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The Stele of Polybios

Art, Text and Context in Second-Century BC Greece

Two large stelai were erected in Mantinea and Kleitor, in Arkadia, in honour of the historian Polybios. They both bore identical inscriptions in verse:

τοῦτο Λυκόρτα παιδὶ πόλις περικαλλὲς ἄγαλμα
ἀντὶ καλῶν ἔργων εἴσατο Πουλυβίῳ

The polis for the son of Lykortas set up this excellent statue,
for Polybios in change of his good deeds

The inscribed fragment from Mantinea was found in secondary use near the agora of the city in the 1890s, and only measures 25 x 27 cm, but its profile allowed the first editor to conclude without doubt that it originally formed part of a stele.¹ The stele from Kleitor, which has similarly been known since the 19th century, is extraordinarily large (218 x 111 cm), in relatively low relief, and almost complete (figs. 1 and 2).²

It depicts a warrior, almost 2 m tall, wearing an exomis belted at the waist and a long mantle clasped on his right shoulder. The man raises his right hand high, palm outward, while holding a spear and the rolled lower part of his mantle in his left. A large round shield and a crested helmet rest on the ground. A sword is strapped across his chest.³ The text on the upper frame of the stele is unfortunately very fragmentary, but was fully reconstructed, already at the time of its discovery, on the basis of two later inscriptions from Olympia, honouring a descendent of Polybios.⁴ Both the lettering of the inscriptions and the figurative relief preserved in the stele from Kleitor are perfectly compatible with a late Hellenistic date and it is generally agreed that they should be considered roughly contemporary to Polybios' activity in Greece. This is to be placed either before 168 BC, when his career of military and political leader of the

I would like to thank Irene Berti, Myrina Kalaitzi, Thomas Nelson and Bert Smith for the many useful discussions on the stele and its inscription. I am also grateful to the staff at the Demarcheio of Kleitoria for allowing me to look at the stele in much detail.

1 Text from Mantinea: τοῦτο Λυκόρτα[α παιδὶ πόλις] | περικαλλ[ὲς ἄγαλμα] | [ἀντὶ καλῶν ἔργων] | [εἴσατο Πουλυβίῳ] (Fougeres 1896, 145; IG V 2.304)

2 Gurlitt 1881.

3 Full description in Bol/Eckstein 1975.

4 Purgold, coming back from Olympia in June 1880, integrated the text from Kleitor as: [τοῦτο Λυκόρτα παιδὶ πόλις περικαλλὲς ἄγαλμα] | ἀντὶ καλῶν ἔργων εἴσατο Π[ο]λ[υ]βί[ω]ι (Milchöfer 1881). On the later inscriptions of Flavius Polybios and their significance, see Heller 2011.

Achaean league was cut short by his deportation to Rome, or in the years 146–145 BC, when he was sent to Greece from Rome shortly after the sack of Corinth and the defeat of the Achaean League in order to facilitate the political transition of the Greek cities to Rome's control. Some aspects of this intriguing evidence have been considered recently in works by Anna Heller and John Ma.⁵



Fig. 1: Cast of the stele of Polybios made in Berlin shortly after the discovery of the stele (taken from Gurlitt 1881).



Fig. 2: The stele of Polybios in the Dimarcheion of Kleitoria in 1972 © DAI Athen, neg. 1972-2658.

The existence of these two stelai is paralleled by the account of Pausanias, who repeatedly makes precise reference to images of Polybios carved on stone slabs and accompanied by inscriptions in verse. In the agora of Megalopolis, the image of Polybios, son of Lykortas, is described as carved on a stele and accompanied by an inscribed elegiac couplet reading that “he roamed over every land and every sea, and [...] became the ally of the Romans and stayed their wrath against the Greeks”.⁶ In the

⁵ Heller 2011; Ma 2013, 279–284.

⁶ Paus. 8.30.8: γέγραπται δὲ καὶ ἐλεγεία ἐπ’ αὐτῷ λέγοντα ὡς ἐπὶ γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν πᾶσαν πλανηθεῖν, καὶ ὅτι σύμμαχος γένοιτο Ῥωμαίων καὶ παύσειεν αὐτοὺς ὀργῆς < τῆς > ἐς τὸ Ἑλληνικόν.

sanctuary of Despoina at Lykosoura, the historian was depicted in one of a series of reliefs in white marble that included images of Zeus, Heracles and the Nymphs. At the time of Pausanias, this relief allegedly bore an epigram that read: “Greece would never have fallen at all, had she obeyed Polybios in everything, and when she met disaster her only help came from him”.⁷ Other depictions of the historian on stelai are mentioned by Pausanias at Mantinea, in the temple of Asklepios and the Letoids, and in the agora of Tegea, in the sanctuary of Eileithia next to the altar of Gea and the stele of Elatos.⁸ Pausanias does not specify whether these latter figured stelai bore verse inscriptions or not, but it is likely that the Mantinaean one was the same as that found in fragments in the same site in the 19th century. The point on which the literary evidence agrees entirely with the archaeological and epigraphical data is that most of the honorary monuments for Polybios were stelai. Since figured, large size stelai are a very unusual form of honorary monuments, it seems clear that Polybios was honoured with a series of unique and exceptional documents, the nature of which is better explained by looking separately at their text, image, historical context, and geographical attestations.⁹

1 The Inscription

The identical inscriptions on the stelai from Kleitor and Mantinea (although the latter does not preserve the figured relief) are both incised on the upper frame of the figured stele. Their placement is comparable to that found in funerary stelai of the Classical period such as that of Chairedemos and Lykeas from Salamis.¹⁰ They also come in the form of an epigram, as it is customary in funerary monuments. Although the name of Polybios is qualified by the patronym, and mention is made of a generic polis which dedicated the monument, the text is not engrained in the language and formulas of Hellenistic civic honours and does not reflect any particular context.

The language of the inscribed text is also worth some consideration. The monument is defined *περικαλλές ἄγαλμα*—a beautiful gift—that is an unusual expression of great antiquity. It appears in dedications of the archaic period both inscribed and in literature, where, following Chrestos Karouzos’ analysis of the testimonies, it always refers to objects offered to the gods (statues, vases, tripods).¹¹ Beyond its intrinsic

7 Paus. 8.37.2: καὶ οἱ ἐπίγραμμά ἐστιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τε μὴ ἂν σφαλῆναι τὴν Ἑλλάδα, εἰ Πολυβίῳ τὰ πάντα ἐπείθετο, καὶ ἁμαρτούσῃ δι’ ἐκείνου βοήθειαν αὐτῇ γενέσθαι μόνου.

8 Mantinea: Paus. 8.9.1; Tegea: Paus. 8.48.8.

9 Relief stelai in Greece had mostly funerary or votive purpose, and a stele of this size “would be more understandable as a gravestone” (Ridgway 2000, 212).

10 Steinhauer 2001, 338.

11 Karouzos 1941, 535–578; see also Ma 2013, 283. In the 6th century BC, the formula appears in

meaning, the formula is also a perfect closure for a hexameter and could be used as a standard metric combination at the end of the verse, as shown in a few later dedications.¹² The theme of the beauty (of the gift) is pursued in the following verse, where it is paralleled by the similarly beautiful actions (ἀντὶ καλῶν ἔργων) performed by Polybios. The wording is strikingly simple and non-descriptive, it does not provide any detail of the reasons why Polybios was honoured by the polis (which polis?) and is completely at odds with the contemporary honorific decrees where long explanations and precise formulas are normally used to praise the dedicatees.

Although the writing is far from monumental and the letters are small, the inscription is nevertheless given exceptional prominence because of Polybios' stance. The lifted right hand of the figure, palm outward, breaks the frame of the relief and clearly brings the attention of the viewer to the inscription on the crowning. Text and image become therefore an indissoluble whole: the image points at the text that refers to it. This might have also been a special expedient to facilitate the reading of an honorary monument whose inscription was unusually placed at the top, and not on the base.

John Ma suggests that the sharing of the same text at Kleitor and Mantinea might imply that there was a standard formula available for the cities of the Peloponnese who wanted to honour Polybios.¹³ If this is true, as I believe, it might explain why the text of the inscription was kept so vague and generic, without precise indications of the polis which dedicated the monument, the circumstances of the dedication and the motivation of the honours. In contrast, the texts preserved by Pausanias for the inscribed stelai erected in honour of the historian in Megalopolis and Lykosoura appear of a completely different nature (see above). These have strong political connotations, make obvious use of hindsight, and are strongly coherent with the image given by Polybios of himself in his written histories. Furthermore they appear artificial and literary in their composition.¹⁴ It would not be surprising if they were composed and inscribed well after the death of the historian, in a context of evocation and praise of his literary work and deeds. They would certainly not make much sense, given their insisted reference to the relation with Rome, within the chronological framework of the activity of the historian in Greece, neither before 168 BC, when Polybios was still a hipparch of the Achaean League struggling against Rome, nor after 146 BC, when the Greek cities would have been still much too bruised and unsettled to accept a straight-

Cheramydes' dedications to Hera of the statuary group in Samos (IG XII 6.558); in the dedication of a kouros to Apollo at the Ptoion in Boeotia (CEG I 335); in an inscription for 'the gods' on a bronze aryballos from Sparta. In literature, Herodotus uses the formula twice in reference to dedications of tripods to Apollo (Hdt. 5.60 and 5.61).

¹² Such as the funerary epigram for Areskousa in Lakonia (IG V 1.960) and the copy of Alcamenēs' herm in Pergamon (MDAI(A) 29, 1904, 179–186).

¹³ Ma 2013, 282.

¹⁴ Ma defines the Megalopolitan inscription Odysseian and the Lykosouran one Demosthenic: Ma 2013, 279.

forward and consequential relation between their fall and the lack of submission to the Roman state. This further confirms that the inscription preserved in the stelai of Mantinea and Kleitor probably corresponds to the original text composed in honour of Polybios at the time of his activity in Greece, a text that was vague enough to be used and adapted by the many cities that honoured the historian with a stele in the Peloponnese.

2 The Image on the Stele

Since it appears clear from Pausanias' testimony that all monuments in honour of Polybios were stelai, and the only preserved honorary stele left from this period, exceptional for its size and appearance, is that of Kleitor, it is most likely that all stelai erected in the Peloponnese for Polybios were similar or identical to the stele of Kleitor.

It has already been made clear in the previous paragraphs that the choice of a figured stele with a crowning epigram as the support for an honorary image is highly unusual, and would be more understandable in the world of funerary art. But this is only one of the many ways in which this monument mixes and matches different visual contexts and semantic details. A world of hero and afterlife bliss is evoked also by the iconography chosen for representing Polybios. The image, although allegedly depicting a contemporary figure, verges on the registers of the ideal. The cloak that covers diagonally the left part of his upper body and is firmly held in a thick roll at the front by the left hand is a specific declension of the *Hüftmantel* or hip-mantle. Hip-mantles are believed to have been a popular heroic costume in the Hellenistic period, for both senior deities (such as the Poseidon of Melos) and younger rulers in the East.¹⁵ The *Hüftmantel* worn by Polybios has nevertheless the special characteristic of being clasped on the right shoulder, covering part of the torso. Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway had long suggested that this "typical pattern formed by the warrior's mantle recurs with some frequency on votive and funerary reliefs of the *Hero Equitans* type where the main personage is portrayed on foot near his mount".¹⁶ In particular, the large votive relief of the hero Makedon from Basel and at least three funerary reliefs from Smyrna, Pergamon, and Byzantion, all dated to the 2nd century BC, offer striking comparisons for both the drapery and the pose of Polybios from Kleitor.¹⁷ In all these examples, the long chlamys, wrapped in the peculiar way described above, the chitoniskos and the raised right hand (reaching for the horse or, in one case, a weapon) seem to characterize either the deceased or the hero as a rider. These heroic

¹⁵ Hallett 2005, 120–132

¹⁶ Ridgway 2000, 211.

¹⁷ Schmidt 1991, 17–18 and fig. 43 (Basel); Pfuhl/Möbius 1977, cat. no. 647 (Smyrna), 293 (Pergamon), 292 (Byzantion).

riders are all qualified also as military figures, because they are always accompanied by diminutive squires who carry their weapons: round shields (Basel), spears (Byzantion and Pergamon) and swords (Byzantion). As suggested by Schmidt, the choice of such iconography for the representation of Polybios might have been motivated by the desire to evoke his previous political career as Hipparch of the Achaean League.¹⁸

While the fact that precise visual parallels in relief sculpture can only be found in images of heroes or the heroized deceased encourages one to read the representation of Polybios in the realm of heroization, some deviations from the main prototypes seem to confirm that we are dealing with a different image. Two main elements of the representation of the heroized rider are in fact missing: the horse and the squire carrying the weapons. Although the horse is entirely absent, the gesture of raising the right hand is kept and adapted to signify a new meaning. Similarly the diminutive squire has disappeared, but the main figure still has the canonical weapons that are attested all together or separately in reliefs of heroized riders on foot: round shield, helmet, spear and sword. A main difference is, however, represented by Polybios' attire under the chlamys. This differs substantially from similar figures on funerary and votive reliefs. Polybios is, in fact, wearing an exomis that leaves his chest partially bare, differently from the hero riders who normally dress in chitoniscos or light shirt under the chlamys. The exomis is normally worn by soldiers, workmen and those gods or mythical figures associated with craftsmanship and physical labour.¹⁹ Interestingly, the combination of exomis and chlamys features as the attire of some of the hipparchs in the Parthenon frieze and the closest iconographic comparison to the dress of Polybios seems to be found in a torso from Kassel, generally interpreted as a depiction of an Attic strategos or hipparch.²⁰ The length and arrangement of the Kassel torso's exomis—the way the right side falls off the chest and folds over the waist, and the arrangement of the belt—are extremely similar to those of Polybios. Also, the bodies of the two figures have nearly identical ponderation and their bare right chests are well crafted, but not extremely muscular. It seems likely that yet another level was added to the idealisation of the figure of Polybios: the visual echo of the military leaders of Classical Athens, perhaps precisely the Attic hipparchs.

Finally, I believe that a further level of interpretation can be added when looking at the general stance and appearance of the figure. The unusual gesture of the raised right hand does not find precise parallels in Greek iconography, where similar gestures interpreted as of prayer or adoration are known in the presence of divinities, but never isolated, nor given such a prominent role in the composition of the image.²¹

¹⁸ Schmidt 1991, 17–18.

¹⁹ Bieber 1928, 21.

²⁰ Parthenon: west frieze IV.8, VIII.15; south frieze IV.10. Kassel torso: Gercke/Zimmermann-Elseify 2007, 206–208, cat. no. 64.

²¹ Adoration: Gurlitt 1881, 158–159; Moreno 1994, 515–519; Ma 2013, 281. Reverence or salute: Ridgway 2000, 210.

The pose mostly resembles gestures of *adlocutio* or address to the people known from Roman sculpture.²² In this pose we can easily imagine Polybios when “in an elaborate speech, conceived in the spirit of what has just been said, maintained the cause of Philopoemen” in front of the Roman envoys.²³ The impression of a public figure addressing an audience that could be Greek as much as Roman is emphasised by the wide opening of the gesture and by the use of a mantle that, in the Roman period, becomes characteristic of portrait statues of powerful Romans, traders, generals and finally emperors. Also, the rings on Polybios’ left hand, although relatively common in representations of the Hellenistic period, are evocative of Roman authority. The comparison comes to mind with the contemporary statue of Polybios’ pupil in Rome, Scipio Aemilianus that Cicero describes as easily recognizable, even without inscription, because of *status* (pose), *amictus* (mantle) and *anulus* (ring).²⁴

In conclusion, the image and the writing on the stele are carefully crafted to evoke a number of mythical, heroic and historical predecessors, and to appeal to different audiences with the ultimate aim of creating a multi-faceted iconography. Similarly to the inscription that used an artificial and remote language, drawing from the world of divine and funerary dedications rather than from the contemporary context, the image on the stele belongs to the realm of the ideal. The figure conveys political role, military prowess, but also the power of both the spoken and the written word, encapsulated in the gesture of addressing the viewer and showing the inscription. It can be interpreted as a Greek hero, a civic warrior, a Hellenistic politician or a Roman envoy according to taste and probably depending on the context: whether displayed in an agora or in a sanctuary along with a row of divine reliefs, and depending on the political climate.

3 The Making of the Stele/Stelai

Both the relief and the inscription on the Kleitor stele have left little doubt that the work is a late Hellenistic one, contemporary to the activity of Polybios in Greece or slightly later.²⁵ If one accepts that all the stelai mentioned in Pausanias’ text were similar or identical to the stele of Kleitor and originally bore the same text, the honours for Polybios in the Peloponnese must be read as a concerted programme—a programme with a certain relevance, given the size and serialization of the monuments. In this perspective, the multiple images of Polybios, with “standard inscription” have been recently described by John Ma as “a way of displaying a capacity of collective action [of the

²² Brilliant 1963, 65–68.

²³ Pol. 39.3.11.

²⁴ Cic. Att. 6.1.17.

²⁵ From IG V 2.304 and 370 onwards; see also Bol/Eckstein 1975.

cities of the Peloponnese], even in the aftermath of the destruction of the federal state of the Achaean League and even without formal decision mechanisms”.²⁶ The dating of the programme of honours for Polybios in the Peloponnese depends, therefore, on the dating of the stele from Kleitor.

Some scholars believe that the stele should be dated to the first phase of activity of Polybios as a politician of the Achaean League before 168 BC, on the basis of either the characteristics of the depiction of the historian or the historical context. Paolo Moreno and Ridgway claim that our stele depicts a youthful and idealised warrior, and if it represents Polybios it should be dated to an early stage of his career, when he was still a young Hipparch.²⁷ Anna Heller notes that the generic and sober formulation of the epigram, avoiding any reference to Rome, should be better placed in relation to honours paid to the historian at an early stage of his career.²⁸ Ma, in accordance with the earlier opinion of Angelos Chaniotis, has recently stressed that the most likely historical context for the making of the stelai and their inscriptions is the post-146 setting of Greece, in particular the years around 145 BC, when Polybios was paid a series of exceptional honours by the cities of the Peloponnese.²⁹

Polybios was, in fact, sent to Greece from Rome shortly after 146 BC with the task of following up on the work of the ten Roman commissioners sent to settle the Greek poleis, give the country new constitutions and ultimately facilitate the political transition to the control of Rome.³⁰ On his departure “the people, who always admired and honoured this man, being in every way satisfied with the conduct of his last years and his management of the business just described, honoured him with the most ample marks of their respect (ταῖς μεγίσταις τιμαῖς)”.³¹ This constitutes to my mind the most likely context for the erection of the stele. Arguments aiming at a higher date, on the basis of the youthfulness of the depiction and apparent incoherence of the martial iconography with the contemporary activities of Polybios, can be rejected when accepting that we are dealing with an idealised representation of the historian as a quasi-heroic figure (see above).³² In particular, a date pre-168 for the erection of the reliefs would lead one to question why just Polybios, as a young hipparch of the Achaean League, should have been the recipient of honours so extraordinary as not

²⁶ Ma 2013, 280–281.

²⁷ Moreno 1994, 515–519; Ridgway 2000, 211.

²⁸ Heller 2011, 303.

²⁹ Angelos Chaniotis had already associated all monuments for Polybios and linked them to the events of 145 BC (Chaniotis 1988, 330); more recently Ma 2013, 279–284.

³⁰ Pol. 39.5.1–3.

³¹ Pol. 39.5.4: διὸ καὶ καθόλου μὲν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀποδεχόμενοι καὶ τιμώντες τὸν ἄνδρα, περὶ τοὺς ἐσχάτους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς προειρημέναις πράξεις εὐδοκούμενοι κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ταῖς μεγίσταις τιμαῖς ἐτίμησαν αὐτὸν κατὰ πόλεις καὶ ζῶντα καὶ μεταλλάξαντα (Engl. transl. by E. S. Shuckburgh).

³² Moreno 1994, 516–517, following an original suggestion by Wolters (Friedrichs/Wolters 1885, no. 1854); Ridgway 2000, 211.

even his father, who led the same league, ever received. Also, on the verge of the final clash with the Romans, it is arguable whether such an eminently anti-Roman visual programme, as a result of a collective action of the Achaeans as a political entity, celebrating one of their leaders, would have been strategically wise and not to be intended as provocation.³³

That Polybios was a fundamental figure in the affairs of the Peloponnese precisely in the post-146 BC context is clearly demonstrated, beyond his own writing, by the setting up of a bronze statue in his honour in the most venerable, and most political, place of Greece: the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia. Here he stood, in front of the temple of Zeus, next to statues of Mummius, of the ten commissioners in charge of the political reorganization of Greece and of Rome as a personification.³⁴ These three groups of monuments visualised the most recent developments of Greece's history, and confirmed the pro-Roman position of the Eleans, who had always been in charge of the administration of the sanctuary.³⁵ If Polybios at Olympia was given a canonical bronze statue with a standard honorary dedication in order to visualise the Eleans' allegiance to the Roman state and their acceptance of the conditions imposed through the historian, is it then possible that a similar situation was also in place in the other cities of the Peloponnese who displayed his image?³⁶

In such a context, it would make complete sense that five (at least) unique and extraordinarily large stelai, all bearing the same depiction of Polybios as a heroic civic warrior, and a generic, but sophisticated inscription adaptable to the use of any polis, were produced, commissioned and distributed in the cities of Arkadia (Kleitor, Mantinea, Tegea, Lykosoura, Megalopolis). These were the most likely to be associated with the diplomatic activities of Megalopolitan Polybios. The making and displaying of the stelai of Polybios, because of their scale and unity of conception, would not only show the capacity of the poleis for collective action even after the dissolution of the League, as put forward by Ma, but might also hint at a visual programme of a political nature.³⁷ The images and the poetic text celebrating the historian in the guise of a heroic fighter and politician were probably produced to be displayed in

³³ Similarly less likely are proposals that tend to make the stelai posthumous honours by comparison with the later stelai of his descendent Flavios Polybios (Heller 2011, 303–304). It would be even more difficult to imagine such a serialization of a clearly political image in a period much distant from the dissolution of the Achaean League.

³⁴ Mummius: IvO 319; ten commissioners: IvO 320–424; Rome: IvO 317.

³⁵ The Eleans—and the sanctuary of Olympia—clearly dissociated themselves from the rebellious behaviour of most other Peloponnesians and welcomed Mummius and his political team as a new phase in their history. Such position might explain why Elis, alone among the Achaean cities, retained the right to struck coins and received a particularly lenient treatment after the events of 146 BC.

³⁶ Statue base for Polybios: IvO 302. The statue preserves the sockets for two bronze feet on its upper side. The inscription reads ἡ πόλις ἡ τῶν Ἑλλείων Πολύβιον / Λυκόρτα Μεγαλοπολείτην.

³⁷ Ma 2013, 280–281 on 'collective action'.

cities where the negotiations with Rome had been successfully completed and the transition to the new order had already taken place. To the same negotiations might have alluded the unusual gesture of *adlocutio* discussed above. The image of an idealized Polybios addressing the viewer would have ultimately acted as a guarantee that the place was faithful and allied and did not deserve any trouble. Defined in words as an *agalma*, an untouchable and divine gift of semi-religious character, the stele might have served as protection for the land and its goods—a protection similar to that which the historian was able to exert in person when he saved the statues of Philopoemen and Aratus that the Roman commissioners wanted to carry away. In the face of political disruption the image chosen to bear a message of alignment to Roman policy, while trying and preserving the local identity, was ultimately that of a Greek of noble and quasi-heroic descent, no matter his political views.

A last question remains, which relates to the practicalities of the making of the stelai. The latter must have implied considerable labour because each piece was very sizable, there were probably more than five of them, they all had to be similar if not identical and distributed to different poleis. We cannot imagine this work to be accomplished anywhere else but in a well-developed local workshop, where over-size sculptures of marble could be made. The years between 168 and the mid 1st century BC were among the most dramatic for the Peloponnese and those parts of Greece that were to constitute the Roman province of Achaia.³⁸ This was a time when artistic patronage and building activity were most improbable, since pillages and destructions affected the territories of the cities that had opposed Rome, and the country was torn apart by internal divisions and cash stripped because of wars and war tribute. Around the middle of the 2nd century BC only one workshop seems to have been flourishing in the Peloponnese, that of the sculptor Damophon of Messene, who “specialised in heroic and divine images, some on a colossal scale”.³⁹ The works of Damophon and his sons reached an extraordinary network of poleis well beyond the Peloponnese, to Achaia, the Cyclades and Ionian islands. Damophon himself was very well connected and able to satisfy diverse customers even when the need arose to work for free or pay for primary material out of his own pocket, as it is documented in a number of decrees in his honour.⁴⁰ The workshop of Damophon would therefore have been one of the few, if not the only, capable to both produce and distribute the remarkable series of monuments for Polybios. The fact that works of Damophon are attested in at least two of the locations where Polybios was honoured (Megalopolis and Lykosoura) seems to enforce this connection.

Franz Studniczka suggested for the first time in 1911 on stylistic and technical grounds that the stele of Polybios should be attributed to the workshop of Damophon

³⁸ Gruen 1984, 517–23; Kallet-Marx 1995, 89–94.

³⁹ Themelis 1996, 178.

⁴⁰ Melfi 2013.

the Messenian, a suggestion later resurrected by Moreno.⁴¹ A brief survey of the heads preserved in Lykosoura and Messene confirms many technical and stylistic similarities with the 'portrait' of Polybios, in particular in the shape of the oval, the treatment of the eyes with arched top eyelids and deep eyebrows converging to the nose in a straight line, the characteristic bulging profile of the forehead, and the revealing modelling of the small lips with side dimples. Demeter and Anytos from Lykosoura, and Apollo and Herakles from Messene seem to have several of the above features in common with Polybios.⁴² It is nevertheless the more general style of the representation that is, to my mind, intimately connected with the art of Damophon. This is the eclectic neoclassicism that characterises most of his work, the capacity of mixing the high-classical composition of an Attic stele, and the 4th century features of a warrior's head with the Asiatic rendering of a civic drapery, and the iconography of Roman portrait statues, while verging on the neo-attic in the details.⁴³ This highly cultured eclecticism is not limited to style, but is also evident in the choice of semantic components from past and present in order to convey a complex image.

Viewed in a historical perspective, the choice of the complex and well-organised workshop run by Damophon and his children, that had produced and distributed a number of statues and statuary groups for at least 20 years in the Peloponnese and beyond, would have been the most obvious for the monuments of Polybios. The specific historical context, that is to say the period of economic crisis and confusion following the fall of Corinth, and the need of replicating the image fast and effectively could also explain the choice of an unusual type, the honorary stele, much unlike any pre-existing examples. Stelai of local marble were certainly cheaper to make and easier to replicate than statues in the round for an experienced local workshop.⁴⁴ Even if the stelai of Polybios distributed in the Peloponnese were not the product of the Messenian workshop of Damophon and his sons, we are forced to reconstruct the activity of a capable and networked workshop that was able to provide a unique and extraordinary example of serialization of images and text for the Peloponnesian poleis at around 145 BC. The images were accompanied by a standard inscription, easily adaptable to all poleis involved and to a range of public contexts within the poleis (agorai, sanctuaries etc). Some of the poleis, though, might not have accepted

⁴¹ Studniczka 1911 compared the treatment of the forehead, eyes and temples of Polybios with those of the colossal heads of Demeter and Anytos from Lykosoura. He furthermore noticed the use of detailed relief decoration in both the mantle of Despoina and the pommel of Polybios sword. Moreno 1994, 517 noted the structural affinity between Polybios' head and those of the divinities of Lykosoura and the Asklepieion of Messene, all ascribed to Damophon.

⁴² For the most complete treatment of Damophon's sculptures, see Themelis 1993.

⁴³ Such as the decoration of the pommel of the sword strapped at Polybios' side, where Studniczka detected either a griffin or an eros riding a feline (see n. 41 above, and Studniczka 1911).

⁴⁴ According to Studniczka the stele was made of the same Doliana marble as the Lykosoura sculptures, but this can only be proved by specific analysis of the stone.

the suggested text and possibly displayed the stele without inscription, or later added one or the other of the poetic texts recorded by Pausanias. The importance of this operation cannot be overestimated and suggests that only a few months after passing under the control of the Romans, the cities of the Peloponnese used the language of the images and the effectiveness of the written word to express clearly their political position to the incoming power.

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