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E B B A N D F L O W - A P O L Y B I A N M E T A P H O R

T o i v o V i l j a m a a

The Greek historian Polybius' language and style may be described by two characteristics: profoundness in proving things and abundance in imagery. A typical example of his style is the passage, 6,10, where he describes the Lycurgan constitution of Sparta. Lycurgus formed a kind of "mixed state" in which the constitutional elements or forms, royal, aristocratic and democratic, were balanced so that they counter-acting each other prevented the state from corruption inherent in single forms.

Polybius describes this equilibrium of forces of the Spartan constitution using metaphors of the balance (Polyb. 6,10,6-7): Λυκοῦργος οὐχ ἀπλῆν οὐδὲ μονοειδῆ συνεστήσατο τὴν πολιτείαν, ἀλλὰ πάσας ὁμοῦ συνήθροισζε τὰς ἀρετὰς καὶ τὰς ἰδιότητας τῶν ἀρίστων πολιτευμάτων, ἵνα μηδὲν αὐξανόμενον ὑπὲρ τὸ δέον εἰς τὰς συμφύεῖς ἐκτρέπηται κακίας, ἀντισπωμένης δὲ τῆς ἐκάστου δυνάμεως ὑπ' ἀλλήλων μηδαμοῦ νεύη μηδ' ἐπὶ πολὺ καταρρέπη μηδὲν αὐτῶν, ἀλλ' ἰσορροποῦν καὶ ζυγοστατούμενον ἐπὶ πολὺ διαμένῃ κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀντιπλοίας λόγον ἀεὶ τὸ πολέτευμα.

The last phrase of the cited passage (κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀντιπλοίας λόγον) is problematic. However, due to the profoundness of Polybius' diction, there is no doubt as for the sense of the phrase: Polybius wants to say that the Lycurgan constitution had great stability "thanks to the principle of reciprocity or counter-movement". Most scholars agree to this interpretation.¹ But as to the kind of metaphor and as to a more concrete meaning of ἀντίπλοια there is no agreement.

1 Cf. F.W. Walbank, A Historical Commentary on Polybius, 2 vols., Oxford 1957/67, I, 661.

The reason is evident. If we accept the reading of the manuscript tradition we have to deal with a *hapax* in ancient Greek and therefore the interpretation of the word is almost totally dependent on this Polybian passage. Yet, the verb ἀντιπλεῖν is attested twice in the manuscripts of Thucydides (1,50 and 1,54) as a *varia lectio* to ἀντεπλεῖν and once in Pseudo-Phocylides (113 Bergk), but the *variae lectiones* in Thucydides are certainly errors made by the copyists and in the Pseudo-Phocylidean passage the meaning of the verb is too obscure to help the interpretation of ἀντιπλοια. Anyway, we must take into account the fact that in those cases there is a verb form with full verbal force, but in Polybius we have a verbal noun which, for instance, does not assume activity performed by a personal agent.

Hapax legomena are quite frequent in Polybius.² This phenomenon may be natural for the reason that Polybius is our first prominent representative of scientific Hellenistic Greek. Almost everything written before him in Hellenistic times after Aristotle is lost. Therefore there is no *a priori* reason to suspect the status of a *hapax* in Polybius. Of course, the problem could be solved supposing that a copyist has made a mistake, but then we would be dealing with speculations. The suggested emendations like τ' ἀντιπάλου, τῆς ἀντιπαλλίας, τῆς ἀντιπνοίας, τῆς ἀντιπαθείας seem to be satisfactory for the sense of the phrase.³ In these suggestions, however, one question remains to be answered: do they meet the requirements of the metaphorical diction in the passage? This is the reason why it seems plausible to explain the metaphor as that of the water-level.⁴ But, as Walbank notes (Commentary I, 661), the solution seems to be somewhat far-fetched and, moreover, there is no reason to think that a word referring to the sea could be associated with the meaning of

² See the word-list collected by J-A. de Foucault, *Recherches sur la langue et le style de Polybe*, Paris 1972, 325-389.

³ See Walbank, *Commentary I*, 661.

⁴ Suggested by Hultsch in his Polybius edition, Berlin 1867-71, and approved by C. Wunderer, *Polybios Forschungen III: Gleichnisse und Metaphern*, Leipzig 1909, 41-43.

a levelling instrument. Anyway, the most natural way of interpretation is to connect the metaphor of ἀντίπλοια with the other metaphorical expressions in the same passage, i.e. with the equilibrium which is metaphorically described by the words ἰσορροποῦν and ζυγαστατούμενον. It is interesting to note that according to Wunderer (p. 42 note) and de Foucault (231) the latter metaphor (that of ζυγαστατεῖν) is new in Polybius (occurs also in 1,20,5). In fact, it is naturally an indication of Polybius' striving for imagery.

If we assume that by the phrase κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀντιπλοίας λόγον Polybius wants to give similar associations as by the metaphors of the balance, then the idea must be that of a state in continuous wavering where the stability is sustained by the principle of equal forces weighing each in turn.

What is the natural phenomenon that can be compared with a balance and can be referred to with the word ἀντίπλοια? The phenomenon must be connected with the sea, as the verb πλεῖν and its derivatives in -πλοος and -πλοια are connected. In my opinion, this phenomenon is the counter-movement of the sea, the ebb and flow, which is also often used by Greek philosophers, especially by the Stoics, to demonstrate the sympathy of natural forces.⁵ The mentioning of the tides in Cicero is particularly illustrative; it is the constancy and the stability that is stressed by him: *Quid Chalcidico Euripo in motu identidem reciprocando putas fieri constantius ... Quid aestus maritimi vel Hispanienses vel Britannici eorumque certis temporibus vel accessus vel recessus sine deo fieri nonne possunt?* (nat. deor. 3,24).⁶

No doubt the metaphor of the ebb and flow is most appropriate in connection with the metaphors of the balance to describe the Lycurgan constitution. In fact, in the Aristotelean writing *Meteorologica* (354 a 8-11) we find the continuous movement of the ebb

⁵ See L. Edelstein and I.G. Kidd, *Posidonius I: Fragments*, Cambridge 1972, No 214-220. For relevant literature, A.S. Paese, *M. Tulli Ciceronis De natura deorum libri II et III*, Cambr. Mass. 1958, ad nat. deor. 2,19.

⁶ Cf. Cic. nat. deor. 2,19 and div. 2,34.

and flow compared with the balance (τὸ ταλαντεύεσθαι ἢ ταλάντωσις).

Now we must answer another question, which probably is more difficult: what is the concrete, non-metaphorical meaning of ἀντίπλοια? Can it denote the counter-movement of the sea? The scholars who want to keep the reading of the manuscript tradition unchanged explain the word either as rowing into the wind or luffing to the wind (see Walbank, Commentary I, 661 and II, 646).⁷ I agree with Walbank in that those procedures are not sensible here. It is difficult to connect the idea of sailing or rowing against the wind with the idea of equilibrium.

It is interesting that in the Polybian passage under discussion there is before the τῆς ἀντιπλοίας the word ἀντισπωμένης that can involve in the reader's mind the idea of the ebb and flow. In Greek doxographic and etymological writings the verb ἀντισπᾶν and the noun ἀντισπασμός are used to explain the etymology of ἄμπωσις (ebb) or the causes of the tide phenomenon. To illustrate this I shall quote three passages from the doctrine Πῶς ἄμπώτιδες γίνονται καὶ πλήμμυραι:

Ἀριστοτέλης καὶ Ἡρακλείδης ... προωθουμένην ἀνοιδεῦν τὴν Ἀτλαντικὴν θάλατταν καὶ κατασκευάζειν τὴν πλήμμυραν, καταληγόντων δ' ἀντιπερισπωμένην ὑποβαίνειν, ὅπερ εἶναι τὴν ἄμπωτιν.

Πλάτων ἐπὶ τὴν αἰώραν φέρεται τῶν ὑδάτων. εἶναι γὰρ τινα φυσικὴν αἰώραν διὰ τίνος ἐγγείου τμήματος περιφέρουσιν τὴν παλίρροιν, ὑφ' ἧς ἀντικυμαίνεσθαι τὰ πελάγη.

Κράτης ὁ γραμματικὸς τὸν ἀντισπασμόν τῆς θαλάσσης αἰτιᾶται. (Aetii placit. philos. III 17 §§ 1,5,7; Diels, Doxographi Graeci, 382-83).

Besides the words ἀντιπερισπωμένην and ἀντισπασμόν occurring in the passages one may also observe the word ἀντικυμαίνεσθαι describing the tides, the word which easily can be imagined as a synonym of the ἀντίπλοια.

⁷ Cf. also the Latin translation of Dübner, Polybii historiarum reliquiae, Paris 1839: *Quemadmodum in navigando servatur navis, dum nimius ventorum impetus opposita vi remorum temperatur.*

Navigation is a peculiar procedure in the sense that the "object" of the activity is the ship but the "agent" is either the navigator or the sea. The double character of the activity is exemplified, for instance, by the Latin *navigare* (the agent is the sailor) and the Greek *πλεῖν* (the agent is the sea). In my opinion, the commentators of Polybius have too much adhered to the idea of an activity verb *πλεῖν*, although the verb, in fact, is stative "to rest on the sea, float". P. Chantraine (*Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 915-16) gives the following characterization: "les sens de 'naviguer' important en grec et naturel dans un peuple de marins, résulte d'un développement particulier, le radical signifiant originellement 'être dans l'eau, flotter, être inondé' or 'inonder', etc."

In addition, it is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with a verbal noun, not with a personal verb form. Verbal nouns usually do not assume such grammatical relations as the subject or the object. In the Greek word system the "nouns of action" ending in *-ος* and *-ᾶ* (*εῖα*, *οῖα*) are opposed to other nouns of action (ending *-τύς*, *-σις*) just because they do not presuppose an agent or a subject which is affected by the action.

J. Gagnepain (*Les noms grecs en -ος et en -ᾶ*, Paris 1959, 57-59) discusses the semantics of these nouns and shows that, in general, there is a radical difference between them. The opposition is that of particular (intense) and generic (extense). In other words, the nouns in *-ᾶ* are more abstract and their meaning is more vague. The difference can also be seen in the comparison of Greek compound nouns ending in *-πλοος* (*-πλους*) and *-πλοια* (*-πλοῖη*):⁸

ἀνά, ἀπό, διέκ, διά, εἶς, ἔκ	}	-πλοος
ἐπί, κατά, παρά, περὶ, πρό, πρόσ		
ᾶ, ἀντί, δυσ (δυσπλοῖη), εὔ, εὐθύ	}	-πλοια
μονό, νυκτί, ὁμό, πρωτό, ταχύ		

⁸ The nouns are collected from LSJ and Kretschmer-Locker, *Rückläufiges Wörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*, Göttingen 1963.

Except two cases of later Greek (ἀπόπλοια in Libanius and εὔπλοια in Etymologicum Magnum) there is no overlapping: in composition these two nouns have different prefixes. The prefixes of -πλοος are more concrete and denote the direction or the place of the act. For instance, the word εὔπλοος can have the following three interpretations (LSJ, s.v.): "sailing in", "right of entry", "entrance of a harbour". It is also typical of πλοος-compounds that the act they denote can be spatially or temporally measured, compare Herodot. 2, 4,3 ..., ἐς τὴν ἀνάπλοος ἀπὸ θαλάσσης ἑπτὰ ἡμερῶν ἐστὶ ἀνὰ τὸν ποταμόν.

The prefixes of the πλοια-compounds, on the other hand, delineate the quality of the phenomenon. Considering this distinction, it seems that the Greek expression corresponding to the suggested interpretations "sailing or rowing against" (cf. above) should be ἀντεπίπλοος not ἀντίπλοια.

Due to the generic vague meaning the simple πλοια does not occur, while the simple πλόος quite frequently occurs in Greek texts. Gagnepain (58) describes the difference of -ος and -ᾶ -nouns with the opposition "Essence : Acte" (-ος) versus "Existence : Efficience" (-ᾶ). Because an act can be seen totally, but an existence partially, it follows that a πλοος is in opposition to another act (e.g. περίπλοος opp. περίοδος) but a πλοια is in opposition to another πλοια (e.g. εὔπλοια opp. ἄπλοια). This means that in πλοια-compounds the prefix has the informative emphasis. It is also characteristic of -ᾶ -nouns that they are easily used figuratively (Gagnepain, 59) because the phenomenon they denote is only circumstantially defined. So, for instance, ἄπλοια can be "the time or the place in which the navigation is impossible" or "the wind or other natural force that makes the navigation impossible".

According to the considerations about the semantics of πλοια-compounds the expression ἀντίπλοια can be imagined as a time, or a place, or a situation which is associated with the movement of the sea (πλοια) and defined by the quality ἀντί ("reciprocally, mutually, counter").

It is regrettable that a great part of Hellenistic prose has been lost. And therefore, it is often very difficult to understand an expression occurring in a text preserved to us, but not attested elsewhere. In order to get a clear idea of its meaning one must (1) make a close inspection of the written context of the word, (2) examine the synonymic expressions, and (3) study the semantic properties of the word. In my mind, a study carried out along these principles leads to the conclusion that the men of Polybius' time associated the word ἀντίπλοια with the ebb and flow phenomenon. Of course, I admit that it is not easy to imagine oneself in the place of a reader of ancient times and adopt his intuitions.