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David Stuttard,  
*Nemesis: Alcibiades and the Fall of Athens.*

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In *Nemesis*, Stuttard's attractively produced and well-edited biography about Alcibiades, son of Cleinias, we have a book written "not for the specialist but for the general reader with an interest in the many areas of human experience with which Alcibiadaes' biography intersects: politics and society, religion and philosophy, ambition and betrayal, and the drama of a life lived to the fullest by a subject who often seems to have been making up the rules as he went along" (7). Alcibiades' career, as the author notes, is "unique" and quite apt for such a diverse, contextual approach, because among his contemporaries Alcibiades' career was "not confined to his native city" (9). For both better and worse, Stuttard provides a kaleidoscopic presentation of the age of Alcibiades, who, in tragic fashion, suffered a retributive *nemesis* by trying "to break the mould — only to be broken himself" (7).

Stuttard's book plays a useful role: there is no real non-specialist biography of Alcibiades. P.J. Rhodes' *Alcibiades: Athenian Playboy, General, and Traitor* (South Yorkshire 2011) and Walter M. Ellis's *Alcibiades* (New York 1998) are both very academic in approach. The only other true biography in English is Edward F. Benson's *The Life of Alcibiades* (New York 1929), a romantic account of Alcibiades' career, full of breathless interjections and fanciful speculation presented in mental Alcibiadean soliloquies. Stuttard's book, like many modern biographies designed for a mass audience, is a straightforward narrative that gives concise but sufficient background and context for the non-specialist. Stuttard has "made hard choices" (7) over what to include with the goal of maintaining a coherent narrative, though when he makes an exceedingly "hard choice" he reveals his anxieties in the endnotes.

The combined pastiche of politics, socio-cultural history, and biography is, for the most part, successful. The prologue, entitled "A Family Divided," illustrates the strengths of Stuttard's approach. The stage is set with myriad stories about Alcibiades' family and ancestry (accompanied by a family tree on p. xv that traces the subject's heritage back to Nestor on the Alcmaeonid side and Ajax on the Eurysacid side). Stuttard emphasizes the aristocratic *bona fides* of Alcibiades' maternal and paternal heritage in detail, mixes in colorfully fitting primary sources from Pindar

to Libanius, and includes almost every story of note he can find about Alcibiades' ancestors. His family, foreshadowing the dynamic career and personality of Alcibiades, establishes multi-faceted connections with Athens, Persia, and Sparta, and Stuttard's web of anecdote, familial characterization, and the occasional cultural/literary addendum informs and entertains.

Stuttard's efforts in the prologue are emblematic of the breadth of his research and learning throughout. Each chapter not only presents information about Alcibiades and his life along with necessary historical background and a summary of the political situation, but also provides concise, often vibrant details about pertinent bits of Athenian culture as well as whatever people—Spartan, Persian, Thracian—Alcibiades comes into contact with. When Alcibiades arrives at Sparta, the reader is treated to a précis of the Spartan government from the view of an Athenian, and finds a jarring mention of the "*Crypteia*, a ruthless liquidation squad, tasked with policing Sparta's Helot slaves" (168). When Alcibiades arrives at the court of Chithrafarna (Greek Tissaphernes; Stuttard chooses to use Persian names instead of Greek ones: hence, *e.g.*, Farnavaz, Korush, and Dārayavahuš for Pharnabazus, Cyrus, and Darius), we learn of Persian birthday customs and the symbolic, hierarchy-supporting "hunting" parties (196-7).

For the most part, Stuttard's technique of including everything but the proverbial kitchen sink proves evocative, but sometimes these erudite additions cross the line from interesting to distracting. When the primary sources are more reliably thorough and Stuttard has a stronger biographical foundation from which he can add supplemental information, they prove charming, in spite of their lack of importance to the overarching narrative. Yet, in the chapters where sources about Alcibiades are wanting, especially the first three chapters, I found myself experiencing "detail fatigue." For example, from pages 24 to 30, Stuttard covers the following topics: Alcibiades' adoption by Pericles, Pericles' status/career, Pericles' affair with Aspasia, Greek nannies, Spartan nannies and women's roles in a household, *paidagogoi*, Zopyrus the Thracian *paidagogos*, Athenians' view of Thracians, Alcibiades as a headstrong child, rumors about Alcibiades, typical Athenian male education, elite education, Alcibiades and Homer, and gymnasia. The result is a dizzying panorama of facts and anecdotes, tying myriad threads not altogether clearly, and the ostensible subject, Alcibiades, is lost for paragraphs (if not pages) at a time.

As a consequence of Stuttard's method, I find the composite of Alcibiades lacking cohesion. This inclusion of so much background and summary of the political situation, as well as the insertion of myriad bits of socio-cultural elements of the ancient Mediterranean peoples, frequently overshadows Alcibiades as a character.

Sometimes the cost of getting the reader to see as much of Classical Greece as possible costs Stuttard the reader's connection to Alcibiades himself, *i.e.*, imparting so much history waters down the book's biographical essence.

My other lament probably stems from the fact that I am an adorer of Plutarch, whose biographical purpose is that of moral instruction through the analysis of character. Plutarch, in fact, occasionally attempts to provide such instruction through the motif of tragic *nemesis*. Plutarch's moral approach fits well with such a theme, and Stuttard's broader historical approach struggles with it. After the introduction he rarely revisits the matter, nor does he clarify what has tragically undone Alcibiades, even in Chapter 12 ("Nemesis"). The most dissatisfying of his implied *nemeses* concerns Alcibiades' death at the hands of Persian assassins. Stuttard's explanation of all the parties' motives (Lysander's, Agis', the Thirty's, Farnavaz') is far too muddled to come across as being due to a tragic failure of Alcibiadean character. In fact, Stuttard ultimately says it "did not matter" who wanted him dead, even proposing, among other possibilities, that Farnavaz had determined that he was an "agent of the Evil One, the Great Lie, Angra Mainyu" (296)! Ultimately, the narrative structure of the biography fails to highlight the "tragedy" of Alcibiades in a specific, satisfying way, and is secondary to other concerns with which Stuttard approaches his subject.

In conclusion, what this book does well is to give a concise and atmospheric history of what occurred in Greece and Asia Minor during Alcibiades' lifetime. For a non-specialist interested in Hellenic antiquity, the book will prove a fine and entertaining example of popular biography. Scholars probably won't find much new here, but the writing is evocative, the campaign narratives easy to follow, and many of the episodes charming and occasionally insightful. The relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates, in fact, is judiciously depicted and explains the unfortunate separation of the two in a way I find exceptionally plausible. And if this reviewer does not see a cohesive strand in the character and ultimate *nemesis* of Stuttard's Alcibiades, perhaps it is not so much that Stuttard has not done his job well, but the opposite: Alcibiades remains as convoluted and tricky a figure to come to grips with as ever.