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David Stuttard. *Nemesis: Alcibiades and the Fall of Athens.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. 400 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-66044-1.

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David Stuttard presents us with ***Nemesis: Alcibiades and the Fall of Athens***, a text that takes the familiar ground of the Peloponnesian War as the backdrop for the biography of one of its most influential participants: the famous Athenian politician Alcibiades. Stuttard's book is expressly written for the general reader, and I judge it on those merits as well as on the merits of using the text in the classroom. In this, it succeeds as a text for general readership, though it (understandably) stands less prominently for academic or pedagogical purposes.

The first half of the book strolls through the early life of Alcibiades, his early military career, and his subsequent rise to fame during the Athenian armistice with Sparta as a leading voice for renewing the war. The second half of the book is markedly different, telling a twisting tale of treachery, revolution, and deceit as Alcibiades and many other individuals and states repeatedly switch sides, goals, and even systems of government as Athenian disaffection with democracy grows and new players like Argos, Syracuse, and even Persia enter the conflict. Alcibiades presented himself at first to the Athenians as the only person who could defeat the Spartans and later to the Spartans and Persians as the only person who could defeat the Athenians. He may have had a point.

Stuttard provides us a compelling narrative redolently dripping with pleasantly ornate verbiage, adverbial abundance, and the poetic metaphor familiar in Greek literature but normally eschewed within the halls of academic prose, so often constructed with ponderous and overprecise jargon. While these may be the hallmarks of storytelling rather than history-writing, Stuttard is writing a story, and a delightful rendition at that.

Nevertheless, despite Stuttard's intent to entertain general readers and history enthusiasts, more than a few points of academic interest do emerge. For example, in the introduction (p. 3): Thucydides and Alcibiades were in exile at the same time, and Alcibiades would have been an excellent source for details at Athens post-424 (the year Thucydides was exiled), and Stuttard's implication that Alcibiades also provided details for earlier parts of the history stakes out a position deep in disputed territory.[1] Moreover, Stuttard's introductory section on sources provides a clear and useful background to scholarship, and his mastery of the primary and secondary sources is clear throughout, including many works written in the past five years. As Stuttard leaves no source unturned in his description of the life of Alcibiades, his references also pose a useful resource for further study of Alcibiades. Finally, the synthesis of new research on Greece and Persia presented in chapter 8 is likely worth examining even for the Greek historian.

Though most is accessible to all, at times, some sections of the book may be difficult to follow without an academic's knowledge of the chronology of the Peloponnesian War and contemporary events at Athens. For example, while discussing Alcibiades at Sparta, Stuttard references numerous events of the war a decade earlier, making for potential misunderstandings. At other times, Stuttard presents questionable accounts on the same level as more trustworthy ones (for instance, the Aelian anecdote recounted on p. 63 and p. 322n46 is improbable at best). While his helpful endnotes do often clarify matters, the narrative still often presents weaker sources alongside stronger ones with equal emphasis.

Stuttard provides literal translations of Greek names and terms, an unusual but not unappealing choice, though an explanation of the aristocratic association of horses might help explain names like Hipparete better than the simple translation "Horse Virtue" (p. 77).[2] Similarly, Stuttard eschews the traditional Greek version of Persian names for more linguistically accurate transliterations (e.g., Chithrafarna for Tissaphernes, Kashayarsha for Xerxes).

Topical discussions on drama (e.g., pp. 56-68), political philosophy, or the Persian empire, occasionally displace chronology. Casual readers might well be forgiven for thinking the ***Clouds*** was written earlier than ***Knights*** or ***Acharnians***, for it appears earlier in the narrative. As Stuttard presents them as posing differing views of Alcibiades, however, they are arranged differently. Does Aristophanes pose Alcibiades as an antidote to Cleon, or does he pose him as a demon, and should we expect these portrayals to be different? Is Aristophanes his ***bête noire*** (p. 199) or his good-natured friend (p. 136)? While Stuttard wishes to present the more negative portrayals of Alcibiades together, this variability in his sources would actually serve Stuttard's overall depiction of the Athenians' ever-changing attitudes toward the ever-changing Alcibiades.

While some figures are lauded, other prominent figures, notably Nicias and Chithrafarna, are treated in scathing terms. While Nicias is not the modern historian's favorite, his portrayal is not often quite so negative, and at odds with Plutarch's assessment of Nicias as one of the three best citizens of Athens (τρεῖς βέλτιστοι τῶν πολιτῶν, Plut. *Nic*. 2.1). The depiction of Chithrafarna as always vacillating and treacherous (e.g., p. 287) also belies the evidence that he appears to have remained steadfastly loyal to his kings. This depiction serves the story more than the history.

Stuttard opens with an ending, leaving a conclusion framed around the posthumous reception of Alcibiades in Athens. One might suggest that a greater posthumous postscript on the trial of Socrates for corrupting the youth (for what student of Socrates could appear more corrupt than the quick-tongued, twice-traitor Alcibiades?) would not be misplaced. This event does get a short paragraph in the epilogue (p. 301), and Socrates looms large in the first half of the work, but more could be said.

Writing with humor and gusto, Stuttard presents an exciting tale of the late fifth century BCE. Despite certain misgivings about the manner of presentation at times, I thoroughly enjoyed the book. I would not recommend this book to current undergraduate students for assignments, lest they be too drawn to Stuttard's dramatic arguments and decorative scenes to construct their own from a study of the evidence. I would, however, heartily recommend this text to those readers interested in ancient history who do not have a final paper on the line.

Notes

[1]. Thucydides does not note this specifically in his aside at 5.26, and typically, the argument has focused on the closing details in book 8 The best places to follow up this debate are probably P. A. Brunt, "Thucydides and Alcibiades," ***Revue des Études Grecques*** 65, nos. 304-05 (1952): 59-96; and H. D. Westlake, "The Influence of Alcibiades on Thucydides, Book 8," ***Mnemosyne 38,*** nos. 1-2 (1985): 93-108.

[2]. Such explanations are not entirely lacking, by any means. Some discussion is noted at p. 55.

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