



SHORTER NOTE

A PUZZLE IN THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF POLYBIUS

ABSTRACT

This note offers the solution to a puzzle in the manuscript tradition of Polybius that has baffled eminent modern authorities.

Keywords: Polybius; manuscripts; palaeography; colophon; compendia; shorthand; Constantine Porphyrogenitus

In his Sather lectures on Polybius, Walbank discussed the puzzling subscription at the end of Book 39 in manuscript M of Polybius (Vaticanus gr. 73), stating that ‘no wholly satisfactory explanation of this subscription has been proposed’.¹ After the numeral 39 there is a sign which Buettner-Wobst in his edition (vol. 4, page 512) printed as ./., perhaps taking it to be a sign added by the scribe to signify that he had finished his task. This, however, if it was his belief, was mistaken. The sign normally used by copyists at the end of a task was :- . And the sign ./- was an abbreviation for ECTI.

But that is not an accurate representation of what one sees in the manuscript. Walbank attempted to do better: what he printed looks like an omega with two dots attached to the top of the final stroke. Later, in his commentary of 1979, he printed the mysterious sign as an omega with smooth breathing and a grave accent.² He then repeated his acceptance of a transposition in the wording of the subscription which had been proposed by Struve.

The solution to the puzzle is quite different, and was in fact available, admittedly without supporting explanation, in the description of M in the printed catalogue entry for this manuscript.³ The mysterious signs—there are in fact two of them—are interpreted as ZHTEI, ‘look for’ Book 40, which makes perfect sense. The scribe used two shorthand symbols, nos. 189 and 786 in the Byzantine system.⁴ As he was doubtless a highly qualified member of the staff of the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus it is not surprising that he had some knowledge of shorthand.

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¹ F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley, 1972), 16 n. 82.

² *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (Oxford, 1979), 3.743–4.

³ G. Mercati and P. Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *Codices Vaticanani graeci, tomus I, Codices 1–329* (Vatican City, 1923), 69 (top line).

⁴ See N.P. Chionides and S. Lilla, *La brachigrafia italo-bizantina* (Vatican City, 1981).