A Greek Looks at Rome: Polybius VI Revisited*

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1.

In 217 B.C.E. a conference was held at Naupactus on the Corinthian Gulf to try to bring to an end the war between the Macedonian Confederacy, led by Philip V, and the Aetolian league. It became famous for a remarkable speech by Agelaus of Naupactus, who, if we can believe Polybius's account, urged all Greeks to bury their differences and to turn their eyes to the 'cloud in the West', that is to the struggle between Carthage and Rome, since the winner in that conflict was likely to go on to destroy Greek freedom.[1] Almost exactly fifty years later, in 168, at the battle of Pydna, that prophecy was fulfilled: for in that year the Macedonian monarchy under Perseus was abolished and the Seleucid king Antiochus IV was humiliated by a Roman envoy at Eleusis in Egypt.[2] Henceforth Rome was the undisputed superpower. The Roman victory was followed by a purge throughout Greece, as a result of which most men of influence found themselves detained in Italy. Among them was the Achaean statesman and future historian, Polybius, who was to spend the next sixteen years in Italy, where he planned and began his great history of Rome. In this he set out to show 'how and thanks to what kind of constitution (πῶς καὶ τίνι γένει πολιτείας)' Rome had become mistress of the inhabited world, the *oikoumene*, in not quite fifty-three years.[3]

In its original form this *History* was designed to cover the years 220 to 167 in thirty books. These were later extended to forty to provide a closing date in 146/5, when both Corinth and Carthage had been destroyed and Polybius's native Achaean confederacy disbanded. But this extension will not concern us here, since what I am concerned with now is Book 6, which was unquestionably part

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1 Polyb. 5.104. Henceforth references are to Polybius unless otherwise indicated.

2 29.27.

3 1.1.5.

of the original plan;[4] for if the *History* as a whole described *how* Rome rose to her dominant position, the other half of the enquiry —'thanks to what kind of constitution' — was to find its answer in Book 6. An Italian scholar has recently argued[5] that the purpose of Book 6 was to contrast the orderly world of Rome with the confusion rife in the Hellenistic kingdoms, as could be seen in the wars of Macedonia and Syria described in Books 4 and 5. A good historian, it is true, often has more than one reason for including particular items in his work: but the contrast Lucio Troiani wishes to draw is one of minor importance and not such that, alone, it would justify devoting a whole book to a description of the Roman *politeia*. Like most scholars who have interested themselves in this topic, I translate *politeia* here as 'constitution'; indeed that is the basic meaning of the word. But *politeia* often includes more than simply the political arrangements within a state. It can, and frequently does — for example in Plato's *Politeia* — embrace social customs and a general way of life, ἔθη καὶ νόμιμα, to use Polybius's phrase. In Book 6 the account of the *politeia* is extended to include such topics as Roman religion and the organisation of the army with which Rome conquered the world.

2.

Book 6 of Polybius's *History* is an extraordinary and complicated piece of writing. Polybius places it at the point in Roman history when Hannibal's victory at Cannae had brought Rome to her knees. From then on the way was to be all uphill. I have been interested in this book for over fifty years[6] — as long as it took the Romans to rise to world dominion! — and my reason for returning to it now is that some distinguished scholars have recently shown themselves to be not entirely clear about what exactly Polybius is trying to say. As I have just observed, the book is complicated. That is because it represents a mixture of theorising on the basis of doctrines set out by earlier Greek political writers, including Plato, members of the peripatetic school and perhaps others, together with Polybius's own observation of Roman political institutions and customs during sixteen years spent as a rather privileged detainee at Rome. What he is trying to do in Book 6 is to interpret what he saw there in terms of certain

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4 Cf. especially 3.2.6 and 6.2.3. There is nothing in book 6 which cannot have been written by 150; see my *Polybius* (Berkeley, 1972) 134.

5 L. Troiani, 'Il funzionamento dello stato ellenistico e dello stato romano nel v e nel vi libro delle *Storie* di Polibio', in *Ricerche di storiografia greca di età romana* (Pisa, 1979) 9-19.

6 See, for example, *CQ* 37 (1943) 73-89, 'Polybius and the Roman constitution', superseded by *CQ* n.s. 4 (1954) 97-122 'The construction of the sixth book of Polybius' (in conjunction with C.O. Brink); *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* 1 (Oxford, 1957) 635-746; *Polybius* (n. 4) 130-56.

traditional Greek views about the nature of states and human society. In the process he sometimes forces his material into an over-schematic form and, moreover, simplifies and abbreviates, to make the evidence fit the pattern he imposes. Nevertheless, though open to justifiable criticism in places, his attempt to apply Greek political theory to Rome is a striking innovation, which deserves our full attention. As far as we know, this had never been attempted before.

Unhappily, Book 6 is incomplete; but we can reconstitute its original shape with some confidence from the fragments contained in the Codex Urbinas and in the so-called Constantinian excerpts, together with passages in later writers who quote Polybius, not least Athenaeus, who had the useful habit of quoting the number of the book from which he took his passages. There are also one or two helpful indications elsewhere in the *History*. So let me now briefly sketch its contents. After a short introduction Polybius explains that there are various kinds of constitution, but that whereas those found in Greek states are simple and therefore easy to understand, that of Rome is quite the opposite, because it is complicated; and its future is hard to foretell, through ignorance about its past.[7] Simple constitutions are of three kinds, kingship, aristocracy and democracy. And each of these has a perverted form, tyranny, oligarchy and ochlocracy (or mob-rule). Historically the simple constitutions follow each other in a natural succession of primitive monarchy, true kingship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy and, following that, democracy, which declines into mob-rule and eventually ends in monarchy once more. At this point the cycle begins again. To these simple forms, however, another must be added, namely a mixed constitution, such as Lycurgus set up at Sparta. This was a mixture of the three simple, uncorrupted varieties. Polybius then traces in detail the way in which the successive constitutions succeed each other; this process he calls the *anacyclosis,* a word otherwise unrecorded in this sense.[8] For convenience I shall call it simply the constitutional cycle.

Rome, like Sparta, was fortunate in having acquired a mixed constitution. But, whereas that at Sparta had been set up by one individual, the famous lawgiver Lycurgus, that at Rome had been reached 'by the discipline of many struggles and troubles, and always choosing the best in the light of experience gained in disaster.'[9] At this point in the book there is, unfortunately, a long lacuna. We know, however, that Polybius here had a substantial section describing in some detail the early development of Rome down to the year 450, the date of the Decemvirate; but, apart from a few trivial details and a handful of dates, this section has been entirely lost.[10] It was followed by a passage that has survived

[7] 6.3.1-4.
[8] 6.3.5-9.14.
[9] 6.10.14.
[10] 6.11a.1-10; cf.21.13.11=6.1.9, on the Salian priests.

complete, in which the powers of the consuls, the senate and the people — which represent the royal, aristocratic and popular elements in the state — and the checks which were exercised on each of these by the other two, are described at length.[11]

Next comes an account of the Roman army and military system, nominally as it existed at the time of Cannae.[12] This is important, since it was through the army that Rome rose to world-power during the fifty-three years from 220 to 167. The army is also the element in which Rome is superior to Sparta, for Sparta, we are told, was unsuccessful when it came to foreign conquest; and foreign conquest is something that Polybius rates highly.[13] In the next section the Roman constitution is compared with those of other noteworthy states, in particular those of Sparta and Carthage, especially Carthage;[14] and finally Polybius sketches the probable future development of Rome and rounds off the book with an anecdote illustrating the high Roman morale which existed after the defeat at Cannae, thus bringing us back to the point at which he interrupted his narrative.[15]

3.

As one can clearly see, the book contains a bewildering variety of loosely, but logically connected themes, and I shall now discuss one or two of these in greater detail. To begin with, there is an obvious problem, which Polybius has not wholly surmounted, concerning the cycle of constitutions. This cycle, Polybius emphasises,[16] was a natural development; and by 'natural', κατὰ φύσιν, Polybius means that it follows the biological pattern, to which he repeatedly refers and which requires all things to have their birth, growth, prime, decay and end. But it is not at all easy to reconcile such a scheme with that of the constitutional cycle, which has no clear prime but, once started, is subject to perpetual change in a circular form, with a series of high points in kingship, aristocracy and democracy, each of them followed by a corresponding low point in their successive perversions. Various attempts have been made to reconcile this cycle with the biological sequence, but never, I believe, with success.[17]

Another difficulty concerns the nature of the revolutionary changes within the cycle, thanks to which the perverted forms of tyranny and oligarchy are

11 6.11.1-18.8.
12 6.19.1-42.6
13 6.48.6-8.
14 6.43.1-56.15.
15 6.57.1-58.13.
16 6.4.12-13.
17 See my *Historical Commentary* (n. 6) 1.645-7 on the *anacyclosis* and the biological theory.

superseded by the next 'good' forms, namely aristocracy and democracy. As Wilfried Nippel has recently pointed out,[18] these transformations do not, as one might expect, reflect changes in power within society. In each case it is the *people* who overthrow the corrupt rulers and then hand over power, first to the noble leaders, aristocrats, and later, when aristocracy declines into oligarchy, no longer either to kings or to a select few, but to themselves. Thus the changes here contemplated do not correspond to changes in the power relations of various groups in society, as they do in Aristotle. The social base is always 'the people' and the circumstances leading to the violent change are of a moral nature, namely corruption in the rulers, which arises 'naturally', just as rust arises in iron or woodworm in timber. This is a profoundly pessimistic view of the effects of power and of the limited life and effectiveness of all political forms. Polybius nowhere suggests that this 'inbuilt evil' (σύμφυτον κακόν) within the successive simple constitutional forms can be corrected by exercising moral pressure on the offending elements. The only long-lasting solution is to be found in a constitution which embodies various elements rather than in any single form.

4.

What Polybius actually says is that there are three kinds of constitution (τρία γένη πολιτειῶν), namely kingship, aristocracy and democracy, but that the best constitution is a combination 'of all the afore-mentioned forms' (πάντων τῶν προειρημένων *ἰδιωμάτων*).[19] This certainly appears to be a reference to the 'mixed constitution', which was by this time a well-known concept, going back at least as far as Thucydides, who praised that set up at Athens by Theramenes as a moderate mixture (ξύγκρασις) as regards the few and the many.[20] And indeed Aristotle[21] even regarded Solon's constitution in sixth-century Athens as a mixture. That this is what Polybius is here talking about has been generally agreed. Recently, however, the eminent French scholar Claude Nicolet has argued that this 'ideal' Roman constitution was not a mixed constitution at all, but an aristocracy.[22] We should, I think, glance at the arguments he puts forward for this paradoxical view.

First, he alleges that Polybius is not describing a constitution composed of three different forms, but one which contains 'characteristics' of those forms. He bases this somewhat arcane argument on the meaning of the word ἰδίωμα in the

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18 W. Nippel, *Mischverfassungstheorie und Verfassungsrealität in Antike und früher Neuzeit: (Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21) (Stuttgart, 1980) 142-56.

19 6.3.5-7.

20 Thucyd.8.97.2.

21 Aristot.*Pol*.2.12.1273 b 35ff.

22 C. Nicolet, 'Polybe et la constitution de Rome' in *Demokratia et Aristokratia* (ed.Nicolet) (Paris, 1983) 15-35.

passage I have just quoted, which refers to 'all the afore-mentioned ἰδιώματα'. Now ἰδίωμα does commonly mean a 'specific quality', a 'characteristic' of something, as in Polyb. 2.38.10, where it is used of the characteristics of the Achaean political principles (προαίρεσις) and constitution. But Polybius uses it in relation to the three single constitutional forms for quite another reason. Having just mentioned 'three constitutional forms (πολιτεῖαι)', he now wants to say that the best πολιτεία is one consisting of all three. But that would involve a rather clumsy repetition of the word πολιτεία and so, for euphony, instead of saying 'of the three πολιτεῖαι' he substitutes the phrase 'of the three ἰδιώματα'.[23] In his *Polybios-Lexikon* Mauersberger renders ἰδίωμα in this passage as 'Staatsform', 'constitutional form'. This must be right, for Polybius cannot here mean 'afore-mentioned characteristics', as Nicolet alleges, since he has not mentioned 'characteristics' before, but only constitutional forms, i.e. kingship, aristocracy and democracy. So Nicolet's first reason for thinking that Polybius is not describing a 'mixed constitution' vanishes.

His second reason lies in a passage in Book 23[24] where, in an obituary on Scipio Africanus, Polybius describes him as 'pursuing fame in an aristocratic state'. That is indeed inconsistent with the argument in Book 6 that during the third and second centuries Rome had a mixed constitution. But Polybius has a very good reason for this remark about Scipio. He specifically wants to contrast him with the Achaean leader Philopoemen, who died in the same year and who 'pursued fame in a democratic state' viz. the Achaean confederation.[25] If then one asks, as one must, which is Polybius's more considered view, the fully argued exposition in Book 6 or this isolated comment in Book 23, introduced to create a rhetorical contrast, then I think there can be no doubt that one must opt for the former. The whole tenor of the argument in Book 6, including the comparison with Sparta, where Lycurgus had introduced a mixed constitution, is against the view that Polybius seriously regarded third- and second-century Rome as an aristocracy. It is true that he tells us that at Rome, in contrast to Carthage, at the time of the Hannibalic War deliberation was still in the hands of the 'best people', the aristocracy;[26] but, as Viktor Pöschl pointed out long ago,[27] that is where deliberation *should* be in a mixed constitution and Polybius's mention of it here shows that the Roman constitution had not yet begun the downward

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23 In a discussion following the reading of this paper in Jerusalem, Professor A. Laks suggested that an additional reason for Polybius's choice of the word ἰδίωμα might be its suitability to describe a *specific* constitutional form, as opposed to the *mikte*.

24 23.14.1.

25 23.12.5.

26 6.51.5-8.

27 V. Pöschl, *Römischer Staat und griechisches Staatsdenken bei Cicero* (Berlin, 1936) 61; see my *Historical Commentary* (n. 6) 1.736.

decline evident at Carthage, where deliberation was already in the hands of the people (οἱ πολλοί). That is why, to the outsider, who cannot get the whole picture,[28] the Roman constitution, falsely, appears to be aristocratic (τελείως ἀριστοκρατικὴ φαίνεθ' ἡ πολιτεία).[29] It is, moreover, difficult to see why Polybius should have gone to such pains to describe the mixed constitution as a means of avoiding a built-in tendency to corruption in the separate constitutional forms, if it was not relevant at Rome, where there was an aristocracy containing only certain 'characteristics' of the three best separate forms.

If then we agree that Rome enjoyed a 'mixed constitution', how exactly is this to be envisaged? The similar Lycurgan constitution at Sparta is 'mixed' in the sense that it is in a state of equilibrium, like a balance (ἰσορροποῦν καὶ ζυγοστατούμενον).[30] This was not a new idea. The Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum had described Sparta in much the same terms in the fourth century.[31] The Roman constitution was mixed in a very similar way. It was not, that is to say, like a cake made out of well-mixed ingredients. On the contrary, its three main elements remained separate, but exercised a series of checks or restraints over each other, in such a way as to create a balance and ensure political stability. For Polybius does not define those elements as constitutional forms such as kingship, aristocracy and democracy, but rather as concrete, political entities operating in a political continuum — the consuls, the senate and the people, which embody, respectively, the royal, the aristocratic and the democratic elements in the state. As we saw, he devotes a long section of Book 6 to listing the powers exercised by each of these entities and to showing how any two can limit and constrain the power of the third.[32]

5.

Having described the mixed constitution and how it functioned, Polybius was faced with a serious problem. He had to show how it could have arisen 'naturally' out of a constitutional cycle which, in its natural form, had no place for it. As we saw, it had arisen, not like the one at Sparta, at the hands of a single lawgiver, nor by any process of reasoning, but 'by the discipline of many struggles and troubles and always choosing the best in the light of experience gained in disaster'.[33] We know that Polybius's account of the operation of the

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28 6.12.3.
29 6.13.8.
30 6.10.7.
31 See my *Historical Commentary* (n. 6) 1.640-41.
32 6.11.11-18.8.
33 See above, n. 9.

constitution was followed by a section describing the early history of Rome and it is a reasonable assumption that this account was designed to explain how Rome moved over from the revolving wheel of the cycle to the relative stability of the mixed constitution. Since Johannes Schweighaeuser's outstanding edition of Polybius at the end of the 18th century, it has been usual to call this section the *Archaeologia* — a term not, as so many scholars assert, without any ancient authority, but one taken from a passage in the *Roman History* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus,[34] where Polybius is listed among those historians who have written on early Rome — though in fact the word *archaeologia* is there used specifically in reference to Hieronymus of Cardia. Unfortunately, of this section there survive only a few dates and some isolated and rather trivial, if sometimes illuminating, comments, such as the information that it was customary for Roman men to kiss their female relatives on meeting them, in order to ascertain whether they had been illicitly drinking wine.[35] Otherwise the whole of the *Archaeologia* is lost. As one can imagine, scholars over the years have devoted a great deal of effort to trying to recover what it said. On this Professor Nicolet judges it wiser to remain silent: 'plus sage de garder le silence'.[36] He may be right. But if we are to understand Polybius's argument in Book 6, I think we have to take a chance and see how far we can get with this question. In tackling it, we are not entirely helpless.

As I have already indicated, we know that Polybius's account went down to 450 and the Decemvirate.[37] So it is a reasonable assumption that it was from that date that the mixed constitution came into existence. We also know that Polybius thought that it was at its best at the time of the Hannibalic War,[38] — which perhaps implies that it was no longer at its best in the mid-second century, when he was writing. If, however, the mixed constitution came into existence in 450, then between 751, the year Polybius gave for the foundation of the city, and 450 Rome presumably followed, somehow or other, the constitutional cycle as he describes it. In fact, the events of early Rome can, with a little help, be fitted into that cycle, if we assume that Romulus was the original primitive monarch, Numa, who introduced many religious institutions at Rome, and perhaps the elder Tarquin or Servius Tullius were the good kings, Tarquinius Superbus the tyrant, the early republic the aristocracy and the second decemvirate the oligarchy — after which the mixed constitution took over.

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34 Dion.Hal.*Ant.Rom.*1.6.

35 6.11a.4.

36 C. Nicolet, 'Polybe et les institutions romaines' in *Polybe* (Entretiens Hardt 20: ed. E. Gabba; Vandoeuvres-Geneva 1974) 211n.

37 Cf. 6.11.1 with the note in my *Historical Commentary* (n. 6) 1.674 and that of R. Weil, *Polybe, Histoires Livre vi* (Paris, 1977) 85, with the complementary note of C. Nicolet, ibid. p. 146.

38 6.51.5.

This seems a plausible scheme, in outline, but it leaves a good many problems and difficulties. For example, the conditions in which Romulus set up his monarchy are quite different from those which followed some natural cataclysm, as described in the cycle. What is more important, did the Roman constitution pass directly from oligarchy to a mixed form, avoiding democracy, in the year 450? This seems very unlikely, for it would run directly counter to Polybius's insistence that Rome acquired her mixed constitution by choosing the best course in a series of crises over a period of time. So should we perhaps think of Rome as taking on board, from the outset, first the aristocratic and later the democratic elements that eventually enabled it to enjoy a mixed constitution? That was the view of Fritz Taeger, who wrote a striking but harshly criticised book about Polybius's *Archaeologia* in 1922.[39] In particular, he was attacked, a decade later, by Viktor Pöschl,[40] who rightly pointed out that he had loaded his case with some very unconvincing hypotheses on the extent to which we can recover Polybius's original argument from Diodorus, Dionysius and Cicero, all of whom he assumed to have drawn on Polybius. On the other hand, Pöschl misunderstands Taeger's argument at some points and, I would now argue, is wrong to reject it outright. For Taeger was certainly justified in trying to relate the development of Rome to the constitutional cycle: otherwise why should Polybius have included both a detailed account of that cycle and a sketch of early Roman history in Book 6? But before I take this argument any further, I must turn to an essential piece of evidence which is directly relevant to our problem.

6.

In 1821 Angelo Mai discovered the lacunose text of Cicero's *De re publica* on a palimpsest in the Vatican Library and it became immediately clear that for the earlier books of this work Cicero had drawn on Polybius; for he describes him there (speaking in the person of Scipio Aemilianus) as 'our friend Polybius, who is unsurpassed in chronological accuracy'.[41] This reference to Polybius suggested that Cicero had taken at least his dates for the reigns of the kings from his work; but had he utilised this for more than that? There is good reason to think that he had. As we saw, Polybius interpreted a mixed constitution as one in which various elements were balanced to create stability. Now Cicero says, in *de re publica* 2.42, a passage in which he compares the Roman state at the time of the kings to those of Sparta and Carthage, that the three elements of kingship, aristocracy and democracy 'were mixed, but in such a way that there was no proportion whatsoever' (*ita mixta ... ut temperata nullo fuerint modo*). In his scheme, apparently, the various elements were there from the start, but they were prop-

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39 F. Taeger, *Die Archäologie des Polybios* (Stuttgart, 1922).
40 See above, n. 27.
41 Cic. *de re pub.* 2.27.

erly combined only with the acquisition of a fully mixed constitution. May we then assume that Polybius had sketched a similar development in Book 6? That is a question not easy to answer. As Pöschl has shown, Cicero used other sources besides Polybius; and, although Cicero's mixed constitution is 'properly combined' (*temperata*), that combination is not achieved by the various elements in the state exercising a check on each other, but by something far more reminiscent of the *concordia ordinum*, Cicero's own ideal, in which those elements were integrated under the guidance of the *optimates*. Furthermore, in Cicero's dialogue C. Laelius is made to say[42] that the ideal state which Scipio is describing is 'a new style of discussion (*ratio ad disputandum nova*), nowhere employed in the writings of the Greeks', which certainly sounds like a claim to originality. Laelius goes on to explain, however, that by this he means that Scipio is not inventing an ideal state wholly in the air, *suo arbitratu,* like Plato, nor yet discussing various types of state in the abstract, like Plato's successors (i.e. Aristotle and Theophrastus). On the contrary, he is dealing with a real state, Rome, and assigning a rationale to its development. But this is surely what Polybius was doing in the *Archaeologia.* So perhaps we should not take Cicero's claim to originality too seriously. After all, we know that Cicero's normal practice in his philosophical works was to draw extensively on Greek sources; and to claim originality was a regular *topos*. I think we can therefore make cautious use of Cicero, as indeed Pöschl admits, in our attempt to recover Polybius's *Archaeologia*.

In so doing we must, however, be clear about certain limitations imposed by an obvious divergence between Cicero's account and what we know must have stood in Polybius. Cicero, for example, has nothing corresponding to the passage at the beginning of the cycle, in which Polybius discusses the earliest stages of human society after some great natural cataclysm, when a primitive horde, in fear, seeks the protection of a monarch, whose main characteristic is physical strength.[43] Indeed Cicero specifically refuses to go into the question of the origins of human society here,[44] though elsewhere[45] he makes clear that (unlike Polybius) he regards the earliest association of human beings in society as springing not from fear and a feeling of weakness, but rather, like Aristotle,[46] 'from a certain social spirit, which nature has implanted in man' (*non tam imbecillitas, quam naturalis quaedam hominum quasi congregatio*). Furthermore, he begins his account of his constitutional cycle, what he calls 'the orbit, whose natural motion and circuitous course you are to recognise' (*ille ... orbis,*

42 Ibid. 2.21.
43 6.5.4-9.
44 Cicero, *de re pub.* 1.38.
45 Ibid. 1.39.
46 Aristot. *Pol.* 1.2.1253 a 1ff.

cuius naturalem motum atque circuitum a primo discite agnoscere), only from the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, the tyrant.[47]

We must not, therefore, expect to find anything like a close reflection of Polybius in Cicero's *De re publica.* We can, however, as Pöschl argued, assume that, like Cicero, Polybius described a natural growth and blossoming of the state, which gradually, by way of the cycle, developed from the sequence of single constitutions to a more stable mixed constitution, and he will have traced that path through the history of early Rome, probably emphasising the critical occasions when Rome chose the right solution.

There are, however, still some unresolved difficulties. Are we, for instance, to assume that all three elements — the royal, the aristocratic and the popular — were present, in some form, at Rome from the outset, but not in due proportion? That is certainly the case in the scheme put forward in Cicero's *De re publica.* Or did society begin with a monarch and then move on first to aristocracy, while retaining a monarchic element, and then to the acquisition of the democratic element essential to the mixed constitution? The second alternative might seem to gain some support from a passage in Book 6,[48] where Polybius, describing the perversion of the aristocratic regime at the hands of the children of the original aristocrats, says that they had no experience of political equality and freedom of speech (πολιτικῆς ἰσότητος καὶ παρρησίας) Why not? Nicolet has argued that it is because political equality and freedom of speech are characteristics of all the three 'good' regimes, but *not* of their corrupt forms.[49] This, however, is an unsatisfactory explanation, since the second generation of aristocrats had been reared by their parents, under whom *ex hypothesi* these qualities did exist. I think we must rather assume that the second-generation aristocrats' ignorance of these two virtues sprang from the fact that they only appear at that point within the constitutional cycle at which one achieves democracy or, in the case of Rome, the mixed constitution, which took its place.

This need not mean, of course, that *all* elements belonging to aristocracy and democracy only entered the cycle at the point at which those forms of government became dominant. That is clear when one bears in mind that Polybius prefers talking about specific state institutions — the consuls, the senate and the people — rather than about political abstractions. These institutions were all there from the beginning of the republic (and in some form from the foundation of the city), though (as Cicero said) their powers were not proportionately mixed. What changes in the various stages of the cycle is the amount of influence each of them exercises. And it is on that that our characterisation of the state as a monarchy, an aristocracy or a democracy depends.

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47 Cicero, *de re pub.* 2.94.
48 6.8.4.
49 Op.cit. (n. 22) 27.

Indeed, as Nippel has shown (and as we have already seen),[50] the people plays a vital role from the beginning of the cycle, overthrowing each corrupt regime and replacing it by its 'good' successor. So what we should perhaps envisage Polybius as having described in the *Archaeologia* is a developing society in which the various organs — magistrates (representing kingly power), leading citizens and the people in general — gradually, or in a series of political acts, some of them violent, assume new relations towards each other, which can be described as kingship, aristocracy and then, elsewhere, democracy but at Rome the mixed constitution.

7.

This hypothetical reconstitution of the *Archaeologia* is to some extent confirmed by what happened after Rome acquired her mixed constitution. For clearly Polybius regarded this, not as a permanent solution to the problems inherent in the constitutional cycle, but merely as a kind of brake on movement. When, towards the end of Book 6, he draws a comparison between the two states locked in a conflict which was to decide the fate of the Mediterranean world, he points out that Carthage also had a mixed constitution[51] — as indeed Cato had recorded[52] — but that at the time of the Hannibalic War Carthage was worse (χείρων) and Rome better (ἀμείνων); and the reason for that was that at Carthage the populace (δῆμος) had acquired the chief voice in deliberation, whereas at Rome this was still under the control of the senate. As we have already seen, that was not, as Nicolet believes, because Rome was really an aristocracy, but because in a mixed constitution at its prime deliberation is one of the prerogatives of the aristocratic element within the state, viz., at Rome, the senate. This tells us something about where Polybius wanted to locate true power within a mixed constitution. It also opens up the question of what would succeed that constitution. If the balance had already slipped a little at Carthage, would this also happen at Rome? And if it did, what would that mean?

Polybius answers that question in chapter 57, almost at the end of Book 6; but he does not emphasise it, for his purpose in writing that book was not to prophecy doom, but to explain Roman success. There are, however, two passages in Book 6 describing how states eventually decline; for though it is true that his constitutional cycle logically has no overall decline, but continues from good to bad and then, after a revolution, to good again, in a circular movement, Polybius at the same time tries to combine this with the 'natural', biological pattern of political birth, growth, prime, decline and destruction. As he says,[53]

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50 Above, n. 18.
51 6.51.1-8.
52 *HRR*. Cato, fg. 86.
53 6.57.1.

'all existing things are subject to decay, a proposition which scarcely requires proof, since the inexorable course of nature (ἡ τῆς φύσεως ἀνάγκη) is sufficient to force it upon us'. Seen in that perspective decline into ochlocracy seems to bring the cycle to its end.

The first of these two passages dealing with decline is to be found at 6.9.6-9, where Polybius sketches the last stage of the cycle, in which democracy is corrupted and becomes mob-rule, declining eventually into complete savagery from which the only escape is a new master. The second is in 6.57, which describes the decline of a particular state, clearly Rome, although Polybius, perhaps from embarrassment, nowhere refers to it by name.

In the first of these passages the rich leaders of the state, who are the grandsons of the democratic founders, come to despise equality and free speech and bankrupt themselves by bribing the people to give them powers which they cannot secure on their own merits. This inspires the people with an appetite for financial hand-outs, and when their original corruptors no longer have enough wealth to continue providing these, they fall for the blandishments of a leader who is bold and ambitious, but poor. So they have recourse to violence, institute massacres, banishments, plunder and division of the land and end up with a new master and a monarch (δεσπότην καὶ μόναρχον). This new master is probably the poor, ambitious man who has led them on to this. He is, as Nicolet rightly observes, a Greek tyrant. For this picture is entirely Greek and draws on Polybius's own experience of similar seizures of power in the Greek political life of the third and second centuries. It bears no relation to Rome.

Chapter 57, on the other hand, deals with the eventual decline of the mixed constitution at Rome. Although this, towards the end, bears some similarity to the process described in 9.6-9, it diverges from it in several essentials. That is, indeed, what we should expect, since it is describing a decline from a mixed constitution, not one from democracy, as is the case in the regular constitutional cycle. Decline begins when after many perils a state achieves 'supremacy and uncontested sovereignty' (ὑπεροχὴν καὶ δυναστείαν ἀδήριτον)[54] — an obvious reference to Rome. For this is a new feature, peculiar to Rome, and indeed the central theme of Polybius's *History*. It leads to great prosperity, an extravagant life-style and growing fierceness in competition for office; and it is this that will initiate the decline. The responsibility for this decline will rest with the people who, flattered by those seeking office, and resentful of greedy politicians, against whom they conceive some grievance, will eventually refuse to obey or even accept equality with their rulers (τοῖς προεστῶσιν) but will demand the greater share for themselves; and this will end in mob-rule.

Where does all this come from? The answer is simple. It exactly matches the situation described by Polybius, in a later book, as existing at Rome after 168. In the course of a digression in Book 31 he gives a character-sketch of Scipio

[54] 6.57.5.

Aemilianus, his friend and patron, in which he contrasts his behaviour with that of his contemporaries. In this passage he asserts that it was precisely from that date that vicious and extravagant behaviour became widespread at Rome, because 'since the fall of the Macedonian kingdom it appeared that Rome enjoyed undisputed dominion and because after the riches of Macedonia had been brought to Rome, there was a great display of wealth, both public and private.[55] Scipio was exceptional in spending his time hunting when the other young men were busy in the forum occupied with legal cases and morning *salutationes,* in an attempt to win popular favour.[56] There can be little doubt that Polybius's prognostication of Roman decline draws directly on his perception of this situation at Rome[57] and not on the Greek parallels so evident in the description of the comparable stage in the constitutional cycle.

In a recent review[58] of the *Festschrift* for Zvi Yavetz in the *Journal of Roman Studies* the Oxford scholar Andrew Lintott rightly pointed out that the divergent route back into the constitutional cycle, which Polybius postulates here, logically suggests a similar divergent route away from the cycle in its early stages, in order to arrive at the mixed constitution. As we have seen, his suggestion was not wholly original, since something like it was outlined in Taeger's study of 1922. But both were, I think, on the right track.

8.

If we look forward to the first century, we can find there many aspects of Roman political life, which seem to correspond with Polybius's account of what is in store for Rome. The exploitation of popular grievances by tribunes, the breakdown of public order at the time of Milo and Clodius, culminating in the burning of the senate-house, and finally the resolution of several decades of disorder and civil war with the setting up of the principate — all this can be pressed into a pattern not unlike the one Polybius describes. But such a comparison would be superficial and misleading. Polybius's strength was not as a prophet. His monarchic conclusion to the cycle comes from Greek political theory, not from a sub-

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55 31.25.6-7.

56 31.29.8-12; for a recent discussion of this passage see Y. Dana, 'Plutarch on political theory and praxis in the career of a Roman statesman in mid-second century BC' in *Teoria e prassi politica nelle opere di Plutarco,* ed. I Gallo and B. Scardigli (Naples, 1993).

57 Polybius had detected the beginnings of this even earlier in the land-legislation of Flaminius (2.21.8).

58 I. Malkin and Z.W. Rubinsohn (eds.) *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in honor of Zvi Yavetz* (Mnemosyne Supplement CXXXIX). Leiden: Brill, 1995 in *JRS* 86 (1996) 193-4.

tle analysis of the situation in second-century Rome. The merits of Book 6 lie elsewhere.

As Taeger long ago observed, this remarkable book represents the first sketch in the history of political philosophy known to us from antiquity, in which an author with practical political experience attempts to investigate and set out, free from utopias, the development of a particular state in a historical context. But one can, I think, go further. Polybius was an intelligent Greek, caught up in a daunting exile, in which personal privilege and racial subordination were uneasily combined. He was, however, unusually resilient in turning his misfortune to direct advantage. Instead of repining in exile, he set out to understand and to elucidate, primarily for his own countrymen, the phenomenon of a new world-power. Book 6 deserves our especial attention because it is there that he has attempted to assess the real significance of Rome by interpreting its past, its present state and its probable future fate against the background of ideas bequeathed to him from Greek political thought. In this direct response to the problems raised by the Roman empire he was the first of a long line of Greeks, including such figures as Panaetius, Poseidonius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus, Plutarch and Aristides. His interpretation suffers from some obvious failings; but that is a useful reminder of how far we are all limited, perhaps irretrievably, by the cultural presuppositions among which we are born and brought up.

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