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POLYBIUS AND THE DATE OF THE BATTLE OF PANORMUS

THE battle of Panormus, in which L. Caecilius Metellus (*cos.* 251) decisively defeated the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal, was one of the major victories of the First Punic War. The year in which it took place, however, has long been matter for dispute, reasons being found for placing it in 251 or 250. There is now, it is true, a general preference for 250,¹ so that there may seem to be little need to traverse this ground yet again. But there is also Polybius' reputation to consider. Whichever dating scholars prefer, they invariably maintain that Polybius' account of the years 253–250 (I. 39. 7–41. 4) is more or less disfigured by confusion, contradiction, and inaccuracy; on either view he is accused, expressly or by implication, of making remarks which point to the wrong year. It is my contention that such an assessment is totally unjustified. Provided that his narrative is read with care, and without preconceptions, it not only proves entirely logical and consistent, but also sets the battle of Panormus squarely in 250.

It will be as well to discuss first the evidence drawn from sources other than Polybius. For though this has been held to provide two arguments for setting the battle in the earlier year, 251, it cannot be considered a challenge to, let alone a control on, his account. First, then, several sources describe Metellus as consul at the time of the engagement.² Now Polybius, so the argument runs, tells us explicitly that Hasdrubal advanced on Panormus ἀκμαζούσης τῆς συγκομιδῆς, and this phrase must mean 'when the harvest was at its height', in Sicily the month of June.³ Since the months of the Roman year agreed closely with those of the Julian Calendar during the First Punic War, and since the official Roman year at this same period ran from the start of May to the end of the following April, Metellus could obviously have fought *as consul* only in June 251.⁴ All this means little. On the one hand, the battle of Panormus—thanks to Polybius—bulks large in discussions of the relationship between the two calendars, and placing it in 251 allows a reconstruction quite different to

¹ T. R. S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, i. 213, reserves judgement. Though the chronology of the war and the date of this battle were much discussed at the beginning of the present century, I have limited references to the fullest or most forceful statements of the different views then offered. (All dates are B.C.)

² Flor. 1. 18. 27; Eutrop. 2. 24; Oros. 4. 9. 14; Frontin. *Strat.* 2. 5. 4; Diod. 23. 21. The point was stressed by F. Reuss (*Philologus*, lx [1901], 115). Zonaras 8. 14. 8 says neither more nor less about Metellus' status than does Polybius, and nothing can be made of Plin. *NH* 8. 16; whether this refers to the battle or (as I think more probable) to Metellus' triumph, the numeral serving to date the incident is corrupt, and one

emendation is no more plausible than another.

³ Polyb. 1. 40. 1; cf. F. Reuss, 'Der erste punische Krieg', *Philologus*, lxxviii (1909), 419–21; F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, i. 102. For the harvest see H. Nissen, *Italische Landeskunde*, i. 400; Olck, *RE* vi (1909), 479.

⁴ The correspondence of the Roman and Julian Years was well argued by W. Soltau, *Römische Chronologie* (1889), 207–11, and by G. De Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani*, iii. 1 (1916), 248–50 and 254–68. There is a useful survey of other views in O. Leuze, 'Die Schlacht bei Panormus', *Philologus*, lxxvi (1907), 139–42. For the official year (this is secure) see W. Soltau, *Die römische Amtsjahre* (1888), 12 ff., especially 16 f.; De Sanctis, *op. cit.* 248.

that achieved by setting it under 250. The year of the battle has to be established by other means, before the evidence of the calendars may be employed.¹ On the other hand, as De Sanctis long ago remarked, no weight can be given to the tradition which styles Metellus consul: four of the five sources concerned derive from Livy, who several times fails to distinguish between the consuls and proconsuls of the period, and the fifth (Diodorus) is self-evidently worthless anyway.² As we know that Metellus' *imperium* was prorogued (he celebrated his triumph *pro cos. de Poeneis a. d. VII Id. Sept.*), there is nothing to prevent the view that he fought as proconsul at a date in 250 after the end of his official year of office.³

Secondly, there is the tradition of Marcus Regulus' mission to Rome, not found in Polybius but repeated by a whole host of other ancient writers. In the accounts of these latter, Hasdrubal's defeat at Panormus led the Carthaginians to send an embassy to Rome in order to sue for peace, and in the hope of increasing its powers of persuasion they made one of the members Marcus Regulus (*cos.* 256), according to Orosius 4. 10. 1 their prisoner of the past five years. Regulus, however, refused to play the part assigned to him; when the consuls urged him to speak (this detail is supplied by Zonaras 8. 15. 3), he delivered his speech in favour of continuing the war. Since Marcus Regulus was captured by the Carthaginians in 255, the remarks of Orosius and Zonaras show that he must have come into contact with the consuls of 250, C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso. The argument, constructed on the assumption that the Roman year corresponded exactly with the Julian calendar, runs as follows. The consuls of 250 must have left for their province, Sicily, no later than the end of July;⁴ given the speeds of travel possible in antiquity, therefore, Marcus Regulus could not have left Carthage after a battle fought in June 250 and have been able to reach Rome before C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso departed for their province at the end of July. Hence the battle must belong in June 251.⁵

This is totally unconvincing. Quite apart from the fact that the relationship between the two calendars is uncertain, the argument is implausible in and of itself. If we were to accept the tradition of the embassy to Rome and were to date the battle to June 251, we would also have to accept the fact that a mission supposedly the direct result of that engagement only arrived some ten months later, in May 250, when C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso entered office. Nor would it help to suppose these men consuls designate when Marcus Regulus reached the city. The exact date at which the consular elections were held during the war may be unknown, but there is no reason whatever to think they occurred earlier than December 1 of the official year immediately preceding the magistrates' entry into office.⁶ If we were to assume that C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso were elected at the earliest likely date (December 251) and dealt promptly with Marcus Regulus, that

¹ I hope to discuss the matter of the calendars further elsewhere.

² De Sanctis, *op. cit.* 262. On Diodorus see also P. Pédech, 'Sur les sources de Polybe: Polybe et Philinos', *REA* liv (1952), 247-8.

³ Triumph: Broughton, *loc. cit.*

⁴ Of the consuls of 251 C. Furius Pacilus returned first (Polyb. 1. 40. 1) and Metellus

triumphed in early September 250; their successors must have arrived in Sicily before Metellus left, some time in August.

⁵ So F. Reuss, 'Zur Geschichte des ersten punischen Krieges', *Philologus*, lx (1901), 114 f.

⁶ Cf. A. Lippold, *Consules* (1963), 108, n. 129.

would still leave a full six months of inactivity after a battle fought in June 251, and it is inactivity whose explanation can be found neither in bureaucratic red tape nor in *mare clausum*.¹ It would be far easier to suppose that the battle was fought in June 250 and negotiations hurried through before the end of July. Though the ancient world generally travelled at a leisurely pace, speed was possible when the need arose; indeed, such evidence as we possess points clearly to the conclusion that four weeks would have been ample time for a mission such as Regulus'.² Nor can the argument be saved by assuming any discrepancy between the Roman and the Julian Years. As Walbank says, the embassy is almost certainly not historical at all, and should be dismissed with the rest of the Regulus myth.³

Since other evidence on the date and circumstances of the battle is therefore inconclusive, we may now consider Polybius' account. And as the argument is necessarily complicated at times, it will be best to begin by setting out the relevant part of his narrative (1. 39. 7–41. 4) in summary form.

[39. 7] Overcome by the mishaps of 253, culminating in the loss of over 150 ships in a storm [described at length in 39. 1–6], the Romans gave up assembling another fleet. [8] Placing their remaining hopes in the legions, they sent the consuls [of 251], L. Metellus and C. Furius Pacilus, to Sicily, and manned only sixty ships to revictual their troops. [9] Because of these reverses, Carthaginian prospects again looked better. [10] They enjoyed command of the sea now that the Romans had ceased naval activity, and they placed great hopes in their armies. [11] Nor was this unreasonable. The Roman troops knew what the Punic elephants had done to Marcus Regulus' forces in Africa. [12] Hence they were so afraid of the beasts that, 'for two years after the aforementioned events',⁴ they never dared begin a battle with the Carthaginians, nor to come down on to level ground at all. [13] In this period they took only Thermae and Lipara by siege, because they kept to mountainous and difficult country. [14] Recognizing their troops' poor morale, the Roman government 'changed their minds and again decided to try the sea'. [15] Electing C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso consuls [for 250], they assembled a new fleet. [40. 1] Hasdrubal, aware of the legions' fear and learning that one of the consuls [for 251: Furius Pacilus] had returned to Italy with half the entire force, decided to attack the other—Metellus—at Panormus. [2–15] The battle. [16] The Roman victory restored the legions' courage and their readiness to fight on open ground. [41. 1] The Roman government were gladdened by the news of the troops' fresh confidence. [2] So 'they were again encouraged to send out the consuls to campaign with a fleet and naval force in accordance with their original plan, since they hoped to end the war'. [3] When all was

¹ Cf. Leuze, *op. cit.* 138. That the seas were far from completely closed in winter is shown by E. de Saint-Denis, '*Mare Clausum*', *REL* xxv (1947), 196–214.

² Since it was possible to travel between Rome and Carthage in three days (Plin. *NH* 15. 75; 19. 4), we may very reasonably allow one week for the news of Metellus' victory to travel from Sicily to Carthage, one week for the Carthaginians to appoint and brief their embassy, one week for the ambassadors to travel to Rome, and one week

for the negotiations to start and break down.

³ Walbank, *Commentary*, i. 93 f. and 102. For full discussion see Klebs, *RE* ii (1896), 2088 ff.; P. Pirmin Blättler, *Studien zur Regulusgeschichte* (Diss., Freiburg [Switzerland], 1945), 34 ff. Nothing is added by E. R. Mix, *Marcus Atilius Regulus: Exemplum Historicum* (1970).

⁴ Phrases placed within quotation marks in this summary will be discussed further below.

ready, the consuls [for 250] sailed for Sicily with 200 ships. [4] Thus in the fourteenth year of the war, the consuls anchored off Lilybaeum, were joined by their land forces, and undertook the city's siege: they thought that its capture would enable them to transfer the war again to Africa.

This narrative contains two clear indications that Polybius set the battle of Panormus under 250. Firstly, there is the reference at 39. 12 to the Roman fear of elephants 'for two years after the aforementioned events': ἐπὶ δὲ ἐνιαυτοὺς τοὺς ἑξῆς τῶν προειρημένων καιρῶν. True, these words have occasioned some perplexity. In the belief that Polybius is referring to Marcus Regulus' disaster of 255, mentioned immediately beforehand in 39. 11, scholars have even suggested that the numeral be emended.¹ But καιροί is used here in a general sense, whereas Regulus' defeat was one specific event, and Polybius frequently employs προειρημένος to refer back to matters other than those last mentioned.² In this particular case, the 'aforementioned events' must be the mishaps of 253 which culminated in the loss of a large Roman fleet in a storm (39. 1-6). The point being made is that the Roman legions had feared the Punic elephants since 255, but because the government could also rely on the fleet, this fear had been of relatively little importance at first. The mishaps of 253 changed the situation radically. As Polybius says at 39. 8, they forced the Romans to rely exclusively on their troops; and because the troops were terrified of the elephants, they were able in the next two years only to capture Thermae and Lipara. The two years in question are manifestly 252 and 251.³ So the battle of Panormus must belong under 250.

To this it might be objected that Polybius' chronology is in any case suspect; at 39. 8 he reports the dispatch of the consuls for 251, C. Furius Pacilus and L. Metellus, *before* he mentions at 39. 13 the capture of Thermae and Lipara, undoubtedly the achievements for which their predecessor, C. Aurelius Cotta (*cos.* 252), celebrated a triumph *de Poeneis et Siculeis*.⁴ There is no problem here. As the context shows, Polybius thought the capture of these towns unimportant.⁵ Since he names the consuls of a given year only when they contribute significantly (be it for good or ill) to the progress of the war,⁶ it is readily understandable that he should have omitted Cotta at 39. 8 and have pressed on to Furius Pacilus and L. Metellus. They certainly contributed to the progress of the war, Furius Pacilus by leaving Sicily and tempting Hasdrubal to attack Metellus (40. 1), Metellus by defeating Hasdrubal. At 39. 13 Polybius backtracks for a moment. He does so deliberately, in order to show how little the

¹ Reuss, *Philologus*, lxxviii (1909), 422 f.; P. Bung, *Q. Fabius Pictor: der erste römische Annalist* (Diss., Cologne, 1950), 122 n. 4; V. La Bua, *Filino-Polibio Sileno-Diodoro* (Palermo, 1966), 108-9.

² On the uses of καιρός in Hellenistic prose see J. Palm, *Über Sprache und Stil des Diodoros von Sizilien* (1955), 163. The expression ὁ προειρημένος ἀνὴρ at Polyb. 1. 19. 1 refers not to Hiero, named at 1. 18. 11, but to Hanno, named at 1. 18. 8; further examples will be found in F. Kaelker, 'Quaestiones de elocutione Polibiana', *Leipziger Stud. zur class. Philologie*, iii (1880), 269 f.

³ Cf. Leuze, *op. cit.* 149, n. 30; De Sanctis, *op. cit.* 164 n. 46. Though Walbank,

Commentary, i. 101, rejects De Sanctis's view that consular years are meant, he does so only on the ground that the source here is Philinus; which is far from certain (cf. La Bua, *op. cit.* 107 n. 16).

⁴ Cf. La Bua, *op. cit.* 108.

⁵ Orosius 4. 9. 13 is clearly tendentious, as has been remarked by Lippold (*RhM* xcvi [1954], 273 and 286) and by Thiel (*A History of Roman Sea-Power before the Second Punic War* [1954], 253 f.).

⁶ F. W. Walbank, 'Polybius, Philinus and the First Punic War', *CQ* xxxix (1945), 3; A. Klotz, 'Studien zu Polybios', *Hermes*, lxxx (1952), 334.

Romans had achieved in the two years preceding the battle and thus to emphasize its importance. And he tells us exactly what he is doing by mentioning the 'two years after the aforementioned events', events of 253 as we have seen.

The second indication that Polybius set the battle in 250 lies in the part played by Metellus' colleague in the consulship of 251, C. Furius Pacilus. He, we are told (40. 1), left Sicily with his two legions before the engagement took place. If we were to suppose that the battle was fought in 251, we would also have to suppose that Pacilus was recalled some time before, perhaps long before, the end of his term of office. This is certainly possible, and Reuss suggested that he returned to Italy in order to defend the coastline against raids by a Carthaginian fleet.¹ But though we can make nothing of Polybius' failure to mention such raids (as we have seen, he is not interested in minor events of the war), this is not the natural explanation of the context. At 39. 15-40. 1 Polybius records in sequence the election of the consuls for 250, Hasdrubal's learning of Pacilus' departure and his decision to attack Metellus. It is entirely reasonable to argue that, for Polybius as for any Roman reader, it would be automatic to link the mention of the consular elections with that of Pacilus' departure, and to conclude that Pacilus returned to Rome to conduct those elections.² It need cause no surprise that he took his legions with him, if this was his only purpose; whenever they could, the Romans at this period adhered to the practice of an annual levy.³ Nor is it remarkable that Polybius mentions the elections before Pacilus' return to Italy. He is not interested in the Roman's destination, nor even in the fact that his departure changed the balance of power in Sicily. What concerns him is the effect produced on Hasdrubal by the news of his departure, and he concentrates on Hasdrubal's decision to exploit the change in the balance of power. For Polybius' purposes, therefore, the arrangement of the material is entirely logical;⁴ and it points clearly to the conclusion that Pacilus left Sicily toward the end of his year of office, and that the battle of Panormus was fought in 250.

This, however, brings us to what has proved the major obstacle to all previous studies, the view that Polybius more or less repeats himself in two passages bracketing his description of the battle, that this repetition was produced by his changing or misunderstanding his sources, and that consequently there is no sure way of telling whether the battle should more fitly be placed in 251 or in 250.⁵ The first of the two passages in question, set before the battle,

¹ Reuss, *Philologus*, lxxviii (1909), 424. Though Polyb. 1. 39. 8 records that the Carthaginians regained sea-supremacy after 253, there is nothing to suggest that the ambitious naval plans they had formed earlier (1. 38. 1-3) were put into effect until late 250, after Panormus (1. 41. 6; 44. 1 ff.; cf. Thiel, op. cit. 252 f.).

² Cf. Leuze, op. cit. 137 f. Heavy weather was made of this by Reuss (*Philologus*, lx [1901], 114), since he failed to recognize that *καταστρίσαντες στρατηγούς* at 39. 15 refers only to the election of the consuls for 250, not to their entry into office (similarly De Sanctis, op. cit. 263; La Bua, op. cit.

114; for the correct view see Walbank, *Commentary*, i. 101; A. Mauersberger, *Polybios-Lexikon*, i. 3. 1204).

³ Polyb. 1. 16. 2; 6. 19. 5-7.

⁴ In a small way this confirms the findings of K.-E. Petzold (*Studien zur Methode des Polybios*, 141), that in the *prokataskeue* Polybius is more interested in causal than in chronological links.

⁵ In addition to the works cited during the following discussion see Reuss, op. cit. 114; Leuze, op. cit. 138 f. and 151; Bung, *Fabius Pictor*, 123 f.; La Bua, op. cit. 109 and 113 f.

is 39. 14–15; here it is stated that the Romans, recognizing their troops' poor morale, 'changed their minds and decided again to try the sea' (αἰθις ἔγνωσαν ἐκ μεταμελείας ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῆς θαλάττης), elected the consuls for 250 and prepared a new fleet. In the second passage, 41. 2, placed after the battle, we are told that when the Romans learnt of Metellus' victory, 'they were again encouraged to send out the consuls to campaign with a fleet and naval force in accordance with their original plan, since they were eager to end the war' (διὸ καὶ πάλιν ἐπερρώσθησαν διὰ ταῦτα κατὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς πρόθεσιν εἰς τὸ μετὰ στόλου καὶ ναυτικῆς δυνάμεως τοὺς στρατηγούς ἐπὶ τὰς πράξεις ἐκπέμπειν, σπουδάζοντες εἰς δύναμιν πέρας ἐπιθεῖναι τῷ πολέμῳ).

If this view were correct, the battle of Panormus could scarcely be dated to 250. The 'original plan' mentioned at 41. 2 refers to the Romans' original decision, taken in 261, to raise a fleet and fight the Carthaginians by sea as well as by land.¹ If this is also the subject of 39. 14–15, the Romans must already have decided to send land and sea forces to Lilybaeum when they elected the consuls for 250. They must have intended, in other words, to commit their troops before the battle of Panormus even took place—which robs the battle of the significance Polybius so obviously attributed to it. Little more can be said than that it commemorates Hasdrubal's folly in doing the Romans' job for them; instead of awaiting them at Lilybaeum he went to meet them at Panormus.² To accept this view is to maintain that Polybius' account is remarkable chiefly for its sheer oafishness. Not only does he expatiate on a battle devoid of any real significance; he also gives us this long-winded description in what is supposed to be a brief introduction to his main theme.³

If Polybius did indeed repeat himself at 39. 14–15 and 41. 2, there would be more to be said for placing the battle in 251. This at least permits the Roman victory to enjoy the significance Polybius attributed to it; for it now precedes the election of the consuls for 250 and gives the Roman government their reason for launching the attack on Lilybaeum. Yet Polybius must still be taken to task. Not only does he break the chronological thread of his narrative by recording the elections for 250 before describing a battle which preceded them.⁴ He also contradicts himself; after giving two clear indications that the battle was fought in 250, he now constructs his account in a way which appears logically to demand that we set the engagement a year earlier.

If it is by now obvious that something is wrong, the cause is not far to seek—the delights of *Quellenforschung*. Polybius himself tells us that he constructed his account of the First Punic War from the works of Fabius Pictor and Philinus of Agrigentum;⁵ for the sake of his own reputation he would have done better to keep silent. As it is, much time and effort have been expended in hunting down and labelling the source for each segment of his narrative. Yet the lack of success achieved is truly remarkable. If Polybius conflated his account with the stupidity so commonly attributed to him, he really ought to have shown much less skill in obscuring the sources of his various statements; but as Pédech

¹ The original plan of 261 will be described in more detail below.

² Cf. De Sanctis, op. cit. 166; Thiel, op. cit. 260 f.; J. van Ooteghem, *Les Caecilii Metelli de la république* (Brussels, 1967), 10.

³ Cf. Polyb. 1. 13. 7. On the character of the *prokataskeue* there is much of value in

R. M. Errington, 'The Chronology of Polybius' Histories, Books I and II', *JRS* lvii (1967), 96–108, and in Petzold, op. cit.

⁴ Cf. K. F. Eisen, *Polybiosinterpretationen* (1966), 176 f.

⁵ Polyb. 1. 14–15.

says, perhaps too charitably, 'le même passage de Polybe est attribué par les uns à Fabius, par les autres à Philinos, et tout le monde donne de bonnes raisons'.¹ So it is with the supposed repetition of 39. 14-15 and 41. 2. One passage, it is argued, derives from Fabius and the other from Philinus; and the difficulties created by these hypotheses are used to confirm the validity of the argumentation.²

The only scholar of recent years who has avoided the excesses of *Quellenforschung* and seen any distinction in meaning between 39. 14-15 and 41. 2 is Walbank. In his admirable *Commentary on Polybius* he is rightly wary of positing any change of source or contradiction between the two passages, and he explains them as follows: the plan of fighting at sea, 'abandoned after the shipwreck of 39. 6, ... was resumed as a policy of desperation (39. 14-15) after a two years' interval (39. 12). The victory of Panormus led the Romans to pursue it with the hope of bringing the war to a successful conclusion. The change in policy has already been recorded (39. 15): the important thing here [i.e. at 41. 2] is the change in spirit.'³ Unfortunately, this too fails to go far enough. Polybius in these two passages is describing neither a single policy nor even a change of spirit in the application of a single policy. He is talking about two entirely different policies.

Let us look again at 39. 14-15. Here Polybius tells us explicitly that the Roman government recognized their troops' low morale before they changed their previous course of action and decided again to try the sea. By this he can only mean that they planned to abandon operations on land and to concentrate on naval warfare. After the setbacks of 253 the Romans had placed all their remaining hopes in their legions (39. 8). The only result had been two years of virtual inactivity, in which the legions were immobilized by their fear of the Carthaginian elephants: 252, when C. Aurelius Cotta was consul, and 251, when Furius Pacilus and L. Metellus held office (39. 11-13). Their hopes were obviously misplaced; decisive action could not be brought about by the legions, whereas there was some chance of success at sea. So they made full allowance for their troops' despondency (*θεωροῦντες . . . τὴν ἐν τοῖς πεζικοῖς στρατοπέδοις πτοίαν καὶ δυσελπίστιαν*), not unnaturally changed the policy they had followed throughout 252 and 251 (*ἐκ μεταμελείας*), and decided again to try the sea (*αὐθις ἔγνωσαν . . . ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῆς θαλάττης*). Adopting a policy of desperation, they had decided—by the time they elected the consuls for 250—to abandon the war on land and, as they had done in 253, to concentrate exclusively on fighting at sea. And this is why the consuls of 250, C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso, were both experienced in naval warfare.⁴

If we now consider 41. 2, the passage supposedly repeating this material, we find a very different situation. The reference here to the Romans' 'original plan' shows clearly that they were no longer thinking of writing off their legions and fighting only at sea. The 'original plan', as has been said already, is the plan which the Romans formed in 261, when they recognized that they could not win the war in Sicily unless they took to the sea. This realization had not

¹ Pédech's remark (*Latomus*, xxvi [1967], 862) is well illustrated by La Bua, op. cit. 107, n. 16.

² Salutory protests against *Quellenforschung* of this kind have been made by Walbank

(*CQ* xxxix [1945], 1 ff.) and by Badian (*RFIC* xcvi [1968], 203 ff.); so far they seem to have had little effect.

³ Walbank, *Commentary*, i. 103.

⁴ Cf. Thiel, op. cit. 255.

led them to think that they could abandon the use of the legions on land.¹ If Polybius himself was much more interested in their going to sea than he was in their continuing to fight on land, this was only to be expected, when he thought their taking to the sea the decisive step which spread Roman rule through the *oecumene*.² Nevertheless, he was careful to indicate that the consuls of 260, Cn. Cornelius Scipio and C. Duilius, the men first entrusted with the plan's execution, were given naval *and* land forces.³ So here he reports that the Romans were encouraged because the victory of Panormus restored the legions' confidence (41. 1), that the consuls for 250 disposed of a large fleet (41. 2–3), *and* that they were joined by the legions for the attack on Lilybaeum (41. 4). There is perhaps a lack of clarity in Polybius' account, to the extent that he is again more concerned with the Romans' naval activity than with their operations on land.⁴ But there can be no doubt that he is describing a situation in which the Romans planned once again to undertake combined operations against their enemy. By no stretch of the imagination can 41. 2–4 be regarded as a repetition of the statements made at 39. 14–15.

In short, Polybius gives us a logical and consistent account of Roman activity between 253 and 250.⁵ When the Romans were overtaken by the mishaps which culminated in the loss of a large fleet in 253, they decided to concentrate on land warfare. This effectively brought the war to a standstill; because their troops were terrified of the Punic elephants, they succeeded only in capturing Thermae and Lipara in all of 252 and 251. In late 251 or early 250, therefore, they resolved in desperation to abandon fighting by land and to concentrate on the war at sea. Furius Pacilus returned to Rome to preside over the consular elections, and the successful candidates were C. Atilius Regulus and L. Manlius Vulso, both experienced naval commanders. While they were preparing a fleet, however, Hasdrubal attacked Metellus at Panormus and was decisively defeated. When the Roman government realized that the victory had freed the troops of their fears, they immediately revised their plans and decided that the new consuls should take the offensive by land and by sea; and they had good reason to hope that the war could soon be ended. The siege of Lilybaeum followed—and with it the disappointment of those hopes, robbing Metellus' victory of long-term significance on a par with the unquestionable importance it possessed in 250.

Thus the battle of Panormus can be dated securely. As we have seen, the evidence of other sources may at first sight appear to point to 251, but their testimony is so unconvincing that it must yield before the authority of Polybius.

¹ Polyb. 1. 20. 1–8.

² Cf. Bung, *Fabius Pictor*, 49 f.

³ Polyb. 1. 21. 4; 22. 1; 23. 1.

⁴ This emerges most clearly from 41. 2. When Polybius says that the Romans were encouraged *εἰς τὸ μετὰ στόλου καὶ ναυτικῆς δυνάμεως τοὺς στρατηγούς ἐπὶ τὰς πράξεις ἐκπέμπευ*, he does not mean that they were encouraged to send out the consuls for 250, but to send out the consuls (of 250, as it happened) just as they had been encouraged to send out the consuls in other years. And though the 'original plan' implies the participation of the legions, that is made explicit only at 41. 4. Nor is this delay

altogether excused by the lengthy account of land warfare which has preceded (39. 8–40. 16), since the legions which joined the consuls at Lilybaeum must have been newly raised, as was remarked by Luterbacher (*Philologus*, lxxvi [1907], 417) and by Thiel (op. cit. 262 n. 653).

⁵ There is no difficulty in the different numbers of warships recorded at 39. 8, 39. 15, and 41. 3: see Walbank, *Commentary*, i. 101 and 103. Nor is it an obstacle that Polybius terms 250 the fourteenth year of the war at 41. 4: see Walbank, loc. cit., and R. Werner, *Der Beginn der römischen Republik* (1963), 64 ff.

And his narrative, properly understood, unequivocally sets the battle under 250. More important by far, however, is the fact that Polybius' reputation has been vindicated. Though he was certainly not infallible, his account of the years 253–250 is no clumsy patchwork of contradictions and inaccuracies. It is a careful and critical narrative, written by a highly skilled and intelligent historian.¹

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