

Poseidonios, On Perseus of Macedon (169)

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169 Poseidonios

Ken Dowden (Birmingham)

BNJ	Posidonius	Poseidonios
Historian Number:	169	

169 T 1 - PLUTARCH Aem. Paul. 19.4	meta [[id="169" type="T" n="1" sourcework(level1="Plutarchus" level2="" level3="Aemilius Paullus" level4="" level5="" level6="19")]]
Subject: Historical Work: Source date: Historian's date: Historical period:	Translation
4 οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ #paraphrase# Ποσειδώνιος τις ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῖς χρόνοις καὶ ταῖς πράξεσι γεγονέναι λέγων, ἱστορίαν δὲ γεγραφὼς περὶ Περσέως ἐν πλείοσι βιβλίοις#, φησὶν...	4 Notwithstanding which, a certain Poseidonios - who says he lived in those times and amidst those events – wrote a history of Perseus in several books in which he says...

169 T 1 Commentary

This is the key passage from F 1. This Poseidonios does not appear to be the same as any of the Poseidonioi known to the *Suda* (see on BNJ 87 T 1.C). Moreover, it is clear that Plutarch knows nothing about him either except the internal evidence of the text ('a certain... who says he lived...'). He appears not even to know how many books the work comprised – he has only a particular book that includes Pydna (see on F 1) – Book *n*, so the work is 'in several books'. Walbank (F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* 3 (Oxford 1979), 378), starting from P. Pédech (*La Méthode historique de Polybe* (Paris 1964), 139 n. 212), thought that Plutarch used Poseidonios via an intermediate source; that is not the impression Plutarch gives.

169 F 1 PLUTARCH Aem. Paul. 19	meta [[id="169" type="F" n="1" sourcework(level1="Plutarchus" level2="" level3="Aemilius Paullus" level4="" level5="" level6="19, 4-6")]]
Subject: Historical Work: Source date: Historian's date: Historical period:	Translation
19.2... ὁ δὲ τῶν Μακεδόνων βασιλεὺς , ὥς φησι Πολύβιος, τῆς μάχης ἀρχὴν λαμβανούσης ἀποδειλιάσας εἰς πόλιν ἀφιππάσατο,	19.2... The Macedonian king, according to Polybios (29.18), took fright when the battle (<i>of Pydna</i>) began and rode away to the city on the

<p>σκηψάμενος Ἡρακλεῖ θύειν, δειλὰ παρὰ δειλῶν ἱερὰ μὴ δεχομένῳ μὴδ' εὐχὰς ἀθεμίτους ἐπιτελοῦντι. 3...</p> <p>4 οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ Ποσειδώνιος τις ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῖς χρόνοις καὶ ταῖς πράξεσι γεγονέναι λέγων, ἱστορίαν δὲ γεγραφὼς περὶ Περσέως ἐν πλείοσι βιβλίοις, φησὶν αὐτὸν οὐχ ὑπὸ δειλίας οὐδὲ τὴν θυσίαν ποιησάμενον αἰτίαν ἀπελθεῖν, ἀλλὰ τῇ προτέραι τῆς μάχης τυχεῖν λελακτισμένον ὑφ' ἵππου τὸ σκέλος· ἐν δὲ τῇ μάχῃ καίπερ ἔχοντα δυσχρήστως καὶ κωλυόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν φίλων ἵππον αὐτῷ κελεῦσαι τῶν φορέων προσαγαγεῖν καὶ περιβάντα συμμῖξαι τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς φάλαγγος ἀθωράκιστον· φερομένων δὲ παντοδαπῶν ἑκατέρωθεν βελῶν παλτὸν ἐμπεσεῖν ὀλοσίδηρον αὐτῷ καὶ τῇ μὲν ἀκμῇ μὴ θιγεῖν, ἀλλὰ πλάγιον παρὰ τὴν ἀριστερὰν πλευρὰν παραδραμεῖν, ρύμηι δὲ τῆς παρόδου τὸν τε χιτῶνα διακόψαι καὶ τὴν σάρκα φοινίξαι τυφλῷ μῶλωπι πολὺν χρόνον διαφυλάσσαντι τὸν τύπον. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὁ Ποσειδώνιος ὑπὲρ τοῦ Περσέως ἀπολογεῖται.</p>	<p>pretext of sacrificing to Herakles – who did not accept cowardly offerings from cowards nor fulfil prayers that disregarded righteousness. 3...</p> <p>4 Notwithstanding which, a certain Poseidonios - who says he lived in those times and amidst those events – wrote a history of Perseus in several books in which he says that he did not go away out of cowardice or citing a sacrifice as the reason, but rather happened on the day before the battle to have had his leg kicked by a horse. Though he was in a bad way and his Friends tried to stop him, he gave an order for a pack horse to be brought for him, mounted it, and joined the phalanx in the battle with no breastplate. Every kind of missile was in the air from both sides and a javelin wholly of iron struck him; its point did not reach him, but it ran diagonally past his left side and with its momentum as it passed it tore open his tunic and reddened his flesh with a hidden bruise that did not fade for a long time. That, then, is the defence of Perseus put up by Poseidonios.</p>
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169 F 1 Commentary

The Battle of Pydna was fought on 22 June 168 between the Romans under the consul (II) L. Aemilius Paullus (*RE* Aemilius (114), actually spelt L. Aimilius Paullus, e.g. *CIL* 1.207) and Perseus, King of Macedon. It was the decisive victory for Rome in the Third Macedonian War, which had begun in 171 BC.

Polybios' account of Pydna does not survive: the fragments are collected, from Plutarch's *Life of Aemilius Paullus* and other sources, as Polybios 29.15-18. Very little of Diodoros' account, which may be assumed to be dependent on Polybios, survives (30.20), and nothing relevant survives from Appian's *Makedonika*. For preserved accounts of the battle, see Livy 44.32-43; Plutarch, *Life of Aemilius Paullus*, 15-23; Zonaras 9.23 (representing Cassius Dio 20). On the available sources, see F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* 3 (Oxford 1979), 378.

Polybios 29.17.3 (from the *Suda*) states that Perseus 'showed a lack of fibre and ran like a coward' (οὐχ ὑπέμεινε τῇ ψυχῇ, ἀλλ' ἀπεδειλία) and this is reflected by Livy *princeps fugae rex ipse erat* ('the king himself was the first to flee', 44.42.2). Plutarch refers to this passage at 19.2 (which Büttner-Wobst then oddly prints separately as Polybios 29.18) and develops its thought in 19.3 (omitted by Jacoby). This alleged cowardice of Perseus forms a thematic contrast to the resoluteness of Aemilius Paullus and probably represents the victor's story (rather than the hostility of the infantry abandoned to a slaughter). Poseidonios, however, presented an independent version, stating (to accredit himself against the standard account) that he was a contemporary and an eye-witness; and indeed, as N.G.L. Hammond states, 'One is inclined to believe Posidonius' (*A History of Macedonia* 3 (Oxford 1988), 557).

Poseidonios' claim to autopsy, connected with Pydna as it seems to be, is unlikely to have occurred at the beginning of his history (contrast Thucydides 1.1.1 and 1.22.1): this will be from a later book (see on T 1).

For (relatively) modern discussion of the battle, see N.G.L. Hammond, 'The Battle of Pydna', *JHS* 104 (1984), 31-47, though it casts no light on Poseidonios; Walbank, *Commentary*, esp. 378-92, with bibliography up to 1979; and J. Briscoe, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 41-45* (Oxford 2012), 568-608, though more oriented towards the difficulties of the text than to history. Amongst older discussions,

one should signal the thorough analysis of the whole campaign by J. Kromayer, *Antike Schlachtfelder* 2 (Berlin 1907), 294-328.

169 F 2 - PLUTARCH Aem. Paul. 20	meta [[id="169" type="F" n="2" sourcework(level1="Plutarchus" level2="" level3="Aemilius Paullus" level4="" level5="" level6="20, 5-6")]]
Subject: Historical Work: Source date: Historian's date: Historical period:	Translation
<p>20.3... καὶ φυγὴ μὲν οὐκ ἦν, ἀναχώρησις δὲ πρὸς ὄρος τὸ καλούμενον †'Ολόκρον, ὥστε καὶ τὸν Αἰμίλιον ἰδόντα φησὶν ὁ Ποσειδώνιος καταρρήξασθαι τὸν χιτῶνα, τούτων μὲν ἐνδιδόντων, τῶν δ' ἄλλων Ῥωμαίων διατρεπομένων τὴν φάλαγγα προσβολὴν οὐκ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ χαρὰ κώματι τῷ πυκνώματι τῶν σαρισσῶν ὑπαντιάζουσιν πάντοθεν ἀπρόσμαχον.</p>	<p>(20.2... the Macedonian phalanx has repelled the Paeligni and the Marrucini)</p> <p>20.3... And it was not a rout, but they did retreat to the mountain called †Olokros, so much so that when Aemilius saw it, Poseidonios tells us, he tore apart his tunic – these men were giving in, while the other Romans were deterred in the face of the phalanx as it gave them nowhere to attack, but, thanks to its dense <i>sarissai</i> (long spears) forming a sort of palisade, confronted them unassailably at every point.</p>

169 F 2 Commentary

According to Polybios 29.17 (from the *Suda*), Aemilius had not seen a phalanx before. It therefore presented a tactical challenge.

Plutarch tells us that the withdrawal of the Paeligni and Marrucini was not a rout (the Roman version, then). Poseidonios, by contrast, is cited for the memorable reaction of Aemilius who tears his tunic in frustration, a detail that may seem consistent with his claim to have been present at these events, though it is not clear how this event could be seen, except by Aemilius' own side, from whom Poseidonios must have learnt about it (assuming it is true). It is the same Poseidonios, in any case, given the proximity of this passage to the mention at 19.4 (F 1).

There is no other reference to a mountain, or indeed anything, called Olokros in Greek or in Latin. In the 19th century the name was assigned to 'a mountain near Pydna, in Macedonia, represented by the last falls of the heights between Ayán and Elefthero-khóri' (W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* (London 1854), relying on Leake, *Travels in Northern Greece* 3 (London 1835), 433). More recently, there are good maps, including estimated battle-lines, in F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* 3 (Oxford 1979), 382, 385, and N.G.L. Hammond 'The Battle of Pydna', *JHS* 104 (1984), 31-47, at 34; in these, the mountain is somewhat further S, between Kitros and Agios Ioannis (= Leake's Ayán), identified with a ridge Phardia Miti. However, the name Olokros is surely corrupt (I have obelised it in the text): it looks as though it should be Phalakros (or Balakros, in Macedonian dialect), 'Bald' Mountain. Kitros and Agios Ioannis may be found on Google maps, but a better map was drawn for the 3rd Military Mapping Survey of Austria-Hungary (c. 1910) and is found on the site of the Department of Cartography and Geoinformatics of Eötvös Loránd University, at <http://lazarus.elte.hu/hun/digkonyv/topo/200e/40-40.jpg> (accessed 16 Nov 2013; I owe this reference to Dr K.A. Wardle (Birmingham)).

169 F 3 - PLUTARCH Aem. Paul. 21	meta [[id="169" type="F" n="3" sourcework(
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	level1="Plutarchus" level2="" level3="Aemilius Paullus" level4="" level5="" level6="21, 7")]]
Subject: Historical Work: Source date: Historian's date: Historical period:	Translation
τῶν δὲ Ῥωμαίων ἔπεσον, ὥς μὲν Ποσειδώνιος φησιν, ἑκατόν, ὥς δὲ Νασικᾶς, ὀγδοήκοντα.	The Roman casualties were 100 according to Poseidonios, 80 according to Nasica (<i>BNJ</i> #233 F 3@#233 F 3@#).

169 F 3 Commentary

Though Poseidonios appears to have given a sympathetic account of Perseus (F 1), he rounds rather than exaggerates Roman casualties (as does Livy 44.42.8 *non plus centum*, ‘not more than 100’). He is even-handed. The Macedonian losses were horrendous: 20,000 according to the transmitted text of Livy 44.42.7, 25,000 according to Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus* 21.7 (presumably the figure that had stood in Polybios 29 and which he in turn might well have derived from Nasica).

Nasica is P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica ‘Corculum’ (*RE* Cornelius (353)), who played an important role at Pydna (Livy 44.38, Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus* 15-17), probably as military tribune, and was later consul (162 BC). For more detail on Nasica see H. Beck on *BNJ* 233.

169 Biographical Essay

Poseidonios (not in *RE*) was on his own account present at the events of Perseus’ life, in particular Pydna in 168. Perseus was exhibited in the triumph of Aemilius in 167, then transferred to house imprisonment at Alba (Livy 45.42), probably committing suicide (Plutarch, *Aemilius* 37) probably around 165 (F. Geyer, ‘Perseus (5)’, *RE* 19.1 (1937), 996-1021, at 1021). It would be after this that Poseidonios wrote his work, perhaps when the political situation had become more settled – maybe even after the death of Paullus in 160. Like Polybios, Poseidonios is in a sense responding to the impact of Rome, by writing about the last Macedonian king. We cannot tell where he wrote – for instance in Macedonia, in Athens, or under house arrest in Rome. But the 150s seem the right moment for this history, before Carthage and its destruction seized the headlines.

He appears to have been a good source, free from exaggeration (F 3), with access to information from both sides (F 1; contrast F 2, F 3?). He had a telling eye for detail (F 1, F 3). Plutarch presumably relies on him in some places where he is not cited too, supplementing the account drawn from Polybios. One would expect Polybios also to have read him, though too little of Polybios survives on which to base this judgment and such as does survive is unrelentingly hostile to Perseus; he doubtless preferred the account of Scipio Nasica (*BNJ* 233), though he differs from that too.

There may well be further fragments of Poseidonios lurking in Plutarch’s account. So for instance, J. Kromayer (*Antike Schlachtfelder* 2 (Berlin 1907), 304 n.1), as Walbank notes (F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* 3 (Oxford 1979), 383), attributed to Poseidonios a story of a Cretan deserter informing Perseus of Nasica’s movements, though frankly it is more likely, as Walbank observes that the colourful story comes from Nasica’s somewhat self-serving account.

We know nothing further about Poseidonios or his output – unless any of the historical work of Poseidonios of Olbiopolis (*BNJ* 279) is actually his. This appears to be the view of M.M. Sage, *The Republican Roman Army: A Sourcebook* (London 2008), 187, but it can only be guesswork, cf. V. Costa on *BNJ* 279, Biographical Essay, *ad fin.* The other lost writer about (Philip V and) Perseus that we hear of is Straton (*BNJ* 167), but we know nothing about him (cf. D.L. Gilley on *BNJ* 167) and therefore cannot relate him to Poseidonios.

169 Bibliography

None.