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Polybios, the Laws of War, and Philip V of Macedon¹

ABSTRACT: In his account of Philip V of Macedon's attack of Thermos in 218 BC (5.9–12), Polybios uses the 'laws of war' as a rhetorical device to reinforce his own interpretation of the king and perspective on the situation. While this is not the only place within his work where the laws are referenced in such a way – they are, for instance, similarly used in the defence of Achaian actions after recapturing Mantinea in 226 BC (Plb. 2.58) – the Thermos episode represents the most extensive and explicit application of this motif and therefore offers us an opportunity to investigate the historian's historiographical aims and literary workings in more detail. This article sets out to offer fresh perspectives on this well-known episode, exploring how the reference to the 'laws' has serious consequences for the development of the king's character within the narrative, how it engages with wider didactic and political purposes, and what it reveals about Polybios' historical method and literary workings.

Keywords: Polybios – Philip V – Thermos – War – historiography

In the summer of 218 BC, Philip V attacked the citadel of Thermos in Aitolia. This was the fourth year of the king's reign (221–179 BC) and the third of the Social War (220–117 BC), a conflict instigated by Philip and his allies against the Aitolians in retaliation for their raids upon Achaian and Messenian territory in 222–221 BC.² After two years of military activity against the insurgents in the Peloponnese, Philip was approached by the Akarnanians, one of his allies in the Symmachy and neighbours to the Aitolians, at the beginning of 218 BC to take a new direction and move the war into Aitolia itself. The Aitolian *strategos*, Dorimachos, and half the army were currently on campaign in Thessaly and moving steadily towards Macedonia. Aratos of Sikyon, a prominent leader of the allied Achaian League, also supported this plan and advised that this was the opportune moment to press forward: with the majority of the Aitolian forces abroad, invading and plundering Aitolia would be easy (Plb. 5.5–7). As the Akarnanians pointed out, this

- 1 Great thanks must go to Federico Santangelo, Andrew Erskine, Chris Mowat, Johannes Walter, Sabine Walter, and *Historia's* anonymous reviewers for their valuable and insightful comments during the preparation of this paper. All opinions and errors contained within are entirely my own.
- 2 During Philip's reign the members of the League included the Macedonians, Achaian League, Epirotes, Phokians, Boiotian League, Akarnanians, Euboians and Thessalians (Plb. 4.9.5; 7.11.7; 11.4–6). For a comprehensive discussion of the Symmachy, its foundation, members and institutions, see K. Scherberich, *Koinè symmachia: Untersuchungen zum Hellenenbund Antigonos' III Dason und Philipps V. (224–197 v. Chr.)*, (Stuttgart 2009).

action would also force the enemy away from Macedonia and Macedonian-controlled regions. The wealthy religious and administrative capital of Aitolia, Thermos, therefore became their target (Plb. 5.8.3–5).³

Following the construction of a fleet and an unsuccessful attempt on the Aitolian stronghold of Palos on the island of Zakynthos, Philip landed his fleet at Limnaia on the Aitolian mainland and collected the levied Akarnanian forces waiting for him (Plb. 5.6.1–2). The Epirotes, Polybios states, had been no less eager for such an attack as they too had suffered badly from Aitolian raids, but were unable to gather their forces in time to join the assault (Plb. 5.6.3). With this increased force, Philip then swiftly pushed on to Thermos (Plb. 5.6–8).⁴ He arrived at the city in the evening unopposed and sent his men out to loot the surrounding villages and plains. On the next day, the richest and most precious of the booty and armour from the dedications in the porticoes was taken by the army and the remainder burnt to prevent future usage by the enemy (Plb. 5.8.6–9). Polybios then warns the reader that “Until this point, everything had been done well and justly in accordance with the laws of war, but I do not know how I should speak of the things that followed” (Plb. 5.9.1: καὶ ἕως μὲν τούτου πάντα κατὰ τοὺς τοῦ πολέμου νόμους καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ἐπράττετο: τὰ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα πῶς χρὴ λέγειν οὐκ οἶδα). He narrates how the Macedonians, keeping in mind the Aitolians’ attacks on the sanctuaries of Dion and Dodona the year before, burnt the colonnades of the sanctuary of Apollo, demolished the votive offerings and raised the buildings to the ground, destroying two thousand statues and sparing only those representing the gods or bearing inscribed dedications to them (Plb. 5.9.2–3). On the walls they also inscribed a line of verse proclaiming their act of vengeance: ‘Do you see where the divine bolt has flown?’ (Plb. 5.9.4–6: ὄρας τὸ δῖον οὐ βέλος διέπτατο). The king and his associates are said to have felt justified that their actions were conducted righteously in retaliation against the Aitolians for their earlier acts of sacrilege (Plb. 5.9.4–6).⁵

Following this justification, Polybios immediately voices his objections to their judgement and begins a long digression critiquing the king’s actions. He points out that Philip had failed to emulate the clemency and reverence of his predecessors (Antigonos Dason, Philip II and Alexander the Great), making his actions no better than the enemy and inspiring a reputation for impiety, brutally and lawlessness (Plb. 5.9.7–10.11). He highlights how Philip has contravened the laws of war by his destruction of religious property: he boldly states that “it is all very well to take resources from the enemy in order to weaken them and strengthen oneself, as this is what the laws compel us to do. But to cause damage to temples, statues and other works that give no benefit to the war-effort must be considered the work of a raging passion and mind” (Plb. 5.11.1–5: πῶς οὐκ ἂν εἴποι τις εἶναι τρόπου καὶ θυμοῦ λυττῶντος ἔργον). The historian continues by arguing that the purpose of war is to reform the enemy rather than destroy them; that Philip was

3 Cf. J. D. Grainger, *The League of the Aitolians* (Mnemosyne 1999) 37–39, 60, 171–72, 193–4.

4 Cf. M. Kleu, *Die Seepolitik Philipps V. von Makedonien* (Bochum 2015) for a comprehensive study of Philip’s sea policy.

5 For Philip’s attack on Thermos, see J. D. Grainger, *League of the Aitolians*, 16, 208, 277, 284–6.

acting the tyrant in his brutality (Plb. 5.11.5–7); that the Aitolians would have regarded him with goodwill and felt ashamed at their own behaviour had he not damaged the colonnades and statues and therefore shown due piety and moderation; and finally, that conquering the enemy by noble conduct is of far greater advantage than defeating them in the field, demonstrating the restraint and glory of a leader rather than the impulsiveness of a soldier (Plb. 5.11.7–12.4).

Polybios' main point is that Philip has transgressed the laws of war and his reputation will be negatively affected by such an offence. It is this argument which is the primary focus of the present article. It will not attempt, however, to reconstruct Polybios' own conception of the laws; Von Scala endeavoured to establish such a system out of the historian's incidental remarks in the 19th century, but this proved unsuccessful and illustrates the futility of attempting such a task.⁶ A similar result was also found more recently by Spickermann in regard to ascertaining Polybios' personal religious attitude: while the ancient historian clearly saw the destruction of religious property as outrageous and hubristic behaviour, and was himself a benefactor of the temple of Zeus in Megalopolis,⁷ he also exhibited the stance of a philosophical rationalist in humanising the gods and considering religion more of a means to discipline the masses.⁸ The aim of this piece, then, is rather to explore the historian's use of the 'Laws of War' as a rhetorical device to reinforce his own interpretation of Philip V of Macedon. The attack on Thermos in 218 BC occurs during the king's early reign when Polybios claims he displayed exemplary behaviour, three years before taking a sudden 'turn for the worse' in 215 BC by attempting to seize the allied city of Messene (Plb. 7.10–14). Thermos represents an important moment in the narrative as it is the first instance in which Polybios criticises the king and his actions for being savage, excessive and impious. These qualities would become increasingly prominent in the portrait of the king as his life progresses (e.g. Plb. 15.20, 21–24; 16.1), and the historian highlights this decline and uses it to explain the defection of the Achaian League to Rome in 198 BC (Livy (P) 32.19–23) and Philip's defeat at Kynoskephalai in the following year (Plb. 18.18–27). In the longer term, it is this bad behaviour that caused, Polybios claims, the destruction of the Macedonian royal house (Plb. 8.8.1; 10.26; 15.20.5–7; 23.10.1–3). The Thermos episode therefore has serious consequences for the whole portrait of the king: it is the beginning of his decline. Furthermore, as an extensive discussion of the laws of war in the *Histories*, it also directly engages with the wider didactic purpose of the work by explicitly pointing out good and bad behaviour in the spheres of politics and war. It reflects a deeper concern of the

6 R. Von Scala, *Die Studien des Polybios* (Stuttgart 1890) 299–324. Cf. F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybios*, I (Oxford 1957) 264.

7 Cf. H. Lauter, "Polybios hat es geweiht ...": Stiftungsinschriften des Polybios und des Philopoimen aus dem neuen Zeus-Heiligtum zu Megalopolis (Griechenland)", *AW* 33 (2002) 375–386.

8 W. Spickermann, "Kultisches und Religiöses bei Polybios", in Grieb, V. & C. Koehn (eds.) *Polybios und seine Historien* (Stuttgart 2013) 301–18. For earlier scholarship on Polybios' religious attitude, see P. Pédech, "Les idées religieuses de Polybe. Études sur la religion de l'élite gréco-romaine au IIe siècle av. J.-C.", *RHR* 167 (1965) 35–68, particularly 35–38; and A. J. L. Van Hoof, "Polybios' Reason and Religion. The Relations between Polybios' Casual Thinking and His Attitude towards Religion in the *Studies of History*", *Klio* 59 (1977) 101–128.

historian: that military practices among the Greeks and Macedonians have become corrupted. No longer do leaders exhibit the candidness of the ancients who would openly declare war, refuse the use of projectiles, and fight hand-to-hand in plain sight. Instead, they maintain the necessity of deceit and secrecy in military affairs and conduct, and proclaim honest dealing to be a sign of poor generalship (Plb. 13.3).⁹

By its focus on Polybios' narratological workings, this article also contributes to the recent literary turn in Polybian scholarship. This new direction began with an article by James Davidson in 1991, influenced by the narratological concepts developed by Gerard Genette, which explored Polybios' presentation of warfare through the use of focalisation and the importance of perception for both historical agents and readers.¹⁰ This first literary approach to the *Histories* has since inspired a flurry of important new studies, including David Golan's *The Res Graeciae in Polybius, Four Studies* (1995), Felix Maier's *Überall mit dem Unerwarteten rechnen. Die Kontingenz historischer Prozesse bei Polybios* (2012), Jonas Grethlein's chapter on Polybios in his *Experience and Teleology in Ancient Historiography* (2013), and Nikos Miltsios' *The Shaping of Narrative in Polybius* (2013).¹¹ Crucially, Brian McGing and Boris Dreyer have also explored certain aspects of Polybios' portrait of the Macedonian king along these lines: the former identifying the prominence of the theme of youthfulness in the account of his early years and its use to create expectation and suspense within the narrative; and the latter reassessing the source material for Polybios' account of Philip's last years and highlighting the presence of indecision within his depiction of the Macedonian king (and his son Perseus) and its devastating consequences.¹² This paper aims therefore to contribute to this growing literary approach and draw out fresh perspectives on the king and this well-known episode.

The Controversy over Retaliation & the Laws of War

In terms of the laws of war, this episode at Thermos is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the existence of two opposing ideas about the acceptability of retaliation after a breach of their terms. For Philip and his commanders, their attack on religious

- 9 Cf. F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius II* (Oxford 1967) 416. This view of moral decline in military tactics is also evident much earlier in Demosthenes 9.48–50, who saw Philip II's military tactics of campaigning outside of the usual summer season, his use of bribery, skirmishers, archers, and ambushes, as contraventions of the usual practices of war.
- 10 J. Davidson, "The gaze of Polybius", *JRS* 81 (1991) 10–24; G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca 1972).
- 11 See also N. Miltsios, "The Perils of Expectations: Perceptions, Suspense and Surprise in Polybius' Histories" in J. Grethlein & A. Rengakos (eds.) *Narratology and Interpretation: the content of narrative form in ancient literature* (Berlin 2009).
- 12 B. McGing, "Youthfulness in Polybius: The Case of Philip V of Macedon" and B. Dreyer "Frank Walbank's Philippos Tragoidoumenos: Polybius' Account of Philip's Last Years", both in B. Gibson & T. Harrison (eds.) *Polybius and his World* (Oxford 2013). See also B. McGing, *Polybius' Histories* (Oxford 2010) and B. Dreyer, "Polybios und die Hellenistischen Monarchien" in V. Grieb & C. Koehn (eds.) *Polybius und seine Historien* (Stuttgart 2013).

property at Thermos was justified because the Aitolians had committed similar offenses at Dion and Dodona the year before (219 BC; Plb. 4.62, 67) – the Macedonians were therefore avenging the gods by taking ‘an eye for an eye’. This, of course, was probably not their primary motive for attacking the city, but it was an explanation which Polybios claims satisfied them and no doubt others too, as the historian felt the need to expand on this matter and to correct this (mis)understanding. Certainly in this episode, Polybios clearly takes the opposite opinion: avenging one transgression of the laws of war with another is unacceptable.¹³ The difficulty for us, and undoubtedly for Polybios in making his point, is that both views are supported in the literary evidence and there is confusion over which is the proper behaviour. This reflects the wider problem of defining ‘the laws of war’ as a concept in the ancient world.

οἱ τοῦ πολέμου νόμοι, ‘the laws of war’ generally refer to a set of shared practices that constituted what was considered to be just and reasonable conduct within the course of ancient Greek warfare.¹⁴ These belonged to a wider body of universal norms variously and vaguely described as ‘the laws of the Greeks’, ‘the laws of all men’, and ‘the common laws’, dictating appropriate Greek behaviour in all aspects of life.¹⁵ It seems, from references in the surviving evidence, that they could include the protection of sacred sites, objects, officials, festivals and observances,¹⁶ as well as the immunity of heralds, ambassadors and merchants, the respectful treatment and return or burial of the enemy dead, and the victors’ prerogative to treat the defeated as they wished.¹⁷ Yet as they were *agraphoi nomoi* and never fully defined in our sources, ascertaining the details of their

- 13 Plb. 5.9.6, ‘ἔμοι δὲ τάναντία δοκεῖ τούτων,’ and 5.11.2, ‘αὐτὸς δὲ παραπλήσια ποιῶν οὐκ ἔφετο τῆς ὁμοίας ἐκείνοις τεύξεσθαι δόξης παρὰ τοῖς ἀκούσασι.’
- 14 Scholarship on these customs is vast. For their contents and enforcement in the Greek world, see for example C. Philipson, *The International Law and Custom of Ancient Greece and Rome* (London 1911); J. Ober, “Classical Greek Times” in M. Howarrd et al. (eds.), *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (Yale 1994) 12; D.J. Bederman, *International Law in Antiquity* (Cambridge 2001) 242–66; P. Krentz, “Fighting by the Rules: The Invention of the Hoplite Agon”, *Hesperia* 71 (1) (2002) 25–34; V. Alonso, “War, Peace and International Law in Ancient Greece” in K. A. Raaflaub (ed.) *War and Peace in the Ancient World* (Oxford 2007); and A. Lanni, “The Laws of War in Ancient Greece”, *Law and History Review* 26 (3) (2008) 469–489.
- 15 τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων νόμιμα (Thuc. 4.97; Diod. 19.63), τὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων νόμιμα (Thuc. 1.3, 118; Plut. *Pericles* 17), τὰ κοινὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων νόμιμα, κοινὸι νόμοι, κοινὰ δίκαια τῆς Ἑλλάδος, τὰ κοινὰ ἀνθρώπων ἔθη (καὶ νόμιμα) (Plb. 1.70.6, 4.67.4), οἱ κοινοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων νόμοι (Plb. 2.58), τὰ κατὰ κοινὸν ὠρισμένα δίκαια παρ’ ἀνθρώποις (Polyb. 4.6.11), τὰ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δίκαια (καὶ τὰ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς ὄσια) (Plb. 2.8.12, 12.13.8), νόμιμα πάσης (συγγέωτας) Ἑλλάδος (Eurip. *Suppl.* 13). Cf. Phillipson, *International Law* 1.57–58; Krentz, “Fighting by the rules”; and Lanni, “Laws of War” 471–72.
- 16 For the inviolability of religious structures see Thuc. 4.97.2–98, Xen. *Agesilaus* 10.1, Plb. 5.10 and Paus. 10.28.3. For the immunity of officials, Homer *Iliad* 1.442–45, Hdt. 7.136.2, Plb. 16.33, and Plut. *Alex.* 11. For the prohibition against waging war during religious festivals, Hdt. 6.106 and 7.206, Thuc. 5.49.1 and 7.73.2, and Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2–7. Cf. Phillipson, *International Law* 2.246–49; M. D. Goodman & A. J. Holladay, “Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare”, *CQ* New Series 36 (1) (1986) 158–60; Bederman, *International Law* 246; and Lanni, “Laws of War” 477–78.
- 17 For immunity of heralds and ambassadors see Homer *Iliad* 1.334, Paus. 1.36.3 and Hdt. 7.133–136. For the respectful treatment of the dead, Eur. *Heracl.* 1010 and *Suppl.* 19, 311 and 526, Hdt. 9.78–79 and 4.202–205, and Thuc. 4.98; for the religious character of this law, Eur. *Suppl.* 19, 311, 526. For the victor’s right to deal with the defeated as they wished, Xen. *Cyrop.* 7.5.73, Arist. *Pol.* 1255a6–8, and Plb. 5.11. See also Thuc. 1.85.2, 3.9.1 for the correct treatment of those seeking restitution, and those who change allegiances.

contents, the extent of their application (their phrasing often suggests they went beyond the Greeks), as well as their development over time, has caused continual issues. The fact that there was no international adjudicator to exact punishment for transgressions of these normative practices (retribution for their contravention was generally assigned to the gods) has resulted in the view that they did not exist.¹⁸ Yet the fact that references to them, or parts of them, appear reasonably frequently in literature from the fifth century BC onwards, alongside the fact that most peoples extended rights to foreign individuals, suggests that there was some fundamental conception of these 'laws' within Greek thought.¹⁹ It would be cutting out a vital part of the cultural picture to deny their existence completely. The vagueness of the 'laws', however, does suggest that while widely acknowledged they were ill-defined even in Greek thought and, like the differing terminology, fluid in interpretation. As a result, they often came into matters of morality and reputation, and were variously manipulated to ratify or condemn certain actions and behaviours depending on perspective.

This is clearly demonstrated by a couple of episodes recorded by Herodotus. He writes that after the killing of the Persian ambassadors sent by Dareios in 491 BC the Spartans thought it appropriate to dispatch two volunteers to offer their lives to Xerxes in atonement (Hdt. 7.133). Xerxes, however, refused to accept this attempt at reconciliation, claiming that he did not wish to act, like the Spartans, against the laws of all men by murdering the ambassadors of a foreign power (Hdt. 7.136: τὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων νόμιμα). Thus, while the Spartans considered an act of vengeance to be acceptable in the current situation – they believed that they had been unable to obtain favourable omens from their sacrifices because of this transgression – Xerxes did not. He considered it far worse to be subject to such a reputation even through an act of reprisal, and did not want to encourage similar divine anger. Later too, after the battle of Plataia, the adviser Lampon suggests to the victorious Spartan Pausanias that he impale the body of Mardonius in retaliation for the earlier decapitation and impalement of the Spartan king, Leonidas, by the Persian commander and king Xerxes. The treatment of the dead in such a brutal manner was against the laws of war. This act of revenge, Lampon claimed, would win praise from all the Spartans and the rest of Greece. Pausanias, on the other hand, responds with horrified rejec-

18 This view is espoused by Realist theorists, who conceive that there can be no effective international law in an international system characterised by a formal state of anarchy (a lack of leadership). For (neo)-Realist theory, see K. N. Walter, *Theory of International Politics* (New York 1979) 113, and J. Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge 2000). For its application to the Hellenistic world, see A. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (California 2006) and A. Eckstein, *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230–170 BC* (Oxford 2008). More recently, this view has been contested by Constructivists; see A. Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organisation*, 46 (1992) 391–425, D. C. Copeland, 'The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay', *International Security*, 25 (2000) 187–212. A clear example of their different approaches to the ancient world can be seen in the parallel articles of P. J. Burton, 'Ancient International Law, the Aetolian League, and the Ritual of Surrender during the Roman Republic: A Constructivist View' in *The International History Review*, 31 (2) (2009) 237–252, and A. Eckstein 'Ancient 'International Law', the Aetolian League and the Ritual of Unconditional Surrender to Rome: A Realist View' in *The International History Review*, 31 (2) (2009) 253–267.

19 See fn. 14, 15, and 16.

tion, viewing such an act as something un-Greek and insulting to the dead (Hdt. 9.78–9).

Clearer acceptance of retaliation in response to a transgression of the laws appears in other contexts, however. Thucydides, for instance, describes how the Boiotians thought it a reasonable reprisal against the Athenians' occupation of Delion and disruption of the Boiotian sanctuary's river in 424 BC to refuse to hand over the Athenian dead for proper burial until they had vacated the temple (Thuc. 4.97–8). Similarly, Plutarch also claims that the execution of Mantinean leaders and the enslavement of their population by the Achaian League after the capture of the city in the Kleomenean War came under the law of reprisal (Plut. *Arat.* 45.4–5).

Notably, Philip II and Alexander also justified certain actions in very similar terms to those used by Philip V in attacking Thermos. Interestingly, this is something not mentioned by Polybios when he uses them to discredit the later king and is evidence of how he has carefully selected and tailored his information in this digression in order to support his point. Philip II defended his intervention in central Greece by claiming that he was forced to punish the Phokians for plundering the temple treasures at Delphi in the Third Sacred War (356–346 BC; Justin 8.2.3; cf. Paus. 10.2–3, Diod. 16.35). Alexander similarly claimed that his march on Asia was to avenge the Persian acts of sacrilege against Greek temples, and he was further compelled by his position as hegemon of the Sacred League to intervene (Plb. 3.6).²⁰ Each statement, like that of Philip V, reflects a concern that their interference and aggression be considered legitimate and just, and are unlikely to have come from a genuine concern for the laws of war. The repeated use of such justifications implies that they were to some degree accepted, and, therefore, also validates retaliation.

In this light, the act of retaliation was a controversial one and the decision to seek vengeance ultimately came down to the position, beliefs and principles of the victims of the offence. Those who refrained from striking back were not adhering, as Adriaan Lanni suggests, to 'an accepted international norm against reprisals', but nor were they necessarily only reflecting 'a particularly pious attitude toward sacred customs'.²¹ For some, retaliation in kind for transgressions of the 'laws' was reasonable punishment. For others, contravening norms yourself, even to avenge a similar act, was considered excessive and unnecessary, potentially causing future retribution from a deity and severe damage to one's reputation. Polybios' views in this instance are clearly aligned with the latter perspective.

20 See also M. M. Austin, "Alexander and the Macedonian invasion of Asia: Aspects of Historiography of War and Empire in Antiquity" in J. Rich & G. Shipley (eds.), *War and Society in the Greek World* (Oxford 1993) 200–1.

21 Lanni, "Laws of War" 472–74.

Polybios' Rhetoric & the Laws of War

Yet, Polybios' statements about the laws of war and retaliation are not consistent within his *Histories*.²² For instance, he demands far more leniency be shown to the Achaian League than to its opponents. He describes how the Mantineans, after deciding to defect from the Achaian League to Sparta in 227, massacred an Achaian garrison originally installed upon the request of the inhabitants for their protection (Plb. 2.58.1–4). Polybios claims that this was an act of the greatest treachery: in breaking their friendship, they should at least have spared the lives of these men and allowed them all to depart under terms. Such treatment, he claims, is accorded even to enemies by the common laws of men (Plb. 2.58.4–8). A few lines later, however, while defending Achaian actions following the recapture of Mantinea with the help of Antigonos Doson (the population was enslaved and their property pillaged), Polybios states that some might say now that the Mantineans had been crushed by armed force, they should have been sold into slavery with their wives and children. But this, he claims, is in accordance with the laws of war and suffered even by those who have not committed any impious act. Because of their transgression, he says, the Mantineans should therefore have received a far worse penalty than enslavement and the plunder of property (Plb. 2.58.9–15).²³

A close reading of this passage thus shows inconsistency. His first statement concerning the treatment of the Achaian garrison asserts that the laws of war require that the defeated be allowed to depart under terms, while only a few lines later when discussing their enemy he claims that the laws of war allow the harsher treatment of enslavement. Moreover, his final statement that the punishment of the Mantineans could have been far worse, and even justly so because of their earlier transgression of the laws, suggests that our historian is in this case advocating retaliation in kind, as well as condoning actions exceeding the laws' remit. He tries to persuade the reader that this would have been acceptable in the eyes of other Greeks, and therefore that these actions would not have caused reputational damage. Yet, this is clearly not the case as both Phylarchos (as inferred from Polybios' defence of this episode; Plb. 2.56–8) and Plutarch suggest that it did.²⁴ The latter's account is explicit in stating that these actions were thought to be un-Greek (Plut. *Arat.* 45.4: ἐδόκει δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ Μαντίνειαν οὐχ Ἑλληνικῶς διωικῆσθαι τοῖς

22 Note the similar inconsistency in his religious statements as outlined by Spickermann, "Kultisches und Religiöses bei Polybios", 317–18.

23 A similar argument based on his bias towards the Achaian League and disagreement with Phylarchos' sensational telling of the events is shown at 2.59–60 when discussing the Achaian treatment of the ex-tyrant of Argos, Aristomachos. For Polybios' Achaian bias, see K. Haegemans & E. Kosmetatou, "Aratus and the Achaean Background of Polybios" in G. Schepens & J. Bollandsee, *The Shadow of Polybios: Intertextuality as a Research Tool in Greek Historiography* (Leiden 2005). For the disagreement between Polybios and Phylarchos, see G. Schepens, "Polybios' Criticism of Phylarchus" in G. Schepens & J. Bollandsee, *The Shadow of Polybios: Intertextuality as a Research Tool in Greek Historiography* (Leiden 2005); F. W. Walbank, "The Double Shadow: Polybios among the Fragments" in G. Schepens & J. Bollandsee, *The Shadow of Polybios: Intertextuality as a Research Tool in Greek Historiography* (Leiden 2005); A. Eckstein, "Polybios, Phylarchus, and Historiographical Criticism" in *CP* 108 (2013) 314–38. Cf. Plutarch criticism of the affair in *Arat.* 44.4.

24 For Phylarchos, see T. Africa, *Phylarchus and the Spartan Revolution* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1961).

Ἀχαιοῖς), and we know from his comments on the differing accounts of Phylarchos and Polybios that he had use of both of them. As a Greek himself, even one living centuries later, Plutarch obviously did not agree with Polybios' claims, and this confirms that retaliation in kind and transgressions of this sort were generally condemned.

Polybios' statements are, of course, also strongly inconsistent with his stance in the Thermos episode. Walbank therefore justly concluded from this discrepancy that Polybios clearly had no consistent answer as to how the laws of war should be applied, or if he did, he was happy to bend their interpretation to his purpose. Polybios approaches them therefore in 'the light of party and patriotic prejudices' – he is defining and using the laws here to defend the actions of the League and discredit Phylarchos' sensational statements about its cruelty.²⁵ This must make us very wary of their presence within the text as they are included for a purpose beyond the mere recording of what they are. As Von Scala established, we are unable to recover Polybios' true understanding of what they consisted of, if he even had a consistent understanding of them, because this was not his objective in discussing them. The laws of war are used as a rhetorical device adapted variously to the context in order to persuade the reader of the truthfulness of Polybios' own interpretation of the events in question. The laws' innate vagueness facilitates this flexibility and use.

This means, of course, that the perceived wrongness of retribution at Thermos is very much dependent on the specific perspective, aims and biases of our historian, and not based on a coherent conception of what the laws actually entailed. Polybios' strong reaction to Philip's disregard of the laws and claims of retribution has a rather different purpose. Thermos represents a significant moment in the development of Philip's character in the *Histories*, as it is the first instance in which Polybios finds fault with the young king's actions. It sets up the scene for Philip's dramatic change in character three years later, when, after trying to capture the allied Greek city of Messene in 215 BC, he allegedly changes all of a sudden from 'the darling of the Greeks' to a treacherous and ruthless tyrant (Plb. 7.12–14). This decline in character frames the rest of the king's life. His continuing treacherous, impious and unrestrained behaviour towards allies and enemies alike causes, Polybios claims, the defection of his allies in 198 BC (Livy 32.14, 20–23), and Philip's defeat by Rome in the following year (Plb. 18.19–27).

To aid in this tarnishing of the king's character, Polybios sets the whole episode up as if he were the prosecutor in Philip's trial. Following his accusation (Plb. 5.9.1) and narrative (5.9.2–6), his proof (5.9.7–10.4) is deliberately selective and manipulates certain aspects of detail, bringing some elements to the fore, while ignoring others more problematic for his own argument. Most prominently, he omits the more practical advantages that such a venture would have offered Philip; this is no doubt because ideas about what is profitable to a war-effort may be very different when considering the practical and moral repercussions. Polybios focuses almost entirely on the latter.²⁶ Thus Polybios'

25 Cf. Walbank, *Commentary I* 264.

26 Cf. A. M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybios* (California 1995) 249 for Polybios' entwining of intellectual-technical and moralising purposes in *The Histories*.

emphasis on the transgression of the laws at Thermos is in aid of developing the king's (and his Macedonian officers') moral inferiority at an early stage in his career to help explain his future misfortunes, and support and rationalise Polybios' generally negative portrayal of him.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest, even within Polybios' own narrative, that Philip's actions at Thermos did not cause him the widespread reputational damage that the historian claims he suffered, and that his behaviour and actions arose from more than just passion and irrationality. An investigation along these lines will highlight the contrived nature of the arguments presented in this episode and reveal an important section of Polybios' construction of Philip.

Reputation & Strategy: Moral vs. Practical Considerations

In discussing the reputational repercussions of the devastation at Thermos, Polybios asserts that by his damage to religious buildings and paraphernalia, Philip was acting no better than the enemy and would consequently earn a similar reputation for impiety, brutality and lawlessness. The Aitolians, he claims, would have regarded Philip with goodwill if he had left undamaged the colonnades and statues, showing piety and moderation in his attack (Plb. 5.11), and he would have gained a far greater advantage and reputation had he conducted himself in a noble and just manner, revealing himself to be a restrained and reasonable leader (Plb. 5.12). While his comments may have some logic to them and even hold some form of truth, Polybios is, however, decidedly one-sided and notably silent on the positive consequences such an endeavour would have afforded.

The reputation of a Hellenistic king, indeed any powerful figure or state, could be considerably affected by his capacity to provide for his allies' needs and interests, both in times of war and peace. A continuous demonstration of strength and goodwill was therefore essential if he was to receive their long-term loyalty and support.²⁷ The Greek states allied to Macedonia in the Symmachy were of crucial importance to Philip, especially at the beginning of his reign, as they secured him an important foothold within the Peloponnese and northern Greece. It was therefore in the king's best interest that he protect and assist them in their war against Aitolia at the time, as well as to deal with the enemy as they expected. Moreover, for Philip himself, as a new king, such a course of action would have been attractive as it offered the potential for military glory and success; an important requirement for all Macedonian kings, but particularly for one so young and relatively untried in war.²⁸ Thermos was generally considered impregnable due to its

27 Cf. M. M. Austin, "Hellenistic kings, war and the economy", in *CQ* 56 (1986) 457–59, K. Bringman, "The King as Benefactor: Some Remarks on Ideal Kingship in the Age of Hellenism" in A. W. Bulloch (ed.), *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World* (California 1993) 8–17, R. A. Billows, *Kings and Colonists: Aspects of Macedonian Imperialism* (Leiden 1995) 56–70, and J. Ma, "Kings", in A. Erskine (ed.) *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2003) 179–83.

28 Cf. Austin "Hellenistic kings", Billows, *Kings and Colonists* 24–33.

topographical situation (Plb. 5.7.2: διὰ τὰς ὀχυρότητας τῶν τόπων) and its capture was therefore regarded as impossible. The prospect of accomplishing such a feat successfully undoubtedly stirred the ambition of the young king.²⁹ Its assault would also link him more closely with Philip II and Alexander and their campaigns, the pretext for which was vengeance for the destruction of Greek temples. Such an attempt could therefore be pivotal for his own position and reputation among the Macedonians, as well as for securing Macedonia's prominence in Greek affairs.

That the Akarnanians and Epirotes wanted to hit the Aitolians hard is clear from Polybios' narrative (Plb. 5.6.1–3). However, as a consequence of his Achaian perspective, we have a much fuller account of the force of the Achaian League's support of the venture.³⁰ Polybios relates how Aratos' advice to raid Thermos even opposed the council given by one of the king's Macedonian advisers, Leontios, who urged the king to stay in the Peloponnese instead and deal directly with the Spartan aggression against Messene, an ally and member of the Symmarchy (Plb. 5.5). It was also Aratos, again in opposition to Leontios, who advocated an immediate attack against the citadel and sanctuary once they had arrived in Aitolia, rather than allow the army to recover and potentially offer the Aitolians time to react (Plb. 5.7.4).³¹ Certainly very practical advice, especially if an open confrontation with the enemy was to be avoided. Aratos' intentions were clearly influenced, not only by the interests of the Symmarchy, which had declared war on Aitolia in 220 BC (Plb. 4.25–26.1), but also by those of the Achaian League which had been plagued by Aitolian raids since 222 BC. A surprise and strategic attack on Aitolia itself could cripple the enemy and give the members of the alliance a decisive advantage in the war. This advice reflects the desire of Philip's allies for fast, successful military action against their enemy, and, if followed through, would likely strengthen their goodwill towards their Macedonian hegemon. Furthermore, while Philip was vital to the war effort, his presence in the Peloponnese required the Achaian League to supply the Macedonian army with provisions and pay, and thus involved considerable expenditure (Plb. 5.1). Encouraging the king to move out of the region eased Achaian finances. The attack on Thermos was therefore in accordance with what the Akarnanians, Epirotes, Achaian League and Philip would have wanted.

Yet, Polybios claims that the transgression of the laws of war, the excessive destruction to the colonnades and statues, during this event went beyond this want and would have damaged Philip's reputation rather than enhanced it. He therefore implies that it did so with his allies. This, of course, may have happened on a moral level, particularly amongst those who did not subscribe to acts of retaliation, and probably contributed

29 Philip's attack of 'impregnable' places is a strategy implemented quite frequently during this period: see also for example Ambrakos (Plb. 4.61), Psophis (4.70), Lissos (8.13), and Pergamon (16.1).

30 This bias towards the Achaian occurs throughout Polybios' work; see, for instance, Gruen, E. S. "Aratus and the Achaean Alliance with Macedonia", *Historia* 21(4) (1972) 609–625; Haegemans & Kosmetatou, "Aratus and the Achaean Background of Polybios", 123–140.

31 Plb 5.7.4: οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Ἀρατον, θεωροῦντες τὸν μὲν καιρὸν ὄξυν ὄντα τῆς ἐπιβολῆς, τοὺς δὲ περὶ τὸν Λεόντιον προδήλως ἐμποδίζοντας, διεμαρτύροντο τὸν Φίλιππον μὴ παριέναι τὸν καιρὸν μηδὲ καταμέλλειν. Cf. Golan, *The Res Graeciae in Polybios*, 33.

to his later decline in popularity following a longer career of conceivably questionable behaviour just before and during the Second Macedonian War (200–196 BC). At the time, however, Polybios crucially records no definite expressions of ill-will following the sack of Thermos amongst his allies. The king's success is rather described as being acknowledged as a triumph amongst his commanders and retinue, which would have undoubtedly included Akarnanian commanders and Aratos, and we hear nothing about the opinions of anyone else.³²

In an indirect way, Polybios claims that Aratos opposed such action at the end of his critique at 5.12.5–8 because his noble character would not have allowed him to advise such sacrilege and excess. He accuses the Illyrian adviser, Demetrios of Pharos, of being the one responsible for persuading Philip to such recklessness instead. Critically, however, Polybios supports this statement not by supplying any concrete evidence for Aratos' actions or behaviour at the time, but by referring to future events: the historian ties this passage to an instance that occurs three years later, when Aratos, Demetrios and Philip are debating whether or not to install a Macedonian garrison on Messene's citadel (Plb. 7.12–14). Here Aratos is shown to defend the Messenians and warn Philip away from betraying his alliance with them and thereby accruing distrust amongst his allies, i.e. the Achaian League. It is from this later example that Polybios extrapolates and supports the claim that Aratos would never have advised such sacrilege at Thermos. Yet, there are a number of problems with his statement. Firstly, Demetrios' sudden appearance on the scene at the end of the Thermos affair is suspicious as he has taken no part in the narrative leading up to Thermos; until this point it has been Leontios who has been Aratos' opponent on policy. Secondly, as a leader of the Achaian League, Aratos had far more reason to wish for swift and severe action against the Aitolians, who had been a constant thorn in the Achaians' side, than Demetrios whose relationship with the Aitolians was far less antagonistic and hostile. He came to reside at Philip's court in 219 after Rome had evicted him from, his Illyrian chiefdom undoubtedly to regain it with the king's support (cf. Plb. 3.19.8, 4.66.4–5). Thirdly, Aratos was not opposed to questionably moral action himself: the enslavement of the Mantineans in 226 BC and the cruel execution of the ex-tyrant Aristomachos in 225 under his leadership, for instance, aroused public outrage; Phylarchos' criticisms indicate that such views were certainly current (Plb. 2.58–59). Polybios' claim that Aratos did not advise the excess and sacrilege at Thermos is, therefore, not well-supported and his over-emphasis of the Achaian leader's good character spread over two episodes in two different books suggests a strong yet subtle defensive stance. In the face of these issues, it is difficult to be sure of Aratos' real role in the sack of Thermos.

Determining exactly how the loyalty of Philip's Greek allies and their opinion of him was affected by this event is unfortunately an impossible task and best left open. How-

32 Plb. 5.14.8–9: ὁ δὲ Φίλιππος καταστροποπεδεύσας ἐν ὥρᾳ τοῖς θεοῖς ἔθνευ εὐχαριστήρια τῆς γεγενημένης αὐτῷ περὶ τὴν ἐπιβολὴν εὐροίας, ἅμα δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἡγεμόνας ἐκάλει, βουλόμενος ἐστιᾶσαι πάντας. ἐδόκει γὰρ εἰς τόπους αὐτὸν δεδωκέναι παραβόλους καὶ τοιοῦτους, εἰς οὓς οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμησε πρότερον στρατοπέδω παρεμβαλεῖν.

ever, it appears that if there was any ill-feeling it was not sufficiently strong at this stage to cause problems of loyalty. As far as Polybios' record indicates, Thermos was the first instance in which Philip had shown morally questionable behaviour, so his allies may have viewed it merely as a one-off incident at the time. What is more, the Akarnanians, Epirotes and Achaian League, all originally eager for the venture, would undoubtedly have been buoyed up by the success of their allied king and benefactor against their abiding enemy. For them, as much as the Macedonians, the sacking of such a valuable and important site for the Aitolians would have been a success and a boost to their own reputation and standing in the war. Moreover, these three states remained attached to Philip for many years after the Social War and Thermos, years in which Polybios claims the king fell into increasingly tyrannical and ruthless behaviour. (Plb. 10.41; Livy 27.29–30, 32; 28.5–8). It was not until 198 BC, when under pressure from the growing threat of Rome and the declining strength of Philip, that the Epirotes and the Achaian League were finally persuaded to leave its alliance with Macedonia (Livy (P) 32.14.4–6 [Epirus], (P) 32.19–23 [Achaian League]; cf. Plut. *Flam.* 5.1).³³ Akarnania only left once Philip was defeated (Livy 33.16–17).³⁴ While Philip's attack on religious structures may have, on the one hand, weakened his image as a follower of moral and pious behaviour, on the other, it also boasted his reputation as a benefactor and military leader; two qualities which, given the chaotic political climate of the Hellenistic world, would have been far more beneficial and attractive to himself, Macedonia and his allies.³⁵

There were also other advantages gained by the destruction of Thermos that go unmentioned by Polybios. Firstly, the capture of booty, which will have offered financial relief to Philip and his allies, as well as worsened the state of Aitolian funds for the war effort. Philip's sojourn outside the Peloponnese, while offering potential benefits to his reputation, would have lost him the pay and resources supplied by the Achaian League (Plb. 5.1). It then became essential that the enterprise also prove financially lucrative, and the acquisition of booty became an important component of the operation.³⁶ By specifically targeting Thermos with its large quantities of supplies and luxury goods, the venture turned into a far more viable one. Secondly, the effect on the morale of both the Aitolians and Macedonia's Greek allies by such a raid must not be ignored. Philip's suc-

33 For Epirus' defection see, see S. I. Oost, *Roman Policy in Epirus and Acarnania in the Age of the Roman Conquest of Greece* (Dallas 1954) 48. For the League's defection and Livy's adaptation of this section in Polybios, now lost, see A. Eckstein, "Polybius, the Achaeans, and the 'Freedom of the Greeks'", *GRBS* 31 (1990) 55–57; P. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods*, (Cambridge 2003) 169; and R. Pfeilschifter, R. *Titus Quinctius Flamininus: Untersuchungen zur römischen Griechenlandpolitik*, (Göttingen 2005) 187. For the League's reluctance to go to war, see G. de Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani*, Vol. 4 (Torino 1923); A. Eckstein, 'T. Quinctius Flamininus and the Campaign against Philip in 198 B. C.', *Phoenix* 30 (2) (1976) 119–142; and Pfeilschifter, *Titus Quinctius Flamininus* 184–203, esp. 186–90.

34 For Akarnania's defection, see Oost, *Roman Policy in Epirus and Acarnania*, 49–51.

35 Cf. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy and Rome Enters the Greek East* for the anarchic nature of the Hellenistic world and the necessity for constant aggression and action for players to be successful.

36 Cf. Walbank, *Commentary I* 546. Austin, "Hellenistic kings" 465, and A. Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2005) 129–37 for booty as a motivation in war, and W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (California 1991) 160–66 and Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World* 154–59 for the plundering of sanctuaries.

cess in ravaging the heart of Aitolia with little resistance, his capture of large amounts of booty, and his devastation of the sanctuary will have severely damaged Aitolian resources, reduced the threat they posed to Philip in Thessaly (they marched back to Aitolia at top speed in time to make an attempt on Philip's tail as he was leaving the area; Plb. 5.13), and perhaps also aroused feelings of abandonment by the god. What is more, the perception that Thermos was impregnable would be undone, and a greater fear of Philip and Macedonian military might would be inspired in the enemy, as well as both hope and wariness in Philip's Greek allies. Indeed, such was the effect on Aitolian morale that in the next year we find them forcibly resigned to reconciliation and peace (Plb. 5.103: *θεωροῦντες αὐτῶν τὴν ὀρμὴν τὴν πρὸς τὰς διαλύσεις*; cf. 5.105).³⁷

We cannot reconstruct the Aitolian opinion of Philip, particularly whether they regarded his attack on Thermos as excessive and impious, as Polybios claims, or whether they really would have "regarded him with goodwill if he had not touched the colonnades and statues, and even felt ashamed at their own behaviour had he shown such piety and moderation" (Plb. 5.11.7). We only have Polybios' words to vouch for this highly moralistic interpretation, together with the knowledge that while the Aitolians, exhausted by the war, submitted to peace the following year, they also continued to make trouble for Philip and the Achaian League later in the First and Second Macedonian Wars. Their grievances against Philip were primarily based on the fact that he was an ally of their enemy, and therefore an enemy to themselves; the extent to which religious grievances, in combination with political ones, factored in the hostility between the two is impossible to discover.

While it is, of course, impossible to discover the real reasons behind Philip's destruction of Thermos, it is evident that there was very likely far more going on than pure irrational vengeance: psychologically and financially it proved a profitable venture. It would be an injustice to suppose that these issues were not taken into consideration by the Macedonians, Achaians and Akarnanians in their plans, and to take Polybios wholly at his word when it is clear that he has a specific moral agenda in constructing this argument and has left much unsaid. Yet, as Polybios is trying to persuade his readers that Philip's actions came as a result of the revelation and progression of his impulsive character, and that he was turning into a ruthless, treacherous tyrant, a state of being that would affect the rest of his life, it is more effective to omit much of these benefits from his argument.³⁸ They would not have added to, but in fact hindered, his rhetoric and the picture of the king he wanted to portray. Polybios' moral outrage is therefore used to manipulate perception and persuade readers to his interpretation of events.³⁹ It is unlikely that the historian was blind to the financial benefits of the Thermos venture, nor to its morale-crushing effect on the Aitolians. Yet, he is not interested in these short-term gains, but the wider course of the king's life. In this respect, the horror of this transgres-

37 Cf. Eckstein, *Rome Enters the Greek East* 98.

38 Cf. F. W. Walbank, *Philip V of Macedon* (Cambridge 1940) 55.

39 For the importance of perception in Polybios and its construction, see Davidson, "The gaze of Polybios' *Histories*" 10–24.

sion of the laws, and the significance it had for the king and his allies, was probably felt far more acutely by the historian than by the Aitolians.⁴⁰

The Argument for Passion & Irrationality

What about Polybios' claims that Philip was acting with passion and irrationality in the destruction of Thermos? Two further passages in the *Histories* show additional internal weaknesses in this argument, and therefore the forced nature of Polybios' interpretation here. Firstly, at 5.9.3, the start of Polybios' criticism, we find a statement which contradicts the severity of his accusation of impiety towards the gods:

ἀνέτρεψαν δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἀνδριάντας, ὄντας οὐκ ἐλάττους δισχιλίω· πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ διέφθειραν, πλὴν ὅσοι θεῶν ἐπιγραφὰς ἢ τύπους εἶχον· τῶν δὲ τοιούτων ἀπέσχοτον.

They threw down the statues, which numbered no less than two thousand; and many they destroyed, sparing only those that were inscribed with the names or figures of gods.

Notably, the statues thrown down – τοὺς ἀνδριάντας – were likely dedications of victors in the games, or at least statues of men rather than gods.⁴¹ Therefore, although Polybios states that Philip destroyed the porticos, offerings and statues of men, he also openly asserts that the king preserved the images and names of the gods, a remark which cannot denote complete lack of reverence or restraint. There is still some control in the destruction of Thermos. Furthermore, evidence that not everything had been destroyed in 218 is found in book 11 of Polybios' *Histories* when Philip returns Thermos in 207/6 BC to deface all the sacred buildings which he had spared on his former occupation of the town (Plb. 11.7).⁴²

The second attack in 207/206 BC also appears not to be entirely irrational, but arises from an understanding of the political situation and the effect such action would have on the enemy. At the time, the Aitolians, alongside their Roman allies, were once again at war with Philip (in the First Macedonian War, 211–205 BC). While the Romans supported the Aitolians, they had shown little direct interest in the conflict other than a desire to keep Philip occupied and away from Italy and Hannibal (with whom Philip had formed an alliance in 215 BC; Plb. 7.9, Livy 23.4.4, 38.7), and for the past year had left the Aitolians near enough to fend for themselves.⁴³ The latter soon fell into difficulty and were once again considering suing for peace. Philip's second attack on Thermos was an-

40 Cf. Walbank *Commentary I* 546–7.

41 Cf. Walbank *Commentary I* 547.

42 Plb. 11.7: ὅτι Φίλιππος ... παραγενόμενος εἰς τὸν Θέρμον, ἐνθ' ἦν ἱερὸν Ἀπόλλωνος, ὅσα πρότερον ἀπέλιπε τῶν ἀναθημάτων, τότε πάλιν ἅπαντα διελωβήσατο, κακῶς μὲν πρὸ τοῦ.

43 Cf. E. J. Bickerman, "An Oath of Hannibal", *TAPA* 75 (1944) 87–102; E. J. Bickerman, "Hannibal's Conventant", *AJP* 73 (1952) 1–23; F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybios II* (1967) 55–56; E. S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (California 1984) 375–77; and Eckstein, *Rome Enters the Greek East* 83–86.

other implementation of the same tactic used in 218 to force their submission to terms. As before, this move proved very effective and the Aitolians made peace with Philip in 206. It is therefore difficult to see Philip's attacks on Thermos solely in terms of passion and irrationality as the historian wishes us to believe.

Secondly, the irrationality and severity of Philip's behaviour during his first attack of Thermos is crucially also undermined by Polybios himself at the end of his digression at 5.12.5:

ἴσως μὲν οὖν οὐκ ἂν τις αὐτῷ Φιλίππῳ τῶν τότε γενομένων πᾶσαν ἐπιφέρει τὴν αἰτίαν διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν, τὸ πλεῖον δὲ τοῖς συνοῦσι καὶ συμπράττουσι τῶν φίλων, ὧν ἦν Ἄρατος καὶ Δημήτριος ὁ Φάριος.

Equally, however, we should not place all the blame for what happened at this time onto Philip himself, considering his youth, but rather onto the friends who associated and acted with him, among whom were Aratos and Demetrios of Pharos.

Polybios concedes, therefore, that the young king could not necessarily be held responsible for the severity of the actions he took, as he would very likely have listened to the advice of others at such a young age (he was, as mentioned, only about twenty years old). This passage comes at the end of Polybios' invective and seems to be an afterthought but for the fact that he places it here to start a discussion about the advisers, Aratos and Demetrios, and the good and bad nature of their characters and advice respectively (Plb. 5.12.5–8). This polarisation of the two is later expanded and reinforced in book 7 after Philip's attempt on the allied city of Messene, and only emphasises further the strong influences that these counsellors had on the conduct of the king (Plb. 7.13.2–4).⁴⁴ This concession at Thermos, later brought out at Messene, therefore prevents us from taking such a strong view of the young king's behaviour at this point. Seeing that both the beginning and end of his argument compromise the interpretation that the

44 Polybios' repeated statement (7.13.2–4): ἡμεῖς δέ, τοῦ κατὰ τὴν πέμπτην βύβλον ἡμῖν ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ καὶ φάσει μόνον εἰρημένου νῦν δι' αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν πίστιν εἰληφότος, βουλόμεθα προσαναμνησαίμεθα τοὺς συνεφιστάνοντας τῇ πραγματείᾳ, πρὸς τὸ μηδεμίαν τῶν ἀποφάσεων ἀναπόδεικτον μηδ' ἀμφισβητουμένην καταλιπεῖν. καθ' ὃν γὰρ καιρὸν ἐξηγουμένοι τὸν Αἰτωλικὸν πόλεμον ἐπὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος τῆς διηγήσεως ἐπέστημεν, ἐν ᾧ Φιλίππον ἔφαμεν τὰς ἐν Θέρμῳ στοὰς καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν ἀναθημάτων θυμικώτερον καταφθεῖραι, καὶ δεῖν τούτων τὴν αἰτίαν οὐχ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸν βασιλέα διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν ὡς ἐπὶ τοὺς συνόντας αὐτῷ φίλους ἀναφέρειν, τότε περὶ μὲν Ἄρατον τὸν βίον ἐφήσαμεν ἀπολογεῖσθαι τὸ μηδὲν ἂν ποιῆσαι μοχθηρόν, Δημητρίου δὲ τοῦ Φαρίου τὴν τοιαύτην εἶναι προαίρεσιν. The episode ends by turning to a general discussion about the importance of advisers for kings, an important theme in Polybios' account of the Hellenistic monarchies. Unfortunately, only the first sentence of this diversion survives (7.14.6). Cf. a similar polarising of Antiochos III's advisers, Hermeias and Epigenes (Plb. 5.40–42, 49–51). For Philip's dependence on his counsellors see Walbank, *Philip V of Macedon*, 261–263; K. W. Welwei, *Könige und Königtum im Urteil des Polybios*, (Herbede 1963) 39–47; R. M. Errington 'Philip V, Aratus and the "Conspiracy of Apelles"' *Historia* 16 (1967) 19–36. For royal advisers in general, see Austin, "Hellenistic kings" 462–63, G. Herman, "The Court Society of the Hellenistic Age" in P. Cartledge et al. (eds.), *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History and Historiography* (California 1997) 199–217, L. Savalli-Lestrade, *Les Philoi Royaux dans l'Asie Hellenistique* (Geneva 1998), and J. Ma, "Court, King, and Power in Antigonid Macedonia" in R. J. L. Fox (ed.) *Brill's Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Leiden 2011).

historian wants his audience to take up, it is clear that Polybios has forced his point of view onto the narrative to make it fit with his wider aims.

It certainly appears that Philip used the destruction of religious property as a tactic in warfare and he openly transgressed this aspect of the laws of war when it suited him, sometimes with an earnest attempt to justify it, sometimes not.⁴⁵ However, Polybios claims that the only reason for such behaviour could be irrationality and passion, and that there was no tactical consideration involved nor benefit to be gained from it – Philip is consequently depicted as transgressing the laws for no good reason other than to satisfy his own aggression. This is a claim which becomes far more uncertain and suspect under scrutiny. Philip's first visit to Thermos is recorded by Polybios, despite his intentions, as being somewhat restrained and not without respect for the gods. There were also a number of potential tactical, financial, and political benefits for an attack of the religious structures which Polybios has chosen to omit in his discussion: the acquisition of booty and supplies for his army, the fulfilment of Achaian interests, the glory obtained from the success of such a raid on enemy territory, and the detrimental financial and psychological effects it would have had on the enemy. Even within his own narrative, therefore, it becomes clear that Polybios has over-emphasised his point about Philip's bad behaviour and over-simplified the situation.

Polybios' Lesson

The purpose of Polybios' comments on the laws of war at Thermos go beyond the blackening of Philip's image: they also contribute to his didactic purpose by addressing the correct and proper way for men to behaviour in public life. He explicitly describes the incident as wrong, despite the Macedonian justifications of religious vengeance by the fact that it went "against the laws of war" (Plb. 5.9.1: κατὰ τοὺς τοῦ πολέμου νόμους), and represented "the way of a tyrant" (5.11.6: τυράννου ἔργον) and, by its impulsiveness, "the actions of a soldier than a leader" (5.12.4: τὸ δὲ τῆς πράξεως τῶν ὑποτατομένων, τῶν ἡγουμένων).⁴⁶ A good ruler would consistently comport himself in accordance with these principles.⁴⁷ The consequences of flouting them, especially on a consistent basis, could have significant practical consequences, reducing the goodwill of friends and allies, causing a breakdown in communication and collaboration, and subsequently damaging influence and power.⁴⁸ It is this which Polybios warns about in criticising Philip's disregard of the laws (Plb. 5.9.4–6). He uses the Macedonian king in this episode, as well

45 Philip similarly attacks the Nikephorion sanctuary in Pergamon in 201 BC (16.1), and local shrines in Attika in 200 BC (Livy (P) 31.26, 30). Cf. M. Kohl, "Das Nikephorion von Pergamon", in *Revue archéologique* 34 (2002) 227–253.

46 Cf. Eckstein, *Moral Vision*, esp. 145 for Philip's lack of self-restraint at Thermos and Ch. 6 for Polybios' ideas about generalship and the character of the soldiery.

47 Eckstein, *Moral Vision*, discusses the importance of this principle for Polybios and clearly demonstrated the persistent presence of this moralising theme within his narrative.

48 Cf. Lanni, "Laws of War" 474–75.

as in the narrative of the rest of his life, as an illustration of what happens if you do not conduct yourself in a way that is respectful and honourable. Philip's impiety, excessive behaviour, and change from kingly respect to the irreverence of tyranny, brought about his own downfall, as well as that of the whole Antigonid royal house.⁴⁹

This encouragement to uphold higher principles is an important feature throughout Polybios' work, and Philip is not alone in receiving criticism for his destruction of religious property. The historian also condemns other violators of sanctuaries: for example, the Aitolians for their attacks on Dion and Dodona in 219 BC (Plb. 4.62 and 67); Antiochos IV Epiphanes for his attempt on the temple of Artemis at Elymais in 164 BC (Plb. 31.11); and Prusias of Bithynia's attack of the Nikephorion in Pergamon in 155 BC (Plb. 32.15.3–9; cf. Appian *Mith.War* 3).⁵⁰ This disapproval of sacrilege in warfare is also voiced in the speech of Lykiskus of Akarnania at Sparta in Polybios book 9,⁵¹ lamenting the capture of Delphi by the Phokians, and the plundering of the temples of Poseidon at Tainaron, Artemis at Lusoi, Hera at Argos, and Poseidon at Mantinea. Lykiskus is made to assert that none of Alexander's successors ever committed similar acts of sacrilege (Plb. 9.34: ὧν οὐδὲν πέπρακται τοῖς διαδεξαμένοις). This last statement reinforces Polybios' view that the moral behaviour of the present generation in regard to the inviolability of sanctuaries and warfare had declined (Plb. 13.3). Certainly the number of offenses he cites suggests that the attack of religious property in the third and second centuries BC was not altogether unusual and had become more common in the Hellenistic period. It was on the basis of this very statement that Rostovtzeff made such a claim in his classic account in 1941.⁵² Yet, this was not necessarily the case. Even during the Classical period, these laws and the religious observances they pertained to were sometimes ignored or manipulated for self-interest:⁵³ the Athenians, for instance, hoping to catch the Mytilenians off guard in 428/7 BC, attacked the city when it was celebrating a festival (Thuc. 3.3); the Thebans did the same to Plataea in 431 (Thuc. 3.56); and, as noted above, the Athenians occupied the Boiotian sanctuary of Delion in 424, and altered the course of its sacred river to protect themselves against attack (Thuc. 4.97). Later too, the Phokians raided the treasury at Delphi to hire mercenaries to aid them in the Third Sacred War (Paus. 10.2–3, Diod. 16.23–37). Philip's indifference towards the inviolability of religious structures, like his justifications of retaliation, was not therefore as unique and unusual as Polybios claims, but represents a broader trend in military practice that our historian saw as detrimental and wished to point out and correct.

49 Cf. Spickermann, "Kultisches und Religiöses bei Polybios", 306–8.

50 Cf. Spickermann, "Kultisches und Religiöses bei Polybios", 308–10.

51 Cf. Walbank *Commentary I* 2. For Polybios' construction of this speech see also P. Pédech, *La Methode Historique de Polybe* (Paris 1964) Ch. 5 especially 265; F. W. Walbank, *Speeches in Greek Historians* (Oxford 1965) 16–17; and F. W. Walbank "Polybios and Macedonia" in B. Laourdas & Ch. Makaronas (eds.) *Ancient Macedonia I* (Thessaloniki 1970) 296–97 = *Polybios, Rome and the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge 2002) 95–96.

52 Cf. R. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 1941) 200–1, 1364 n. 23 and Goodman & Holladay, "Religious Scruples" 154.

53 Cf. Lanni, "Laws of War" 482–89; see also Chaniotis, *War in the Hellenistic World*, 154–157 for a general overview of violence against sanctuaries.

In the wider context of his *Histories*, this episode adds another layer to his explanation for, and response to, the violent changes that had shaken the ancient world with the advent of Roman supremacy.⁵⁴ It contributes to the warning against the change in Roman behaviour Polybios observed following their rise and acquisition of empire, formulated most clearly in the last ten books of the *Histories*. The fate of Philip is representative of what happens when individuals and states do not continue to preserve and promote the piety and moderation upon which they rose. The great hegemonic power becomes corrupted and their subjects turn against them, leading to their downfall. A similar lesson is placed before the Greeks, but its purpose is more retrospective: it helps to explain why the great leaders of the Hellenistic world collapsed in the face of Roman power and, whilst doing so, suggests that adhering to moral, respectable behaviour makes one a better leader, a better Greek, and better at navigating the transitions taking place in the Mediterranean and the personal reversals of fortune that would follow.

Conclusion

On closer scrutiny, Polybios' statements about the laws of war at Thermos are not only inconsistent with his other references to them but also framed within a highly moral argument, one-sided in its omission of a number of important practical aspects of the situation. This is because his use of the laws within his narrative has more to do with rhetorical effect than a consistent and precise discussion of them. He applies them differently depending on the context and the side for which he is arguing, and thus explains the shift in severity between the laws in the Achaian and Thermos cases. In the former instance, Polybios is defending the actions of the League and not illuminating an instructive episode for the reader; in the latter, he is chiefly interested in expounding the moral issue to his audience and discrediting Philip's behaviour as part of his overall depiction of a king and kingdom's decline and fall. The fluidity of the laws, both within the wider Greek world and very likely within Polybios' own thoughts, made the two arguments possible and probable to author and reader.

From a broader perspective, the Thermos episode also contributes to the historian's wider concerns about success and failure, and his lessons about how to act in order to reduce the chances of the latter as far as possible, both at an individual and state level. By positioning his arguments around recent historical examples which illustrate direct correlation between behaviour and success, Polybios is able to persuade his readers more easily that ignoring the traditional customs of war and the subsequent consequences to reputation leads to negative outcomes. Yet, this idealism is in conflict with the realities of the time, and the attitudes and desires of those involved in political affairs. It does not take into consideration the pressures inherent in monarch-city-state relationships, nor the logistical imperatives of warfare. Reputations for military success, for meeting allies'

54 Cf. J. Thornton, "Polybios in Context: The Political Dimension of the *Histories*", in B. Gibson & T. Harrison (eds.), *Polybios and his World: Essays in memory of F. W. Walbank* (Oxford 2013) 213–230.

needs and expectations, and for exacting retribution for impiety could be just as beneficial, if not more so, in the anarchic climate of the Hellenistic world than reputations for perpetual moral integrity. In streamlining the situation at Thermos to concentrate on the moral issues alone, Polybios' interpretation of Philip is unduly simplified, and we are not encouraged to consider the positive aspects of his actions. We are instead urged to magnify the immorality and excess displayed in this episode, draw lessons from it, and at the same time develop a more negative perspective of Philip.

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