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Polybius and Oscar Wilde: *Pragmatike Historia* in Nineteenth Century Oxford

For Jennifer Ingleheart

1 Introduction

In 1879 Oscar Wilde, then twenty-four, prepared an essay for the Chancellor's English Essay Prize on the theme of "Historical Criticism Among the Ancients". This prize was one of the many which the University of Oxford annually awarded, and still awards. Wilde, as we shall see, relished ironies of collocation throughout his life. He might have appreciated the fact that the 2016 notice for this prize on the Oxford University website appears two entries after that for the Newdigate Prize, which he won with his poem "Ravenna" in 1878,¹ and immediately before that for the Lord Alfred Douglas Memorial Prize.²

Wilde had graduated from Magdalen College, Oxford, on the 28th of November 1878,³ after sitting the examinations for the Final Honour School of *Literae Humaniores* in June of that year. Having matriculated in 1874,⁴ he fell easily within the requirements of eligibility for the Chancellor's English Essay Prize.⁵ The title of the essay was not Wilde's choice. It had been announced "in the same issue of the *Oxford University Gazette* as that which recorded the winners of the 1878 prizes".⁶

1 Ellmann 1987, 93.

2 (consulted on 20.04.2016).

3 Ellmann, 1987, 100.

4 Ellmann 1987, 36.

5 For details on the Prize, see Mason 1914, 470. Ellmann 1987, 102 seems to imply that Wilde was exploiting a constitutional loophole by entering the competition as a graduate: "By a quirk of the Oxford statutes he was *still* eligible" [my italics]. In fact candidates for the Prize in this period would typically have graduated or at the very least finished their studies, as only students who had exceeded four years but not seven of their matriculation were eligible (so correctly Guy 2007, xx); matriculation occurs at the beginning of the student's course, and *Literae Humaniores* usually takes four years.

6 Guy 2007, xx.

Wilde did not win the 1879 Prize. It was not awarded to any of the candidates, a withholding which seems to have happened on only one previous occasion (1871) since the Prize was founded in 1768.⁷ Wilde never published the essay, which has subsequently become known as both *Historical Criticism* and *The Rise of Historical Criticism*,⁸ in his lifetime. There is no strong evidence that he ever intended to do so.⁹

The publication history of the essay after Wilde's death in 1900 is a long and rather complicated affair. It is explained with admirable clarity by the essay's most recent editor.¹⁰ Until the Twenty-First Century, the version of *Historical Criticism* in common circulation was one that had been subjected to considerable editorial intervention by Wilde's friend Robert Ross. Josephine Guy's 2007 edition of the essay from the original manuscript, which is now held in the Clark Library,¹¹ has therefore inaugurated a new age in the study of *Historical Criticism*.¹² Even more recently, Philip E. Smith II has published a manuscript book of Wilde's containing notes and drafts of language for the text.¹³ The labours of Guy and Smith in their editions and commentaries, and Horst Schroeder's articles in response to Guy's edition, have contributed very greatly to our understanding of the text.

Historical Criticism has met with a somewhat mixed critical response in the one hundred and thirty-eight years since Wilde wrote it. J.W. Mackail, whose opinion on the piece Wilde's bibliographer Hugh Mason sought in the early Twentieth Century, said that "the essay, young as it is, is quite up to the general level of that sort of thing" and did not know why the prize had not been awarded.¹⁴ Wilde's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* says that it shows

7 So Mason 1914, 470.

8 The three manuscript books in which the text is preserved bear slight variations on the title *Historical Criticism*: *Ἀληθεύειν*. See Guy 2007, xxiii. In what follows, I call the essay *Historical Criticism*, and the notebook in which Wilde recorded notes and drafts of language for it the *Historical Criticism Notebook*, following the practice of Guy 2007 and Smith 2016.

9 Ellmann 1987, 102 speculates that the essay might have been amongst the essays about "Greek matters" which Wilde envisaged publishing in 1880, but Guy 2007, xx–xxi, notes that it was never mentioned in his correspondence after the summer of 1879; see also Schroeder 2009, 64.

10 Guy 2007, xxiv–xxvii.

11 MS Wilde W6721M3 R595 [1879?]. I have not personally inspected this MS, a fact which will be of significance with regard to a textual point (see n. 58 below).

12 Guy 2007, 3–67. All references to *Historical Criticism* in what follows are keyed to Guy's text. It is worth stressing my debt to the achievements of Guy's edition at this point, as I shall be differing substantially from her interpretations of several passages in what follows.

13 Smith 2016.

14 Mason 1914, 470.

“a remarkable grasp of historiography, a subject then in its infancy”.¹⁵ Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand identified what they saw as “the centrality of Wilde’s synthesis and its components (mind, imagination, race, evolution) as guiding ideas” in the essay.¹⁶

By contrast, the most recent editor of the text is keener to stress the derivative elements of Wilde’s argument.¹⁷ Several readers have criticized its turgid and ponderous style, especially surprising in light of its authorship.¹⁸ Above all, its deficiencies of structural organization have met with general censure.¹⁹ These are particularly obvious in the recent Oxford edition of the essay, which returns to Wilde’s autograph rather than the version which Robert Ross had tidied up. Indeed, Horst Schroeder has recently expressed scepticism that a piece so manifestly ramshackle (and leaving so little subsequent archival trace) could ever actually have been submitted for the Chancellor’s English Essay Prize at all.²⁰ Even a cursory reading of *Historical Criticism* in the 2007 edition reveals the force of this point. To take one example among many, Wilde, in defence of his claim that Livy has no powers of critical thinking, claims: “I append three instances as a proof”. Not only does Wilde not produce his three instances, he moves immediately on to talk (briefly and elliptically) about Tacitus instead.²¹

One may think that the text of *Historical Criticism* as it now remains for us was indeed submitted for the Prize (which to me, as to Schroeder, seems unlikely). One may think that Wilde never entered the competition at all (a more likely hypothesis). One may think that what we have now is a penultimate draft and that the version which Wilde ultimately submitted is lost to time (this seems to me a hypothesis with more to recommend it than Schroeder allows). Whatever the truth of the matter, the essay retains an arresting interest. Quite apart from

¹⁵ [consulted 18.05.2016].

¹⁶ Smith and Helfand 1989, 37.

¹⁷ Guy 2007, xxviii.

¹⁸ Ellmann 1987, 102: “The essay he offered was longer than anything he would ever write in the discursive mode, and did not escape an uncharacteristic tediousness”; Kohl and Wilson 1989, 70: “its somewhat heavy, long-winded style is totally uncharacteristic of Wilde’s later work”.

¹⁹ Ellmann 1987, 102: “Otherwise, the organization of this essay was rickety, a defect which Wilde attempted to override by frequent references to his structural ‘plan’”; Dowling, 2001, xx, sees the essay as “Arnoldian but disorganized”.

²⁰ Schroeder 2009, 64. We may note, however, that the absence of a copy of Wilde’s essay in the University Archives is not, in fact, at all suspicious. The University Archives at Oxford do not generally seem to retain copies of the entries for the Chancellor’s English Essay Prize (as I ascertained in correspondence with the Keeper, Simon Bailey, 26/06/17).

²¹ Guy 2007, 65.13.

the later glories of its author, it is (as the *Dictionary of National Biography*, quoted above, notes)²² an exercise in the comparative study of classical historiography from a time when such enterprises were less fashionable in England and Ireland than they have subsequently become.

There is a particular aspect to the enduring interest of *Historical Criticism* which makes a study of it well-fitted to the concerns of the present volume. This is the exceptionally prominent place which Wilde gives Polybius in his discussion of ancient historical thought. Richard Ellmann noted this unusual prominence in his 1987 life of Wilde.²³ Josephine Guy, in the 2007 Oxford edition, does a good job of tracking down Wilde's Polybian references, supplemented and corrected at some points by the indefatigable subsequent researches of Horst Schroeder and Philip Smith II.²⁴ Outside the recent Wildean editions and *adversaria* relating directly to them, however, the importance of Polybius in *Historical Criticism* has not received much critical attention, with the exception of J.A. Garcia Landa's brief examination of Wilde's use of Polybius in relation to his parallel treatment of Vico.²⁵ This applies even to modern synoptic treatments of Wilde's relationship to classical authors.²⁶ The absence from the scholarly literature is understandable. Wilde did not make much use of Polybius in later life. Yet the prominence of Polybius in this item of Wildean juvenilia remains of interest.

In what follows, I shall begin by looking at Wilde as a student of classical historiography in general in *Historical Criticism*. I shall suggest that, while he certainly shows numerous weaknesses in his interpretations, his work in this vein is more up-to-date, and more alive to contemporary debates about ancient history, than some of the recent scholarship has suggested. I shall examine the question of why Polybius enjoys this somewhat surprising visibility in Wilde's unsuccessful prize essay. I shall argue that Polybius' usefulness to Wilde may be considered under three main headings: historiographical methodology; structural transition within the over-arching argument of *Historical Criticism*; and, perhaps most interestingly, Polybius as a predecessor to Wilde's own practice in writing the essay. In connexion with the last point, I shall conclude with the argument that the use of Polybius in *Historical Criticism*, for all the work's manifest flaws, shows,

²² P. 417.

²³ Ellmann 1987, 102: "His praise of Polybius, unusual for the time, showed his independence ...".

²⁴ As, for example, at Schroeder 2013a, 72–73, Schroeder 2013b, 63–64.

²⁵ Garcia Landa 2013.

²⁶ In Ross 2013, for example, Polybius is mentioned once (134), to illuminate Wilde's view of Alexandria. K. Riley, A. Blanshard, and I. Manny (eds.), *Oscar Wilde and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford, 2017), appeared just as this volume went to print, so unfortunately no account could be taken of it in this discussion.

occasionally, the self-reflexive wit and slyness of argument that would come to the fore in Wilde's later prose works.

2 Wilde as a student of classical historiography in *Historical Criticism*

Wilde makes a fair few missteps while analysing the classical historians in the pages of *Historical Criticism*. At the very least, he indulges in some misleading emphases. The Oxford edition notes several examples of these delinquent moments. For instance, Wilde slightly mixes up the epigraphic evidence alleged by Thucydides for one of his arguments about earlier Athenian history.²⁷ Some other cases of Wildean errancy or *suggestio falsi* in *Historical Criticism*, however, perhaps deserve some treatment here, as they are not altogether apprehended in the current scholarly literature.

These blemishes vary in severity. Sometimes Wilde is simply a little disingenuous. Such is the case when he asserts, alluding to Thucydides 1.22.1,²⁸ that “Thucydides states clearly that where he was unable to find out what people really said, he put down what they ought to have said”.²⁹ In fact, Thucydides does not say that his policy on speeches (whatever it was) applied where he was *unable* to find out what “people really said”. Rather, he speaks of the *difficulty* that he and his informants had in remembering exactly what was said.³⁰ Wilde also quietly omits any discussion of the notorious ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων clause, which is not especially easy to reconcile with his interpretation of the passage.

In fairness to Wilde, the exact meaning of Thucydides 1.22.1 is still a notorious crux. Christopher Pelling has observed that “no sentence in the Greek language

²⁷ Guy 2007, 16.23–5: “This view he [sc. ‘Thucydides’] further corroborates by another inscription on the altar of the Apollo, which mentions the children of Hippias and not those of his brothers”. As Guy 2007, 302 notes, Thuc. 6.55.1 actually attributes this inscription to a stele concerning the wrongdoings of the tyrants, not the altar of Pythian Apollo which he has mentioned earlier in the same passage (Thuc. 6.54.6–7).

²⁸ The reference is not noted in the commentary on this passage at Guy 2007, 345, but is picked up at Schroeder 2013a, 74; neither comments on the minutiae of Wilde's rather creative translation.

²⁹ Guy 2007, 55.28–9.

³⁰ Thuc. 1.22.1: χαλεπὸν τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων διαμνημονεῦσαι ἦν ἐμοὶ τε ὧν αὐτὸς ἤκουσα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοθεν ποθεν ἐμοὶ ἀπαγγέλλουσιν.

can have been taken quite so variously”.³¹ Some of Wilde’s other missteps are less justifiable. It is a little hard on Livy to assert that “his method as a rule is merely to mention all the accounts, and to decide in favour of the most probable sometimes, but usually not to decide at all”.³² One of the examples Wilde alleges of a crux where Livy will not make up his mind, “who was the first dictator”,³³ is actually one where Livy reasons out a decision, and not merely on the grounds of probability.³⁴ Pursuing from Thucydides his discourse on the nature of speeches in ancient historiography, Wilde remarks that “we find that one of the most celebrated speeches in Tacitus[,], that in which the Emperor Claudius gives the Gauls their freedom[,] is shown by an inscription discovered recently at Lugdunum to be entirely fabulous”.³⁵ This is a dubious and hyperbolic characterization of the relationship between the speech recorded on the Lyons tablet and Tacitus *Annals* 11.24.³⁶ The nadir is probably Wilde’s assertion, earlier in the same passage, that “the speeches given in the senate on the occasion of the Catilinarian Conspiracy are very different from the same orations as they appear in Cicero”.³⁷ In fact, Sallust notoriously does not give any rendering of a speech by Cicero at all in the *Bellum Catilinae*. The nearest he ever approaches to doing so is a single sentence: “*Tum M. Tullius consul, sive praesentiam eius timens sive ira conmotus, orationem habuit luculentam atque utilem rei publicae, quam postea scriptam edidit*” (Then M. Tullius the consul, whether because he was unnerved by his [sc. “Catiline’s”] presence or because he was overcome by anger, delivered a speech that was beautiful and of service to the state, which he subsequently wrote down and circulated).³⁸ This describes the delivery of the speech that we know as the *First Catilinarian*.³⁹

31 Pelling 2000, 115. I am indebted to Professor Pelling for his helpful comments on this.

32 Guy 2007, 64.32–65.2.

33 Guy 2007, 64.31.

34 Livy 2.18.4–7, which brings in not only appeals to probability (why choose Manius Valerius rather than his more experienced father?) but also analysis of the comparative antiquity of sources (the oldest authorities plump for Larcus). The precise reference to Livy, omitted at Guy 2007, 357, is identified at Smith 2016, 179 n. 195.

35 Guy, 2007, 56.4–7, with the commentary at 347.

36 Contrast, for example, the more subtle argumentation of Martin 1981, 149, Griffin 1982, 405, and Woodman in Kraus and Woodman 1997, 98–99. It is also a little odd for Wilde to describe the Lyons Tablet, which was found in 1528 (so Martin 1981, 147; not, *pace* Guy 2007, 347, in 1524) as “an inscription discovered recently”.

37 Guy 2007, 55.31–3.

38 Sall. *BC* 31.6 (my translation).

39 Guy 2007, 346 does not note quite how glaring the mismatch between Wilde’s claims and what the sources actually say is here.

It is tempting to read significance into the fact that Wilde's more obvious errors tend to congregate in his discussion of Latin sources. Ellmann notes that "Wilde did not care much for Latin, having absorbed Mahaffy's contempt 'for any Roman thing'".⁴⁰ The meagre allotment of space to the Roman historians in *Historical Criticism* is also, at first blush, suggestive. Wilde's whistle-stop tour of Latin historiography takes up about three and a half pages of a sixty-four page essay.

One should, however, sound a note of caution here. As often with Wilde, the reality of his taste was a little more complex than his resonant declarations would sometimes seem to suggest. Much later, in Reading Prison, he requested and received the *Corpus Poetarum Latinorum* as reading matter.⁴¹ The verbal texture of *Historical Criticism* is enriched, at one point, by a casual allusion to Horace's *Odes*, though the phrase in question is, to be sure, a fairly famous one.⁴² More significantly, Smith's edition of Wilde's notes towards the *Historical Criticism* essay reveals that Wilde actually amassed several pages of material on Tacitus, which did not find their way into the text of *Historical Criticism* as we now have it.⁴³ Whatever Wilde's reasons were for omitting this material from *Historical Criticism* (a question that is obviously bound up with that of the exact textual status of the draft we currently possess), he had, at least, done the ground-work.

The fact remains, however, that Wilde makes a fair few mistakes in *Historical Criticism*. The general tenor of the Oxford edition is to suggest that the essay is not merely sloppy but also derivative.⁴⁴ Once more, however, caution is in order. We have already seen that the Oxford edition, while it does, on the whole, a sound job of tracking down many of Wilde's allusions, also misses quite a few of them.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Ellmann 1987, 42, quoting Stanford and McDowell 1971, 31. J.P. Mahaffy had been Wilde's tutor at Trinity College, Dublin.

⁴¹ Ellmann 1987, 465.

⁴² Guy 2007, 10.1: "There were heroes before the son of Atreus". This translates Hor. *Od.* 4.9.25: "*vixere fortes ante Agamemnona*", which, appropriately, is in a context about the importance of having an author to write up one's deeds if one wishes to enjoy a posthumous reputation. The allusion is not noted at Guy 2007, 292.

⁴³ Smith 2016, 122–27. Smith notes and examines the disparity between the material on Tacitus in the *Historical Criticism Notebook* and Wilde's much more brief and dismissive treatment of that historian in *Historical Criticism* as it stands at Smith 2016, xxvi–xxviii.

⁴⁴ Guy 2007, xxviii: "The Commentary to the present edition will also make readers more alert to the frequently derivative elements of Wilde's argument ...": Guy 2007, 270: "There are several instances in *Historical Criticism* where the particular textual examples which Wilde gives, and the particular contexts in which he discusses them, suggest that his knowledge was often second-hand, and thus that the range of classical allusions in his work is not all that it seems".

⁴⁵ As, for example, in the case described in n. 42 above.

As a result, the reader of the Oxford edition may easily take away the impression that Wilde's range and facility of allusion was more constrained than it really was.

There are also some methodological issues to ponder. The Oxford edition explicitly tries to relate what Wilde says in *Historical Criticism* to the coverage of such matters in a small number of secondary sources which Wilde is known (or overwhelmingly likely) to have read: Mommsen's *History of Rome*; Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*; Symonds' *Studies of the Greek Poets*; and Grote's *History of Greece*.⁴⁶ The editor defends this procedure on the grounds that "Of course these were not the only general books on classical culture to which Wilde may have had access; nevertheless they provide a useful reference point by which to judge the novelty (or otherwise) of his particular observations..."⁴⁷ The texts in question are certainly well-chosen. Mommsen, for example, was, beyond doubt, an important figure in Wilde's classical scholarship: Mommsen's *History of Rome* would ultimately be another of the books that Wilde would request while serving his penal term for gross indecency in the 1890s (at Pentonville, this time, rather than Reading, but the book accompanied him throughout his changes of prison).⁴⁸ "Dr. Mommsen" is also mentioned by name towards the end of *Historical Criticism*.⁴⁹

The problem with this method is that the Oxford edition sometimes cites "cross-references" to these secondary sources for passages of *Historical Criticism* which are not, in fact, based upon, or allusions to, these secondary sources at all. The effect of this is to reinforce the impression that Wilde's argument in the essay is informed only by a small number of well-worn authorities. In fact, Wilde's range of scholarly reference is demonstrably both wider and more up-to-date on contemporary strands of ancient historical scholarship in the late 1870s than the Commentary to the Oxford Edition suggests.

The most significant example of this up-to-dateness is to be found in Wilde's remarks on what we might now call "revisionist" historiography:

Similar ethical canons are applied to the accounts of the heroes of the days of old, and by the same a-priori principles Achilles is rescued from the charges of avarice and insolence in a passage [Rep. Bk. III. 391] which may be ranked as the earliest instance of that "white-washing of great men", as it has been called, which is so popular in our own day when

⁴⁶ Guy 2007, 273.

⁴⁷ Guy 2007, *ibid*.

⁴⁸ Ellmann 1987, 456.

⁴⁹ Guy 2007, 64.11: "...Dr. Mommsen's view of him [sc. 'Sallust'] as merely a political pamphleteer..."

Catiline and Clodius are represented as honest and far-seeing politicians, when “ein edle [sic] und gute natur” is claimed for Tiberius, and Nero rescued from his heritage of infamy, as an accomplished dilettante whose moral aberrations are more than excused by his exquisite artistic sense; and charming tenor voice (Guy 2007, 7.23–32).

What leads Wilde to choose the examples of Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius in this passage? The Oxford Edition sees the remark about “whitewashing” as “probably an allusion to Mommsen’s comments on the partisan nature of Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae*”.⁵⁰ Wilde does indeed speak about “Dr. Mommsen’s view of him [sc. ‘Sallust’] as a merely a political pamphleteer”, with the clear implication that he does not whole-heartedly agree, towards the end of the essay.⁵¹ But it will not do to detect Mommsen’s views on the *Bellum Catilinae* as the subject of allusion in this portion of *Historical Criticism*. This passage is concerned with perverse (in Wilde’s view) interpretations of particular historical miscreants. Sallust paints Catiline as prodigiously talented, but a dyed-in-the-wool villain.⁵² He does not mention Clodius in his extant works or fragments at all, although the full text of the *Historiae* would, no doubt, have been a different matter.⁵³ Nor is it likely that Sallust saw a need to whitewash the infant Tiberius.

In fact, one can make a good case that, by picking the sequence of Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius (in that order, and together), Wilde is pointedly setting himself in opposition to a position taken in a freshly-published and controversial piece of English historical scholarship. In 1878, the year before Wilde prepared *Historical Criticism*, E.S. Beesly, Professor of Latin at Bedford College, London, published *Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius*.⁵⁴ This was, indeed, a notably revisionist take on three traditionally despised historical characters.

The sequence, the concinnity of dates, and Beesly’s notably heterodox stance on his eponymous subjects are enough in themselves to suggest that Wilde has Beesly in mind for this stretch of *Historical Criticism*. But we can also establish that Beesly was running through Wilde’s mind at another point in his essay. Consider the following passage:

⁵⁰ Guy 2007, 285.

⁵¹ See n. 49 above.

⁵² As, for example, at Sall. *BC* 5.1.

⁵³ See Tatum 1999, 46–47 for the argument that Plut. *Luc.* 34.3–4, giving a speech of Clodius at the Nisibis mutiny, is derived from Sallust’s *Historiae*.

⁵⁴ Beesly, 1878. For an assessment of Beesly’s work on the late Roman Republic, see Wiseman 1998, 121–34.

No canon of historical criticism can be said to be of more real value than that involved in this distinction: and the overlooking of it has filled our histories with the contemptible accounts of the intrigues of courtiers and of kings, and the petty plottings of back-stair influence, particulars interesting no doubt to those who would ascribe *the Reformation to Anne Boleyn's pretty face*, *the Persian war* to the influence of a doctor or *a curtain-lecture from Atossa*, or the French Revolution to Madame de Maintenon, but without any value for those who aim at any scientific treatment of history (Guy 2007, 50.1–9; my italics).

Guy observes that Wilde's allusion to "Anne Boleyn's pretty face" in the above extract is "puzzling, since she was not generally considered to have great beauty".⁵⁵ Schroeder subsequently notes that the notion of Anne Boleyn as a beauty probably has its origin in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry the Eighth*.⁵⁶ However, while that play may be the ultimate authority for the queen's pulchritude, we are justified, I think, in detecting a more proximate source for Wilde's passage:

If there is a childish way of explaining a political movement, a literary man will generally adopt it. He is irresistibly attracted by what is petty and personal, as he is repelled and alarmed by the idea of an orderly evolution of human affairs. It is so easy, and to the vulgar mind so agreeable, to attribute *the Persian invasion of Greece to a curtain lecture of Atossa's*, or *the English Reformation to the pretty face of Anne Boleyn* (Beesly 1878, 67; my italics).

Wilde, it seems, liked Beesly's fulminations against those who would ignore the possibility that greater forces than individuals shape historical events enough to import it (without acknowledgment, and with some additions and modifications) into his own essay. This demonstration of his acquaintance with Beesly's text makes it all the more probable that he includes the examples of Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius earlier in *Historical Criticism* as a deliberate shot across the Professor's bows. He may even have made this challenge explicit: Wilde produces, amongst what look like his verso notes to the main text,⁵⁷ a list of writers who have indulged in the "whitewashing" that he denigrates, one of which, a name

⁵⁵ Guy 2007, 340.

⁵⁶ Schroeder 2009, 69.

⁵⁷ Guy 2007, xc.

of five or six characters beginning with “B”, has perplexed the readers of the manuscript.⁵⁸ Wilde certainly accuses these named authors of being “paradoxical”;⁵⁹ the charge of “paradox” is one which Beesly’s *Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius* anticipates.⁶⁰ In any event, Beesly’s contemporary book has had a palpable effect on the genesis of *Historical Criticism*.

The example is instructive. If one avowedly seeks to relate Wilde’s text only to a handful of well-worn authorities, then *Historical Criticism* will naturally present a hackneyed and derivative aspect. But sometimes, if one is in a position to chase down the precise sources of Wilde’s allusions, the aspect changes. Wilde on historical revisionism is not, in fact, reheated Mommsen. Rather, he is pointedly dissenting from one of the latest English works on Roman history. Moreover, once we realize that Beesly is appropriated with approval elsewhere in the text (that is, in the denial that grand historical events can be explained solely in terms of the caprices of individuals), we can see that Wilde’s response to Beesly is necessarily a complex one. On the one hand, Wilde wants to refute Beesly’s heterodox readings of historical individuals: Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius are not the heroes of the people that Beesly desires them to be. On the other hand, Beesly’s Positivist insistence on the applicability of general laws to historical development (“an orderly evolution of human affairs”) is in tune with *Historical Criticism*’s own take on historical (and historiographical) development, where, as we shall see later, Comte is very much in mind.⁶¹ Wilde is not simply swallowing or rejecting past texts wholesale. His response is, at least in the case of Beesly, more nuanced than that. In fact, despite the disagreements about other individuals, the interpretation of the career of Julius Caesar which emerges from the pages of *Historical Criticism* is not very far away from Beesly’s.⁶²

58 Wilde’s handwriting is not always easy to elucidate. Guy 2007, 7, 32 opts tentatively for “Besler[?]”, but notes (286) that it is hard to see the significance of that name in this context. Schroeder 2009, 65, speculates that the name might be “Beulé” (that is, Charles Ernest Beulé, who, as well as being an archaeologist, wrote several works of popular ancient history), but adds that this suggestion is made “*faute de mieux*”. I have not, however, scrutinized the autograph myself to determine my suggestion’s plausibility.

59 *Historical Criticism* is censorious (amusingly so, to a reader familiar with its author’s later literary output) about purveyors of paradoxography. Wilde attributes to Polybius (with apparent approval) the stance that the ideal historian is not “to falsify *truth* for the sake of a paradox or an epigram” (Guy 2007, 57.15–16).

60 Beesly 1878, 86: “Do not suppose that I take a perverse pleasure in maintaining a paradox”.

61 Guy 2007, 29.25–6, in conjunction with the excellent note at 319–20.

62 Guy 2007, 58.23–5: “... culminated, as all democratic movements *do* culminate, in the supreme authority of one man, the Lordship of the world under the world’s rightful Lord, Gaius Julius Caesar”. Cf. e.g. Beesly 1878, 71.

Historical Criticism, then, shows rather more width and discrimination in its use of sources, ancient and modern, than one might at first expect. It is against such a background of philological discrimination that we should consider the unusual prominence of Polybius in the essay. Whatever the reason for this prominence, it should not be ascribed merely to unthinking assimilation of a limited number of authorities on Wilde's part.

3 Polybius and Methodology

If Wilde's enthusiasm for Polybius in *Historical Criticism* is not merely a matter of his sources, what other plausible reasons can we give for it? One explanation is, to a modern student of ancient historians, very obvious. Writers of history in antiquity vary a great deal in the extent to which they are prepared to meditate explicitly upon their own methodology. This can easily lead to a situation, in modern treatments of ancient historiography, where the prominence of a given historian in the treatment is proportional to his willingness to issue such meditations.⁶³

Historical Criticism, to an extent, falls in line with this observation. This helps to explain why Xenophon, alone among the substantially extant Greek historians writing before the first century BCE, is barely represented in the extant text of *Historical Criticism* at all,⁶⁴ and does not appear in the *Historical Criticism Notebook* either.⁶⁵ Xenophon, notoriously averse to making explicit statements about historiographical methodology,⁶⁶ simply does not give Wilde enough material to work with. Such taciturnity leaves him prey to the dictum by which Wilde executes his transition from Thucydides to Polybius: "As my aim is not to give an account of historians, but to point out *those great thinkers whose methods have furthered the advance of this spirit* of historical criticism, I shall pass over those annalists and chroniclers who intervened between Thucydides and Polybius".⁶⁷

Of course, it was not just practising historians in the ancient world who were willing to discuss how to write history. Modern writers looking for theoretical

⁶³ Cf. Pitcher 2009, 28.

⁶⁴ Guy 2007, 293, notes a possible reference to Xen. *Mem.* 3.9.2 (not one of Xenophon's historiographical works, of course) at 10.19–21; otherwise, the Xenophontic cupboard is bare.

⁶⁵ The only appearance of Xenophon in Smith 2016 is in a discussion of a phrase that comes up in an unrelated notebook (xxx).

⁶⁶ Marincola 1997, 69.

⁶⁷ Guy 2007, 41.13–17. The italics here represent Wilde's own underlining (Guy 2007, xc).

works on historiography from antiquity itself do not find many extant candidates. Scholars therefore tend to fall back on a limited number of texts: passages from Cicero's *De Oratore* and *De Legibus*; Plutarch's treatise *On the Malice of Herodotus*, and Lucian's *How History Ought To Be Written*. Wilde certainly availed himself of most of these texts in his preparation for writing *Historical Criticism*. This is another case where (as in that of Tacitus, mentioned above)⁶⁸ material from the *Historical Criticism Notebook* did not make its way into the surviving version of the essay itself: there are two pages of notes on *How History Ought To Be Written* in the *Notebook* of which no trace survives in *Historical Criticism*, where Lucian is no longer mentioned.⁶⁹ Plutarch *On the Malice of Herodotus* retains a mention in *Historical Criticism*, though only as a note to a discussion of Herodotus himself,⁷⁰ and Wilde does allude rather obliquely to the beginning of *De Legibus* in his brief comments about Cicero's views on the status of myths in writing history,⁷¹ and the orator's conviction that he was well-fitted to be a historiographer.⁷² On the whole, however, Wilde does not use these texts to anything like the extent that one might expect in an essay on ancient history-writing. For example, Cicero *De Oratore* 2.62–3, which customarily plays an important role in modern discussions of the subject,⁷³ does not appear at all. In general, *Historical Criticism*, as compared with the *Historical Criticism Notebook*, seems to move away from allotting as much importance to the views of ancient writers who were neither philosophers (since Wilde sees the gradual perfection of historical method as a manifestation of wider tendencies in rigorous thought)⁷⁴ nor historians (in the strictest sense) in their own right: Smith perceptively notes that Wilde “reduces Plutarch

68 P. 421 with n. 43.

69 Smith 2016, 128–29, with Smith's note on this material at xxix.

70 Guy 2007, 11.27–32. Other works of Plutarch do appear later in the essay: Guy 2007, 60.

71 Guy 2007, 64.14–16: “Cicero had a good many qualifications for a scientific historian and (as he usually did) thought very highly of his own powers.” Cic. *Leg.* 1.5: “*potes autem tu profecto satis facere in ea, quippe cum sit opus, ut tibi quidem uideri solet, unum hoc oratorium maxime*” (“Moreover, you are assuredly able to do justice on that score, since this is an enterprise, at least in your habitual opinion, uniquely and pre-eminently worthy of an orator”—my translation). Guy's commentary at 357 is not explicit on this allusion.

72 Guy 2007, 64.16–17: “On passages of ancient legend however he [sc. Cicero] is rather unsatisfactory. For while he is too sensible to believe them he is too patriotic to reject them”. This seems to be an allusion to the discussion between Cicero and Atticus at Cic. *Leg.* 1.3–4 (again, Guy's commentary at 357 is not explicit on this allusion).

73 As most famously in Woodman 1988.

74 Note, for example, the prominence of Aristotle at Guy 2007, 24–26.

from historian to biographer” in the transition from the notebook to the essay.⁷⁵ Wilde may simply have preferred to stick, by and large, to what practising historians had to say about historiography.⁷⁶

Against this background, the prominence of Polybius becomes readily explicable. Polybius talks longer, more thoroughly, and more clearly about the nature and practice of historiography than any other practising historian of the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, Wilde openly acknowledges this characteristic:

And to Polybius belongs the office—how noble an office he made it his writings show—of making more explicit the ideas that were implicit in his predecessors, of showing that they were of wider applicability and perhaps of deeper meaning than they had before seemed, of examining with more minuteness the laws which they had discovered, and finally of pointing out more clearly than anyone had done before the range of the science, and the means it offered for analysing the present and predicting what was to come (Guy 2007, 40.16–23).

The sheer volume and range of quotable passages about historiography within Polybius’ oeuvre make him indispensable to Wilde’s enterprise. Polybius’ willingness to talk about methodology also helps to explain the distribution of the passages within his corpus which Wilde is most interested in discussing. As one might expect, Wilde makes particular use of Book 12—the traditional hunting-ground of students of historiography, where Polybius sets out many of his objections to the practices of other historians. Polybius’ strictures on Timaeus form the back-bone for Wilde’s discussion of Polybian methodology.⁷⁷

In line with the practice of most students of historiography before or since (including the present writer), Wilde’s picture of Polybius is given a certain homogeneous quality by his decisions about which passages he cites and which he omits. Wilde’s Polybius, for example, has an enthusiasm for the control of historical hypotheses through comparison with documents that Ranke would have approved, and which pointedly contrasts with the epigraphic carelessness of Wilde’s Tacitus:⁷⁸ “In other cases he [sc. ‘Polybius’] appeals to public documents *the importance of which he was always most foremost in recognising*; showing for instance by a document in the public archives of Rhodes how inaccurate were the

⁷⁵ Smith 2016, xxxi. Plutarch was more fortunate than his fellow biographer Suetonius, however. Suetonius is mentioned once in the *Historical Criticism Notebook* (Smith 2016, 126), but not at all in the essay.

⁷⁶ Cf. Marincola 2014, 39–40.

⁷⁷ Guy 2007, 53–55.

⁷⁸ See p. 420 above.

accounts given of the battle of Ladé by Zeno and Antisthenes”.⁷⁹ Wilde’s allusion to Polybius 15.8 here is shrewd (although Polybius does not claim to have seen the document himself).⁸⁰ But Wilde arguably does not do full justice to Polybius’ sniffiness elsewhere about epigraphic investigations if Polybius was not the one who was conducting them.⁸¹

In similar vein, Wilde portrays Polybius as a courteous critic, in contrast to what he sees as the prevailing tendencies of the ancient world: “But in Polybius there is I think little of that bitterness and pettiness of spirit which characterises most other writers, and an incidental story he tells of his relations with one of the historians he criticised shows that he was a man of a great courtesy and refinement of taste as indeed befitted one who had lived always in the society of those who were great and of noble birth”.⁸² As Schroeder notes, this is an allusion to Polybius’ account of how he wrote to Zeno in a friendly manner to correct Zeno’s mistakes about Laconia.⁸³ While subsequent students of historiography have differed as to their assessment of Polybius’ ingenuousness in that passage,⁸⁴ the allusion is, once again, a shrewd one, and Wilde’s picture of Polybius as a critic is one that some modern scholars would certainly endorse.⁸⁵ All the same, it would be fair to say that some passages of Polybius on his predecessors (above all, perhaps, his treatment of Callisthenes) would produce a rather different impression.⁸⁶

Wilde’s quotations of Polybius on historiographical ways and means show, then, a thoughtful, if slightly partial, fashioning of Polybius as something close

79 Guy 2007, 53.20–3 (my italics). Guy 2007, 344 seems a little surprised by Wilde’s decision to accentuate the latter syllable of “Ladé”, but he was, of course, trying to replicate the final eta of the island’s name in Greek.

80 On Polybius and documents, see Pitcher 2009, 200 n. 24.

81 Plb. 12.11.2. Wilde does, however, allude more obliquely to this passage in his discussion of how Polybius criticizes Timaeus for not giving accurate citation details for one of his alleged inscriptions (Guy 2007, 55.18–22).

82 Guy 2007, 53.6–10.

83 Plb. 16.20.5–9, as identified at Schroeder 2013a, 72–3.

84 Marincola 1997, 230 takes it as being sincere and notes the tradition of lauding courteous correction elsewhere in classical historiography. Contrast von Scala 1890, 294 and Walbank 1972, 54–55.

85 Marincola 1997, 230: “In practice, he [sc. ‘Polybius’] is a sensible and (on the whole) mild critic, despite the prevalent view of him as unfair and captious”.

86 As conceded at Marincola 1997, 230. Marincola notes (n. 72) that Callisthenes “treated a time that had nothing to do with Polybius’ chosen theme”, but this does not seem to me pertinent to the issue of Polybian bad faith in how Callisthenes is treated in his text. Polybius does not say, at 16.20.5–9, that courtesy is subject to a statute of limitations.

to a methodological paragon amongst the historians of antiquity. For Wilde, Polybius is not necessarily a great innovator. But he is a writer who expounds and takes to their logical conclusion the discoveries of his predecessors.

Polybius is not alone in generating historiographical precepts, of course, even if he is particularly fertile in them. Other historians might not have been as chatty as Polybius on such matters, but, equally, they were not all as silent as Xenophon. Wilde can, and does, make use of such precepts from the other historians who are the principal focus of his concern. We have already seen him taking a stance on the meaning of a famous and controversial methodological moment in Thucydides. Wilde similarly deploys other key disquisitions on method from the history of the Peloponnesian War, making particular use (as one might readily expect) of the celebrated passage on the likelihood of the reiteration of something like the sufferings generated by the stasis at Corcyra “ἔως ἂν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ᾖ”.⁸⁷ The *Historical Criticism Notebook* makes it clear that he also gathered together authorial statements from the text of Tacitus, though these tend more to express Tacitus’ own views on particular metaphysical issues than historiographical method *per se* and (as noted above) this material did not make it into the present text of *Historical Criticism* itself.⁸⁸

However, Wilde’s deployment of Polybius is not merely quantitatively, but qualitatively, different from the use he makes of the other classical historians. The volume of useful material is a consideration, but it is not the only one. There is merit in exploring why this is the case.

4 Polybius and the Structure of *Historical Criticism*

Polybius’ significance to Wilde is structural as well as evidential. The structure of *Historical Criticism*, as we have seen, has not won many plaudits from critics.⁸⁹ It would be fair to say that some elements of Wilde’s handling of Polybius bear out that criticism. In particular, there is the oddity that Polybius is effectively introduced *twice*, a couple of pages apart in the essay.⁹⁰ Wilde is clearly aware of this awkwardness, and makes a game attempt to smooth it out (“the man of genius

⁸⁷ Thuc. 3.82, with Guy 2007, 29.1–11 and 319.

⁸⁸ Smith 2016, 124–25.

⁸⁹ Above, n. 19.

⁹⁰ Guy 2007, 40.9, 42.23.

whose influence in the evolution of the philosophy of history I have a short time ago dwelt on").⁹¹ The effect remains a little jarring.

All the same, *Historical Criticism* does have a structure, and one in which Polybius is the lynch-pin. Some aspects of this centrality are obvious. Indeed, Wilde himself spells some of them out. We have already seen that, in Wilde's developmental model of Greek historiography, Polybius represents a sort of culmination, the codifier and thorough exponent of what has gone before.⁹² Wilde also, at one point, formalizes the progression from Herodotus through Thucydides to Polybius in terms of Comte:

Perhaps we may say that with him the philosophy of History is partly in the metaphysical stage, and see in the progress of this idea from Herodotus to Polybius, the exemplification of the Comtian law of the three stages of thought, the theological, the metaphysical, and the scientific: for truly out of the vagueness of theological mysticism this conception, which we call the Philosophy of History, was raised to a scientific principle according to which the past was explained, and the future predicted, by reference to general Laws (Guy 2007, 23–30).

Polybius works pretty well as the culmination to a sequence of this sort. Thucydides does allude to the possibility of past events recurring in some form or another in future time.⁹³ But Polybius speaks more explicitly than Thucydides ever does about the possibility of predicting future events in a way that may actually be tangibly profitable to his reader.⁹⁴

There are, however, other movements in *Historical Criticism*, beyond those that Wilde explicitly acknowledges. He claims, as we have seen, to be giving an account of "*those great thinkers whose methods have furthered the advance of this spirit of historical criticism*". In practice, however, *Historical Criticism* is not simply a work on the history of history. It perpetually teeters on the edge of becoming a work of history in its own right, exemplifying the historiographical principles it spends the rest of its time describing. This, of course, is a not uncommon move when literary writers, even nascent ones such as the young Wilde, venture

⁹¹ Guy 2007, 42.23.

⁹² Above, p. 428.

⁹³ See n. 87 above. Scholarship is still divided on the question of what, if anything, Thucydides thinks that such predictions might achieve. See, for example, Raaflaub 2013, especially 6–7 and Stahl 2013, especially 314. Wilde seems to have felt that Thucydides was at least trying to prepare readers for future recurrences, "in order that on a recurrence of the same crises men may know how to act" (Guy 2007, 17.29–30).

⁹⁴ See, for example, Plb. 12.25b.3, with Mitsis 2016, especially 117–18.

a treatise on a subject. The treatise begins, often self-consciously, to display the very qualities that it describes.⁹⁵

To this enterprise, the city of Rome is key. Wilde paints the initial rise of Rome in lush colours: “the gradual rise of this Italian city, from the day when the first legion crossed the narrow strait of Messene to the fertile fields of Sicily...”⁹⁶ The city’s evolution from city-state to dominant Republic to Empire is an underlying theme as the essay progresses, with Wilde obeying his own dictum that the “spirit of the age” is more important in a work of a history than “the intricate details of sieges and battles”.⁹⁷ Above all, Rome is then pivotal in the triumph of Christianity:

Nations may not have missions but they certainly have functions: and the function of ancient Italy was not merely to give us what is static in our institutions and rational in our law but to blend into one elemental creed the spiritual aspirations of Aryan and of Semite: Italy was not a pioneer in intellectual progress, nor a motive power in the evolution of thought. The owl of the goddess of wisdom traversed over the whole land and found nowhere a resting place. The dove which is the bird of Christ flew straight to the city of Rome and the new reign began (Guy 2007, 65.25–31).

The religious turn of this latter passage, enhanced, perhaps, by sidelong Biblical allusion,⁹⁸ is fundamental to Wilde’s treatment of Rome in the essay. The present disposition of Roman monuments becomes a symbol for the failure of paganism to prevail against Christianity: “... in what vain defence the statue of Mary set in the heart of the Pantheon can best tell us”.⁹⁹ (*The Historical Criticism Notebook* is, once again, illuminating here on Wilde’s evolving intentions as he wrote the essay, since he originally seems to have intended to use very similar phrasing about

⁹⁵ Compare Alexander Pope (equally self-reflexively) on Longinus in *An Essay on Criticism* (3.679–80): “Whose own example strengthens all his laws; / And is himself that great sublime he draws”.

⁹⁶ Guy 2007, 43.18–19.

⁹⁷ Guy 2007, 17.7, 9.

⁹⁸ The owl that cannot find a resting place evokes, perhaps, the dove of *Genesis* 8:9 (not noted at Guy 2007, 358), as well as Hegel (which Guy does note). Wilde produces an equally pointed allusive incongruity earlier in the essay (10.15–16), when Herodotus’ intellectual aspirations (“his eyes are ever strained to discern the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters of Life”) are described in the language of *Genesis* 1:2 (not noted at Guy 2007, 293, perhaps on the grounds that the allusion is a very obvious one).

⁹⁹ Guy 2007, 9.

the Athenian Parthenon instead, but apparently changed his mind).¹⁰⁰ Such ironies of collocation appeal to Wilde. He even pulls off a particularly adroit example in a glance at the textual transmission of Polybius: “But perhaps there is no passage which breathes such a manly and splendid spirit of rationalism in the whole of ancient and modern history as one preserved to us in the Vatican—strange resting place for it!”.¹⁰¹

When one notes this narrative of Rome as a recurrent theme in *Historical Criticism*, Polybius’ structural importance within the essay becomes obvious. As well as being the preeminent source for historiographical methodology in antiquity, Polybius affords Wilde an excellent means by which he can effect a transition to Roman history without having to talk much about Roman historians. We have already noted Wilde’s rather erratic and jejune treatment of Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus in *Historical Criticism*. The situation with regard to Tacitus, as we have seen, might have been a little better if Wilde had seen fit to include the Tacitean material from the *Historical Criticism Notebook*, but the impression even from that is that Wilde finds Tacitus rather interesting than wholly admirable: “all three questions Tacitus poses in his history, like many a wiser man he has no answer for them ...”,¹⁰² “... it would be wrong to call it [sc. “Tacitus’ interest in crime”] morbid for it is essentially intellectual and yet it is too analytical to be really healthy ...”.¹⁰³ By contrast, Wilde’s focus on Polybius means that Tacitus can be reduced, in the main narrative of *Historical Criticism*, to little more than a vector for Polybius’ views on the Roman constitution, while enabling Wilde himself to discourse upon Roman history.

Polybius ends this great diapason of Greek thought: when the philosophy of history appears next, as in Plutarch’s tract on “Why God’s anger is delayed”, the pendulum of thought has swung back to where it began.

His theory was introduced to the Romans under the cultured style of Cicero and was welcomed by them as the philosophical panegyric of their state.

The last notice of it in Latin Literature is in the pages of Tacitus who alludes to the stable polity formed out of these elements as a constitution easier to commend than to produce,

100 Smith 2016, 85: “the statue of Mary sits the heart of the Parthenon, how vain a method of defence it was...”. Smith 2016, 186 n. 246 does not note that Wilde replaces the Athenian Parthenon in the notebook with the Roman Pantheon in the essay.

101 Guy 2007, 46.

102 Smith 2016, 124.

103 Smith 2016, 126.

and in no case lasting. Yet Polybius had seen the future with no uncertain eye and had prophesied the rise of the Empire from the unbalanced power of the ochlocracy...¹⁰⁴

Wilde does not do himself or his interpreters any favours with his clarity of expression at this point in the essay. The introduction of Plutarch in the first sentence of the extract above means that “His...” at the beginning of the second could grammatically refer either to Polybius or to Plutarch.¹⁰⁵ Wilde does not spell out to what exactly “his theory” and the “last notice of it” refers.

The context, however, makes it clear that the theory in question is Polybius’ characterization of the Roman state in Book 6 of his history.¹⁰⁶ Tacitus is talking about the theory of the mixed constitution, of which Polybius was by far the most notable exponent, in the passage of the *Annals* which Wilde is freely translating in the penultimate sentence of the extract above.¹⁰⁷ One also notes that Polybius is the subject of the final sentence of the extract. (We may further observe that the earlier reference to Cicero is probably to the constitutional passage in the *De Re Publica* rather than to the general historiographical one in the *De Legibus* that the Oxford editor suggests).¹⁰⁸ Polybius, then, enables Wilde to manage a segue from Greek historiography to Roman history, with only a minimum of dalliance on the less congenial topic of Latin literature.

5 Wilde’s Polybius; Polybius’ Wilde

In its treatment of Rome, *Historical Criticism* reveals its pretensions to consideration as a work of history in its own right. The essay paradigmatically displays, or seeks to display, those virtues in the development of historiographical method which it simultaneously traces through the ancient Greek historians. This brings us to the third way in which, one might argue, Polybius was a particularly tempting subject for Wilde. Wilde, in the writing of his essay, goes out of his way to demonstrate virtues as a historian that are eminently Polybian.

¹⁰⁴ Guy 2007, 40.25–41.1.

¹⁰⁵ Guy 2007, 331: “W’s syntax does not make it absolutely clear whether it is the work of Plutarch or Polybius which he claims to find ‘in the pages of Tacitus’...”.

¹⁰⁶ Pace Guy 2007, 331, who seems to lean towards Plutarch on stylistic grounds, although she does not try to identify the passage.

¹⁰⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.1 (“*delecta ex iis et consociata rei publicae forma laudari facilius quam evenire, vel si evenit, haud diuturna esse potest*”), translated by Wilde as “the stable polity formed out of these elements as a constitution easier to commend than to produce, and in no case lasting”.

¹⁰⁸ Cic. *Rep.* 1.34, pace Guy 2007, 331.

Wilde's Polybius is a man who "employs his own geographical ... knowledge", particularly with regard to mainland Greece.¹⁰⁹ Polybius' ideal historian, as Wilde puts it, is "no bookworm, living aloof from the experiences of the world in the artificial isolation of a university town but a politician, a soldier, and a traveller".¹¹⁰ Wilde is true to the spirit of Polybius in this summation. One might recall, for example, what Polybius himself has to say about Odysseus.¹¹¹

Rather as in the case of Polybius's own remarks, however, it is hard not to suspect a certain element of self-reflexiveness here. A very prominent characteristic of Wilde's depiction of Polybius is the importance that he allots to the historian's native land, and the elaboration with which he describes it. "Born in the serene and pure air of the clear uplands of Arkadeia Polybius may be said to reproduce in his work the character of the place which gave him birth".¹¹² "For he is connected with another idea whose course is as the course of that great river of his native Arcadia which springing from some arid and sun bleached rock gathers strength and beauty as it flows till it reaches the asphodel meadows of Olympia and the light and laughter of Ionian waters".¹¹³ In 1877, two years before composing *Historical Criticism*, Wilde had flouted Oxford rules by visiting, in term-time, both Greece and Rome. He explored the area of ancient Arcadia at the beginning of April, and met Gustav Hirschfeld, director of the German excavations at Olympia.¹¹⁴ In describing the area of Polybius' upbringing, then, Wilde is showing himself true to the Polybian precept that the proper historian must be a traveller—rather than one who loiters in a "University town", as Wilde twice puts it in the

109 Guy 2007, 53.11–19.

110 Guy 2007, 56.31–57.1. Wilde is even more expansive on Polybius the traveller in the *Historical Criticism Notebook*: "(for he had travelled from Gaul & the Atlantic to the Nile & Euxine often as he tells us in grievous perils)" (Smith 2016, 31).

111 Plb. 12.27.10–12.28.1.

112 Guy 2007, 42.26–8.

113 Guy 2007, 59.19–23.

114 Ellmann 1987, 69–70; Ross 2013, 46–47. Smith 2016, 187 n. 250 notes that Wilde visited Mycenae with Mahaffy as well, and that, while Mycenae appears in the *Historical Criticism Notebook* (Smith 2016, 86), it is absent from the parallel passage in *Historical Criticism*. See also Smith 2016, n. 419 on the likely relationship between Wilde's own visit to Athens and what he says about it in *Historical Criticism* and the *Historical Criticism Notebook*.

essay, such as Alexandria,¹¹⁵ or (dare one say it?) such as Oxford. *Historical Criticism* likes to stress the virtues of such autopsy, and, often, does so with reference to areas which Wilde himself has personally seen.¹¹⁶

Such sly self-reflexiveness may have been only for Wilde's own benefit. Essays for Oxford prizes are, at least in principle, anonymous. Wilde's primary (and perhaps only) intended readership should not have been aware of how thoroughly *Historical Criticism* was informed by the personal experiences of its author. All the same, the decision to dwell upon the Arcadia with which Wilde had made himself personally familiar is suggestive. Even if only for his own amusement, Wilde fashions a vision of himself as the adventurous and experienced historian, in contradistinction to the bookworm who languishes in a library. For such a self-fashioning, Polybius was the ideal ancient model.

6 Conclusion

It is difficult to disagree with the verdict that *Historical Criticism*, in the form that has come down to the present day, is a scrappy affair. It does, indeed have a rickety structure. Its claims about ancient historiography (especially where that ancient historiography is in Latin) are occasionally wide of the mark, or even (though seldom) simply mistaken.

On the other hand, we have seen that Wilde's engagement with both ancient and contemporary authors is far from being a dull and chaotic rehash of a limited number of stale secondary authors. In fact, Wilde, in *Historical Criticism*, is demonstrably interacting with the latest trends in ancient historical scholarship. There is a dialogue with Beesly happening at a couple of points in the essay, which is all the sharper for the fact that the conception of history which *Historical Criticism* articulates is itself in many respects a Positivist one; Wilde appropriates Beesly's insistence that historical forces go beyond the personal passions of individuals, while denying the details of the older scholar's reading of the careers of Catiline, Clodius, and Tiberius. Wilde's prentice work is a livelier affair, and more in tune with current historical debates, than some elements of recent scholarship have suggested.

115 Guy 2007, 42.16–17: “The narrow, artificial atmosphere of that University town as we may call it ...”. For the other instance, see n. 110 above.

116 As for example at Guy 2007, 20.22–3: “...any one who has compared the waste fields of the Eurotas plain, with the lordly monuments of the Athenian acropolis”.

In particular, Wilde's use of Polybius has all the interest which Ellmann's passing remark in his biography suggests. Polybius is a fertile source of historiographical data for Wilde. But he is also something more. The Greek historian of Rome gives Wilde a handy means to expatiate upon the subject of that city without having to devote too much space to Latin writers. And Polybius the traveller, with his easy contempt for the stay-at-home historian, proves a very congenial model to the man who bunked off Greats to visit Greece.

Appendix: A Supplementary List of Classical Allusions in Wilde's *Historical Criticism* and *Historical Criticism Notebook*

As the reader will have seen, Wilde alludes to a wide range of passages from ancient authors in both his *Historical Criticism* essay and the *Notebook* which he used to put the essay together. Wilde does not make the precise source for many of these allusions explicit in either text. Josephine Guy, Philip E. Smith II, and Horst Schroeder track down the vast majority of these allusions in their valuable commentaries and articles on the two works.¹¹⁷ Some, however, remain as yet unidentified in print.¹¹⁸

The present Appendix seeks to identify the provenance of some of these unidentified left-overs, supplementing (and, rarely, correcting) this previous work. Beside this labour's general utility to future scholars, it helps to clarify our picture of Wilde's habits of allusion.¹¹⁹ What follows is keyed to the texts of *Historical Criticism* and the *Historical Criticism Notebook* as presented in Guy 2007 and Smith 2016, respectively. References to Guy give page and line number in her edition and page numbers for her commentary; references to Smith exclude line numbers, which the *Notebook* itself, as a working document, lacks, but include, where relevant, the numeration of notes in Smith's commentary. Spelling mistakes and oddities of expression in the lemmas are Wilde's own; these are so common, particularly in the *Historical Criticism Notebook*, that I have not bothered to sprinkle

¹¹⁷ Guy 2007, 269–360; Smith 2016, 149–225; Schroeder 2009, 64–70, Schroeder 2013a, 62–77, Schroeder 2013b, 57–76.

¹¹⁸ Schroeder 2013a, 77: "...there are, metaphorically speaking, still many keys which need to be retrieved, many passages to be explored, many lumber-rooms to be turned upside down".

¹¹⁹ Cf. Guy 2007, 269–72.

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6.24–5: “the arrows which rattled in the quiver of the ‘Far Darter’” The reference to Apollo’s arrows rattling in this passage makes it an allusion to Hom. *Il.* 1.46.

10.1: “There were heroes before the son of Atreus” Hor. *Od.* 4.9.25 (which confirms Guy’s hypothesis (292) that the ‘son of Atreus’ in this passage is Agamemnon rather than Menelaus).

27.10: “the elaborate researches of Mr Taylor and Sir John Lubbock have done little more than verify the theories put forward in the *Bound Prometheus* and the *De Rerum Natura*”. Lucretius’ account of the rise of humanity from barbarism is at Lucretius 5.925–1457; at *Historical Criticism Notebook* 6, which corresponds to this section, Wilde misidentifies the passage as coming from Book Four.

40.30–2: “His theory was introduced to the Romans under the cultured style of Cicero and was welcomed by them as the philosophical panegyric of their state”. Cic. *Rep.* 1.34, rather than *Leg.* 1.5. See the discussion in the text of the main essay above (p. 434 with n. 108).

40.34: “the stable polity formed out of these elements as a constitution easier to commend than to produce, and in no case lasting”. Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.1, and see the discussion in the main text of the article above (p. 434 with n. 107).

62.10: “Like Apollo it [sc. ‘the Greek spirit’] had lost none of its divinity through its long servitude”. Guy seems to understand this as a reference to the on-going popularity of Apollo’s cult.¹²⁰ It is more likely that Wilde is alluding to the fact that Apollo was a god who, in myth, was constrained on a number of occasions to serve mortals (“servitude”) on account of his transgressions, although it is not easy to determine whether Wilde principally has in mind Apollo’s service to Admetus, whom he served as a shepherd (compare, for example, Eur. *Alc.* 6–9), or his work with Poseidon at Troy for Laomedon (as at Hom. *Il.* 7.452–3, 21.441–57).

64.14–16: “Cicero had a good many qualifications for a scientific historian and (as he usually did) thought very highly of his own powers”. Cic. *Leg.* 1.5 (see p. 427 and n. 71 in the main article above).

64.16–17: “On passages of ancient legend however he is rather unsatisfactory. For while he is too sensible to believe them he is too patriotic to reject them”. Cic. *Leg.* 1.3–4 (see p. 427 and n. 72 in the main article above).

64.31: “how many tribunes there were”. Livy 2.33.2–3.

120 Guy 2007, 353.

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6 “the 4th book *De Rerum Natura*”. See my note on *Historical Criticism* 27.10 above.

28 “Thucydides had indeed recognized the essential by *πρόφασις* and *αἰτία*”. Thuc. 1.23.6, as in the passage of *Historical Criticism* that corresponds to it, which, *contra* Smith,¹²¹ is 49.19–20 (“Thucydides had pointed out the difference between the real and alleged cause”)¹²² rather than 49.23–5, which is about causal vocabulary in Polybius instead. Smith does not, I think, realize that Thucydides, too, has a vocabulary of *aitia* and *prophasis*, which he uses rather differently to Polybius. Subsequent scholarship has tended to understand the explanatory power which Thucydides allots to these two concepts somewhat differently from Wilde.¹²³

31 “(for he had travelled from Gaul & the Atlantic to the Nile & Euxine often as he tells us in grievous perils)”. Polybius mentions the hazards that he faced in travelling to Gaul and the Atlantic at Plb. 3.59.7; his visit to Alexandria (and so the Nile delta) is mentioned at Plb. 34.14.6. It is more difficult to back up Wilde’s assertion that Polybius personally visited the Euxine, although the historian does say that he has gone to Sardis in Asia Minor (Plb. 21.38.7) and gives a detailed account of Sestos and Abydos at Plb. 16.9.3.

59 “but as far as a military training is concerned we are not disposed to regard as in any way æ necessary qualification for a historian, or indeed a useful occupation training for any intellectual man: Gibbon indeed says somewhere that ... but then he was...”. Wilde’s jottings are quite elliptical at this point, but it is clear that he has just been talking about the usefulness or otherwise of military training to an historian. The way in which the reference to Gibbon is structured (“indeed ... but”) suggests that Wilde is thinking of a passage where Gibbon asserts the position, contrary to Wilde’s, that such training is useful to a practising historian. It is therefore likely that what Wilde has in mind is a famous passage from Gibbon’s *Memoirs of my Life and Writing*, recalling his commission in the Hampshire Militia: “The discipline and evolutions of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legion; and the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers (the reader may smile) has not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire”.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Smith 2016, 160 n. 80.

¹²² Schroeder 2013b, 64–65 identifies the relationship of *Historical Criticism* 49.19–20 to Thuc. 1.23.6.

¹²³ Hornblower 1991, 65.

¹²⁴ Murray 1897, 190.

66 “Livy had spoken of Brutus & Cassius with respect, under Tiberius men were murdered for daring to praise their hero”. Wilde is alluding here to Tacitus’ handling of the death of Cremutius Cordus, who was put on trial under Tiberius for praising Brutus and calling Cassius the “last of the Romans” (Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.1); Tacitus has Cremutius Cordus defend himself by mentioning that Livy often treated Cassius and Brutus with respect (Tac. *Ann.* 4.34.5). Note that this passage appears in the *Annals* very shortly after the discourse on the longevity or otherwise of mixed constitutions which Wilde uses elsewhere in his work (*Historical Criticism* 40.34, *Historical Criticism Notebook* 114; see my notes on these passages).

90 “till in the vain sceptics of S. E. it wasted its strength fruitlessly in the barren attacks of”. Smith correctly notes that this passage informs *Historical Criticism* 62.28–32, which concerns the three philosophical systems (Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Scepticism) which Wilde sees as influential in classical Rome.¹²⁵ However, Smith’s hypothesis that “S. E.” “might be taken as abbreviations for Stoicism and Epicureanism” does not really work: Wilde speaks of the “vain sceptics of S. E.”, and would have known that neither Stoics nor Epicureans were Sceptics (contrast, for example, D. L. 10.146). It seems more likely that “S. E.” stands for “Sextus Empiricus”, the most substantial extant source for the doctrines of ancient Scepticism.

91 “Daedalus was a good looking sailor boy”. Palaephatus 12 (Brodersen 2002, 50). Wilde has crossed out a great deal here, and his train of thought is once again quite elliptical. I suspect, *pace* Smith,¹²⁶ that Wilde was actually thinking of the young Icarus (who also appears in that section of Palaephatus) as the “good-looking sailor boy” rather than his father, who would not be in the right age category for such an appellation.

114 “Tac alludes to the fact of Empire having succeeded the Rep as a proof of the unsoundness of the theory.” The allusion here is to Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.1, as in the passage of *Historical Criticism* that corresponds to it. See my note on *Historical Criticism* 40.34 above.

125 “Agrippina’s guilty love for Nero corroborated by authors a popular belief as well as by the psychological probabilities afforded by her previous career”. Smith, noting the reference “IV*Ix” after this passage, correctly sees “IV*Ix” as pointing to Tac. *Ann.* 4.60, which mentions Agrippina’s partiality to Nero.¹²⁷ At that point in Tacitus’ narrative, however, Agrippina’s love is not yet explicitly

125 Smith 2016, 188 n. 261.

126 Smith 2016, 189 n. 262: “his notebook reference to Daedalus as a good-looking sailor boy”.

127 Smith 2016, 209 n. 369.

“guilty”, nor is there any corroboration by “authors” or resort by the narrator to psychological probabilities. The key passage for Agrippina’s *guilty* love for her son is Tac. *Ann.* 14.2, where Tacitus recounts the versions of the story that Agrippina offered herself to Nero. This not only contains corroborating references to authors (Cluvius at 14.2.1; Fabius Rusticus at 14.2.3), but also delves into the question of what version of the story is most in line with Agrippina’s character as revealed by her past career (14.2.4); one may also note that two earlier attributed passages on this page of the *Notebook* are also from *Annals* Book Fourteen.¹²⁸ Wilde’s mention of *Annals* 4.60 is thus more in the nature of an afterthought mentioning a prior place where Agrippina is mentioned in an emotional connexion to Nero than the claimed provenance for the whole passage that precedes it.

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128 Cf. Smith 2016, 208 nn. 366–67.

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