CHAPTER 3

Speeches of Historians and Historiographical Criticism: Timaeus’ Speeches in Polybius’ Book XII

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Polybius’ Book XII, of which large fragments have been preserved, was devoted entirely to historiographical criticism. Polybius passes judgement on his Hellenistic predecessors, although Timaeus is the main target of his attacks. The starting point for some of his arguments is his censure of the orations that Timaeus inserted in his work. As a result, Polybius is harshly critical of the speeches of Gelon’s ambassadors, Hermocrates and Timoleon, which correspond to the three most frequent types of oration in Greek historiography: λόγοι πρεσβευτικοί (ambassadorial speeches), δημηγορίαι (speeches addressed to popular assemblies or councils), and παρακλήσεις (exhortations by generals to soldiers). The present chapter will focus on the speeches that Timaeus attributed to the ambassadors of Gelon of Syracuse.

1 Timaeus’ Reputation

During the Hellenistic period, the work of Timaeus, who was born in Sicily and lived between 350 and 260 BCE,1 enjoyed wide circulation. Jacoby traced his influence on a large range of authors, from poets (Callimachus, Lycophron, Apollonius of Rhodes) to geographers (Artemidorus, Pseudo-Scymnus) and paradoxographers (Antigonus of Carystus).2 His most famous work, the History of Sicily, focused on the Greek West, principally Sicily, but also the Greek cities in Italy. The Punic Wars and Roman expansion drew attention to this area of the Mediterranean Sea, which may have contributed to the promotion of Timaeus’ work.3 Finally, Timaeus has been considered one of the models that inspired the creators of Roman historiography.4

Even though all this added to the reputation of this important historian, it should be mentioned that he was also a controversial figure from the very beginning. Ister the Callimachean, whose *floruit* is set in the mid-third century BCE, wrote a work entitled *In Response to Timaeus*. A few years later, Polemon of Ilium also composed a treatise *In Response to Timaeus*. The greatest impact and influence on the later tradition, however, corresponds to the critical analysis of Polybius. In this respect, the information provided by the *Suda* proves significant: eleven of the twenty text entries originally proceeding from Timaeus are taken from Polybius' book XII. The sharp accusations levelled by Polybius against him are tinged with malice and extremely unjust, as contemporary criticism has long recognized. Polybius, who is a harsh and unfair critic, is at the same time the most important transmitter of Timaeus. The recovery of Timaeus, therefore, must overcome a preliminary obstacle, namely lifting the veil of hostility hanging over him. And the person who most actively encouraged this hostility is, at the same time, our main source of information concerning the author to be recovered.

2 Polybius’ Criticism: A General Assessment

In 12.25a–b Polybius begins his assessment of Timaeus’ speeches: they are not truthful compositions, he says, because they do not seek to reproduce “what was actually said” or “the general meaning of a speech” (οὐ γὰρ τὰ ῥηθήντα γέγραφεν, οὐδ’ὡς ἐρρήθη κατ’ἀλήθειαν), but rather to show the rules of “how to speak properly” (ὡς δεῖ ῥηθῆναι). Consequently, they are like school exercises, whose aim is to display the rhetorical skills of a schoolboy, and as a result, the true meaning of the historiographical speech—which is to find out what words were actually spoken and to explain why what was done or proposed was a

6 *FGrHist* 566TT 16 and 25 (= *FGrHist* 334 F 59)
7 *FGrHist* 566T T 26 (*FHC* 111, p. 126, fol. 39). For the dates of Polemon, see Lasserre (1979) 971.
10 In the list of testimonies to and fragments of Timaeus provided by the electronic edition of *FGrHist (Concordance Jacoby-Source)*, the name of Polybius appears fifty times. For the dominant presence of Polybius in testimonies to and fragments of Timaeus, see also Baron (2013) 58.