrary to probability and the testimony of witnesses who were present at the events⁶⁷—to some god or chance. By making these judgements under the gaze of the reader, Polybius employs his witness not simply to help determine how events may have unfolded, but to convince the reader to accept the version of events he presents.

In his use of witness testimony, therefore, Polybius differs—at least formally—from Isocrates, who resorts to instructive persuasion in the absence of witness testimony. In *Against Euthynus*, he explains he must argue from proofs as there is no witness testimony available (ἐκ τεκμηρίων καὶ ἡμᾶς διδάσκειν, 21.4). In other words, for Isocrates, instructive rhetoric is necessary in the absence of testimony. For Polybius, the testimony is a part of the argument he places before the reader and must be scrutinised by historian and audience alike. For Isocrates, when no certain evidence exists, an

⁶⁷ Pol. 10.9.2–3: χωρὶς τῶν εἰκότων καὶ τῆς τῶν συμβεβιωκότων μαρτυρίας.

accepted opinion will function in the place of truth.⁶⁸ For Polybius, witness testimony is itself an element of the accepted opinion.

Another of Socrates' 'ornaments of rhetoric' that Polybius employs to make his account persuasive is indirect proofs (*τεκμήρια*). For Aristotle, *τεκμήρια* are necessary signs from which a logical syllogism can be constructed.⁶⁹ The *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* defines the term as self-contradictions, that is, one produces an indirect proof by discovering a self-contradiction in the opposing argument (9.1–2, 1430a14–24).⁷⁰ Polybius' use of the term is compatible with both definitions. For instance, he argues that Phylarchus' assertion that Cleomenes grossed 6000 talents from the defeat of Megalopolis and kept 2000 for himself is impossible. He points out that when Athens, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, reckoned the value of all property in Attica in order to levy a tax, the assessed value was 5750 talents. This example shows that Phylarchus' estimate of the value of Megalopolis is ludicrous. But Polybius offers a more certain proof (2.62.10):

μέγιστον δὲ τῶν προειρημένων τεκμήριον· οὐδενὸς γὰρ ὄντες δεύτεροι τῶν Ἀρκάδων Μαντινεῖς οὔτε κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν οὔτε κατὰ τὴν περιουσίαν, ὡς αὐτὸς οὗτός φησιν, ἐκ πολιορκίας δὲ καὶ παραδόσεως ἀλόντες, ὥστε μήτε διαφυγεῖν μηδὲνα μήτε διακλαπῆναι ῥαδίως μηδὲν ὅμως τὸ πᾶν λάφυρον ἐποίησαν μετὰ τῶν σωμάτων κατὰ τοὺς αὐτοὺς καιροὺς τάλαντα τριακόσια.

But the greatest proof of what I've said is this. The Mantineans were second to none of the Arcadians, neither in power nor in resources, as Phylarchus himself says. They were captured after a siege and surrender, so that neither did anyone flee nor was anything easily stolen; nevertheless, the total spoils at that time—including the sale of the captives—came to 300 talents.

Phylarchus' reckoning is self-contradictory, but the reader must construct a syllogism to see why. By his own admission, Mantinea was the wealthiest city, and the value of the spoils taken there was 300 talents. Necessarily, Megalopolis, a poorer city than Mantinea, must have produced fewer than 300 talents in spoils. Polybius uses this proof to convince the reader to

⁶⁸ Cf. Thomas and Webb (1994) 18: 'Isocrates undertook to heal the breach between words and truth, demonstrating that a need to persuade will guide a speech to accepted opinion which, while not absolute truth, is the received truth for most people.'

⁶⁹ Arist. *Rhet.* 1.2.1357b.

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of *τεκμήρια*, cf. Tindale (2010) 114–6. For a discussion of *τεκμήρια* in Thucydides, cf. Woodman (1988) 5–9; Moles (1993) 101–2.

abandon Phylarchus and follow him. Furthermore, as is generally agreed, Polybius is right.⁷¹ This is only one point in a very long history, but Polybius has in this instance—without doubt—employed rhetoric to correct the historical record.

Polybius also employs and understands the rhetorical refutation (ἐλέγχος).⁷² In the first place, he analyses the quality of refutation in Timaeus, who claimed to have personally visited the Locrians (12.9.2):

οὐκέτι κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν εἰκότα λόγον χρώμενος τοῖς ἐλέγχοις, ἀλλ' ἀληθινῶς αὐτὸς ἐπιβαλὼν εἰς τοὺς κατὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα Λοκρούς.

Timaeus no longer used refutations according to probable argumentation itself, but himself truly went straight to the Locrians in Greece.

In the absence of personal investigation, the historian is left with refutation according to the argument from probability. Polybius then sets out to refute Timaeus' claim to have travelled at all. Timaeus' special boast is his display of precision in the matter of dates and public records. He records the name and lineage of the man who gave him information on the Italian Locrians, but he did not name his source for the Greeks. Polybius is sceptical (12.11.3):

ὃν οὐθ' ὑπάρχον τι τῶν τοιούτων ἀγνοεῖν οὐθ' εὐρόντα παραλιπεῖν πιστευτέον οὔτε ψευσαμένῳ συγγνώμην δοτέον οὐδαμῶς.

It is simply not persuasive that if any [evidence] of this sort existed, he would be ignorant of it or that he would have omitted it if he found it. Nor must any pardon at all be given for his lies.

Polybius cannot possibly know with more certainty than Timaeus whether or not the journey took place. Nevertheless, he will not take Timaeus' word. He demands to be persuaded.

We learn of Polybius' own use of refutations from Strabo. He makes particular mention of Polybius' treatment of Dicaearchus 'against whom Polybius himself casts so many refutations' (καθ' οὗ τοσούτους ἐλέγχους αὐτὸς προφέρειται, 34.5.7–11). The statement is somewhat offhanded, but Strabo's language is unambiguous. Rhetorical refutation is a feature of historical narrative.

⁷¹ Cf. Walbank (1970) ad loc.

⁷² Aristotle's discussion of the ἐλέγχος begins at *Rhet.* 2.22, 1396b23. For another example of refutation in the *Histories*, cf. 12.26d.3.

The remaining niceties of rhetoric provide little for analysis. Polybius praises Ephorus for his use of rhetorically sententious style (*γνωμολογία*)⁷³ (12.28.10–11):

ὁ γὰρ Ἐφορος παρ' ὅλην τὴν πραγματείαν θαυμάσιος ὢν καὶ κατὰ τὴν φράσιν καὶ κατὰ τὸν χειρισμὸν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐπίνοιαν τῶν λημμάτων, δεινότητος ἐστὶν ἐν ταῖς παρεκβάσεσι καὶ ταῖς ἀφ' αὐτοῦ γνωμολογίαις, καὶ συλλήβδην ὅταν πού τὸν ἐπιμετροῦντα λόγον διατίθεται· κατὰ δέ τινα συντυχίαν εὐχαριστότατα καὶ πιθανώτατα περὶ τῆς συγκρίσεως εἴρηκε τῆς τῶν ἱστοριογράφων καὶ λογογράφων.

For Ephorus, though he is marvellous throughout his work in respect to his expression, his treatment, and the design of his theme, is most clever in his digressions and his sententious style, and, in short, whenever he offers evaluative judgements.⁷⁴ And, as a matter of fact, he says the most charming and most convincing things about the comparison of historiography and logography.

Polybius complains that certain historians of Hieronymus make small things great (7.7.6):

ἀλλὰ μοι δοκοῦσιν οἱ τὰς ἐπὶ μέρους γράφοντες πράξεις, ἐπειδὴν ὑποθέσεις εὐπεριλήπτους ὑποστήσωνται καὶ στενάς, πτωχεύοντες πραγμάτων ἀναγκάζεσθαι τὰ μικρὰ μεγάλα ποιεῖν καὶ περὶ τῶν μηδὲ μνήμης ἀξίων πολλοὺς τινὰς διατίθεσθαι λόγους.

But those who write historical monographs seem to me, since they have set themselves a limited, narrow subject, poor in subject matter, compelled to make small things great and to recite very many stories of things that deserve no mention.

Writers of the war in Syria are similarly compelled (29.12.3):

ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι τὰ μὲν μικρὰ μεγάλα ποιεῖν.

There is a compulsion to make small things great.

⁷³ Aristotle discusses *γνωμολογίαι* at *Rhet.* 2.20, 1394a19.

⁷⁴ On the translation of *ἐπιμετρῶν λόγος*, cf. Schepens (2011) 401–9. (I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing Schepens' article to my attention.)

Polybius' scorn of this rhetorical procedure contrasts with earlier opinions of its value. In the *Panegyricus* (Isoc. 4.8), Isocrates praises rhetoric because it is able to make great things small and vice versa.⁷⁵ According to the author of the *Lives of the Ten Orators*, when asked to define what rhetoric was, Isocrates responded 'to make small things large and large things small'.⁷⁶ Polybius rejects this aspect of rhetoric in historiography, but his complaint reveals its presence.

Polybius also complains of historians who attempt to arouse anger and pity in historical narrative; in fact, this complaint is central to the attack on Phylarchus (2.56.13):

χωρίς τε τούτων τὰς πλείστας ἡμῖν ἐξηγείται τῶν περιπετειῶν, οὐχ ὑποτιθεὶς αἰτίαν καὶ τρόπον τοῖς γινομένοις, ὧν χωρὶς οὐτ' ἐλεεῖν εὐλόγως οὐτ' ὀργίζεσθαι καθηκόντως δυνατόν.

And apart from these [other complaints], he narrates most of these *peripeteiai* for us without suggesting the events' cause or type, apart from which it is possible neither to arouse pity fairly nor anger appropriately.

This statement does not allow the conclusion that Polybius rejects the arousal of pity and anger in historiography. The historian may be able to arouse these emotions properly, but Phylarchus does not.

Polybius also complains of historians who deal in slander (*διαβολή*, 12.15.9):⁷⁷

ὑπὲρ ὧν δεῖ τὸν συγγραφέα μὴ μόνον τὰ πρὸς διαβολὴν κυροῦντα καὶ κατηγορίαν ἐξηγεῖσθαι τοῖς ἐπιγινομένοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ πρὸς ἔπαινον ἦκοντα περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα.

... concerning which matters a historian must not only fully narrate for posterity that which confirms slander and accusation, but also the things about the man [Agathocles of Sicily] that relate to praise.

⁷⁵ Isoc. 4.8: ἐπειδὴ δ' οἱ λόγοι τοιαύτην ἔχουσι τὴν φύσιν ὥσθ' οἷόν τ' εἶναι περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πολλαχῶς ἐξηγήσασθαι καὶ τὰ τε μεγάλα ταπεινὰ ποιῆσαι καὶ τοῖς μικροῖς μέγεθος περιθεῖναι ...

⁷⁶ 838f6–8: πάλιν δ' ἐρομένου τινὸς αὐτὸν τί ῥητορική, εἶπε 'τὰ μὲν μικρὰ μεγάλα τὰ δὲ μεγάλα μικρὰ ποιεῖν'.

⁷⁷ Aristotle discusses slander at *Rhet.* 3.14, 1415a26. Cf. McCoy (2008) 28. On slander more generally, see Yunis (1996) 171 with n. 40; Carey (1994) 31–2.

Polybius is clearly aware that slander was common in rhetorical argument. He remarks that Flamininus had to work especially hard to counter the slanderous arguments of the Aetolians before the commissioners in Corinth (18.45.8–9):

πλεοναζούσης δὲ τῆς τῶν Αἰτωλῶν διαβολῆς καὶ πιστευομένης παρ' ἐνίοις, πολλοὺς καὶ ποικίλους ἠναγκάζετο ποιεῖσθαι λόγους ὁ Τίτος ἐν τῇ συνεδρίῳ, διδάσκων ...

Since the slander of the Aetolians was used to excess and was convincing to some, Flamininus was compelled to make many different speeches in the assembly, arguing instructively ...

These final examples, making the small great, arousing pity and anger, slandering, serve as a reminder that Polybius does not treat historiography as a rhetorical free-for-all, though in his opinion certain writers did. Historians may employ rhetoric to deceive or to instruct; they may hide their rhetoric or make it explicit. Rhetoric in historiography can be directed to many ends.



I have argued that Polybius demands that rhetoric is central to historiography. In fact, the historian's duty to persuade instructively helps define the genre and distinguish it from other literary forms. The historian behaves as a jurymen when he examines the evidence, witnesses, and written accounts and chooses which source material to accept. Furthermore, the historian behaves as an orator or advocate when he strives to persuade the reader that his account is true. In that pursuit, the historian employs a host of argumentative techniques that were central to rhetorical argument and described in the earliest handbooks. In Polybius' opinion, certain writers use a rhetorical veneer to conceal their mendacity. Like Thucydides, Isocrates, Gorgias, Plato, and Aristotle, he understands that rhetoric can serve both the true and the false, depending on the inclination of any particular practitioner. The solution to this problem is not to exclude rhetoric from historiography, but for historians to argue instructively and for readers to demand instructive arguments.

As a result, modern students of ancient historiography must engage with Polybius in precisely the way he demanded, that is, by considering whether his arguments are persuasive. As P. J. Rhodes argued, we must 'establish what the writers were trying to do, how they set about doing it, what material was available to them, what limitations they were subject to, what limitations

we are subject to in studying them.’⁷⁸ And in fact, whether acknowledged or not, this is the method scholars have employed with Polybius for some time.

Consider the language of Klaus Meister, whose study of polemic in Polybius remains central. Regarding Polybius’ analysis of the Locrian histories of Aristotle and Timaeus, Meister asks: ‘Welches waren nun die Argumente, die Timaios gegen Aristoteles vorbrachte, und wie suchte sie Polybios zu entkräften?’⁷⁹ Later, he asks again, ‘Was entgegnet nun Polybios auf dieses Argument?’⁸⁰ He continues, ‘Vielmehr hat Polybios ... offensichtlich tatsächlich in dieser Weise argumentiert und somit Timaios ganz zu Unrecht Widersprüchlichkeit in den eigenen Angaben vorgeworfen.’⁸¹ Meister is asking the questions Polybius invites him to ask.

Naturally, the fact that Polybius employs rhetoric so openly does not guarantee that his arguments are valid or cogent. Nevertheless, Polybius apparently believes that employing rhetoric in historiography will produce a narrative that is, as far as the ability and character of the historian allow, as close to the truth as possible.⁸² The method we find in Polybius is not the ‘interference of rhetoric with historical research’.⁸³ On the contrary, it is rhetoric facilitating historical research.

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⁷⁸ Rhodes (1994) 157.

⁷⁹ Meister (1975) 13.

⁸⁰ Meister (1975) 14.

⁸¹ Meister (1975) 15.

⁸² Vercruysse (1990) 37: ‘Il [Polybius] ne veut pas tomber dans le meme piège que Socrate, qui renonçait à la rhétorique parce qu’il défendait la vérité.’

⁸³ Momigliano (1978) 21.

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