

The Role of Timaeus in Greek Historiography*

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Last year Lionel Pearson published his monograph *The Greek Historians of the West*. As the subtitle *Timaeus and his Predecessors* indicates, Timaeus is in the centre of the study.¹ In accordance with his previous publications *The Early Ionian Historians* (1939), *The Local Historians of Attica* (1942) and *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great* (1960) Pearson aims to enlarge those fragments that undoubtedly originate in Timaeus with material from later authors, above all from Diodorus and Plutarch.

To accomplish this, Pearson uses two *leges* established by previous scholars which in my opinion are no longer valid today: the “lex Volquardsen”² and the “lex Geffcken”.³ According to the first, Diodorus used only one source for the extended treatment of a particular topic; therefore, in the case of Sicilian history, Timaeus (*FGrH* 566). In fact, Pearson believes that the whole history of Sicily in books 4–21 from the mythical time down to the death of Agathocles in 289/8 B.C. derives from Timaeus and that even differences between him and other authors cited by Diodorus go back to Timaeus: “In fact, it will be argued that when he (*sc.* Diodorus) does mention

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1 L. Pearson, *The Greek Historians of the West. Timaeus and his Predecessors* (Philological Monographs of the American Philological Association, No. 35) Atlanta, Georgia 1987. See now my critical review in *Gnomon* 61 (1989) 520–23.

2 Chr. A. Volquardsen, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen der griechischen und sizilischen Geschichten bei Diodor*, Buch XI–XVI, Kiel 1868.

3 J. Geffcken, *Timaios' Geographie des Westens*, Berlin 1892.

a difference between Timaeus and an earlier writer, it is most likely that he has found the difference recorded in the text of Timaeus". (p. VIII)

This *Einquellentheorie* in its most extreme form⁴ is by no means reconcilable with modern views concerning the way in which Diodorus worked: in addition to one principal source he usually used one or two supplementary sources.⁵ According to the second law adopted by Pearson, agreement or resemblances among the accounts of later writers, e.g. Diodorus, Plutarch, Strabo *etc.*, are a sufficient proof that Timaeus is the common source. Again, *Quellenkritik* has been oversimplified. Especially in the case of Plutarch we must postulate a much more complicated procedure and the use of different sources. It is therefore impossible to trace back the whole vita of Dion or Timoleon to Timaeus, as Pearson does.

The principles of Pearson, therefore, are open to criticism. He stated his main objectives in the preface (p. IX): "My object is to recover as much as possible of his (*sc.* Timaeus') history, to discover what he included in it (and, so far as possible, how he arranged his material), how he described events and situations and how he characterized individuals..., what opinions he expressed and how he differed from or agreed with contemporaries and predecessors... ." Pearson then anticipates possible objections on the part of his readers: "Some readers however will complain that I have not done enough, that I should offer a much more closely argued critical estimate of Timaeus' historical method, his place in the development of Greek historiography, his contribution to chronological research, and so on." His answer to these objections is the following (p. X): "I could answer such complaints simply by saying that, if I attempted to do all this, my book would be so long that no one would have the patience to read it to the end, even if a publisher was foolish enough to print it."

No doubt, this argumentation is a bit simple and strange. For in a monograph of more than 300 pages one would expect some consideration of Timaeus' role in Greek historiography and of his achievements in chronology for the accuracy of which he was already famous in antiquity. On the other hand, one may doubt whether it was necessary to have given so long a

4 Pearson applied the same misleading principles in his earlier article "Ephorus and Timaeus in Diodorus," *Historia* 33 (1984) 1–20, where he rejects Laqueur's thesis.

5 See K. Meister, *Die sizilische Geschichte bei diodor von den Anfängen bis zum Tod des Agathokles*, Diss. Munich 1967. Further literature in my book: *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Hellenismus*, Kohlhammer-Verlag Stuttgart 1990), chapter "Diodor von Agyrion".

paraphrase of Diodorus' treatment of Sicilian history from its beginnings to the death of Agathocles, *i.e.*, a paraphrase of everything which, according to Pearson, derives from Timaeus. However that may be, I will discuss these important questions which Pearson has neglected.

First, some remarks on the life of Timaeus.⁶ He was born *ca.* 350 B.C. in Tauromenion (mod. Taormina) as the son of Andromachus, the ruler of the city. Eight years earlier Andromachus had founded Tauromenion with survivors from Naxos, which had been destroyed by Dionysius I in 403. In 345 Andromachus received Timoleon and gave him the necessary support for his Sicilian expedition. Therefore, after the overthrow of the Sicilian tyrants by Timoleon, Andromachus was the only dynast to retain his position. His son Timaeus was banished *ca.* 315 for unknown reasons by the Syracusan tyrant Agathocles. Timaeus spent his exile in Athens and lived there for fifty years. He became a pupil of the Isocratean Philiscus and wrote there his great historical work entitled *Historiai* or *Sikelikai historiai*. It is possible, but not certain, that he returned to Sicily in the first years of the reign of Hieron II (269–15).⁷ Since his work extended to the year 264, he probably died after 260. According to Pseudo-Lucian (Makrob. 22 = T 5) he reached the age of 96. His life therefore covers an immense period from the more recent tyranny in Sicily to the beginning of the great war between Rome and Carthage.

As for his work, we must first mention a *Sylloge rhetorikon aphormon*, a collection of rhetorical items, in 68 books, ascribed to him by the Suda (s.v. Timaios = T 1). Modern scholars, however, generally deny the authenticity of this work. Another work, the *Olympionikai* or *Chronological handbook*, also mentioned by the Suda, is certainly genuine. The *Olympionikai*, to which we shall return later, are commonly regarded as a preliminary work to the *Historiai*, Timaeus' principal work which comprehended 38 books. The

6 Further literature on Timaeus: R. Laqueur, *RE* VI A (1936) 1076ff. E. Manni, "Da Ippi a Diodoro," *Kokalos* 3 (1957) 137ff. G. De Sanctis, *Ricerche sulla storiografia siceliota*, Palermo 1958. T. S. Brown, *Timaeus of Tauromenion*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1958. A. Momigliano, "Atene nel III secolo a.C. e la scoperta di Roma nelle storie di Timeo di Tauromenio," *RSI* 71 (1959) 529ff. = *La storiografia greca* (1982) 225ff. K. Meister, *Die sizilische Geschichte bei Diodor von den Anfängen bis zum Tod des Agathokles*, Diss. Munich 1967. *Idem*, *Historische Kritik bei Polybios* (1975) 3ff. F. W. Walbank, "The historians of Greek Sicily," *Kokalos* 14/15 (1968/69) 476ff. R. Vattuone, *Ricerche su Timeo: La "pueritia" di Agatocle*, 1982. K. Meister, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung*, 1990, 131ff.

7 See my article "Das Exil des Timaios von Tauromenion," *Kokalos* 16 (1970) 53ff.

Historiai began with the mythical period and extended to the death of Agathocles in 289/8. In addition, Timaeus wrote a separate work, *idia pragmateia*, on the wars with Pyrrhus in South Italy and Sicily and the further developments down to the year 264/3, when war broke out between Rome and Carthage (T 9). Later Polybius began his history with the same year, writing in this way *a fine Timaei, aph' hon Timaios apelipen* (Cf. Pol. 1.5.1 and 39.8.4).

The influence exercised by Timaeus on later authors was enormous. As for the Greeks, he was used *e.g.* by Callimachus, Lycophron, Eratosthenes, Agatharchides, Polybius, Posidonius, Diodorus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Strabo, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Athenaeus, different scholiasts, Stephanus of Byzantium and the Suda; among the Romans, he was used by Fabius Pictor, Cato, Cicero, Cornelius Nepos, Varro, Gellius, Pliny the elder and Tertullianus. Moreover, different *antigraphai* demonstrate the great reputation of Timaeus: the *antigraphai pros Timaion* of the Callimachean Istros (cf. T 16); the 12 books *Against Timaios* of Polemon from Ilion (F 26) and, last but not least Polybius, whose long criticism in book 12 clearly shows that Timaeus was a frequently read and famous author. The question arises: why did Timaeus enjoy such a reputation? What was his role in the development of Greek historiography? To answer this question, I especially would like to discuss the following five aspects of Timaeus' historical work: (1) the thematic, (2) the methodical, (3) the contentual, (4) the chronological and (5) the critical.

(1) *The thematic aspect*

Timaeus re-elaborated and actualized the whole history of Sicily.⁸ Thematically, however, he did not confine himself to the history of Sicily, but also treated the events of South Italy and Carthage, and in several excurses, the development in Greece. Above all, he described the history of Rome and treated not only the beginnings of the city (as, for example, Hieronymus of Cardia did) or single important events (as Theopompus and Clitarchus did), but he was the first Greek historian to delineate the development of Roman history from the heroic age to the epoch-making year 264 B.C. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant.Rom.* 1 6.1 = T 9 b) therefore remarks: "After him (*sc. Hieronymus of Cardia*) *Timaeus, the Siceliot, described the older*

8 For a detailed survey see Meister, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung*, 1990, 131ff.

history of Rome in his general work, while he included the wars against Pyrrhus in a special monograph." And Gellius (*NA* 2.1.1 = T 9 c) goes even further, saying: *Timaeus in historiis quas oratione Graeca de rebus populi Romani composuit.*

Now it is disputed in which of his works Timaeus treated Roman history. The most natural explanation of the text of Gellius, no doubt, is that the older history of Rome was described in the *Historiai*, whereas contemporary events were treated in the special work on Pyrrhus.⁹ However that may be, there can be no doubt that Timaeus was the first Greek historian to give a sketch — even with great *lacunae!* — of the whole of Roman history down to the year 264 B.C. This is a very important achievement, and for this reason Polybius, notwithstanding his great aversion to Timaeus, continued the *Historiai* of the latter.

(2) *The methodical aspect*

The principal *genera* of hellenistic historiography were three. First, the so-called rhetorical historiography which had been inaugurated by Isocrates; its main representatives were Ephorus of Cyme (*FGrH* 70) and Theopompus of Chius (*FGrH* 115). These historians intended above all to give a careful stylistic form to their work: *Tu graphein monon epemelethesan*, says Duris of Samos in his famous polemic against Ephorus and Theopompus (*FGrH* 76 F 1). Second, we have the so-called tragic or dramatic historiography, the origin of which is highly controversial among modern scholars, but I cannot consider this problem now. The aims of these historians, according to the same fragment by Duris, were *mimesis kai hedone*, "imitation and joy." This probably means that they intended to provide a realistic and vivid presentation of events and as a consequence, to influence their readers emotionally.¹⁰ The principal historians writing in this manner were Duris of Samos and Phylarchus (*FGrGist* 81). Finally, there is a third *genus*, the research of facts and causes in the Thucydidean manner, resembling the style of writing which was later designated "*pragmatic history*" by Polybius. According to a wide-

9 For Timaeus' view of the past see Walbank's article in this volume.

10 In a recent article Vivienne Gray (*AJPh* 108 [1987] 467ff.) proposes the following interpretation of *mimesis*: "The meaning of *mimesis* in history is the recreation of reality, encompassing recreation of both character and emotion". I believe this interpretation to be substantially correct.

spread opinion among modern scholars,¹¹ these principal *genera* originally developed independently from each other and were combined only much later by Zenon of Rhodes (*FGrHist* 523), a contemporary of Polybius.

On closer examination, however, we discover that Callisthenes (*FGrH* 124) and Clitarchus (*FGrH* 137), two historians and contemporaries of Alexander the Great, already had combined tragic and rhetorical elements in their histories. So Cicero (*Brut.* 43 = F 34), with regard to Clitarchus, speaks of *rhetorice et tragice ornare*. One of the most outstanding examples of the early mixture of different styles of writing history was Timaeus, and in his case we can control this phenomenon much better than in the case of Callisthenes or Clitarchus. Timaeus was a critical historian who dedicated himself to factual and causal research. At the same time, however he was influenced by the tragic manner of writing history, and, in addition, rhetorical historiography has left its traces in his work. Now, as for the serious research of Timaeus, even Polybius (12.27 a) must admit that in some respects he was very eager to find the truth. Polybius speaks above all of the chronological and documentary accuracy of Timaeus. Characteristic, too, is the following self-testimony of Timaeus (F in Pol. 12.28 a): "He himself, he tells us, had incurred such expense and been put to so much trouble in collecting his notes about the Tyrians and inquiring into the manners and customs of the Ligurians, Celts, and Iberians that he could not hope that either his own testimony or that of others to this would be believed." (Paton's Translation in Loeb) However, Timaeus' theoretical claim to truth and his historiographical *praxis* often did not harmonize. It is not hard to see that the following tendencies weaken the historian's reliability:

- (1) His Sicilian patriotism.
- (2) His hostility to tyrants.
- (3) His hatred of the Carthaginians.
- (4) His immoderate criticism of other historians.
- (5) His invention of verbal speeches.¹²

Above all, many passages in Diodorus concerning the wars against the Carthaginians and the history of Agathocles show that Timaeus was strongly influenced by tragic history. Thus he often describes not only in vivid and dramatic manner the cruelty of Agathocles in every detail (*cf.* D.S. 19.3–21.16), but he depicts in a pathetic way the inhuman sufferings which small

11 Cf. N. Zegers, *Wesen und Ursprung der tragischen Geschichtsschreibung*, Diss. Cologne 1959; D. Flach, *Einführung in die römische Geschichtsschreibung* (Darmstadt 1985) 54.

12 For the details compare K. Meister, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung*, 1990, 131ff.

children, defenceless wives and old men were exposed to during the capture of different towns (cf. D.S. 13.57–58, 59–62, 89, 111 from the wars against Carthage; 19.8.3–6; 20.15.4–6, 70 from the history of Agathocles).

Finally, the rhetorical character of Timaeus's history is obvious. His numerous direct speeches are severely criticized by Polybius (12.25 a 3–5): "Can anyone who reads these speeches help noticing that Timaeus has untruthfully reported them in his work, and has done so of set purpose? For he has not set down the words spoken nor the sense of what was really said, but ... he recounts all these speeches like a man in a school of rhetoric attempting to speak on a given subject, and shows off his oratorical power, but gives no report of what was actually spoken." (Paton's transl. in Loeb) As an example, Polybius cites some passages from a speech delivered by the Syracusan statesman Hermocrates during the congress of Gela in 424 (12.25 k ff. = F 22). The banality of the Timaeian reflections on the difference between war and peace is obvious, and the general inferiority of the speech becomes all the more clear if one compares the Thucydidean version of the same oration (4.59–64). The speech by Timoleon before the Crimissus-battle in 343/2 is likewise full of trivialities (Pol. 12.26 a = F 31 b). This is also true of the two speeches concerning the treatment of the Athenian prisoners in Syracuse (D.S. 13.20–27) and of the speech by the Syracusan knight Theodorus (D.S. 14.65–69) against Dionysius I which probably derive from Timaeus.¹³

(3) *The contentual aspect*

Certainly Timaeus' far-ranging view of history contributed to his great reputation. Not only did the *Historiai* contain accounts of military and diplomatic activities, but many geographical and ethnographical descriptions appeared in it as well. Myth, too, played an important role and there were many excurses regarding cultural and religious history. Last but not least, there were many anecdotes and *thaumasia* of all kind. In this immense work there was, so to speak, something for everyone. We can therefore understand the emphatic praise of Timaeus given by Cicero (*De Or.* 2.55ff. = T 20) who, after mentioning famous historians such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Philistus, Theopompus, Ephorus, Xenophon and Callisthenes, says: *Minimus natu horum omnium Timaeus, quantum autem iudicare possum*

13 See lastly L. Pearson, "The speeches in Timaeus' History," *AJPh* 107 (1986) 350ff.

longe eruditissimus et rerum copia et sententiarum varietate abundantissimus et ipsa compositione verborum non impolitus, magnam eloquentiam ad scribendum attulit, sed nullum usum forensem.

(4) *The chronological aspect*

Pearson is sceptical about the merits of Timaeus in this field: "We may believe that he gave a good many more (*sc.* Olympic dates), but there is quite insufficient evidence to construct a chronological frame-work of Timaeus' history, or to reach any conclusion about his chronological method." (p. 262) In the same context he doubts whether Timaeus gave a comparative list of eponyms. In my opinion Pearson is quite wrong because even Polybius must admit (12.10.4): "I think we all recognize the special characteristic of Timaeus in which he excels and which won him recognition. I mean his great emphasis on accuracy in the matter of dates, his use of official records and his attention to this side of his work." Polybius is more precise when he continues (12.11.1 = T 10): "After all, this is the man who offers us a comparison of the Spartan ephor list (from olden times) with the Spartan king list, who compares the archon list in Athens and the list of priestesses in Argos with the list of the Olympic victors, and reveals the errors that cities have made in their records, with a discrepancy amounting to three months."

To sum up, the merits of Timaeus in the field of chronology are the following:

- (1) He was the first historian to make comparative lists of this kind. In this way he was a forerunner and model for numerous chronographers in antiquity, *e.g.* Apollodorus of Athens and Castor of Rhodes.
- (2) We know that Hippias of Elis and Aristotle had already made lists of Olympic winners. New in the case of Timaeus was not only the comparison with other eponyms, but a thorough revision of these lists. It is the merit of Timaeus that he established the Olympic dates in Greek historiography. Eratosthenes adopted the same dating device in his *Chronographiai*, and, among well-known historians, Polybius and Diodorus use the Olympiad which we still find in late Antiquity.
- (3) Furthermore, in the fragments of Timaeus and in the narrative of Diodorus we can find a number of precise chronological dates. Note, for example, the following:

F 125: Capture of Troia 417 years before the first Olympic games.

F 60: Foundation of Rome and Carthage 38 years before the first Olympic games.

D.S. 5.16.3: Colonization of Ebusus 160 years after the foundation of Carthage.

F 71: Foundation of Massalia 120 years before the battle of Salamis.

D.S. 5.9: Expedition of Pentathlos to Sicily in the 50. Olympiad (580–76).

D.S. 13.59 and 62: Selinus existed 242 years, Himera 240 years.

Besides these, we find, *e.g.* in the history of Agathocles, some precise datings within the course of the year:

19.65: “At the harvest-time...;” 20.69: “At the time of the decline of the Pleiades... .”

(5) *The critical aspect*

In book 12 Polybius mentions often the tendency of Timaeus to criticize nearly all earlier and contemporary historians. This characteristic feature of Timaeus has been observed by many other ancient writers, too. The witty nickname *Epitimaïos*, *dia to polla epitiman* goes back to Istrus, and Diodorus (5.1.3 = T 11) speaks of Timaeus’ *akairoi kai makrai epitimeseis*.

In fact, the systematic criticism of his colleagues in history, for the first time in Greek historiography, played a very important part in Timaeus. He was particularly polemical against Philistus of Syracuse (*FGrH* 556), his immediate predecessor in the field of Sicilian historiography. His principal aim was to justify in this way his own work which naturally was based to a great extent on that of Philistus. As for the origin of the Sicani “he refutes the ignorance of this author” (F 39), as for the Sicilian expedition of the Athenians he even tries “to make him a complete idiot and ignorant” (T 18) and finally, in describing his death, Timaeus could not forbear from insulting him (F 154). Additionally, we find heavy attacks against Homer (F 152), Heraclitus (F 132), Antiochus of Syracuse (T 17), Thucydides (T 18, F 101), Plato (T 18), Isocrates (F 139), Aristotle (T 19, F 156), Callisthenes (F 155), Ephorus (T 17.19, F 7), Theopompus (F 117), Callias of Syracuse (T 17), Demochares (F 35) and Heraclides Ponticus (F 132).

In view of the numerous criticisms and the pungency of the polemic, Koerner’s observation,¹⁴ “that no other Greek historian pronounced himself so often and so variously on his predecessors as Polybius” is wrong. And the following statement by Prof. Walbank in his important article “Polemics in Polybius”¹⁵ should probably be corrected: “When ancient historians wanted

14 R. Koerner, *Polybios als Kritiker früherer Historiker*, Diss. Jena 1957.

15 *JHS* 82 (1962) 1ff.

to take cognizance of what their predecessors had written, they seem usually, though not always, to have preferred an anonymous reference to one by name. To this practice the most noteworthy exception is Polybius". In my opinion the most noteworthy exception is Timaeus.

Conclusion

The re-elaboration and actualization of the whole history of the Western Greeks down to 264, the special regard for Roman history, the synthesis of different historiographical *genera*, the grand conception of history, the thematic variety, the fundamental researches in the field of chronology and the systematic criticism of his predecessors and colleagues in history — all this marks the important role of Timaeus in Greek historiography and explains the fact that not only numerous ancient writers used him, but that modern scholars, too, often occupy themselves with him.

This brings me to a last point, the general assessment of Timaeus among modern scholars. This is a controversial point; I shall cite here two Italian scholars, Mario Attilio Levi and Gaetano De Sanctis, as exponents of contrary opinions.

The judgement of Levi¹⁶ is the following: "Substantially Timaeus is following a rhetorical and propagandistic concept of history for which distortion of the truth is possible because history has no other importance but to argue for persuasion. Polybius, when he accuses him of forgery, is holding against the Isocratean concept of history his own one, which, to a certain extent, is more connected with that of Aristotle, in so far as he, like Aristotle, intends to give documentary evidence to the politician, whereas the Isocratean historians have the intention of teaching oratorical *politike techne*".

Already some years before Levi, De Sanctis¹⁷ had expressed the following opinion: "Altogether, the conclusion cannot be doubtful. Timaeus, notwithstanding his faults, must be regarded as one of the greatest ancient historians and as one of those who have made the greatest contribution to the progress of history. His faults, on the other hand, even if they make his personal character unlikeable, do not conceal his merits as a historian, especially as the first to have given a scientific basis to the historiography of the Western

16 M. A. Levi, "La critica di Polibio a Timeo," *Miscellanea di studi alessandrini in memoria di A. Rostagni* (Torino 1963) 195ff.

17 G. De Sanctis, *Ricerche sulla storiografia siceliota* (Palermo 1958) 69.

world". Both judgements are one-sided because each scholar has made a single aspect in Timaeus' work absolute: in the case of Levi, it is the rhetorical character of the work, in the case of De Sanctis, the scientific accuracy of Timaeus. In reality, as we have seen, one must consider the scientific, rhetorical and tragic character of his work equally and give a more differentiated and balanced judgement of this author.

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