



English Summary: The Rest of the Biography (Sections 23-39)

Alcibiades, condemned to death by the Athenians *in absentia* for parodying the Eleusinian Mysteries, fled from the Athenian fleet which was engaged in the Sicilian Expedition and renounced his country. First he went to Sparta and gave them advice on how to hurt Athens in the Peloponnesian War. There he adopted Spartan lifestyle and custom, leading Plutarch to state that he was even better at changing than a chameleon, since such creatures struggle to become white whereas there was nothing which Alcibiades could not imitate. But a number of Spartans and the king Agis, a personal enemy, took steps to have him put to death: influential Spartans envied him, while there were rumours that Alcibiades had even fathered a child with Timaea, the wife of the king. Alcibiades used to charisma and versatility to win over Tissaphernes, the Persian satrap (a governor of a province), and become his adviser – Tissaphernes even named his most beautiful garden ‘Alcibiades’. He advised Tissaphernes not to give Sparta enough help to destroy Athens but rather let both sides wear each other down, then he contacted the Athenian fleet at Samos and suggested he could bring Tissaphernes to the Athenian side. Despite the objections of one commander, Alcibiades’ overtures were welcomed; a coup in Athens instigated by Alcibiades’ supporters at Samos led to the overthrow of the democracy and the installation of the oligarchic Four Hundred. Unhappy with the news of events in Athens, the popular Athenian party in Samos sent for Alcibiades to be general of the forces and lead them against those ruling in Athens. Alcibiades took charge but convinced everyone that they should not set sail and in doing so abandon their conquests around Ionia and start war at home in Athens. He was held



responsible for stopping a large fleet sent by Tissaphernes from joining the war, one which would have tipped the balance to whichever side it fought alongside. He then sought to win some victories before heading back to Athens, where the restored democracy wished him to return from exile. He sailed to help Athenian forces defeat Mindarus and the Spartans at Abydos before trying to win over Tissaphernes to the Athenian cause, but the satrap had him arrested. After escaping his guards Alcibiades masterminded a naval victory over Mindarus and the Persian satrap of Phrygia, Pharnabazus, at Cyzicus off the Ionian coast, before winning over some territories around the Hellespont through sieges and offering terms.

He returned to Athens where he was greeted as a hero, though they regretted removing him from the Sicilian expedition, which had perhaps cost them success there. Now he was seen as their saviour and the restorer of their empire. After successfully guarding a procession of worshippers to and from Eleusis to celebrate the Mysteries there, taking them past a Spartan stronghold in the process, Alcibiades led out an expedition to capture islands in the Ionian sea and cities on the Ionian coast. His reputation meant too much was expected from him, so when there were not as many immediate successes as hoped for, some began to criticise Alcibiades. In order to pay his troops he had to make trips to raise funds, whereas Sparta had financial support from Cyrus, the king of Persia. Going away to Caria to collect some money, Alcibiades left Antiochus in charge with instructions not to engage the enemy. Antiochus, however, could not resist sailing by the Spartans and provoking them; when Athenian ships came to support Antiochus, the Spartan commander Lysander sailed against them, inflicting a heavy defeat and killing Antiochus in the process. The Spartans returned to shore victoriously and refused to be enticed into a subsequent battle once Alcibiades, returning to Samos on hearing of the loss, sailed out with the remaining Athenian forces against them. Thrasybulus, an Athenian who disliked Alcibiades, sailed from Samos to Athens to denounce him, accusing him of neglecting his duty, leaving his army with flatterers and travelling around for



enjoyment and revelry. The Athenians sided against Alcibiades and sent other commanders to take charge of the fleet. Alcibiades promptly left, amassing a force of mercenaries and attacking some tribes in Thrace. When the Athenian fleet looked for a decisive encounter with Lysander and his naval force near Aegospotami but could not provoke him to engage, Alcibiades rushed to the Athenian forces and advised them that their position was not sound and that the time spent having to gather supplies from elsewhere left the fleet vulnerable. Ignoring his warning, the Athenians were soon defeated when Lysander launched an attack which resulted in the capture of nearly two hundred ships and the massacre of around three thousand men. Athens herself was soon taken, and her Long Walls demolished, before the Spartans installed another oligarchy, the Thirty. Alcibiades planned to seek support for Athens against Sparta from the Persian king Artaxerxes and approached Pharnabazus, the Persian satrap in Phrygia, to arrange this. Meanwhile the Athenians regretted their actions, in particular their treatment of Alcibiades, whom they had blamed for another's mistake. But the Spartans were fearful of him returning and disrupting their plans, so sent instruction to Lysander to have Alcibiades dealt with. He in turn contacted Pharnabazus and ordered him to have Alcibiades killed. Afraid of entering his house, the assassins encircled the property and set fire to it. When Alcibiades leapt through the flames unhurt, still no one came to attack him at close range, but rather he was killed in a shower of javelins and arrows. His mistress buried him and gave a funeral. There was also a view that in fact Alcibiades was living with a noblewoman he had seduced and that it was her brothers who came and killed him in this way, attributing none of it to the Spartans, Lysander or Pharnabazus.

Plutarch's biographies typically end with the death of their subject but often he also includes details of questions about the nature of their death or he queries the version of events just



reported; it is perhaps fitting that here Plutarch concludes by noting that Alcibiades' death was possibly brought about by a reckless, amorous adventure rather than by the actions of the enemy Sparta, a far more prosaic explanation: Alcibiades' death would mirror how he had lived his life.

Other than what may be inferred from this, Plutarch does not make any final assessment of Alcibiades, his morals or his character within the biography itself. Such a summing-up element of his *Lives* is left to the Comparison which follows (see pgs. 187-188 in the OCR Anthology for Classical Greek 2021-2023).