

**Source: The Histories of Polybius V2 by Polybius □
(translated by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh 1889)**

BOOK XII

CRITICISM OF TIMAEUS

1. BYZACIA is near the Syrtes ; it has a circumference of two thousand stades, and is circular in shape. . . .

Hippo, Singa, Tabraca, are cities in Libya. Chalkeia, however, is not, as Demosthenes ignorantly states, the name of a city, but means only a “bronze-factory.” . . .

2. The lotus is not a large tree ; but it is rough and thorny, and has a green leaf, like the rhamnus (black or white thorn), a little longer and broader. The lotus. See Herodotus, 2, 92. The fruit is like white myrtle-berries when they are come to perfection ; but, as it grows, it becomes purple in colour, and in size about equal to round olives, and has a very small stone. When it is ripe they gather it : and some of it they pound up with goats of spelt, and store in vessels for their slaves ; and the rest they also preserve for the free inhabitants, after taking out the stones, and use it for food. It tastes like a fig or a date, but is superior to them in aroma. A wine is made of it also by steeping it in water and crushing it, sweet and pleasant to the taste, like good mead ; and they drink it without mixing it with water. It will not keep, however, more than ten days, and they therefore only make it in small quantities as they want it. Vinegar also is made out of it. . . .

3. The excellence of the soil of Libya must excite our

admiration. But one would feel inclined to say of Timaeus, Misstatements of not merely that he had never studied the Timaeus about country, but that he was childish and entirely Libya, unintelligent in his notions; completely enslaved to those old traditional stories of Libya being wholly sandy, parched, and barren. The same too holds good about its animals. The supply of horses, oxen, sheep, and goats in it is beyond anything to be found in any other part of the world; because many of the tribes in Libya do not use cultivated crops, but live on and with their flocks and herds. Again what writer has failed to mention the vast number and strength of its elephants, lions, and panthers, or the beauty of its buffalos, or the size of its ostriches? Of these not one is to be found in Europe, while Libya is full of them. But Timaeus, by passing them over without a word, gives, as though purposely, an impression exactly the reverse of the truth.

And just in the same random way in which he has spoken about Libya, he has also done about the island and Corsica, called Cynus. For, when mentioning it in his second book, he says that wild goats, sheep, wild oxen, stags, hares, wolves, and some other animals are plentiful in it; and that the inhabitants employ themselves in hunting them, and in fact spend most of their time in that pursuit. Whereas in this island there are not only no wild goats or wild oxen, but not even hare, wolf, or stag, or any animal of the sort, except some foxes, rabbits, and wild sheep. The rabbit indeed at a distance looks like a small hare; but when taken in the hand, it is found to be widely different both in appearance and in the taste of its flesh; and it also lives generally underground.

4. The idea, however, of all the animals in the island being wild, has arisen in the following way: the reason of his mistake. The caretakers cannot keep up with their animals, owing to the thick woods and rocky broken nature of the country; but, whenever they wish to collect them, they stand on some convenient spots and call the beasts together by the sound of a trumpet; and all of them flock without fail to their own trumpets. Now, when ships arrive at the coast, and the sailors see goats or cattle grazing without

any one with them, and thereupon try to catch them, the animals will not let them come near them, because they are not used to them, but will scamper off. But as soon as the keeper sees the men disembarking and sounds his trumpet, they all set off running at full speed and collect round the trumpet. This gives the appearance of wildness; and Timaeus, who made only careless and perfunctory inquiries, committed himself to a random statement.

Now this obedience to the sound of a trumpet is nothing astonishing. For in Italy the swineherds manage the feeding of their pigs in the same way. They do not follow close behind the beasts, as in Greece, but keep some distance in front of them, sounding their horn every now and then; and the animals follow behind and run together at the sound. Indeed, the complete familiarity which the animals show with the particular horn to which they belong seems at first astonishing and almost incredible. For owing to the populousness and wealth of the country, the droves of swine in Italy are exceedingly large, especially along the sea coast of the Tuscans and Gauls: for one sow will bring up a thousand pigs, or sometimes even more. They therefore drive them out from their night styes to feed, according to their litters and ages. Whence, if several droves are taken to the same place, they cannot preserve these distinction of litters; but they of course get mixed up with each other, both as they are being driven out, and as they feed, and as they are being brought home. Accordingly the device of the horn-blowing has been invented to separate them, when they have got mixed up together, without labour or trouble. For as they feed, one swineherd goes in one direction sounding his horn, and another in another: and thus the animals sort themselves of their own accord, and follow their own horns with such eagerness that it is impossible by any means to stop or hinder them. But in Greece, when the swine get mixed up in the oak forests in their search for the mast, the swineherd who has most assistants and the best help at his disposal, when collecting his own animals, drives off his neighbour's also. Sometimes too a thief lies in wait, and drives them off without the swineherd knowing how he lost

them ; because the beasts straggle a long way from their drivers, in their eagerness to find acorns, when they are just beginning to fall. . . .

4. (a) It is difficult to pardon such errors in Timaeus, considering how severe he is in criticising the False criticisms of Timaeus on Theopompus and Ephorus. slips of others. For instance he finds fault with Theopompus for stating that Dionysius sailed from Sicily to Corinth in a merchant vessel, whereas he really arrived in a ship of war. And again he falsely charges Ephorus with contradicting himself, on the ground that he asserts that Dionysius the Elder ascended the throne at the age of twenty-three, reigned forty-two years, and died at sixty-three. Now no one would say, I think, that this was a blunder of the historian, but clearly one of the transcriber. For either Ephorus must be more foolish than Coroebus and Margites, if he were unable to calculate that forty-two added to twenty-three make sixty-five ; or, if that is incredible in the case of a man like Ephorus, it must be a mere mistake of the transcriber, and the carping and malevolent criticism of Timaeus must be rejected.

(b) Again, in his history of Pyrrhus, he says that the Romans still keep up the memory of the fall of Troy by His false account of the October horse. shooting to death with javelins a war-horse on a certain fixed day, because the capture of Troy was accomplished by means of the "Wooden Horse." This is quite childish. On this principle, all non-Hellenic nations must be put down as descendants of the Trojans ; for nearly all of them, or at any rate the majority, when about to commence a war or a serious battle with an enemy, first kill and sacrifice a horse. In making this sort of ill-founded deduction, Timaeus seems to me to show not only want of knowledge, but, what is worse, a trick of misapplying knowledge. For, because the Romans sacrifice a horse, he immediately concludes that they do it because Troy was taken by means of a horse.

(c) These instances clearly show how worthless his account of Libya, Sardinia, and, above all, of Italy is ; and that, speak-

ing generally, he has entirely neglected the most important element in historical investigation, namely, the making personal inquiries. For as historical events take place in many different localities, and as it is impossible for the same man to be in several places at the same time, and also impossible for him to see with his own eyes all places in the world and observe their peculiarities, the only resource left is to ask questions of as many people as possible; and to believe those who are worthy of credit; and to show critical sagacity in judging of their reports.

(*d*) And though Timaeus makes great professions on this head, he appears to me to be very far from arriving at the truth. Indeed, so far from making accurate investigations of the truth through other people, he does not tell us anything trustworthy even of events of which he has been an eye-witness, or of places he has personally visited. This will be made evident, if we can convict him of being ignorant, even in his account of Sicily, of the facts which he brings forward. For it will require very little further proof of his inaccuracy, if he can be shown to be ill-informed and misled about the localities in which he was born and bred, and that too the most famous of them. Now he asserts that the fountain Arethusa at Syracuse has its source in the Peloponnese, from the river Alpheus, which flows through Arcadia and Olympia. For that this river sinks into the earth, and, after being carried for four thousand stades under the Sicilian Sea, comes to the surface again in Syracuse; and that this was proved from the fact that on a certain occasion a storm of rain having come on during the Olympic festival, and the river having flooded the sacred enclosure, a quantity of dung from the animals used for sacrifice at the festival was thrown up by the fountain Arethusa; as well as a certain gold cup, which was picked up and recognised as being one of the ornaments used at the festival. . . .

The reason of his mistakes a want of care in making inquiries.

Nor is he to be trusted even in matters that fell under his own observation.

Arethusa.

5. I happened to have visited the city of the Locrians on

several occasions, and to have been the means of doing them important services. For it was I that secured their exemption from the service in Iberia and Dalmatia, which, in accordance with the treaty, they were bound to supply to the Romans. And being released thereby from considerable hardship, danger, and expense, they rewarded me with every mark of honour and kindness. I have therefore reason to speak well of the Locrians rather than the reverse. Still I do not shrink from saying and writing that the account of their colonisation given by Aristotle is truer than that of Timaeus. For I know for certain that the inhabitants themselves acknowledge that the report of Aristotle, and not of Timaeus, is the one which they have received from their ancestors. And they give the following proofs of this. In the first place, they stated that every ancestral distinction existing among them is traced by the female not the male side.¹ For instance, those are reckoned noble among them who belong to "the hundred families"; and these "hundred families" are those which were marked out by the Locrians, before embarking upon their colonisation, as those from which they were in accordance with the oracle to select the virgins to be sent to Ilium. Further, that some of these women joined the colony: and that it is their descendants who are now reckoned noble, and called "the men of the hundred families." Again, the following account of the "cup-bearing" priestess had been received traditionally by them. When they ejected the Sicels who occupied this part of Italy, finding that it was a custom among them for the processions at their sacrifices to be led by a boy of the most illustrious and high-born family obtainable, and not having any ancestral custom of their own on the subject, they adopted this one, with no other improvement than that of substituting a girl for one of their boys as cup-bearer, because nobility with them went by the female line.

6. And as to a treaty, none ever existed, or was said to have existed, between them and the Locrians. The trick of the Locrians in Greece; but they all knew by tradition of one with the Sicels: of which they give the follow-

¹ Cp. a similar custom of the Lycians, Herod. i, 173.

ing account. When they first appeared, and found the Sicels occupying the district in which they are themselves now dwelling, these natives were in terror of them, and admitted them through fear into the country; and the newcomers made a sworn agreement with them that "they would be friendly and share the country with them, as long as they stood upon the ground they then stood upon, and kept heads upon their shoulders." But, while the oaths were being taken, they say that the Locrians put earth inside the soles of their shoes, and heads of garlic concealed on their shoulders, before they swore; and that then they shook the earth out of their shoes, and threw the heads of garlic off their shoulders, and soon afterwards expelled the Sicels from the country. This is the story current at Locri. . . .

By an extraordinary oversight Timaeus of Tauromenium commits himself to the statement that it was not customary with the Greeks to possess slaves.¹ . . .

These considerations would lead us to trust Aristotle rather than Timaeus. His next statement is still more strange. For to suppose, with Timaeus, that it was unlikely that men, who had been the slaves of the allies of the Lacedaemonians, would continue the kindly feelings and adopt the friendships of their late masters is foolish. For when they have had the good fortune to recover their freedom, and a certain time has elapsed, men, who have been slaves, not only endeavour to adopt the friendships of their late masters, but also their ties of hospitality and blood: in fact, their aim is to keep them up even more than the ties of nature, for the express purpose of thereby wiping out the remembrance of their former degradation and humble position; because they wish to pose as the descendants of their masters rather than as their freedmen. And this is what in all probability happened in the case of the Locrians. They had removed to a great distance from all who knew their secret; the lapse of time favoured their pretensions; and they were not therefore so foolish as to maintain any customs likely to revive the memory of their own degradation,

¹ He may have been referring to pre-homeric times, cp. Herod. 6, 137, οὐ γὰρ εἶναι τούτων τὸν χρόνον σφίσι κω οὐδὲ τοῖσι ἄλλοισι "Ἐλληνσι οἰκέτας.

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