

CORNELIUS NEPOS

• ——— THREE LIVES ——— •

ALCIBIADES • DION • ATTICUS

INTRODUCTION • TEXT • NOTES • VOCABULARY

BY

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	<i>page</i>
I. The Author	1
II. Historical Background	3
TEXT	
ALCIBIADES	15
DION	26
ATTICUS	36
NOTES	57
INDEX OF PROPER NAMES	101
VOCABULARY	109

LIST OF PLATES

(*following page 2*)

- I. Piraeus (*Greek Information Office*)
- II. Alcibiades (*Anderson*)
- III. Athenian Tetradrachms (first two, *Bibliothèque National, Paris*; third, *British Museum*)
- IV. (a) Socrates (*British Museum*); (b) Plato (*Anderson*)
- V. Syracuse (*Foto-Stampa Angeli, Terni*)
- VI. Coins from Asia Minor, Syracuse and Rome (*British Museum*)
- VII. (a) Cicero (*Apsley House*); (b) Agrippa (*Alinari*)
- VIII. The Appian Way (*E.N.I.T.*)

Map to illustrate the *Three Lives*, pages 12 and 13

CORNELIUS NEPOS : THREE LIVES

ALCIBIADES

c. 450-404 B.C.

The career of Alcibiades is the story of a man who had every advantage of birth and upbringing. He was blessed in addition with wit, intelligence, good looks and quite irresistible charm. Yet in spite of all this—or perhaps because of it—he never developed a sense of responsibility, or the moral strength which is needed for greatness.

As a boy he was inevitably spoilt by admiring friends and relations. Pericles, the great statesman who was his guardian, made little impression. But Socrates, who loved him not for his physical beauty but for the potential beauty of his soul, was a powerful influence for good, which persisted at least until Alcibiades was twenty-seven. From then on, vanity and a craving for the spectacular dominated his life, causing immeasurable harm to Athens.

Having quickly wrecked the Peace of Nicias which might have ended the Peloponnesian War, he set his fellow countrymen hankering after the Sicilian adventure from whose failure they never recovered. (Not that he should be blamed too harshly for this. Given the chance, he might even have brought it to a successful conclusion.) From Sparta out of sheer vindictiveness he dealt Athens two crippling blows, knowing her weaknesses more clearly than his hosts. From Sardis, where he fled after making Sparta too hot to hold him, his intrigues played no small part in the mercifully short-lived oligarchic revolution of 411.

Yet the restored democracy at Athens was still ready to forgive and forget; and in 407 gave him sole command of its forces. Even in 405, after he had forsaken her for the second time, we find that Athens 'misses him, but hates him, yet longs to have him back' (Aristophanes *Frogs* 1425).

His lonely and pathetic death was a fitting end to the tragedy of a man who could inspire such vast and undeserved devotion.

I

CH I. *The remarkable contradictions in Alcibiades' character suggest an experiment by Nature to see what she could produce.*

Alcibiades, Cliniae filius, Atheniensis. in hoc quid natura efficere possit videtur experta. constat enim inter omnes, qui de eo memoriae prodiderunt, nihil illo fuisse excellentius vel in vitiis vel in virtutibus.

2 natus in amplissima civitate summo genere, omnium aetatis suae multo formosissimus; ad omnes res aptus consiliique plenus (namque imperator fuit summus et mari et terra); disertus, ut in primis dicendo valeret, quod tanta erat commendatio oris atque orationis, ut nemo ei [dicendo] posset resistere; dives; cum

3 tempus posceret, laboriosus, patiens; liberalis, splendidus non minus in vita quam victu; affabilis,

4 blandus, temporibus callidissime serviens: idem, simul ac se remiserat neque causa suberat quare animi laborem perferret, luxuriosus, dissolutus, libidinosus, intemperans reperiebatur, ut omnes admirarentur in uno homine tantam esse dissimilitudinem tamque diversam naturam.

II

CH. 2. *He was fortunate both in his upbringing and in his wealthy marriage. Socrates was among his many admirers.*

Educatus est in domo Pericli (privignus enim eius fuisse dicitur), eruditus a Socrate. socerum habuit Hipponicum, omnium Graeca lingua loquentium ditissimum, ut, si ipse fingere vellet, neque plura bona reminisci neque maiora posset consequi, quam vel natura vel fortuna tribueret. . . .

III

CH. 3. *He was chosen by the Athenians as joint commander of their Sicilian Expedition (415). Before its departure the statues of Hermes were mutilated and many suspected Alcibiades.*

Bello Peloponnesio huius consilio atque auctoritate Athenienses bellum Syracusanis indixerunt: ad quod gerendum ipse dux delectus est, duo praeterea collegae dati, Nicia et Lamachus. id cum appareretur, 2 prius quam classis exiret, accidit ut una nocte omnes Hermae, qui in oppido erant Athenis, deicerentur praeter unum, qui ante ianuam erat Andocidi (itaque ille postea Mercurius Andocidi vocitatus est). hoc 3 cum appareret non sine magna multorum consensione esse factum, quae non ad privatam, sed publicam rem pertineret, magnus multitudini timor est iniectus, ne qua repentina vis in civitate existeret, quae libertatem opprimeret populi. hoc maxime convenire in Alci- 4 biadem videbatur, quod et potentior et maior quam privatus existimabatur: multos enim liberalitate devinxerat, plures etiam opera forensi suos reddiderat.

- 5 qua re fiebat ut omnium oculos, quotienscumque in publicum prodisset, ad se converteret neque ei par quisquam in civitate poneretur. itaque non solum spem in eo habebant maximam, sed etiam timorem, 6 quod et obesse plurimum et prodesse poterat. aspergebatur etiam infamia, quod in domo sua facere mysteria dicebatur (quod nefas erat more Atheniensium) idque non ad religionem, sed ad coniurationem pertinere existimabatur.

IV

CH. 4. *When recalled from Sicily for trial he went instead to Sparta, which was at war with Athens. His advice to the Spartans was very harmful to Athens.*

- Hoc crimine in contione ab inimicis compellabatur. sed instabat tempus ad bellum proficiscendi. id ille intuens neque ignorans civium suorum consuetudinem postulabat, si quid de se agi vellent, potius de praesente quaestio haberetur, quam absens invidiae 2 crimine accusaretur. inimici vero eius quiescendum in praesenti, quia noceri non posse intellegebant, et illud tempus exspectandum decreverunt, quo is exisset, 3 ut absentem aggrederentur, itaque fecerunt. nam postquam in Siciliam eum pervenisse crediderunt, absentem, quod sacra violasset, reum fecerunt. qua de re cum ei nuntius a magistratu in Siciliam missus esset, ut domum ad causam dicendam rediret, essetque in magna spe provinciae bene administrandae, non parere noluit et in trierem, quae ad eum erat deport- 4 andum missa, ascendit. hac Thurios in Italiam pervectus, multa secum reputans de immoderata civium suorum licentia crudelitateque erga nobiles,