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## Being, Seeming and Performing in Polybius

The contrast between *einai* and *dokein*—what is real, and what only seems to be real—is ubiquitous in Classical Greek literature. In Classical Greek historiography (especially Thucydides) this often corresponds to a contrast between *ergon* and *logos*: action and speech, or reality and pretence. If one comes to Polybius with these dichotomies in mind, some passages read rather oddly, especially his long digression in Book 31 on the training of Scipio Aemilianus for political life. This paper proposes to examine the use of *dokein*, to seem (or to have a reputation for, to be known for)<sup>1</sup> and *doxa*, opinion/reputation, in Polybius in order to investigate the role played by this traditional dichotomy in his *Histories*. The paper falls in two parts: first, the relationship between reputation and reality in the *Histories* will be explored through a close reading of the Scipio Aemilianus digression; then, we shall broaden the perspective to the rest of the *Histories* and investigate the use of *dokein* and *doxa*, partly in the light of Davidson’s theory of the gaze in Polybius. At the end, this will lead to some conclusions about Polybius’ view of historical causation, and the possibility of knowing reality.

### 1 The reputation of Scipio Aemilianus (Plb. 31.23–30)

This long digression<sup>2</sup> on how Scipio Aemilianus with Polybius’ help trained himself for political greatness is central for understanding the relationship between being and seeming in Polybius. Several scholars have argued that the passage shows that it was more important for Polybius that Scipio gained a reputation for being a good man than that he actually was, or became, good.<sup>3</sup> This fits into a pervasive interpretation of Polybius as a pragmatic, even cynical, author, for whom the end justifies the means.<sup>4</sup> I have recently demonstrated at length that

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1 E.g. Plb. 1.16.11, 1.56.3, 3.19.13, 4.47.1.

2 By calling these chapters a “digression” I am only implying that they constitute a temporal pause in the linear narrative, not that they are extraneous to Polybius’ project. Polybius’ long digressions are always central to his larger project, the best example being Book 6 on the Roman constitution.

3 E.g. Astin 1967, 31–34, Walbank 1979 *ad* Plb. 31.23–31, esp. *ad* 31.28.10–11 and 31.29.9. *Contra* Eckstein 1995, 149.

4 See e.g. Aymard 1940, Walbank 1965, 1972, 58 and *passim*, 1977, Ferrary 1988, 265–348, Green 1990, 269–85.

this view of Polybius is far too simplistic, and that his *Histories* are meant to be didactic both on a practical and a moral level;<sup>5</sup> but that raises the question of the role of Scipio's reputation, which manifestly figures prominently in the digression. Let us examine the passage from the beginning.

We begin with the introduction to the narrative of Scipio's training:

Now that the progress of my narrative and the time period call our special attention to this family, I wish in order to satisfy the reader's curiosity to execute a promise I made in the previous book and left unfulfilled. For I promised to explain why and how the fame/good reputation (δόξα) of Scipio advanced to such a height and became brilliant faster than normally happens, and also how it came to pass that the friendship and intimacy between him and Polybius grew to such an extent that not only did the fame (φῆμην) of it spread as far as Italy and Greece, but their preference for each other's company also became known to those further afield (Plb. 31.23.1–3, transl. modified from Paton).

It is striking that Polybius gives as his purpose for this digression not to explain Scipio's character or ancestry, as one might expect, but rather to explain his fame or reputation, and its fast and wide dissemination. Similarly, with regard to the friendship between himself and Scipio the focus is on its widespread fame, but here there is a direct link with reality: when Polybius says that he wants to explain "how it came to pass that the friendship and intimacy between Scipio and Polybius grew to such an extent that ...", it is clear that the fame of the friendship was a direct result of its intensity and not of any publicity strategy.<sup>6</sup> Such a causal link is not spelled out between reality and Scipio's personal fame, and it would at this stage be possible to imagine that Polybius was going to outline the acquisition of an undeserved reputation, perhaps one which exceeded Scipio's actual achievements. However, in the following chapters we shall see that Scipio's reputation does, in fact, have a solid basis in reality.

Continuing Polybius' narrative of Scipio, the next few lines tell how Scipio and his brother first become acquainted with Polybius, and then we get the detailed scene with dialogue in which Scipio asks Polybius to become his friend (31.23.8–12). Here Scipio complains that Polybius seems to prefer his brother to him and says that he has "a reputation for being (or seems to everyone to be) quiet and without initiative, with none of the energetic character of a Roman" (δοκῶ γὰρ εἶναι πᾶσιν ἡσύχιός τις καὶ νωθρός, ὡς ἀκούω, καὶ πολὺ κερωρισμένος τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς αἰρέσεως καὶ πράξεως) and not living up to his family name. We note that it is his reputation that is hurting Scipio, not his own perception of what his

<sup>5</sup> Hau 2016. See also Eckstein 1995.

<sup>6</sup> For the historical reality of the friendship, see most recently Erskine 2012 and Sommer 2013.

own character is really like. Polybius-as-a-character responds by praising Scipio for this sentiment, saying that it proves that, in reality, he is high-minded (δηλος γὰρ εἶ διὰ τούτων μέγα φρονῶν). This makes Scipio very happy, and he implores Polybius to be his friend and mentor, saying that he would then “seem to himself to be” (δόξω ... ἑμαυτῷ) worthy of his family and ancestors (31.24.9–10). The fact that Scipio uses the same verb, δοκεῖν, to express his self-perception as he does to express his reputation in the eyes of his peers is our first hint that δοκεῖν does not just describe outward semblance, but can denote something deeper as well although, of course, a person’s self-perception does not necessarily match reality.

The passage detailing the beginning of the friendship between Scipio and Polybius ends with a statement that introduces a level of reality into all the talk about appearances (31.25.1). Here, the narrator says that Scipio and Polybius from that point onwards “kept giving each other trials/evidence of themselves in actual action (ἐπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων πείραν αὐτῶν διδόντες ἀλλήλοις) and by that means became as close as close relatives”. The expression “actual action”, αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων, is partly an antithesis to the warm words spoken by Scipio and Polybius, to emphasise that their later actions lived up to those words, that their *erga* matched their *logoi*; but it is also a contrast to all the talk of semblance and reputation, to show that they did *in reality* become both good men and close friends.

We then get to the actual beginning of Scipio’s training (31.25.2). This is introduced by the statement that “The first impulse and ambition for what is good that came upon him (πρώτη δέ τις ἐνέπεσεν ὁρμή καὶ ζήλος τῶν καλῶν) was the impulse and ambition to acquire a reputation (δόξαν) for moderation (σωφροσύνη) and to exceed in this respect his peers in age”. In the next line, this *doxa* is called a “fine prize” (μέγας ... στέφανος) by the narrator. Here we get an indication of an intrinsic relationship between reputation and reality: it is Scipio’s real and existing “impulse and ambition for *ta kala*” that leads him to want a reputation for moderation. We are surely meant to understand that this “impulse and ambition” lead him to want to actually learn moderation and actually be moderate, but that he also wants to be rewarded for this moderation by a reputation for it. It is worth remembering that *ta kala* means not just the morally good, but also the glorious: both the moral behaviour and its worldly reward.

The following chapter describes the general decadence of Roman youth at the time, and then how Scipio “combated all his desires” (πάσαις ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ἀντιταξάμενος) and made his life “coordinated and harmonious” (ὁμολογούμενον καὶ σύμφωνον) in all respects and so “made universal (πάνδημον) his reputation for an orderly lifestyle and for moderation” (τὴν ἐπ’

εὐταξία καὶ σωφροσύνη δόξαν, 31.25.9). Again, it is clear that Scipio actually became moderate and in reality did live a well-ordered life, but the emphasis is on the reputation, or fame, he gained from it.

In the next chapter, Scipio sets out to “distinguish himself from others” (διενεγκεῖν τῶν ἄλλων) in generosity. This obviously means that he wants to actually be more generous than other people, but the methods he chooses are conspicuous because they are meant to enhance his reputation, and Polybius is careful every time to report the reactions of the intended audience: the women who witness Scipio’s mother’s new wealth are “shocked”, and so are his brothers-in-law when they receive the full sum of their dowries three years early. The verbs used to express shock here are verbs normally used of panicked soldiers: ἐκπλήττεσθαι (31.26.8), καταπεληγμένοι (31.27.16). When Scipio gives his part of an inheritance to his brother, this becomes “widely talked about” (περιβοήτου) and provides “obviously visible evidence” (δειγμα ... ἐμφανέστερον) of his character (31.28.4), again emphasising the visible, public—one might almost say performative—aspect of the generous act.

The whole thing ends with a conclusion that emphasises Scipio’s reputation, and—most distasteful to modern readers—the relatively low cost at which he gained it:

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν προκατεσκευασμένος ἐκ τῆς πρώτης ἡλικίας Πόπλιος Σκιπίων προήλθε πρὸς τὸ φιλοδοξεῖν σωφροσύνη καὶ καλοκάγαθία. εἰς ἣν ἴσως ἐξήκοντα τάλαντα δαπανήσας, τοσαῦτα γὰρ ἦν προεμένος τῶν ἰδίων, ὁμολογουμένην ἔσχε τὴν ἐπὶ καλοκάγαθία φήμην, οὐχ οὕτω τῷ πλήθει τῶν χρημάτων τὸ προκείμενον κατεργασάμενος ὡς τῷ καιρῷ τῆς δόσεως καὶ τῷ χειρισμῷ τῆς χάριτος. τὴν δὲ σωφροσύνην περιεποιήσατο δαπανήσας μὲν οὐδέν, πολλῶν δὲ καὶ ποικίλων ἡδονῶν ἀποσχόμενος προσεκέρδανε τὴν σωματικὴν ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν εὐεξίαν, ἣτις αὐτῷ παρ’ ὅλον τὸν βίον παρεπομένη πολλὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ καλὰς ἀμοιβὰς ἀπέδωκεν ἀνθ’ ὧν πρότερον ἀπέσχετο τῶν προχείρων ἡδονῶν.

Having thus from his earliest years laid the foundations of it, Publius Scipio advanced in his pursuit of this reputation (φιλοδοξεῖν) for temperance and nobility of character. By the expenditure of perhaps sixty talents—for that was what he had bestowed from his own property—his reputation (φήμη) for the second of these virtues was firmly established, and he did not attain his purpose so much by the largeness of the sums he gave as by the seasonableness of the gift and the gracious manner in which he conferred it. His temperance cost him nothing, but by abstaining from many and varied pleasures he gained in addition that bodily health and vigour which he enjoyed for the whole of his life, and which by the many pleasures of which it was the cause amply rewarded him for his former abstention from immediate pleasures (Plb. 31.28.10–13, transl. modified from Paton).

Three things are clear from this passage. Firstly, this is the conclusion that fulfills Polybius' promise in the introduction to the digression to explain how Scipio's reputation could grow so fast and to such a height. Secondly, Polybius sees nothing odious in deliberately and strategically building up a reputation for virtue. Thirdly, however, while gaining this reputation, Scipio did, in reality, act with great generosity, just as he did become moderate and, indeed, benefitted from this moderate lifestyle for the rest of his life. It may be relevant here to remind ourselves of Aristotle's theory that virtue is created by habitual practice:<sup>7</sup> Scipio made himself generous and moderate for the rest of his life by practising these virtues in his youth, and this practice also gained him a solid and very useful reputation for these virtues.

With this conclusion it sounds as if the digression on Scipio is over, but Polybius adds a chapter on how Scipio trained and proved his courage, not in the law-courts like his peers, but in hunting:

ὁ δ' ἀπλῶς οὐδένα λυπῶν ἐξεφέρετο τὴν ἐπ' ἀνδρεία δόξαν πάνδημον, ἔργῳ πρὸς λόγον ἀμιλλώμενος. τοιγαροῦν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ τοσοῦτον παρέδραμε τοὺς καθ' αὐτὸν ὅσον οὐδεὶς πω μνημονεύεται Ῥωμαίων, καίπερ τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδὸν πορευθεὶς ἐν φιλοδοξίᾳ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασι πρὸς τὰ Ῥωμαίων ἔθη καὶ νόμιμα.

Scipio, on the other hand, without harming anyone, gained his universal reputation (δόξαν) for courage, competing in deed against their words. So that in a short space of time he had outstripped his contemporaries more than any other Roman, although the path he pursued to gain glory (ἐν φιλοδοξίᾳ) was quite the opposite of that followed by all others in accordance with Roman usage and custom (Plb. 31.29.11–12, transl. modified from Paton).

Polybius is driving his own pro-hunting agenda here, and setting up hunting as the real and worthy *ergon* to oppose the artificial and useless *logoi* that take place in the law-courts. Interestingly for our purposes, *doxa* is placed outside of this *ergon-logos* dichotomy. Whereas deeds are presented as better, more honest, and more real than words, reputation is presented, not as further empty words as one might think, but as a true reflection of reality, *i.e.* on the side of *erga* rather than *logoi*.

After this passage on Scipio's courage, the digression is rounded off by an overall conclusion:

I have spoken at such length of the practice (αἰρέσεως) of Scipio from his earliest years, partly because I thought such a history (ἱστορίαν) would be agreeable (ἡδεῖαν) to the old and beneficial (ὠφέλιμον) for the young, but chiefly in order to secure credence for all I

7 Arist. *EN* 1103a30.

shall have to tell of him in the books which follow, so that readers may neither hesitate to accept as true anything in his subsequent life that seems astonishing nor depriving the man himself of the credit of his meritorious achievements put them down to chance from ignorance of the true cause of each. There were some few exceptions which we may assign to good luck and chance. After having narrated these events up to this point in a digression, I shall return again to the point where I left my regular narrative (Plb. 31.30, transl. modified from Paton).

Here Polybius describes the digression as being not about Scipio's reputation, but about his ἀρεσις, his "practice", or perhaps "training for virtue", if Polybius is using it like the Aristotelian προαρεσις. He then declares explicitly that the digression has been included partly for the sake of moral didacticism and partly to underpin the subsequent narrative of Scipio, which might otherwise be hard to believe. These two purposes would obviously not be served if the digression had been solely about Scipio's reputation, even less if it had been about how he acquired an undeserved reputation for virtue. They can only be fulfilled by a digression explaining how Scipio trained his innate qualities to come out to their fullest so that he became a man capable of doing the great deeds he would go on to do (explaining Polybius' subsequent narrative), and, by extension, how the reader can train to become a good man and so be rewarded with a positive reputation (didacticism).

On the basis of this reading of the digression on Scipio Aemilianus' practice of and reputation for virtue, two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, that pursuing a good reputation deliberately is not considered a bad thing—on the contrary, Scipio becomes good by striving for a reputation for excellence. *Doxa* and *dokein* are used not to denote a false impression, but to put emphasis on the perception of Scipio's actions, by himself and by others. Secondly, that Polybius considers it natural that a person wants to be rewarded for his good actions, and that his natural and expected reward is a good reputation, which we might then assume will lead to practical advantages further down the road.

In a large number of passages throughout the *Histories* this situation pertains: reputations are accurate reflections of reality, and the way that characters are perceived is often given more weight than the reality of their deeds or personalities. Thus, the Achaean League deals justly with everyone and so has a universal reputation for trustworthiness and nobility (πίστιν καὶ καλοκάγαθίαν, 2.39.9–10), and Hiero II is a great benefactor to the Greeks and eager for a good reputation, which wins him honours while alive and an immortal reputation after his death (7.8.6). In a great comparative passage, Antigonos Doson and Philip II are said to have been rewarded with "immortal honour and glory" (ἀθανάτου τέτευχε τιμῆς καὶ δόξης, 5.9.9) because of their restrained treatment of those they had defeated, whereas Philip V treats conquered territory in the opposite way and so

acquires the opposite reputation (5.10.11). Later on, Polybius' criticism of Philip V's taking of Cius is phrased as Philip "confirming his reputation" for cruelty and impiety (ἔμελλε κυρώσειν τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ διαδεδομένην φήμην ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰς τοὺς φίλους ὀμότητος, ἔξ ἀμφοῖν δὲ δικαίως καὶ κληρονομήσειν παρὰ πᾶσι τοῖς Ἕλλησι τὴν ἐπ' ἄσεβείᾳ δόξαν, 15.22.3). As with the digression on Scipio's training the focus here is on the perception of Philip's actions more than on the actions themselves, and the end of the passage expresses the result: because of Philip's renewed reputation for/proof of his cruelty and impiety, the Rhodians begin to consider him their enemy (15.22.5–23.10).

In other words, in much of the *Histories* a man's reputation is considered a true reflection of reality, which makes a good reputation the natural reward of a good man and a bad reputation the equally natural punishment of a bad man. In Polybius' eyes this is perhaps how the world works, but it is also a didactic tool. Throughout the *Histories* Polybius is explicit about his didactic purpose, which is both practical and moral.<sup>8</sup> One of his major moral lessons is—as I have shown in detail elsewhere—that being good pays.<sup>9</sup> This may seem odious to readers steeped in a Christian tradition where good deeds are supposed to be done for their own sake (or that of a promised afterlife), but in an ancient Greek perspective it makes perfect sense for a reader to ask: why would I want to be good when it often pays better to be bad? Indeed, this question is repeatedly asked by Socrates' interlocutors in Plato.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 Perceptions and Performativity

Moral didacticism aside, what is most striking in Polybius' digression on Scipio's training for virtue is the fact that the focus throughout so much of it remains on the reputational results rather than on the moral results of Scipio's actions. It often seems that the perception of Scipio held by his fellow-Romans is more important than his actual character. Likewise, in the other passages on characters' reputations mentioned above, the impressions their actions make on other people are foregrounded at the expense of a detailed description of those actions. This state of affairs corresponds rather neatly to the model advanced by

<sup>8</sup> E.g. 1.1, 1.35, 3.4, 10.21. See Hau 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Hau 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Most famously by Thrasymachus in *Rep.* 1.

J. Davidson more than twenty years ago in an article that has not gained the influence it deserves.<sup>11</sup> Davidson argues that perceptions are of central importance in the military narrative of the *Histories*, and that Polybius shows military commanders repeatedly putting on a show for each other and the civilian population in order to demonstrate overwhelming superiority and thus achieve their twin goals of galvanizing the courage of their own side and terrifying their opponents. Davidson distinguishes three levels in Polybius' narrative: at the bottom there is the action-level where things happen; one step up there is the perception-level where these actions are perceived in different ways by different characters; and at the very top there is the result-level where these perceptions—rather than the actions themselves—motivate characters to do things and so cause events to happen (Davidson calls this the pathological level). It is the perception-level that is given most space and attention in Polybius' narrative.

Applied to the Scipio digression, at the action-level there are Scipio's actions of moderation, generosity, and courage; at the perception-level these shock and impress his fellow-Romans (interestingly, the words used to express their shock are the same words Davidson identifies as expressing the reaction to the deliberate shows of force of military commanders)<sup>12</sup> and create his reputation. Then, at the result-level, this reputation means that he is appointed to command in Spain at a time when he would otherwise have been thought too young for such responsibility (Plb. 35.4).<sup>13</sup> For Scipio, and for history, it is this last fact that is the salient point, and it is the direct result of Scipio's reputation rather than of his character. Similarly, in the passage comparing Philip V unfavourably to Antigonos Doso and Philip II, the focus is overwhelmingly on the perception level where Philip's actions are perceived as cruel and impious by the other Greeks, and based on this perception the result of the Rhodians' enmity ensues.

Throughout the *Histories*, numerous political decisions are made on the basis of men's reputation. These passages are most often focalised through the decision-makers, e.g. the Senate or the Assembly at Rhodes, rather than through the character who holds the reputation. Most often the reputation matches what the narrator has said about the character (action-level), but that is less important than the influence his reputation has on the process of decision-making (perception-level) and the results of the decision eventually made (result-level). For instance, in the lead-up to the Battle of Cannae, we are told that:

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<sup>11</sup> Davidson 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Davidson 1991, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Walbank 1979 *ad loc.* doubts that Scipio was actually that young, but acknowledges that the phrasing here is meant to complete the picture painted in 31.23–30.



It happened that everyone looked to Aemilius and placed their hopes especially in him because of the high moral quality of his life generally (τὴν ἐκ τοῦ λοιποῦ βίου καλοκάγαθον) and because he seemed (δοκεῖν) to have handled the Illyrian War a short time earlier both bravely and advantageously (ἀνδρωδῶς ἅμα καὶ συμφερόντως) (Plb. 3.107.8, my translation).

This description matches Polybius' narrative of the Illyrian War and echoes his short narrative of Aemilius' homecoming and triumph, where he also stressed the perceptions of his achievements among his fellow-Romans (ἔδόκει γὰρ οὐ μόνον ἐπιδειξίως, ἔτι δὲ μᾶλλον ἀνδρωδῶς κεχρηῆσθαι τοῖς πράγμασιν, 3.19.3). However, the reader already knows—and Polybius' intended readers will surely have known—that Aemilius is going to suffer a disastrous defeat at Cannae. So in this case, despite the fact that the reputation of a character accurately reflects his character and conduct, and that the decision-makers' perception of the past and present is consequently correct, that is no guarantee for success in the future. A similar passage is 1.73.3 where the Carthaginians appoint Hanno "because he seemed (δοκεῖν) to have" handled an earlier crisis well, but in fact the appointment turns out to be disaster.<sup>14</sup> Both Aemilius and Hanno are shown by Polybius' narrative to deserve their reputation, and it is not hard to imagine that they had both been conscious of their countrymen's eyes on them when they were conducting war on their behalf and so had made some of their decisions with this gaze (to use Davidson's expression) and their own reputation in mind. But in these decision-making passages that is not important. What matters is that the intended audience of the performances that have led to their reputations, namely Aemilius' and Hanno's elite countrymen, use these reputations as a basis for decision-making. We see how, realistically, political decisions are made on the basis not of reality, but of perceived reality. The fact that neither appointment goes well adds a bitter taste to the passages: even based on the most reliable information, human decision-making is always fallible, and unexpected events must be expected.<sup>15</sup>

In this focus on the uncertainty of the outcome of decisions made on the basis of reputations/perceptions of character, these passages are closely related to a number of passages in the *Histories* where people make decisions on the basis of perceptions of their surroundings, also expressed by *dokein*. Sometimes this perception rests on the interpretation of sources, such as spies or messengers. For instance, in 2.27.4, a Roman consul takes hope because it seems (δοκεῖν) on the

<sup>14</sup> Another similar example is 3.98 where the high reputation (*doxa*) of the Iberian Abilyx is stressed just before he betrays the Carthaginian hostages to the Romans.

<sup>15</sup> See Maier 2012. For Polybius on *tykhe*, see Hau 2011 with bibliography.

basis of his scouts' reports that the enemy is caught between two Roman armies. This turns out indeed to be the case, and the Romans win a resounding victory. But such a direct correlation between perception and reality is not always the case: in 3.103.1–2, an exaggerated report of Minucius' victories in the field makes it seem (δοκεῖν) to the Romans that their previous lack of success was due to Fabius Cunctator's lack of initiative. The reader knows from Polybius' narrative that Fabius has been avoiding battle with good reason and so knows that the Romans are being deceived. But this deception is not integral to the meaning of *dokein* in Polybius, it is understood only from the context.<sup>16</sup>

In these passages, *dokein* is used to express the perception of the focaliser or focalisers, on which they base their decision-making. *Dokein* is entirely subjective; it does not tell the reader anything about reality, only about the perception. The same is true in passages that deal with moral perceptions which influence decision making. Thus, in 1.11.1, it seems to (ἐδόκει) the Roman Senate that the unreasonableness of sending help to the treacherous Mamertines is of equal weight to (ἰσορροπεῖν) the advantage that might accrue from it, but we are not told what the narrator thinks. Similarly, in 3.20.7, before the outbreak of the Second Punic War, of the two alternatives offered by the Romans to the Carthaginians one seems to (ἐδόκει) the Carthaginians to entail disgrace and harm while the other seems to lead to great dangers. Again we are not told what the narrator thinks; the emphasis, as with Roman decision-making about the Mamertines, is on the decision-makers' perception of the situation and the way it influences their decision, *i.e.* on the perception-level and the result-level rather than on the basic action-level.

We can go further. In numerous passages, δοκεῖ or δοκεῖ μοι is used to express Polybius' interpretation or evaluation of his sources. Sometimes it is an interpretation of the motives behind an action as in 4.5.5–6 where the narrator qualifies the motives of Cleomenes by a ὡς γ' ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ. At other times it is an evaluation of an action, either in intellectual terms (“in this situation Hasdrubal seems (δοκεῖ) to have done a clever and intelligent deed”, 3.116.7) or in moral ones (“[this] seems to me the very height of villainy” [ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ τῆς πάσης γέμειν κακοπραγμοσύνης], 4.27.2). These expressions lend credibility to Polybius as historian because they give the reader the impression that he has questioned and evaluated his sources.

In the light of our reading of the numerous passages in the *Histories* that use *dokein* to signal the importance of the perception-level over the action-level it is

<sup>16</sup> Occasionally it is used of a character who pretends (3.15.12, 3.68.9—to themselves, 3.92.6, 4.19.10).

impossible not to think that Polybius is deliberately signalling the subjectivity of such perceptions. He is warning the reader to be aware that the historian's perception is fallible too and that the reader, with his or her greater hindsight, must draw their own conclusions.

### 3 Conclusion

The dichotomy of being vs seeming is not very important to Polybius. The important thing is what influences decision-making and causes events to happen, and Polybius knows that this is the perceptions people hold rather than reality itself. As a view of historical causation this is rather sophisticated: in recognising that it is often not people's actual character that lead to epoch-making decisions, but rather what other people perceive their characters, or the general situation, or the morality of the situation to be, Polybius is not writing great-man history; he is writing fallible-human-perception history.

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