Polybius and the Roman Polity: a Perfect Balance?
A public Lecture by Dr Frederik Vervaet
Date: Thursday, 15th May 7pm
Venue: Ithacan Philanthropic Society, Level 2, 329 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne

Polybius, an Achaean aristocrat whose eventful life spanned much of the turbulent second century BCE, continues to enjoy fame and admiration for being the first ancient Greek historian to write an extensive history of the Roman Republic: the so-called Histories. As many would appreciate, he also was the first Western historian to produce a genuine theory of history centered around the concept of cyclical rise and demise. Less well known is that his interpretation of the Roman polity had a profound impact on both Roman and modern political thought. In this paper, we will first briefly discuss the man’s life and times, followed by a survey of his famous theory of constitutional history as applied to Rome especially. This, then, sets the stage for an appraisal of his lasting legacy, all the way from Cicero over the French Revolution to the American Founding Fathers and contemporary US, and, for that matter, Australian politics.

Bibliography

Frederik J. Vervaet (PhD Ghent University) is a Senior Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Melbourne and specializes in Roman socio-institutional and political history, and Roman public law. He was a Research Fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders, Francqui Fellow of the Belgian American Educational Foundation at the University of California, Berkeley, Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College, Oxford, and Visiting Fellow of the Belgian Historical Institute in Rome at the Academia Belgica.

Short bibliography:

